

## Our recommendations:

Informed by over 50 years of researching and recording Australia's art and design archives, we recommend a commitment to preserving and researching Australia's creative contributions in the new cultural policy, including:

- lead and champion commitment to recording Indigenous artistic activity and principles of Indigenous Data Governance
- assist in securing and developing datasets of national importance
- support efforts to develop interoperability between government and sector datasets
- Incentivise collecting institutions to share data
- support sector capability and capacity to use data effectively
- strengthen support for Cultural and Creative Statistics Working Group as a cross-government cooperative data and research forum

## About us

[Design & Art Australia Online \(DAAO\)](#) emerged from a major scholarly effort begun in the 1970s to document and interpret Australia's visual arts and design history. Today, DAAO functions as one of Australia's most significant open-access cultural databases, containing biographical, exhibition, collection and event data relating to Australian artists, designers, craftspeople and curators, it has over 17000 biographies for example.

Originally developed at the University of Sydney under the leadership of art historian Bernard Smith, the project evolved into the *Dictionary of Australian Artists*, supported by the Australian Research Council and expanded by Joan Kerr from the 1980s onward. Kerr transformed the project through an inclusive methodology that foregrounded women artists, craft practitioners and First Nations artists within Australian art history, challenging the narrow canon that had traditionally dominated institutional collecting and scholarship. Following Kerr's death in 2004, a national consortium including the University of New South Wales, the National Library of Australia, the National Gallery of Australia and the State Library of New South Wales secured ARC funding to transform the project into an online national research infrastructure. The first version of the Dictionary of Australian Artists Online launched in 2007 before being redeveloped as DAAO in 2011. Around 2009 the DAAO boosted the visibility of Indigenous artists through the Storylines Project, It remains committed to research through archival, oral and historiographic research.

Built on principles of open access and collaborative scholarship, the platform has become an important piece of national digital humanities infrastructure, connecting dispersed archival records and supporting researchers, educators, curators, artists and the broader public. DAAO is especially valuable for preserving histories that are often absent from mainstream institutional archives, including artist-run initiatives, regional practitioners, women artists and Indigenous cultural production.

Its integration with broader humanities data initiatives such as [HuNI](#), the [Australian Cultural Data Engine](#) and most recently the ARDC led-project [Australian Creative Histories and](#)

[Futures](#) project demonstrates its collaborative basis and the growing importance of interoperable cultural data within Australia's research ecosystem.

Despite its national significance, it has no on-going funding stream and survives from project to project. Sustained investment is essential if DAAO is to continue preserving and expanding access to Australia's artistic and design heritage.

## Background

The DAAO argues for the importance of data in informing policy. We believe in telling Australian stories and preserving our shared visual arts and design heritage. Key points we would make around each of the five pillars includes:

**1. First Nations First:** Indigenous artistic activity is distinctive and should be visible on a global stage. If we do not record and preserve this activity it is lost. We urgently need to establish principles of Indigenous Data Governance in the arts supporting First Nations data sovereignty. Provide sustained funding for Indigenous community archives and digital cultural preservation projects, particularly in regional and remote communities linked with National infrastructure projects such as the DAAO. Support national arts databases and digital cultural platforms to incorporate Indigenous protocols, languages, attribution systems and community-led governance models and support.

**2. A Place for Every Story:** securing art and design data sets of national importance (including community data). Prioritise projects documenting women artists, CALD artists, regional practitioners, disabled artists, LGBTQIA+ communities, craft practitioners and artist-run initiatives whose histories remain underrepresented. Prioritise reparative descriptions from these groups. Acknowledge archiving, cataloguing and digital preservation as creative and scholarly practices central to cultural memory and public access. Support interdisciplinary and cross-artform approaches recognising the interconnected histories of art forms, such as the [Australian Creative Histories and Futures](#) project.

**3. Centrality of the Artist:** Track creative career pathways, identify barriers to accessible career pathways. Protect Australian creatives from exploitative AI practices, develop regulatory and ethical frameworks ensuring artists' works, archives and metadata are not scraped, reproduced or commercialised by generative AI systems without consent, attribution or compensation. Invest in national digital infrastructure that improves public visibility of Australian artists and strengthens pathways to exhibitions, collections, research and publishing opportunities.

**4. Strong Cultural Infrastructure:** Recognise cultural data infrastructure as essential national cultural infrastructure, expand the definition of cultural infrastructure to include digital humanities platforms, cultural databases and interoperable research systems. Implement a coordinated strategy supporting interoperability, metadata standards, linked open data and collaboration across collecting institutions and universities, working towards a national arts data strategy. Support long-term partnerships between universities, collecting institutions and independent organisations to maintain national cultural knowledge resources.

**5. Engaging the Audience:** Invest in accessible digital platforms that allow audiences to explore Australian art, design and cultural histories through open and searchable systems. Reform or repeal elements of the Job-ready Graduates Package that undermine participation in arts and humanities education and weaken the future cultural workforce.

Submission Authored by  
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On Behalf of the DAAO Editorial Committee