LWAG Talks

A podcast by Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery

Ep 13: LWAG Beginnings with Ted Snell and Ivan Hoffman

Published on 13 July 2020

Transcript of an interview with LWAG Director Ted Snell and Ivan Hoffman, the Director of the fundraising campaign for the gallery building, in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery.

**NARRATOR:**

LWAG Talks is Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery’s new podcast, bringing you insights and ideas with artists, curators, educators, writers, and more. 2020 marks the 30th anniversary of the gallery, the first purpose-built university art museum in Australia.

For this week's episode, gallery Director Ted Snell talks with Perth businessman Ivan Hoffman, who in 1986 was the honorary director of the fundraising appeal to build Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery

**TED SNELL:**

I’m Ted Snell, I’m the director of the Lawrence Wilson and I'm here with Ivan Hoffman. Ivan was one of the foundation members really, of the group that raised the funds for the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery 30 years ago. So Ivan, how did you first get involved?

**IVAN HOFFMAN:**

I first got involved by invitation by one of the members of the fundraising committee, Kevin Sullivan, the late Kevin Sullivan, to have a light lunch with the then Vice Chancellor, Professor Bob Smith. So I went down to UWA for a meeting with the two of them. And during the course of that, Professor Smith told me that he desperately wanted to have an art gallery on campus, that the university senate had approved it. But he said we've had a committee of 15 or so of the who's who in the business world in Perth, and said unfortunately, they’ve worked for a year and not raised a dollar, and are not kind, don’t even know how to start raising the money. So he said I want you to think about being the manager of the appeal, to raise money.

**TED:**

And how did you feel when you got that? That must have been a bit of a challenge.

**IVAN:**

It was a bit of a challenge, a bit of a bit of a task. But I thought about it for a minute. I had a personal reason with my mother to do it. So I said yes, I'll take it on, and he said well I want you to think about it. I said, I just thought about it, I'll do it for you.

**TED:**

Tell us about your mother. What was the reason with your mother?

**IVAN:**

She was born in 1916. And as a teenager, she was taken to the site of the UWA, which had been under construction. She'd always wanted to go to the university, but because of family restrictions, and the war intervening when she had three children at that stage, my father was a prisoner of war for the Japanese for three and a half years so she didn't get the chance, although she did go back to summer school later, which she thoroughly enjoyed.

**TED:**

So that was a strong connection the, to the university?

**IVAN:**

It was a strong connection, she heard a voice come down and say just do it. And she's always told me all my life if someone has, needs help, just drop what you're doing and help. So I've always done that all my life. Okay. So then Professor Smith said, “look, I've got to work out how much to pay you to do this.” I said, “I'm sorry, but you don't pay me for this. I'm doing this for the love of the university and the community. So no way am I being paid”- “Yes you are”. I said “No I’m not” -“Yes you are”. This went on for a while. I said, “Excuse me, Vice Chancellor. I told you I do it and I do it for nothing. Why do you keep insisting you pay me?” He says “Because if you don't succeed I have to have a bum to kick and I can’t kick your bum if I haven’t paid you.” (TED laughs)

So as a compromise, I said, look, what we'll do, I will raise the money for you to build the gallery and at the end of that you can pay me whatever you think it was worth. But on the condition that I can donate every cent straight back to the appeal. So I really don't want to benefit from it. So we shook hands, agreed and walked out the door and thought ‘what do I do now?’ I’ll never raise any money like this.

**TED:**

And how much did you have to raise? What was the target?

**IVAN:**

Well, the original target was 2.8 million, but I've had a lot of experience with construction and development. And I realised that as beautiful as the shape of the building was, it could not be extended in any direction and would probably have a life of 15 years and we run out of space. So I got together with the architect Gus Ferguson and told him what I wanted that we had to take the building down, still leave the ground floor up as it was, and the roofline, which is beautiful. And take out a massive basement, which could serve as a car park in the short term and then it could be converted to curatorial space and storage and everything else when the collection of the university grew and so that went back to centre

**TED:**

That was very prescient because of course we've done exactly that!

**IVAN:**

Yes exactly, I’ve got more stories about that too. So the senate said, yes, you can do that. And I said look, okay, now to get started, I need to have a donor of a million dollars to, for naming rights to get started, give it a real kick. So the Senate came back and said yes, you can, you can have that, but you'll never do it. No one in Perth had ever done, made a donation or anything like that before. So good luck, but you won't make it. Won’t I?

So I took it on from there. It took me three four months to get everything in place so that I could raise the money. I liken it to baking a cake; unless you’ve got all the ingredients on the counter, you're never going to start like that with fundraising. I've always done that. So I'll put that together. And I had three targets from the dollar donation. The first one was Laurie Wilson, was on a, was a member of the committee. And I’d been to school with him, in high school, knew him very well. So I went to see him and said, Laurie I'm starting today. And what I'd like you to think about is a donation of a million dollars for naming rights in perpetuity. He said I don’t give money for things like that, couldn't possibly. I said Okay, well, I just wanted to come and see you first because I don't want you in a couple of years’ time to criticise me for having come, not having come to ask you, so you're not going to criticise me. He said no, he thought more and said look, about (indecipherable) tonight and I'll call you tomorrow. So I called the next day and he said Okay we’ve agreed to pay you a million, one condition. I said what's that? He said I’ll give you the money next week, thereabouts and you use the million as the last million of the construction and interest on that million until it is used goes into a fund for a scholarship fund for disabled artists. And I thought that was a wonderful idea. So wonderful. Shook hands, thanked him and went and told the Vice Chancellor was over the moon and away it went from there.

