

National Cultural Policy Submission

1470831

Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I have been working as a writer and curator in the arts for 35 years. My specific area of focus is the crafts. I edit Garland magazine, which features world craft. So far, we've published 2178 articles by 1049 writers from 90 countries.

I appreciate the important role played by crafts in Australian culture, but I feel this is sometimes overshadowed by the focus on contemporary, which denies the relevance of history and our common stories. I witnessed the defunding of Craft Australia in 2011. At the time, the rationale was to review the sector and find a better way of spending the funds saved. A perfunctory review was made, but none of the recommendations was acted on, and the funding was lost.

The state craft organisations are very successful in their own terms, but are constrained to focus on their own state, not the national scene as a whole. In response to this absence, my colleagues and I saw the need to reconstitute the national craft body, which has been operating as a volunteer organisation, World Crafts Council - Australia. This has been moderately successful in building opportunities for Australian craftspersons internationally.

In broad terms, arts bodies have been corporatised, each focusing on its industry, and sector, and seeking strategies for growth. This has led to a lessening of focus on the artistic field, as a sustained history of creative endeavour that binds practitioners.

This is evident in Creative Australia, itself, which seems to have become more of an administrative body for allocating grants than a forum for reflecting on what is happening in our creative field. I do miss the existence of boards that exercised oversight of the different artistic media, especially the Crafts Board.

There has also been a dramatic decline in public discourse about the arts, especially in conferences and seminars. There are critical issues we need to discuss in common, such as the impact of AI, the role of Western culture, and our relationship to nature. But this common conversation has been lost.

While there is much to like about Revive, the overall concept reflects this lack of common conversation. The focus is on democracy, in which different interests are represented. This is an important baseline, but by itself it leaves the arts in the position of a bureaucratic balancing act among different interests and rights.

Our arts policy should indeed support Australian stories. But this is more than ticking boxes to ensure diversity. It should include shared experiences, such as our relationship to the land, our position in the South, the unique skills developed in response to our material conditions, and the evolution of First Nations stories that connect generations.

One of the first projects for World Crafts Council - Australia was to map the many craft organisations across the continent. We were surprised to find nearly 300 of these, including associations, workshops, guilds and a specialist gallery. Some of these are well-established, such as the Australian Ceramics Association and the Woodworkers Association. Most of them are volunteer organisations that don't receive funding and are otherwise invisible to the government. The jump for these to become funded organisations is formidable. There should be a way to support voluntary organisations in developing public programs. This would be one way to bypass industry, talk and connect with a genuine community.