

## Women's Art Register - National Cultural Policy 2022 Submission

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### About the Women's Art Register

The Women's Art Register is Australia's living archive of women's art practice (cis, non-binary and trans inclusive) and a National, Artist-Run and Not-for-Profit community and resource. Assessed as a 'Collection of National Significance' through the Heritage Collections Council in 2009, this unique archive houses the images, catalogues, posters and ephemera of over 5000 Australian and International artists.

Since 1975 the Women's Art Register has provided an inclusive, independent platform for research, education, advocacy and support for its members and the Arts, Education and GLAM sectors, enhancing the status of women artists and addressing issues of equity, professional practice and cultural heritage.

### We submit to the National Cultural Policy the following responses to the 5 pillars:

- 1. First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.*
- 2. A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.*

Our arts are vital expressions of human experience. They embody individual and collective stories, histories, identities and help us understand what it means to be human. They connect us to our past and imagine our future. Our First Nations cultures connect us to over 75,000 years of living culture and knowledge and the country on which we live. The shared stories of millions of peoples who now call Australia home promote mutual understanding and respect and connect us to a global community.

Opportunities for diverse women artists to express their identity, through art practice, are vital. Women represent over 50% of our population, as Australian artist Ann Newmarch underscored in her 1978 print: "Women Hold Up Half the Sky."

**3. *The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.***

The creative and cultural industries contributed \$63.5 billion to the Australian economy in 2016-17. The industries also have positive downstream impacts on the economy, including tourism and hospitality, as reported by the Australia Council in February, 2020.<sup>1</sup> Yet organisations such as ours fall through the cracks of Federal arts policies - that often locate arts infrastructure only in galleries, museums or well known organisations - due to our volunteer and community status. In 2019 there were **1244 hours** of volunteer labour donated to the Women's Art Register by our pool of regular and/or occasional volunteers. We create grassroots opportunities for artists and educational opportunities for students, provide information to researchers and curators, and we assist in training and skills development for women artists. This "invisible" work sits behind often inaccurate assumptions by Governments, of the size and value of the arts sector. Our organisation supports members from all States and Territories, and we punch far above our weight. But our valuable work is under threat, due to an arts ecology that fosters competition, burn-out and reliance on volunteer labour. Strategic and targeted policies and an ongoing funding structure for longstanding grassroots arts communities such as ours, would go a long way to securing the precarious position of such organisations, and to enhance the community service and arts outcomes they demonstrate.

We recommend and support an "**Allowance for Artists**" program. The government could provide a basic income similar to Job Seeker (without the requirement to look for work), in exchange for demonstrated art outcomes via regular part-time placements such as: mentorship of young people or groups, artist-in-residence programs for ALL schools & LGAs, collaborations with not-for-profit & volunteer community groups, Indigenous support partnerships, apprentice & skills training, mentorships/training/residencies with organisations that support communities affected by mental health, family violence, homelessness, & migrant and refugee communities.

**4. *Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.***

A focus on the live performance aspects of the arts, such as music, opera, or comedy, is often demonstrated by Federal and State governments. However, 7 million people visited

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<sup>1</sup> Australia Council, Domestic Arts Tourism: Connecting the Country.Feb 17, 2020  
<https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/domestic-arts-tourism-connecting-the-country/>

a gallery across Australia in 2017, with 44% of those in Regional galleries.<sup>2</sup> Local Government support of the Visual Arts has grown significantly in the last 5-10 years. The Australian Academy of the Humanities' A New Approach Report reveals that 60% of public galleries are now funded by Local Government.<sup>3</sup> This evidence reveals that untapped value in the visual arts is best targeted at the community level, in partnership with existing community groups. In tandem with Local Government and the Not-For-Profit sector, artist-run and volunteer-based organisations are vital in enhancing local opportunities for artists to create and share their work, collaborate with others, build community, enhance community resilience, and advocate for local conditions.

The Women's Art Register would like to see a more equitable distribution of arts funding in Victoria, particularly for smaller organisations that do not necessarily adhere to more traditional funding categories, and operate laterally across multiple areas such as exhibition, collection, community engagement, education, and project-based work.

As an organisation who advocates for, supports, collects and cares for the work and legacy of women artists (cis and trans-inclusive) and gender diverse artists, and is predominantly female-run, we would also like to see more focus on representation for female-identifying and gender diverse artists and arts professionals. This might include specific exhibition and work spaces, cross-sectional support and workshop groups to provide professional development, and more specific grant funding for women and gender diverse artists and arts organisations.

##### **5. *Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.***

As the largest and oldest archive of women's art in Australia, and the longest running organisation of its kind in the world, we have a unique intergenerational knowledge base. With more lateral funding support to grassroots community organisations like ours, we would gain the resources to increase overall digital access, awareness, enjoyment and participation in these stories. We would have increased capacity to celebrate the contribution of women artists and advocate for them in cultural discourse through dynamic public programmes, collaborative partnerships, media engagement, publishing and special projects. As a membership based community of about 300 members from across all States and Territories of Australia, we are already well placed to connect with contemporary artists across Australia, and to understand the issues that affect them. Many community-based organisations like ours already have the ideas and the stories - we just lack the funding resources to realise them.

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Public Galleries Snapshot: <https://pqav.org.au/Australian-Public-Galleries-Snapshot~5294>

<sup>3</sup> A New Approach: <https://www.humanities.org.au/new-approach/>

Report Two: three tiers of government support for the arts. Local Government has grown significantly in last 5-10 years

Report Three: A view from middle Australia: Perceptions of arts, culture and creativity