**TED:**

Fantastic. That's, and so that was always a part of it. He always wanted there to be, for disabled artists to have some contribution. There was some scholarship.

**IVAN:**

Oh, yes, sure.

**TED:**

So tell me Ivan was it difficult to convince people to get money for a gallery, an art gallery on a university campus?

**IVAN:**

Not at that time. In early 1987 the economy was booming strongly. And I raised the money before the 1987 stock market crash which is terrible. Absolutely real recession followed that. But I raised the money before that and all the commitments, so easier to follow through and get the money.

**TED:**

But there are also some quite innovative fundraising tricks or campaign, part of the campaign weren’t there? Can you describe some of those?

**IVAN:**

Well, there was the Luv a Duck matter which Rie Haymans, the former director of the collection, thought to raise funds for all the installations and furnishing in the gallery, not the gallery itself but all the finishing off and everything else. She's a lovely lady, and

that was held, an auction, during the Americas Cup time, and my wife and I were in Fiji on business. But I left instructions with people to bid on two pieces, three pieces, which I did, and got them, still have them.

**TED:**

Fantastic.

**IVAN:**

Yep.

**TED:**

So what happened was artists painted a duck and then the ducks were floated on the reflection pond outside (Winthrop Hall).

**IVAN:**

Yes, they were, that was when the auction was held. I was in, Fiji didn't, didn't get to see that. But I heard all about it and three bids that I made, just three bids, whatever the cost is just by those three things.

**TED:**

And you know how much they raised from Luv a Duck?

**IVAN:**

I can't recall quite honestly, it was quite a few years ago, 35 years ago.

**TED:**

Well that’s right, of course

**IVAN:**

And I wasn't there at the time. But…

**TED:**

But all the money that was raised for the building, including for the furnishings, came from the community, so it was all…

**IVAN:**

There's no money from government or anyone else. It all came from the community, the business community, from private individuals. There was one bequest left by Bert Maller, which is the first donation former post office worker who donated $250,000 and that was sort of, sort of kick started the appeal a bit.

**TED:**

And of course, his name is still there on the visits to Maller gallery, the largest gallery in the in the in the Lawrence Wilson.

**IVAN:**

Ruby May Maller. I’ve got a bit of a memory.

**TED:**

Yes, you have! (Laughs).

**IVAN:**

Yeah. So it was, it was good fun. We had the Five by Nine exhibition as well and I bought

two or three of those.

**TED:**

Can you just talk to us about that a bit more. What was the Five by Nine?

**IVAN:**

It was paintings, the old nine by five paintings, from I don’t know, years ago. There’s certain cigar box lids.

**TED:**

It's an Australian impressionist, the Heidelberg school.

**IVAN:**

That's right. Yes. Yeah.

**TED:**

Roberts and McCubbin.

**IVAN:**

Yeah. So it was followed on from that. And artists were given a

board for nine by five, which they painted. And some interesting ones, including Betty Church's husband.

**TED:**

Roy.

**IVAN:**

Roy. Yes. Yeah. So I think I bought three of them.

**TED:**

So all the artists were very much behind this then. They, it was seen very much as a community, an artist community, arts community event as well.

**IVAN:**

The artists that I knew and I got to know and were so appreciative of what I did and what the university did for art, they were thoroughly behind it.

**TED:**

And how long did it take? How long was the campaign? So you started in…

**IVAN:**

After, after that started, I raised the whole lot in six months.

**TED:**

Oh, wow.

**IVAN:**

The original budget was 2.8-2.9 million but because of my suggestion of going down, which was very expensive, it came close to $6 million. $6 million at the end of ’86, early ’87 was a lot of money. That building probably would cost, I think $50-60 million to build today, at least.

**TED:**

At least, yeah.

**IVAN:**

So it was a lot of money then and I set it up so that I could get it done in six months. And I had to earn a living as well doing other things. (TED Laughs).

Had to get on with it and just make it happen. And it did, it clicked into place.

**TED:**

And then there was the big opening, a big opening.

**IVAN:**

It was a big opening.

**TED:**

Oh, you have, you're showing me the opening of the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, wow, the program.

**IVAN:**

Yes.

**TED:**

So it was on the 18th of July, 1990.

**IVAN:**

Yes, it was indeed.

**TED:**

So our 30th anniversary is coming up.

**IVAN:**

It is indeed.

**TED:**

And can you remember the exhibition that was on? Was it an exhibition of the collection?

**IVAN:**

I think it was, but I can't recall actually. It was all a blur, there was so much there and 300 people, rand I had other things to do, officiate there and make a speech and walk down there. (Laughs)

**TED:**

But it was obviously a wonderful night for Western Australia because it was the first purpose built university art gallery.

**IVAN:**

Yes. And by far the best one, probably still in the country. And one other pleasurable thing of all of that was that when the building was under construction. Sir Sidney Nolan came to UWA, which is very close to the university, and had afternoon tea in the Prescott room. And I had 15 or 20 minutes just talking to him, about his paintings that are hanging on the wall, and all that sort of thing, a lovely man. And then we walked over to, through the scrub to have a look at the building under construction.

**TED:**

So thank you so much. That's wonderful to get all that information about the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery in its 30th anniversary year. Thanks very much.

**IVAN:**

My pleasure. Thank you.