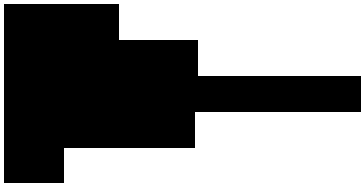


**National Cultural Policy Submission**

1469466

Public and anonymous



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I strongly support the development of a National Cultural Policy. Australia needs a cultural policy that recognises artists not only as cultural contributors, but as workers whose labour, expertise and long-term practice require sustainable financial support.

A key issue in my practice, and across the visual arts sector, is the gap between artist fees and the real cost of sustaining a professional practice. Fee schedules, including NAVA's, provide an important minimum benchmark and have been vital in advocating for artists' rights. However, minimum fees are often far removed from what would constitute a sustainable income.

One useful test for any artist fee is this: how many equivalent paid opportunities would an artist need to undertake in a year to earn a sustainable income, and is that number realistic within the actual conditions of artistic practice?

If we consider \$100,000 gross income as a benchmark, with around \$20,000 absorbed by business overheads, that leaves approximately \$80,000 before personal tax and living costs. If an artist fee is \$5,000, an artist would need 20 equivalent paid opportunities in a year to reach that gross income. If the fee is \$2,500, they would need 40. These numbers are unrealistic.

My current solo exhibition at a nationally recognised contemporary arts organisation is one example. The artist fee was \$5,000, which is generous by Australian standards, and I was allocated a \$3,500 materials budget. The organisation spent considerably more on the exhibition build, but I still spent around \$15,000 producing the exhibition and needed six months of long service leave to realise the work. This is not a criticism of the organisation. It points to a broader structural issue.

It is not uncommon for the artist to be the only person in an institutional gallery context who is not paid once expenses are taken into account. Others are rightly paid for their labour, while the artist's fee is absorbed by production costs, studio costs, materials, transport, documentation, insurance and lost paid work time.

Artists are subsidising the arts in this country through unpaid labour, personal debt, foregone income, personal resources, unpaid research time and the absorption of production costs that should be recognised as part of the cost of presenting work.

This raises urgent questions about equity and access. Who gets to make art in this country? Who gets to build and sustain a career over decades? Which voices maintain a public platform? Under current conditions, the artists who can continue are often those with access to intergenerational wealth, family support, secure housing, a partner's income or other financial safety nets. This affects whose work is seen, whose perspectives shape public culture, and whose practices are lost because they are not financially sustainable.

Meaningful change requires substantially more funding across the entire arts ecosystem, at a level that reflects the cultural, social and economic value the sector produces. Fair artist payment cannot be achieved by asking already under-resourced organisations to redistribute inadequate budgets. It requires structural funding that allows organisations to pay artists properly while supporting arts workers and the broader infrastructure that makes cultural life possible.

A National Cultural Policy should ensure that artists are not simply recognised symbolically, but supported materially to continue making the work on which the sector depends.