

Submission

National Cultural Policy 2026

I am writing an individual submission for Australia's National Cultural Policy. I am an independent **visual artist** and have been working in the visual arts sector for over 10 years. I have experience with exhibitions, art prizes, artist residencies, grants and applications, and have also worked for a small arts organisation as the visual arts program lead. The policy pillar that I am focussing on for my submission is: **Centrality of the Artist**.

Artists face many challenges as workers. One of the biggest challenges for visual artists is the issue of pay. We are often **expected to work for free** or for very small fees. For example, I have been approached by a government funded institution in my state to run a workshop, and also to have an exhibition in their gallery space. This is not a small organisation, and in the last several years they have received significant funding, including government funding, to redevelop and renovate their buildings and their gallery spaces. They have money in the budget to pay me a fee to conduct a workshop, yet they have told me they have **no money in the budget to pay artist fees for exhibitions**. The **artists** - the very **reason the organisation exists** - are the **only people involved who are not being paid**.

Even though a fee of several thousand dollars worth for a single project may seem like a large sum (this is a rare amount, in my experience fees are \$3000 or less). When broken up into an hourly rate over several months - often the time taken to complete a project- these **fees often equate to less than minimum wage**. Selling work is often a sporadic source of income for most artists. My visual art is conceptual, not commercial. Within the conceptual art world, often you can be quite successful within your career - showing in Biennials and Triennials, partaking in prestigious residencies, showing in state institutions such as AGSA, etc - and still be earning very small amounts and selling work inconsistently. I personally know several successful artists who also work as lecturers or have other part time roles within the arts industry in order to make ends meet.

This does not make for a stable or sustainable career, particularly during a cost of living crisis. Visual Arts organisations, when denying us a fee, will often point us towards grants as a form of income for our projects. While grants can be a source of income, the very competitive and lengthy application process is another **unpaid administrative burden for artists**. We are also taxed for income from art prizes and grants. Most grants we apply for, we will not receive. This is in addition to the administrative burdens of tax and application writing that already come with our practice. When I use the word practice in this context, I am referring to all the work that comes with keeping up an arts career; the administrative work, research, art making, networking, learning new skills, etc. The vast majority of this is unpaid. In fact, we often **need to pay to show our own work**, in shipping costs, application fees, travel costs, material and studio costs, gallery hire fees, etc.

The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) has a Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design. This is endorsed by the Revive policy. Many arts organisations refer to the NAVA Code of Practice as guidelines for payment standards. However, these standards are not enforced. Arts organisations are not required to pay in alignment with the code.

I have a list of recommendations to alleviate the problems I have outlined below.

- **Mandate artist remuneration standards** across publicly funded visual arts activity, including minimum rates, consultation fees, regional loading and recognition of hidden and administrative labour. The NAVA Payment Standards could be used as a guide here.
- **Exempt art prizes, fellowships and government grants from income tax** and reform Non-Commercial Loss rules, GST obligations and HECS/HELP repayment settings to better support artists with fluctuating incomes.
- **Implement a Basic Income for the Arts scheme.** This would help artists with financial precarity and aid with the costs of our practice. In Ireland, their scheme recouped more than its net cost of €72m through increases in arts-related expenditure, productivity gains and reduced reliance on other welfare payments, according to a government-commissioned cost-benefit analysis.
- Property and tax reforms to support **affordable artist studios and residencies**, including incentives for landlords to lease vacant or underused properties as creative workspaces and tax deductions for living costs associated with artists' residencies.
- **Reform superannuation laws to ensure artists are paid superannuation** when they are engaged for their labour, including exhibitions, commissions, talks, workshops, residencies and other forms of professional artistic work, and clarify obligations under the Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992 (Cth).
- Expand the Cultural Gifts Program and introduce tax incentives to encourage galleries, businesses and collectors to acquire and **support work by living Australian artists**, particularly emerging artists.
- Consider reforming the **arts grant system to a non competitive format.** The competitive grants system is incompatible with our industry as our work is not productivity based.
- **Introduce legislated protections for artistic freedom and freedom of expression**, recognising the role of artists in public debate and protecting lawful artistic work from censorship, disproportionate sanction and self-censorship driven by fear of legal or reputational consequences.
- **Embed arts education as a key commitment in National Cultural Policy**, including sustained investment in tertiary arts education, vocational pathways and professional development.
- Create a **nationally coordinated arts funding strategy** that improves consistency, accessibility and long-term sustainability across Federal, State and local government funding systems.

- Commit to ongoing **investment in local visual arts infrastructure**, including council-owned exhibition spaces, shared studios, regional arts networks and community artmaking spaces.
- **Develop a national arts strategy addressing AI**, copyright infringement, online harms and the misuse of artists' work in digital environments.
- Establish dedicated disaster preparedness, recovery and resilience funding for cultural infrastructure, including artist studios, archives, collections, community art spaces and locally run arts organisations affected by climate change and natural disasters.

These measures would be steps taken to value artists as workers properly for our time and hidden labour, and to allow us to have sustainable arts careers. The investment put into the arts will recoup more than the economic costs, as shown in Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts Scheme. The **publicly funded visual arts industry relies on artists' willingness to work for free** or for very low pay -this is the **entire reason it is able to operate economically**, with the current funding it receives. If visual artists decided to withdraw our labour until we were paid fairly, the whole industry would grind to a halt.

Show Australian artists that you truly value us, and we will return your economic input many times over! Thank you for giving us a chance to be heard, and for reading my submission.