

I'm Fentine Gard – A game developer & artist from Melbourne. I'm currently working on Dicot, a games project funded by Vicscreen Originate (amongst other sources). I've been developing games for the last decade, & studied game design (as well as their surrounding culture) at RMIT.

On a real, logistical level – videogames are the newest major art form within our culture. They have precedents in pre-digital play, of course, but we're talking about the last 60 years for the most part. In that way, they're often misunderstood – or undervalued as culturally relevant works (their being born into the toy market of the 1980s maybe solidified that misrepresentation, but that's a digression). & yet, they're an *extremely* relevant, widely engaged-with, visible medium. ~ 4/5 people in Australia engage with videogames daily, games employ up to 10,000 Australians, etc. Despite this, they only receive a fractional amount of funding (~3%) compared to film and television – which themselves are obviously important – but it's proportional outsized. With high-budget game development reconfiguring into a minute collection of major conglomerates & international production houses over the last half-decade or so, the majority of Australia's breakaway successes are made by small, independent, Australian teams. These are *visible* successes, and due to digital games distribution, are sincere international ambassadors for Australian art. They have been since easily the early 2010s, I'd estimate. Essentially: videogames are a serious locus of cultural work, labour and international artistic outreach.

To this end, they should be given the same focus as Australia's film and television efforts. Or at least comparable focus – funding equivalent to 10%, maybe, of film & television's. Decision-making bodies for games also need to be populated by people who know the landscape; Actual game designers or publishers are underrepresented within games funding, which often creates an uneven dynamic with artists & practitioners. We also need to be careful of AI's encroachment onto jobs within digital play. It's a real threat, with games as the intersection of computer science, design & visual art – all fields that AI developers routinely threaten to steamroll (with, frankly, inferior implementations of what humans have been doing for decades). Finally – The establishment of a national games agency, as oversight for games funding, operations & global marketing – would be invaluable. It might be able to effectively liaison between small teams, funding bodies, & parent government programs. At present, the connections between these groups are opaque to many career game developers, making livelihoods & ability to practice more unstable than they ought to be.

Australia already has, by all accounts, a strong international reputation for quality games funding & output. But it *could* go further: making careers more stable, opening jobs, protecting what we already have, and making Australian stories flourish both within & beyond this country.

Thank you for your time,  
Fentine Gard.

