**Exhibition Introduction by Dr Cleary, Curator**

With three prime ministers and as many leadership contests how can *Behind the Lines* be anything other than a tale of three leaders? An unpopular leader who came to grief when her fortune changed, a popular leader who briefly succeeded when his fortune revived, and a leader who based his hopes on changing fortune. Yet the interesting thing about fortune is that it wears many guises, is capricious by nature and, for politicians lusting for power, costly to rely on.

2013 was not a year for the faint hearted. When every day seemed to bring a new dramatic happening, a new front page story and a witheringly clever cartoon to our attention, it seems appropriate to reflect on the accuracy of politics viewed through the prism of the press. Each of the chief metropolitan dailies has its own cartoonists and, while impartiality is undoubtedly a great virtue in some professions, it is clear that cartoonists can be far from impartial. Political cartoons feed off conflict and there was plenty of conflict leading up to the September 7 election.

*Behind the Lines* traces the high and low points of the electoral year when opinion polls had the power to destroy or reward, when leadership transition was swift, retribution fast, resignations many and some important issues were trivialized. When so many thought our politicians deserved censure perhaps the exhibition’s enduring value will be to remind us what animated censure looks like.

For cartoonists, Campaign 2013 started when Prime Minister Gillard called an election with an eight month lead time. Andrew Weldon’s banana lounges and book titles, Christopher Downes’ newspaper headline, Jon Kudelka’s electoral eyewear and Andrew Dyson’s product ‘best before’ date remind us of issues seeking shade: ICAC, Craig Thompson, Peter Slipper and Kevin Rudd. When Christine Milne dissolved the Labor-Greens alliance it left the government vulnerable but Bruce Petty thought political oblivion awaited her party. Independents, Tony Windsor and Rob Oakeshott, who feature in David Pope’s version, complain about the disruption although they are unmoved to intervene. By March the Labor Party’s destiny seems clear after the poor Western Australian election result.

A public hearing and corruption findings - the subject could not be less attractive - yet we are drawn into David Rowe’s courtroom. Eddie Obeid’s visage sums up the perceived arrogance and contempt that caused discomfort in the Labor Party. Skiing federal cabinet ministers are not safe if they’re in the path of Peter Nicholson’s careering Obeid snowball. John Tiedemann’s close observation of character pays homage to Grant Wood’s *American Gothic,* althoughdisgraced politician Ian MacDonald will not meet our gaze*.* Michael Leunig’s *Danger Signs* warns the public of what is to come as the Gillard government heads to Sydney’s western suburbs to shore up voter support.

In March parliamentary tension and leadership speculation brought Prime Minister Gillard’s factional supporters sharply into focus. Ward O’Neill’s cartoon tells the story lightly, clearly and unforgettably: AWU heavyweight Paul Howes and federal minister, Bill Shorten, flanking Prime Minister Gillard in response to an exquisite factional dilemma. The push to oust the leader was lost after the faceless men in Rod Clement’s cartoon intervened. Christopher Downes’s composition is even more direct, depicting the conspirators’ fate and, in explaining the public nature of dirty politics, Fiona Katauskas suggests all contenders are tainted and all unity tickets doomed.

A succession of revised revenue forecasts leading up to the May budget eroded public confidence in the Gillard government. Gericault’s *Raft of Medusa* furnished the props and setting for Alan Moir’s shipwrecked Treasurer defiantly holding onto vain hope. Cathy Wilcox’s bottomless pit tells the a story by means of a few carefully chosen details, while John Farmer’s wayward darts and Jos Valdman’s magician’s hat achieve the cheerful spirit required when all seems lost. Only the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Gonski policy barrels keep David Rowe’s shipwrecked Labor politicians afloat.

While Rocco Fazzari’s focus turned to Opposition Leader Abbott’s personal transformation, other cartoonists turned to Coalition policies. Malcolm Turnbull feels the broadband policy pain in Cathy Wilcox’s cartoon whereas the Opposition Leader feels it in David Rowe’s version. Jason Chatfield used the Coalition’s border control billboard and Paul Zanetti a Sydney bookmaker as front man in his live betting odds cartoon. There is no attempt to minimise Shadow Treasurer Joe Hockey’s importance: Bruce Petty drew him centre stage giving his budget reply speech. He is a policy advisor in Jon Kudelkas’s paid parental leave scheme cartoon and a loyal supporter in David Rowe’s *Plan B*.

A potent mixture of gender, opinion polls, self-preservation and ambition fuelled the final session of the 43rd Parliament. Consider for example, David Rowe’s embarrassed Opposition figures and wavering Labor Cabinet members, Fiona Katauskas’s “venal, sexist, toxic, nasty, awful, just awful” days and First Dog on the Moon’s Final Hundred Days of the Labor Government. Michael Leunig and Dean Alston draw our attention to Prime Minister Gillard’s knitting publicity stunt that backfired. Rod Clement draws a troubled and contrite Bill Shorten and, like Greg Smith, a vindicated Kevin Rudd. David Pope’s Prime Minister Rudd is far from humble and there is a bittersweet note in First Dog on the Moon’s eulogy to Julia Gillard.

