

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

Will Hall



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I am an actor and teachers assistant working in Melbourne. I have produced independent theatre and film here and have studied at VCA and UTS. I think a big challenge for arts workers and the cultural sector is about dignity. I struggle to lead a dignified life on such a low income while relying on government payments as well. I think there is a lot of pressure for people who haven't benefitted from nepotism or other pre-existing advantages to rush into commercially viable companies and projects because they need the money to survive, and that the possibilities for diverse, artistic voices are limited or nullified in the process. I got a sense, in the past, that there was more a sense of sanctity or intrinsic value in arts and cultural institutions that certainly inspired me to take my own practice and perception of the world more seriously. I don't see that anymore. I see governments dragging programs and institutions onto the chopping block as though they held the same value as anything else. Arts have become particularly vulnerable to this false equivalence in a way religious institutions never have, and to me that speaks to this difference very well, since the intrinsic value of art can sometimes be seen as spiritual. The kind of work I engage with requires a particular level of vulnerability and sensitivity to people's experiences and circumstances that I cannot uphold in a state of constant concern for my survival. I limit the amount of events or performances I attend throughout the year and lose touch with my community and begin to feel isolated and self-loathing. It's particularly challenging because I have put so much time into developing these skills and nurturing my gifts and I get the sense the Australian community doesn't value or even recognise them. This breeds an even more acrimonious relationship with my loved ones and the community at large, because I begin to look for clues of their disapproval or disdain for artistic sensibilities and find myself even more isolated and inert. Even though at times I can see I have made some great accomplishments, sometimes I feel I've wasted my life. Instead of putting money toward short-term programs to change the appearance of this level of cohesion or lack thereof among the public, fund spaces and projects that can lead to its artists leading dignified lives and to approach this question of resistance and denigration and honestly shame within the Australian mindset toward people devoting their lives to the arts in the vehicle of great works of art. We need to reflect on and define our own experience as a country that is critical and investigative and not simply some hopeful tone that aligns with some copy for a Weet-bix box and upholds a status quo. Since we are many years into the rhetoric of independence and professional distance from decision-makers protecting the freedom of artists and creatives, these provisions must be readdressed. We cannot rely simply on the independence of bodies from government or other powerful influences that would seek to undermine the freedom of expression inherent in art, so this policy must take into account the failure of independence according to legislation to live up to what common sense would define as independence.