

THE UNCONFORMITY

To the Office of the Arts,

From regional Tasmania, The Unconformity sees daily the transformative impact that arts and culture can have in industrial and remote communities, and the fragility of the systems that sustain them. Australia's national cultural policy must recognise that the future strength of the arts depends on continuous investment in creative ecosystems, which can flourish though the recognition that artists are workers, and that culture itself is shared infrastructure that benefits all Australians both socially and economically.

To keep First Nations first, the sector requires long term, structural investment that supports those communities in their goals. Investment in First Nations cultural infrastructure and leadership development is critical, particularly in states such as Tasmania. The Unconformity have built our relationships through slow, intentional collaboration with Palawa artists and arts workers, led by the community in shaping opportunities and cultivating individual talent. Cultural load poses a real issue that affects the sustainability of arts careers, therefore the national policy should support capacity building, mentorship, paid pathways for early career First Nations artists and arts workers, and accessible cultural safety training across the sector.

To reflect the breadth of our stories, policy must recognise the value of local and place-based practice, emerging modes of expression, and experimental work. Festivals are critical platforms for stories like this, that exist beyond the walls of theatres and galleries in communities that may otherwise have limited access, but support for our festivals needs to grow in the reality of rising costs. The Unconformity invests enormous time to support our regional community to participate fully in the arts, working with individuals to develop digital and financial literacy skills and improve equity in our region. We need national solutions for insurance, literacy, and advocacy towards reducing administrative pressure to lower barriers to participation and strengthen connectivity to the arts. Shared service models and robust peak bodies have enormous potential to provide strategic support through HR, disability inclusion resources, governance, and industrial advocacy.

Across Australia, artists and arts workers are leaving the sector due to instability, continuity of employment, low pay, burnout, and the erosion of arts education in schools, TAFEs, and universities. In regional communities this attrition is deeply visible and creates anxiety about whether the arts can offer a viable future. To recognise the centrality of the artist as a worker, career pathways in the arts need to be possible. This requires greater support for the developmental stages of artistic work, and a return to programs like paid mentorships, national creative labs, and professional development funds that once thrived here. The integrity of arms-length peer review processes remains central in supporting rigor and equity, particularly through peers with lived experience in regional, emerging, and experimental practice. In recognition of the work our artists do, this year, The Unconformity piloted a program called Ongoing Artists, an open call opportunity for three artists to join our payroll

for 18 months to develop projects with continuous support. We saw an unprecedented and enthusiastic response from the Tasmanian arts community, with many artists voicing how rare and special the opportunity for equitable support for their work was. Investment in artists is not a handout; it is nation-building through shared economic and social infrastructure that benefits everyone. In countries where basic income for artists is supported, the dollar for dollar returns on investment speaks for itself.

A strong cultural future also requires strong cultural infrastructure. We acknowledge the impact of individuals like Mowenna Collett in building accessible cultural opportunities in Tasmania and nationally, and encourage expanded national investment to make services like access and sustainability consultation possible for every organisation. Regions require dedicated capital funding streams focused on accessibility, adaptation, and cultural commons infrastructure. Mechanisms for electorate-based cultural capital investment that is equitable should be considered. National policy should also support governance training, shared governance models, paid board roles, observer and mentorship opportunities, and incentives for accounting and financial management professionals to contribute skills-based expertise to arts organisations and festivals.

To engage audiences, governments must speak about the arts as a public good and a legitimate industry. Silence around the value of the arts immobilises audiences and undermines confidence in the sector. Funding should be framed not as sporadic grants, but as strategic investment with demonstrated social, economic, and cultural returns. The volatility of funding programs and the absence of coherent state cultural strategies are contributing to what increasingly feels like a national emergency and a potential lost generation of artists and arts workers. Arts education and cultural participation must be embedded across all levels of government policy, with stronger national leadership where state strategies are absent. In this absence, the sector has been left to devise its own survival strategies, which are working: to bolster sector-led initiatives like the Experimental Commissioning Consortium, responsive discretionary funding pools are needed to elevate emerging initiatives onto the national stage.

Finally, we believe there is a missing pillar in current policy discourse: the recognition of excellent, world-class, transformative art as having intrinsic value in and of itself. At a moment of profound geopolitical and social change, Australia has an opportunity to present itself to the world as a thriving, diverse social democracy grounded in the strength of its First Nations cultures, regional communities, creativity, and mateship. To do this meaningfully, national policy must look not only to major institutions, but to the regional, the local, and the artists themselves, who create our cultural life every day.

Thank you on behalf of The Unconformity Board of Directors and Staff,



Loren Kronemyer
Artistic Director, The Unconformity

