

// National Arts Policy Submission //

I began my career in the arts almost 20 years ago in Naarm/Melbourne. I am an independent multidisciplinary artist who, from 2012–2016, was able to live off my practice before experiencing burnout. I have since balanced arts work and teaching to supplement my income. I have presented work from Tom Price, WA to Sydney Festival, Womadelaide, Wodonga, Arts Centre Melbourne, and was on the cusp of touring to Miami, US, when COVID hit. I have worked as a programmer, including at Perth Festival, ArtPlay, and now Cannery Arts Centre. I work with children, across art forms, and in artist development. I have a strong personal commitment to amplifying smaller voices through art practice and producing — be it children, First Nations, BIPOC, or disabled communities.

18 months ago I moved to Kepa Kurl Esperance as the Artistic Director – Galleries at Cannery Arts Centre. Working across Naarm/Melbourne, Boorloo/Perth, and now Kepa Kurl Esperance has given me a broad perspective on our industry. I am also a board member for Theatre Network Australia.

Here is my personal and informed perspective:

Firstly an overview: Art Every Day.

- A campaign and commitment across different portfolios (education, tourism, health, First Nations) to promote the impact and value of arts to our identity, innovation, culture, and wellbeing. [Please see the last page for a poetic articulation.](#)
- Arts to be used in schools, both as a learning tool and independently. There has been a slow eradication of arts education in primary and secondary schools.
- Reinvestment in youth arts. This has been eradicated over the last 10 years and is such a grassroots, important place for our industry's emerging artists.
- Without professional and diverse artists, the arts will become accessible only to the privileged — education needs to be accessible and wages need to be fair.

First Nations First:

- Support for submissions by First Nations artists and organisations.
- More support for non-First Nations-led organisations and artists to learn and become culturally safe. The professional development and consultation are important, but expensive. Each organisation and individual is on their own journey, in a specific context. Moving to regional WA has revealed the lack of cultural understanding from Wadjellars, and the different circumstances here (the Marine Park and Aboriginal Heritage Act divided community here). Some regional areas are doing better; here we are behind metro and national standards.

A Place for Every Story:

- This starts in education, accessibility, and equity. Art can't be a place for every story if the artists and arts workers aren't representative of everyone.

- More money placed at a grassroots and small-to-medium level to allow place-based projects. It's easier for us to take a touring show from Perth than it is to invest in a regional-based project. We have had five metro-based organisations do projects in Kapa Kurl Esperance — most with more money for a single 1–2 year part-time project than we have for our entire organisation for a year. The money should flow directly, not via metro-based organisations.

Centrality of the Artist

- It is harder now than at any other point in my career to be a full-time practising artist. Funding cuts, higher taxes, cost of living pressures, and small-to-medium sector shrinkage all contribute. It is easier for organisations to partner with other organisations than with independents.
- How can an artist create when they are working full-time in another job? How can they develop, take opportunities, find time to write grants, or sell work? It's only those with a commercial practice or a financial safety net who can. The dream is a universal basic income — what has happened in Ireland is inspiring.
- Fair pay for fair work. My income has plateaued despite an increase in responsibility and experience. I had to go to my local council last week and argue that my below-NAVA rates were justified and not excessive. Since I've been in Esperance, artists are finally being paid superannuation. Standard rates have not reached regional WA.
- Freedom of expression. I have concerns about the emphasis on social cohesion, even though that is where my practice lies. We need a spectrum of arts — truth telling, critical work, perspective shifting, revealing different views. Censorship is easy to enact, particularly when a broader, complex context is not considered. Arts are often at the forefront of difficult conversations and change, and should be supported to do so.
- Emerging artists need capacity and support to know their rights and to set up their “business”. I had this through NEIS and emerging artist funds that no longer exist. They need to be brought back.

Strong Cultural infrastructure:

- Please don't build any new theatres. Fund art to go in them, but also in public spaces, schools, parks, on water, and in the skies — it doesn't all have to go in an art gallery or theatre.
- Find a tax policy that makes it worthwhile for empty shopfronts to be rented to artists.
- Pay artists first. “Nice to have” repairs need to come last.
- Advocate for and support local councils to have arts policies.

Engaging the Audience:

- Allow funding to reach grassroots organisations to engage community, rather than prioritising touring.
- All education points above.
- Art Every Day at the top.

- I no longer support the level of national and international touring that existed pre-COVID. We need some touring to inspire and connect communities, but not at the level we had before. For example, one regional artist residency is more impactful than two installers plus freight for an exhibition

Art Every Day.

Art is all around everyone.

Whether it's music when you wake up.

The kid's mug they made in art.

That earworm from pub choir.

The ABC kids app you turn on.

The video game you can't get your boyfriend off.

The book you read at night.

The art hanging up at your work.

The furniture design.

The TV you watch.

The jewellery you wear.

The t-shirt graphic you love.

That scribble scratch you do to calm yourself.

It's the street art festival.

The First Nations celebrations.

The music gig down the road and in the stadium.

A visit to the Art Gallery.

The Museum. The Library.

A children's theatre show.

A comedy act.

A flash mob.

A music video.

It's a tool for healing. For truth telling.

It's the crayon drawing your child draws that tells you their fears.

It's the story book you read to them at night.

It's the way those that can't verbalise something may communicate.

It's a way to loosen anger, trauma, grief.

It's a way to pass time gently when you're stuck in bed.

It's the weaving, whittling, knitting, sewing in all our genes.

It helps us learn.

Sing the timestable. Dance the water cycle.

Role play an ethics question.

Draw your thoughts, what you hear in that lecture.

Use movement for maths. Ceramics for science.

Photography for critical thinking.

It's the skill of writing work that will be read and felt.

It develops imagination, problem solving, critical thinking, empathy.

And where are those skills used?

It's the lawyer who studied drama at school.

The graphic designer who aced art.

The DJ who did music till year 10.

The speech writer who wrote plays.

The PE teacher who won the dance award at school.

The tik tok dancer.

The interior designer. The architect.

The journalist. The animator. The counsellor.

The chef. The fashion designer. The tour guide.

The web designer. The Head of Marketing. The CEO.

The entrepreneur who learnt how to pitch through drama.

The innovator who learnt how to hold risk in a rehearsal room.

The nurse who learnt empathy through role play.

The scientist who learnt to observe through drawing.

The primary teacher who writes her class's school assembly.

The hairdresser and surgeon who's fine motor skills was developed from holding a paint brush.

The builder who finds solutions.

The carpenter who attends to detail.

The politician who performed in his school play.

The first nations learning we hear through story telling.

Through dance, music and film.

Via festivals and opening sports ceremonies.

The stories we hear.

The wisdom we gain.

These are all arts.

And it's for everyone.