

EDMUND CAPON

Edmund Capon was appointed Director of the Art Gallery of NSW in November 1978 for a three year term – the first internationally-trained art historian and curator to be appointed to the role. He held this position for 33 years, retiring at the end of 2011. During his tenure, he oversaw two significant building expansions, particularly regarding the Asian galleries. He established a corporate foundation based upon the NGV model to fund purchases for the collection, oversaw significant collection development and curated many important exhibitions of Australian and International art. He also continued to research, write and publish, and produced a three-part TV series, Meishu – Travels in Chinese Art for the ABC and China Central TV.

Edmund Capon (b. 1940), commenced his museum career at a commercial gallery in London whilst a student at the Courtauld Institute of Art. In 1966, he began his career at the Victorian and Albert Museum. Having completed an MPhil in Chinese art and archaeology (including language) from London University's Department of Oriental and African Studies, he was appointed assistant keeper in the Far Eastern Section of V&A in 1973.

Acknowledged as a specialist in his field, he undertook three cultural tours to China between 1974 and 1978. It was during the first of these tours in Xian that he witnessed the initial diggings which revealed the entombed warriors. In 1976, he was commissioned by the Australia Council and Art Exhibitions Australia to write and publish a book, Art and Archeology in China. The book was an accompaniment to The Chinese Exhibition: a selection of recent archaeological finds of the People's Republic of China which toured the state galleries of Victoria, NSW and South Australia in 1977.

Within his first decade he more than doubled the Art Gallery of New South Wales' annual attendance. His major blockbuster, The Entombed Warriors (1983), broke all records, nationally, by recording over 800,000 paying attendees. He was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1994 and received an OBE and Centenary Medal in 2003. He also received French and Italian honours for his contribution to art and culture. In 2000, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of New South Wales in 2000.