

Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation.

I'm a writer and arts worker who's been working in the sector for 25 years. I've authored six books. I come from a culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) background and I've worked both in creative roles and in advocating for racial equity in the sector.

The shocking truth about the Australian arts and cultural sector is that it is divided by issues of class and race. The data makes this clear. A 2023 study by the Australia Council for the Arts, [Widening The Lens: Social inequality and arts participation](#) showed that almost twice as many people who identify as belonging to the upper classes create art compared to those who identify as belonging to the lower classes (60% vs 37%). David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya reported in their 2024 study [Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia](#) that almost half (48%) of partnered Australian artists rely on support from their partner, while around a quarter (26%) of all artists rely on the financial support from their broader family. This means that people whose families are wealthy enough to support them are shockingly over-represented among Australian artists.

Meanwhile, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), non-English-speaking background (NESB) and CARM communities remain vastly underrepresented among artists, arts workers and arts leaders. According to Creative Australia's 2026 [Towards Equity 2](#) report, only 13% of artists have a NESB background (compared to 22% of the Australian population), while 25% of cultural production sector workers have a CALD background (compared to 34% of Australian workers) and 21% of surveyed arts leaders have a CALD background (compared to 43% of the Australian population). This is worse in certain art forms, such as among writers, only 8% of whom come from a NESB background, according to the [Artists as Workers](#) research.

These figures are deeply concerning because they have a huge impact on the kinds of stories that are told about Australia, how we understand ourselves and who we see reflected back to us when we consider our place in our homeland. The arts do not reflect the reality of the Australian community, which leads to division, animosity and polarisation. Of course, people think something is going wrong when they see their own communities are not the same as the Australia presented to them on screen and in books, in music and on stage. They either become angry and want to replicate the white, affluent community presented to them through regressive and racist policies, or they become angry because they are not represented and demand to have their voices heard through sometimes anti-social means.

We must invest in artists who can create stories of Australia make us feel proud. That can bring our community together with a shared vision for who we are. Only the arts can do this, and it's becoming more urgent than ever.