

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

For more than thirty years I have worked as an independent writer and consultant in the Australian visual arts sector. Since becoming self-employed in 1992, I have built a career across arts writing, criticism, curating, public speaking, artist interviews for archival and film purposes, public art consultancy, and direct consultancy to artists and organisations. My work has included contributions to commercial galleries, magazines, journals, digital publications, state libraries and other cultural organisations. I also write memoir, essays and creative non-fiction.

Over the course of my career, one of the clearest changes I have observed is that it has become increasingly difficult to sustain an independent livelihood within the arts sector, despite the growth in the number of artists, arts graduates, cultural events and public discussion around the value of creativity.

The challenge is not simply individual precarity. It is the gradual erosion of the broader cultural ecology that supports artists, writers and public engagement with the arts.

The reduction and redirection of funding at both state and federal levels has had cumulative consequences across the sector. I support the importance of inclusive funding models and the prioritisation of First Nations arts and culture. However, there also needs to be recognition that many independent practitioners working outside institutions — including writers, critics, editors, curators and small publishers — are struggling to remain viable.

Independent arts writing is particularly vulnerable. Over the past three decades, the number of publications able to support serious visual arts criticism and long-form cultural writing has diminished significantly. Publications increasingly rely on advertising, sponsorship and promotional partnerships to survive. As a result, the distinction between independent criticism and advertorial content has become increasingly blurred.

This matters because arts writing is not simply promotional support for the sector. Independent criticism, essays and reviews contribute to cultural memory, public understanding and informed debate. They create context around artistic practice and help connect artists and audiences across generations. Without independent voices, cultural discourse becomes narrower, more market-driven and less intellectually rigorous.

Freelance arts workers also perform a substantial amount of unpaid or underpaid labour that is rarely acknowledged in policy discussions. Research, travel, relationship-building, mentoring, editing, interviewing and archival work are all essential to the sector, yet much of this labour occurs outside sustainable fee structures. Many experienced practitioners remain in the sector out of commitment rather than economic viability.

I would like to see greater direct support for small-scale cultural infrastructure: niche publishers, independent journals, freelance writers, regional arts initiatives and artist-led activity. Small grants and multi-year operational support for independent cultural producers could have an enormous impact relative to cost. Greater recognition should also be given to the role of arts writers and critics as part of Australia's cultural infrastructure and not as peripheral participants.

Thanks for the opportunity to make a submission.