

Thank you Robert and Louise, and good evening. It's a pleasure to be with you all tonight. Firstly, I would like to congratulate all the students who have works on display. It really is a wonderful show – and cause for great celebration. I'd also like to recognise the dedication of the Art Department, and also parents and friends gathered here tonight who have supported these artistic endeavours.

What I'd like to do in this brief speech is to offer some thoughts on the value of objects. What *might* these artworks mean to us? What will be their fate once the exhibition is over? Many will hang proudly in parents' homes as you, the artists, travel the world; the more portable objects may go with you on all of your adventures; other pieces will be stored under beds, in sheds (hopefully very carefully!) – awaiting the day when they will be unwrapped.

These objects will forever act as markers of time for exhibiting students – they embody some aspect of your feelings about the world in this particular period and, as such, they are precious. I hope that you unwrap (or reacquaint yourself with) these artworks as 20 year olds, 40 year olds, 60 year olds, and experience something of the sensation of being in this moment.

Of course, not all of these objects will carry deep meaning into our old age. As Marcel Proust reminds us, it is impossible to predict which objects will stimulate strong memories – we only understand in time what has been important. For those who are not inclined towards the fine arts, memories may stem from other objects, from other activities, but such clarity of recognition is frequently connected to imaginative thought – to creative acts.

I didn't do 'Art', but rather 'Speech and Drama' (now known as 'Theatre Arts'), in my final year at school. If I try to remember my Year 12 self, in a general sense, I can't really picture who I was. I only begin to understand my 17-year-old self when I remember playing Shakespeare's Juliet, Chekhov's Nina in *The Seagull*, Cathy in Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. The emotions embodied in these characters were beyond my lived experience – I had never fallen in love like Juliet; I had never descended into Nina's deep despair or Cathy's madness. And yet I find my young self again and again when I recall my attempts to inhabit these characters.

These plays and books represent a period when I opened my mind up to the world of the imagination; to emotions I did not yet understand, extending my view of what the world might be. And my grappling with these thrilling new ideas is the memory that remains.

To feel anchored to, and to recall, the best parts of ourselves – the open, thoughtful and curious aspects of our being – has been, at least for me, to be less lost in the world. And this is the gift that I received from this school, for which I am forever grateful.

To share our creativity and intellect with others is also of immense value – because it is by looking at our friend's art, our friend's interpretation of a piece of literature, that we come to learn about alternative realities, alternative views. And I refer again to Proust who writes:

'It is only through art that we can escape from ourselves and know how another person sees a universe which is not the same as our own and whose landscapes would otherwise have remained as unknown as any there may be on the moon.'

Now my 18-year-old nephew told me to cut the conclusion to this speech (!) – telling me everyone will 'tune out' if I suggest any curbing of the use of technology. And sure, I don't wish to give anyone a lecture – technology is part of all of our lives and no one is giving it up any time soon. All I would say to students is; don't let the devices in your life deprive you of a deeper connection to yourselves and others. Take time to nurture your imagination. Be open to the mysteries of your precious minds.

So, without further ado, I declare the John XXIII College Visual Arts exhibition 'open'.