

Next year will be my 50th year of working in the cultural sector. I have worked in urban, rural, regional and very remote parts of Australia. I have worked with people aged from preschool to in their 90's. I have worked through multiple disciplines (dance, theatre, music, storytelling, visual arts and construction). I work with diverse participants and appeal to wide audiences. In 2014, I was made a Member (AM) in the General Division of the Order of Australia in 2014, for my work as a cultural and community worker, especially for the work in the remote Aboriginal community of Lajamanu. I have spent the last 30 years working across the Northern Territory. My work goes beyond the idea of a single language or form and explores collaborative cultural and creative making.

I feel the five pillars are excellent as they recognise that culture and community are vital to our social well-being and cohesion. Although recognising the benefits of well-trained and experienced arts and cultural workers, it is also important to see that much of what creates a vibrant cultural and community life is not recognised in the idea of "Creative Industries" as this only recognises the paid or money-making aspects. Much work done in the community cultural development area is where the sense of who we are as a people, how we celebrate our creative selves, how we learn respect for difference and the rightful place we all have in making and being our own cultural creators.

A major challenge in my area of work is the preferential treatment of the 'higher' art forms, and the subsequent valuing of them, as opposed to the on-the-ground, arts for everyone, everyone's story.

Working in a regional context, and often in very remote Indigenous communities, it is clear that to place First Nations First is going to take more dedicated resources and training. It also goes into education, where our arts and culture can counteract the divisive, racist and phobic behaviours we see developing in this country and worldwide.

If a Place for Every Story is real, then more resourcing needs to go into diverse community practice. If the only stories we see and hear are from higher art forms (as evidenced by where the money goes), then by very practice, most voices are silenced and remain unheard. So I say more support for underrepresented Australian Stories.

In order to centre the artist, we also need to centralise the cultural workers and holders. I recognise the creative spirit of all people, and see more people as artists than the "Creative Industries" might recognise. I see that people who work and engage with their communities, especially on a local basis, are often overlooked. Their practice is usually inclusive, diverse, collaborative, and embedded in their community. COVID made a lot of artists yearn for a connection to their community, and yet their funded practice kept them separate. And as soon as possible, they went back to old ways. I want the policy to recognise and uplift the community arts worker, as this is where the community engagement and sense of meaning is developed. This includes appropriate training and career pathways

Strong infrastructure is not only appropriate and purpose-built facilities (these are good too), but should include the community as infrastructure. People are what scaffold our culture, and people are responsible for its maintenance and development.

When engaging audiences, there are many different pathways, but in a regional context, it is important that the audience sees themselves reflected in the artistic and cultural practices that are around them. Touring work is fine as we get to see something different, but it is often not relevant to us. It is also apparent that if you say how are the arts valued, and you follow the money, then Community and cultural development, the place where most artistic practice actually takes place across Australia, is given a fraction of the financial and infrastructural support that artform development is given. With approximately 28,000,000 people in this country, and if there is a story for everyone, then there needs to be some reality put around this, in resources and embedded thinking. Not all stories need to be big, expensive, and shouted about around the world. Truly local development of art is what creates community cohesion, our sense of safety, and where our true wealth lies.

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