July and August were Prime Minister Rudd’s and Deputy Prime Minister Albanese’s months and under their leadership considerable party and some reform was achieved. Jon Kudelka likened Anthony Albanese to an amanuensis and David Rowe to a faithful companion although the cartoon that places us at the start of Labor’s election campaign is Mark Knight’s caricature of Kevin Rudd’s shaving cut selfie. David Rowe portrayed the Prime Minister as an intrepid explorer clearing a path to economic recovery; Peter MacMullin questioned his political motives while Bill Leak targeted the consummate media performer. Jonathan Bentley’s double portrait of prime minsters Howard and Keating offered the incumbent an opportunity for reflection although Warren Brown preferred to emphasize Rudd’s frenetic mind.

During the Coalition’s election campaign some cartoonists simply got lucky. Many seized on Tony Abbott’s ‘suppository/repository’ and sex appeal gaffes while Glen Le Lievre and Ron Tandberg targeted an influential media proprietor and Coalition supporter. Although David Pope’s voter is stretched between two extremes the election night tally gave the Coalition enough seats to form government. The only prop Sean Leahy needed to convey Tony Abbott’s House of Representatives victory was his iconic red swimming costumes. Not everything went the Coalition’s way: a lengthy Senate ballot paper and complicated vote swap lead to a novel Upper House result, although Kevin Rudd’s reform legacy ensured the Labor Party remained leaderless for some time.

**Eight themes of the Exhibition**

*THE OPENING MOVE*

The year 2013 started quietly enough before the long summer holiday served up an election announcement that was a gift to Opposition leader Abbott and a thunderbolt to all. The 14 September poll date was etched in the nation’s mind but citizens were skeptical. Prime Minister Gillard’s opening move backfilled when her campaign strategy was criticised and the media turned its attention to Kevin Rudd. Within a month of the announcement, the Labor-Greens alliance had dissolved and voters had deserted labor during the Western Australian state election.

*CAUGHT IN THE WEB*

The cloud of controversy over the Australian Labor Party intensified when the New South Wales Independent Commission against Corruption inquiry began questioning federal cabinet ministers. Corruption allegations made the daily press a curse for Prime Minister Gillard, and public discontent mounted. The Labor Party was tarnished but political survival pushed the Gillard government to a resolution, with awkward consequence: a trip to Western Sydney to shore up voters support.

*ROOKS DEFENDING THE QUEEN*

As they moved among Labor’s rank and file, two powerful rooks – Australian Workers Union national secretary Paul Howes and Workplace Relation minister Bill Shorten – showed their strength. Despite all the speculation and opinion polls, a whisper went around that the unions would not desert the Prime Minister. Kevin Rudd heard his supporters rally and rail but would not join them in a single sally. A reinvigorated Gillard sternly turned on disloyal colleagues in a scene not easily forgotten.

*A BROKEN BUDGET PROMISE*

When a slump in the federal tax revenue resulted in a bigger than expected deficit, Prime Minister Gillard and Treasurer Swan jettisoned the promised surplus. The broken budget promise upset the nation and as the deficit increased, so did the credibility gap. With mixed feelings, the Gillard government announced reforms to welfare, health, education, foreign aid and superannuation to help bring down a ‘financially responsible budget’ and fund DisabilityCare and the Gonski education reforms.

*METAMORPHOSIS*

The coalition played a long game, rarely diverting from policy and preferring the certainty of election victory over choosing a new leader and faltering. As long as the Gillard government faced internal division, opposition leader Abbott’s chance of electoral success appeared to increase. By May his banner was flying high and the period of voter doubt has seemingly dispelled. But when prime ministerial change interrupted the predicted flow of events, he wisely started to consider two options: winning the election or losing it.

*DESPERATE DAYS, DESPERATE ACTIONS*

Machiavelli tells us that princess who war with their own hopes and are vanquished bear silence but not submission, and an unpopular leader is replaced during a period of doubt. The poll-driven Gillard government was a party in turmoil; its member were despondent and they questioned what they stood for. But disintegration of the Labor Party was not to be endured, and politicians who yearned for victory re-elected Kevin Rudd as a party leader. Julia Gillard’s face betrayed a transient trace of woe as she acknowledged the sudden, startling defeat.

*THE KING SITS AT THE SUMMIT*

Picture a modern-day political battlefield strewn with Labor politicians. Ponder the cost of leadership change – vale Gillard, Crean, Combet, Emerson, Garret and Smith. The count continued to rise as more ministers resigned and other languished on the back benches. Undaunted, Prime Minister Rudd pushed ahead with his four-fold agenda: to overturn or reform Gillard government policies, to progress using ministers of his choosing, to announce the election date to his advantage and to win the election.

*ENDGAME*

The campaign for control of the 44th Parliament began and the trust Opposition leader Abbott has gained with difficulty he now held with ease. On 7 September 2013 the nation voted, and a leader sure of his strength and of his opponent’s disunity was elected as Australian’s 28th prime minister. When Tony Abbott declared victory, a Labor dream faded.