

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

Seventh Gallery

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Seventh Gallery is an artist-run, non-profit contemporary art space operating in ██████████ ██████████. We program contemporary art, critical discourse and public events at the intersection of practice, politics and philosophy, and we co-operate the Forum of Para-Academia (FOPA), a peer-led forum for artists, writers and researchers working outside institutional scholarship. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the next National Cultural Policy.

Take action against censorship, political interference and racism in the arts, and invest in the grassroots, artist-run infrastructure that holds the sector together

It is critical that the forthcoming National Cultural Policy reflects current issues faced by artists, arts workers and the sector at large. Seventh Gallery is concerned by the prevalence of censorship, political interference and racism in the arts, and by the chronic underinvestment in the artist-run and micro-organisational infrastructure that sustains contemporary visual arts practice in this country. This submission is grounded in core commitments to decolonisation, anti-racism and anti-discrimination; artists as the moral compass of the sector; freedom of artistic expression without limitations; freedom from political interference in the arts; and the recognition of artist-run spaces as essential cultural infrastructure deserving of equitable, recurrent investment.

Commitment to decolonisation, anti-racism and anti-discrimination

(Pillars 1: First Nations First, 3: Centrality of the Artist & 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

- The National Cultural Policy must take a decolonial, anti-racist and anti-discrimination approach. It should respect and take leadership from those in the sector who are already working from a strong decolonial, anti-racist and anti-discrimination framework.
- The IHRA definition of antisemitism must be removed from all arts, cultural and educational institutions and be replaced with the UN Core Stance of Values: *“The UN asserts that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, without distinction of any kind, including race or ethnic origin. It maintains that no state, institution, group, or individual should make any discrimination in human rights and fundamental freedoms.”*

Artists are the moral compass of the sector

(Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist)

- The National Cultural Policy must support artists to continue to be ethical and values-driven leaders of the sector and broader community.
- Artists must be able to speak freely, sign letters and participate in boycott actions without harming their reputation and livelihoods.
- Arts and cultural institutions must respect cultural diversity, and support, champion and care for the diverse conversations that artists bring to their programs, particularly those who have been targeted in the media for speaking out against injustices.
- Artists must not be instrumentalised by institutions, lobbyists, the media and politicians.

Freedom of speech and artistic expression

(Pillars 3: Centrality of the Artist & 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

- Strong cultural infrastructure must be based on artistic freedom of speech. This is already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act (11.e “to uphold and promote freedom of expression in the arts”) and needs to be upheld in the National Cultural Policy.
- In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, art must be able to facilitate critical discourse, address political issues and critique power and class structures.
- In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, there must be an end to the culture of intimidation that prevents artists from expressing and creating art freely.
- The National Cultural Policy must address the prevalence of censorship, targeting and cancellation of artists who speak out against injustices, particularly in relation to nations that have been condemned by the UN for acts of apartheid, genocide and war crimes.

Freedom from political interference in the arts

(Pillars 3: Centrality of the Artist & 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

- In order to create strong cultural infrastructure, the arts must remain independent and free from political interference.
- The National Cultural Policy must ensure independent and ‘arms length’ funding processes across federal, state and local government. This includes ensuring that politicians at all levels must not influence or give advice that results in the provision or removal of funding support of a particular project or artist. This is

already enshrined in the Creative Australia Act (article 14.2) and needs to be upheld in the National Cultural Policy.

- A key action for the National Cultural Policy must be to implement an inquiry into political interference in the arts, including through donations, board membership and lobbying.
- Donors must not influence arts organisations and institutions.
- Board members with connections to political parties or lobbyists must be removed.

Recognise the visual arts as a distinct sector with dedicated infrastructure

(Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story)

- The visual arts - particularly experimental, critical and conceptual practice - remain structurally underrepresented in national cultural policy. Unlike music (Music Australia), literature (Writing Australia), screen (Screen Australia, the Location Offset and streaming content requirements) and digital games (the Digital Games Tax Offset), the visual arts have no dedicated sector body - within Creative Australia or as a standalone agency - and no equivalent Revive-era policy instrument. The Visual Arts Board that once existed within the Australia Council has not been reinstated.
- This imbalance is compounded by the structural overrepresentation of the performing arts in federal cultural funding. The National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF), administered by Creative Australia in partnership with all state and territory governments, currently provides 39 performing arts companies across dance, theatre, circus, opera, orchestral and chamber music, with up to eight years of guaranteed multi-year investment (4+4 year contracts). The visual arts equivalent, the Visual Arts and Crafts Strategy (replaced from 1 July 2025 by the Visual Art, Craft and Design Framework 2025-2028), provides four-year cycles - half the funding security afforded to the performing arts, at a fraction of the per-organisation quantum. The structural disadvantage this creates for the small-to-medium and artist-run visual arts sector has been recognised since at least the 2015 federal arts funding cuts, when major performing arts funding was quarantined while a third of the rest of the Australia Council's funding was cut.
- Contemporary visual art is not only a cultural product, it is a site of thought, critique and civic imagination. The programming undertaken by Seventh Gallery and the para-academic work of FOPA creates space for ideas that do not fit neatly into market-facing creative industries frameworks. The next policy must affirm the value of practice that is discursive, difficult and non-commercial, and ensure funding criteria are designed to support this rather than inadvertently filter it out.

