**Event:** Swinburne Alumni NGV Breakfast with the Masters  
**Date:** 29 August 2015  
**Location:** National Gallery of Victoria  

**Speech notes**  
Vice-Chancellor Professor Linda Kristjanson
Good morning friends of Swinburne, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to welcome you once again to this wonderful event here at the National Gallery of Victoria.

This year we have a great treat in store for our breakfast viewing – Masterpieces from the Hermitage: The Legacy of Catherine the Great.

I understand that this display of more than 400 works from the Hermitage Museum in St PETERSburg is spectacular.

The exhibition includes notable works from artists including Velasquez, Rubens and Titian -- and is said to offer some of the finest Dutch and Flemish art to come to Australia.

I am personally very much looking forward to viewing work by one of my favourite artists, Rembrandt, particularly his famous masterpiece, the intimate ‘Young woman trying on earrings’.

I have heard that there is also an extraordinary array of decorative arts – displayed in rooms designed to provide a sense of being inside the Hermitage -- it promises to be a rich immersive experience.
This exhibition prompts us to reflect not only on great art from the past, but also on the intellectual considerations that underpin the collection.

Catherine the Great was the longest-reigning female leader of Russia, ruling from 1762 until her death in 1796. Her reign is known as Russia’s Golden Age – during which time Russia was revitalised as one of the great powers of Europe.

For Catherine, collecting art was an important part of an economic and diplomatic program, which aimed to improve Russia’s profile abroad and encourage innovative thinking, economic activity and industry at home.

Catherine acquired old masters and contemporary paintings that challenged Russian culture. She insisted that everything was catalogued on arrival – and in this way ensured her collection was recorded as a body of knowledge.

The Hermitage catalogue described thousands of works. Available to visitors to the galleries, the catalogue was a document that educated people as well as a journal of record.

I am fascinated by Catherine’s program of innovation and her commitment to the Hermitage collection as a body of knowledge.
At Swinburne we are also interested in developing new knowledge and driving innovation in a range of disciplines.

Our work in the arts and design is an important pillar of this innovation agenda. We are proud of the ways our staff and students apply contemporary artistic and creative skills to contribute to their communities:

- Swinburne Communication Design Lecturer, Doctor Samantha Edwards-Vandenhoek recently spent a month in Western Australia working with the Warmun community north of Halls Creek. Samantha worked with the community on public displays of street art – helping build community resilience and a sense of place.

- A team of our Multimedia graduates have developed an award-winning virtual reality tool that helps carers understand what life is like for people with dementia.

- And industrial design student Jonathan Yap has developed a prosthetic foot that can be 3D printed for as little as ten U-S dollars.

It has been a busy year at Swinburne.
We have refreshed our undergraduate course offering for 2016. The new course portfolio is designed to strengthen our place in the market and meet student expectations for greater flexibility and certainty in their study options.

We have also improved our Work Integrated Learning offering for students from 2016. Many of you would have benefited from workplace experiences while studying with us. From next year, we will make sure all new undergraduate students have these opportunities.

In Research, we are developing a strategic research and innovation plan, led by the new Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Development, Professor Aleksandar Subic.

The research plan will focus on growth, excellence and innovation, and will articulate the priorities, directions and approaches we need to achieve this.

There will be a strong focus on building research capacity across the university, and growing research engagement with industry and partners both nationally and internationally.

With a great deal of work underway, we are heartened to receive recognition for our successes:
- this year for the first time, Swinburne entered the Times Higher Education Top 100 universities under 50 years’ old
- Swinburne was once again recognised as a world-standard research institution, being named in the top 400 by the Academic Ranking of World Universities
- Professor Matthew Bailes, Pro Vice-Chancellor of Research received a prestigious Laureate Fellowship for his work in astrophysics and supercomputing – he has set himself the task of weighing the Universe
- it has been a year of new beginnings – we launched the Swinburne Law School and welcomed our first law students into the university -- we also officially opened the Advanced Manufacturing and Design Centre and the ARC Training Centre in Biodevices
- this year’s Open Day was also a great success – we hosted 15-thousand people on campus, a 33 per cent increase on last year’s attendance. It was marvellous to experience the energy and enthusiasm of the next cohort of students as they toured our Hawthorn campus.

We all share in celebrating these achievements. As alumni and friends of Swinburne, you are part of a community that has a story stretching back to 1908.

There are now more than 160-thousand Swinburne graduates living in more than 140 countries around the world -- and approximately
eight thousand new graduates join our alumni community every year.

We are a diverse community, with a rich array of experiences to contribute. Your continued involvement in the Swinburne community is essential to our future success, and I am so glad you stay in touch.

I do hope you enjoy this wonderful exhibition. I look forward to catching up with you during the course of the morning.