

**2007 Sydney PEN Award Presentation Speech by Mara Moustafine,  
President of Sydney PEN on 14 November 2007.**

The Sydney PEN Award was instituted in 2006 to acknowledge outstanding work by a Sydney PEN member in support of PEN's aims.

The Award is made possible by the generosity of Sydney PEN member Jane Morgan and Charles Wolf of The Pen Shop in Sydney.

This year we are awarding the 2007 Sydney PEN Award to Nicholas Jose, who has been a driving force in Sydney PEN for over a decade and served as president from 2002 - 2005.

Nick is currently Chair of Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide and is General Editor of the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature. He is an acclaimed and prolific writer and a respected commentator on contemporary Chinese art and culture. Nick has published seven novels, including *Original Face*, *The Red Thread* and *Paper Nautilus*, a memoir, *Black Sheep*, as well as several collections of short stories, essays and translations. From 1987 to 1990 he was Cultural Counselor at the Australian Embassy in Beijing.

Nick's time in China had a profound impact on him.

In his own words: ' I came to understand as never before how intellectual and creative freedom are inseparable from truth and justice in a society. They breathe the same air '.

Nick's active involvement with Sydney PEN began in 1991, shortly after his return from China. He served as vice-President in 1999, then acting President in 2001 and President from 2002 till 2005. On moving to Adelaide, Nick has assisted the development of a PEN group in Adelaide, while remaining a committed member of Sydney PEN.

In all his work for PEN, Nick has truly embraced the PEN vision - taking a strong public stand in supporting freedom of expression in Australia and the world at large and promoting the written word in all its forms as a way to understanding and the free transmission of ideas.

Under Nick's leadership, Sydney PEN saw significant growth in its public profile, membership and support. There are many achievements I could talk about, but I will focus on two areas in particular.

The first is building PEN's relevance locally – which was particularly important during a very dark time in contemporary Australia, including the Tampa refugee crisis in 2001 and the appalling treatment of asylum seekers held in detention.

Nick was among a small group of individuals from Sydney PEN who rallied writers and other prominent citizens to support a petition protesting the government's actions, culminating in an advertisement in the *Weekend Australian* with the names of over 50,000 people.

For years, Sydney PEN had taken action on behalf of writers in prison all over the world. Now, with writers and journalists among the detainees in Australia, Sydney PEN began to highlight the treatment of asylum seekers in its activities and brought the weight of International PEN to bear on the issue.

In February 2003, Sydney PEN's Writers in Detention Committee was formed to campaign for the release of individual writers, the first such committee in International PEN. In 2004, Sydney PEN's anthology *Another Country*, edited by Tom Keneally and Rosie Scott, gave voice to these refugee writers. All of this work led to Sydney PEN receiving a Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission award in 2004. In the words of a couple of people on the Committee at the time, "none of this would have happened without Nick's leadership". I should add that, thankfully, the Writers in Detention Committee is now defunct.

The second area I would like to highlight is Nick's role in strengthening Sydney PEN's links with International PEN, as well as driving greater focus by International PEN on our region, the Asia Pacific. It was during Nick's leadership that Sydney PEN started attending congresses again, taking our views to the international realm to shape the debate there.

Not surprisingly, one of the areas Sydney PEN emphasised as being of critical importance was freedom of expression in China. It was largely through the work of Nick Jose and his then fellow committee member, Chip Rolley that this issue was brought to the top of International PEN's agenda. In 2005, Nick and Chip visited China on behalf of the International PEN Board to report on PEN activity there, shedding light on the pressures on Independent Chinese PEN, which operates both in China and overseas. Their trip led to the holding of the International PEN Asia and Pacific regional conference in Hong Kong in 2007, the first time International PEN has met on Chinese soil.

Through his unwavering commitment, creativity and effort, Nick has played a critical role in bringing Sydney PEN to its present dynamic state in Australia, from where it has also been able to influence International PEN's agenda to fulfill its vision.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to present the 2007 Sydney PEN Award to Nicholas Jose.