

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

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Adelaide University's Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art is part of a national and global network of University Art Museums (UAMs), a sector that plays a critical and under-recognised role in Australia's cultural ecosystem. UAMs contribute directly to the objectives of *Revive* by linking artistic practice, research, education, and public engagement.

Situated within universities, UAMs uniquely connect creative production with knowledge generation. They support artists at pivotal stages of their careers, contribute to nationally significant collections, and engage diverse audiences through free, research-led public programs. As such, UAMs are well placed to deliver on national cultural policy priorities.

Challenges and Opportunities across the Five Pillars

Pillar 1 – First Nations First

UAMs play a vital role in the collection, presentation, and contextualisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. However, further investment is required to support First Nations leadership in curatorial practice, governance, and scholarship.

Recommendation: Establish a matched national acquisitions and commissioning fund for First Nations artists, coupled with targeted support for Indigenous curatorial training through university art museum programs.

Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story

UAMs contribute to a diverse and dynamic cultural ecology through exhibitions, publications, research, and touring, supporting the development and dissemination of Australian visual culture. They play a critical role in national discussions, fostering collaboration across institutions, and advancing knowledge through exhibition-making, scholarship, and public engagement.

University Art Museums are professionally staffed and equipped to deliver exhibitions to a high standard. Despite operating with lean teams, they are exceptionally well positioned to present national touring exhibitions developed by state and national art museums and galleries, significantly extending their reach to diverse and geographically distributed audiences.

UAMs actively support the development of new work and are committed to both artistic practice and public education. As a sector, they are leaders in the dynamic growth of Australia's visual arts ecosystem, yet their contribution remains insufficiently recognised in national policy and funding frameworks.

Recommendation: The contribution of UAMs to the development of the visual arts and to public education should be formally recognised as integral to the National Cultural Policy and University funding. This should be supported through the establishment of a strategic national fund enabling the UAM's to deliver expanded exhibition programs, touring initiatives, publications, collection development, and professional development strategies.

Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist

UAMs are critical incubators for established and mid-career artists, offering opportunities for experimentation, research, and international engagement. However, the sustainability of this support is constrained by limited resourcing.

Recommendation: Develop a national partnership between the Commonwealth, State funding agencies and university sector to expand commissioning, exhibitions, and acquisitions, with a focus on fair remuneration, timely payment, and long-term career development for artists.

Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

UAMs represent a significant component of Australia’s cultural infrastructure, caring for collections valued at over \$300 million and delivering exhibitions, research, and education to broad audiences. Despite this, they are not consistently recognised as core public cultural infrastructure.

Recommendation: Adopt a whole-of-government approach to cultural investment, embedding UAMs within cross-portfolio strategies spanning education, research, tourism, and innovation.

Establish coordinated national and state-based project funding opportunities for university art museums.

Pillar 5 – Reaching the Audience

UAMs are highly accessible institutions, attracting diverse audiences and offering extensive learning and engagement programs. Their integration within universities enables strong connections to young people, regional communities, and lifelong learners.

University art museums, specifically Adelaide University are leaders in Creative Body Based Learning initiatives and are well placed to develop programs for engaging a range of programs for engaging with art and exhibitions, targeting regional and low social economic schools and visitors.

Recommendation: Invest in national digital and hybrid delivery platforms, enabling UAMs to provide virtual exhibitions, online learning through Creative Body-based learning initiatives, and targeted outreach to regional and remote communities.

Conclusion

University art museums are essential cultural infrastructure. They connect artists, ideas, and audiences in ways that no other part of the sector can. The next National Cultural Policy must explicitly recognise and invest in UAMs as key delivery partners, ensuring their capacity to continue to support artists, foster innovation, and contribute to a vibrant and sustainable cultural future.

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