

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

Oron Catts



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I am an artist, researcher, and curator with over thirty years of experience working at the intersection of art, emerging knowledge, and frontier technologies, particularly within the life sciences. From 2000 to 2024, I directed SymbioticA, an art and biology research laboratory at the University of Western Australia (UWA). During its 24 years of operation, SymbioticA established an international reputation as a global leader in the field of Bioart.

Both SymbioticA itself and the projects developed within it have received some of the most prestigious international awards in art and technology, and have been exhibited at leading cultural institutions worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, and the National Art Museum of China. Importantly, the impact of SymbioticA extended well beyond the art world. Work developed in the lab has been widely cited as inspiration across diverse fields including new materials, textiles, design, architecture, ethics, speculative fiction, and food innovation, demonstrating the broader cultural and intellectual value of such interdisciplinary practices.

In 2024, UWA closed SymbioticA, [REDACTED]” This decision followed the discontinuation of State Government support, which had previously played a critical role in sustaining the initiative, [REDACTED]. The withdrawal of even modest public funding was significant: beyond its financial contribution, such support signalled that hybrid entities like SymbioticA, operating between art, science, and research, are valued as part of a broader cultural and innovation ecosystem. Its absence contributed to the conditions that led to the lab’s closure.

This submission highlights the urgent need to support artists and artistic research practices operating at the cutting edge of knowledge production, whether within universities or other research environments. While such practices may not align directly with the core missions of host institutions, they play a vital role in cultural life. Artistic engagement with emerging technologies and scientific developments helps society interpret, question, and contextualise rapid change. It fosters critical reflection on the ethical, social, and cultural implications of new knowledge, and contributes to a more informed and engaged public.

On the global stage, Australia has been recognised as producing exceptional work in the intersections of art and science, and art and technology. However, this experimental and inherently interdisciplinary form of practice requires sustained support and strategic nurturing in order to thrive and expand.

Creative Australia has an important opportunity to play a leadership role by developing funding models and partnerships that support collaboration between the arts and research sectors. This includes recognising the unique value of hybrid initiatives and ensuring that artists working in these areas have access to the resources, infrastructure, and institutional support they require. Strengthening such connections will not only sustain innovation in the arts, but also enrich Australia’s broader cultural and intellectual landscape.