

National Cultural Policy Submission

1471767

Public

Individual

Patrick Clair



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

“First Nations first” is the right intent, interpreted and implemented with overzealous enthusiasm and lacking the nuance our diverse society deserves.

I care deeply about issues pertaining to First Nations people. I wish more Australians cared more, and took more action. I am rage filled at the conditions in which we allow some of our First Nations citizens to live. I am informed and inspired by the stories, artworks and performances of our First Nations artists. But I am also deeply concerned that, by the very act of placing this theme so centrally in our arts policy, we have created an industry that fetishizes, tokenizes and distorts the sacred legacy of their place as the first inhabitants of our land.

As a volunteer I participated in a training session for inductees into a care program. The other participants were young people from overseas, here as students, volunteering their time to help the less fortunate among us. I witnessed a trainer berate and scold these newcomers for not having “done the work” of learning the Indigenous language name for the suburbs they lived in.

We have created an environment where even to criticise the situation above risks being branded a racist.

I have worked at the frontline of this issue. I live in Redfern, and daily I witness the thriving community of families and young people that occupy what was (quite recently) still regarded as Australia’s only true urban slum.

Volunteering in a court support role for Intellectually Disabled persons I witnessed the intractable complexity of our march towards equality.



The issues that stem from the march for Indigenous equality are legion. They are complex and rife with contradictions - where perspectives and rights compete and clash in the most vexing ways.

In the arts, we have reduced this to a racial litmus test and a series of performative acts of lipservice- built on a culture of fear and stifling inquiry or debate.

Deep changes arise from compassion, from building consensus, from understanding the shared value of our humanity - not from creating multi-tiered hierarchies defined by nebulous claims like “lived experience” and “emotional safety.”

Indigenous Australians always have and always will play a vital role in what it means to be Australian. Our arts funding needs to recognise this not just through prioritizing Indigenous perspectives, but respecting the full diversity of our society... new, old and ancient Australians alike.