The centrality of the artist must extend to artist-led organisational labour

(Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist)

- Seventh Gallery strongly supports the framing of artists as workers. However, this recognition must extend to the organisational labour that sustains artist-run culture. The people who run spaces like Seventh are almost always artists themselves, absorbing curatorial, administrative, financial and strategic responsibilities, frequently without adequate pay.
- If policy is serious about fair and safe creative workplaces, it must grapple with the structural precarity embedded in the artist-run model, not merely in employment arrangements at larger organisations. This includes revisiting the relationship between volunteer labour and funding eligibility, which currently disadvantages micro-organisations.

Equitable infrastructure investment: the rent burden on artist-run spaces

(Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure)

- The framing of “cultural infrastructure” in both Revive and the current consultation paper continues to default toward major institutions: collecting bodies, national training organisations, flagship presenting venues. Artist-run initiatives are conspicuously absent from this picture, despite being foundational to the visual arts ecology. Spaces like Seventh provide the conditions under which emerging and mid-career artists develop, take risks and build audiences, work that larger institutions benefit from but rarely fund.
- Rent is one of the most significant and least acknowledged barriers to the sustainability of artist-run spaces. Unlike major collecting institutions and publicly funded organisations that typically occupy government-owned buildings, artist-run initiatives operate in the commercial rental market and carry the full burden of lease costs with minimal support. This structural inequity is rarely addressed in cultural policy and must be named directly in the next National Cultural Policy.
- Rising commercial rents in inner-city areas - where artist-run spaces have historically clustered and built community - are forcing closures and relocations that permanently damage artistic ecosystems. No amount of project funding compensates for the loss of a physical space, and the precarious tenure of artist-run venues undermines long-term programming, mentorship and community-building that cannot be replicated online.
- The National Cultural Policy must explicitly name artist-run initiatives as cultural infrastructure and establish dedicated, accessible funding streams that reflect the micro-organisational reality of how this work is structured. Project funding is insufficient. Operational continuity, including rent, requires recurrent investment.

- Federal, state and local governments should also be encouraged to explore tenancy support mechanisms to address the structural disadvantage faced by the artist-run sector. These should include genuinely affordable leases in government-owned buildings with affordability calibrated to what artist-run organisations can sustainably pay. Percentage-based discounts from market rate are inadequate; in inner-city contexts, even significantly reduced market rents remain unaffordable for micro-organisations. Further mechanisms include rates relief for landlords who house arts organisations, and long-term community land trust models.

Pilot and roll out a Basic Income for the Arts, modelled on Ireland (*Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist*)

- The next National Cultural Policy must commit to piloting and rolling out a Basic Income for the Arts in Australia, modelled on the Irish scheme that has been announced as permanent in Ireland's Budget 2026.
- The financial precarity of Australian artists is well-documented and structural. The most recent *Artists as Workers* study (Throsby & Petetskaya, Macquarie University and Creative Australia, 2024) found that practising professional artists in Australia earn on average \$54,500 per year in total income, with less than half coming from their creative work. The average income from creative work alone is approximately \$23,000, a figure that has remained stagnant in real terms since the 1980s. Just under half of all artists earn less than \$10,000 per year from their creative practice, and only 9% are able to devote all of their working time to artistic practice. This is not a sustainable basis for the sector the National Cultural Policy claims to support.
- Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) scheme provides direct, evidence-based proof that addressing artist precarity is both effective and economically sound. The Irish pilot launched in 2022, paid 2,000 randomly selected artists and creative arts workers €325 per week for three years, was structured as a randomised control trial with a control group, and was independently evaluated. The Irish Government announced in Budget 2026 that the scheme will be made permanent.
- Independent cost-benefit analysis (Alma Economics, commissioned by Ireland's Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, 2025) found that for every €1 invested, society received €1.39 in return. The pilot generated over €100 million in social and economic benefits, including approximately €80 million attributed to improvements in psychological wellbeing and €16.9 million in social value from audience engagement. After accounting for tax revenue and reduced social welfare payments, the net fiscal cost of the pilot reduced from €105 million to under €72 million.

- Practice-level outcomes were significant. Recipients spent approximately 8 additional hours per week on their creative practice, produced 40% more creative output, and reported statistically significant reductions in anxiety and depression compared with the control group.
- A Basic Income for the Arts in Australia would directly address the chronic income inequality faced by artists; reduce dependence on second and third jobs that pull artists away from creative practice; stabilise the workforce that contributed \$67.4 billion to the Australian economy in 2023–24; and meaningfully realise the "artists as workers" framework already embedded in *Revive*.
- Seventh Gallery recommends the next National Cultural Policy commit to a multi-year, randomised pilot of a Basic Income for the Arts in Australia, with independent longitudinal evaluation modelled on the Irish framework, as a foundational action in support of Pillar 3.

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Australia's cultural ecology is only as strong as its smallest, most porous institutions. The next National Cultural Policy must be one that protects artistic freedom, refuses political interference, takes a decolonial and anti-racist stance, and invests seriously in the artist-run sector that holds the contemporary visual arts together.