

Response to the proposed Creative Australia Cultural Policy

General Comments

I am a disabled visual artist and writer who lives on Gamilaroi country in rural NW NSW. Arts and Culture are not seen or appreciated as a necessary part of the human experience in my part of the world and it is very hard to engage the average person in this area in anything but the most traditional (read Colonial, pre-Modern) types of art. Unfortunately, I do not see anything in the proposed cultural policy that will change that.

Being disabled and in a rural area means that the opportunity for me to engage with art at a regional gallery is a 2-hour drive. Access to a diverse variety of art is extremely limited. Access to art is very limited. Our local regional arts body was defunded by the state government and so opportunities offered by that body have disappeared, along with the community of artists they created. This area is a cultural desert that exists solely on the efforts of local artists and arts-based businesses – government at all levels has failed this area, and this policy as it stands will not change that.

Use of AI in the Policy Reading Process

I find it disturbing that AI is being used to vet the submissions to the cultural policy. While I appreciate Creative Australia is making it public when they do not really have to, it is upsetting to see work that a human with discernment, nuanced understanding of the issues at hand, and the skills to see and understand responses from all levels of education, experience, and ability to express thoughts, will not be the first step in making our voices seen and heard. I fear that this process will be just another way that intellectually disabled, less-literate, English-as-a-second-language people will be discriminated against because they will not know to use key words to help their submission say what they want to say. How is the process being checked to see there is balance?

Pillar 2

Disabled artists are actively discriminated against by much of the arts community if they disclose they are disabled or require support in any part of the arts world. Disabled artists' works are judged as inferior strictly because of the word disabled not because of quality of expression - unlike LGBTQI+ art, First Nations Art, or other minority artistic practices. This pillar should give opportunity and direction for the celebration of disabled art as a valid art type and practice. I have not seen a single physical exhibition based around disabled artists – let alone one in regional/rural/remote Australia where I live. There is no place for the disabled artist's story and there's never been a plan to make one.

Proposed solution –

- Elevating exhibitions, organisations, research, that celebrates the accomplishments of disabled artists on their merits
- Accessibility is also something that needs to be a principal part of the arts and cultural policy – no organisation should be funded that does not produce up-to-date disability inclusion plan instead of ticking a box to say they have one.

Pillar 3

Artists struggle to make a living wage yet their contribution to society brings in more money than artists receive. Creative Australia needs to ensure this message is front and centre in this neo-liberal world. AI slop has contributed to the devaluing of the work that artists do, and give the wider community the ammunition to deny artists even the pittance artists now receive.

Why does this pillar not recognise the need to pay artists for their time, experience, and work? How is it that only the privileged few can earn a living wage from their work? It is all very well saying artists are great, but when only the wealthy can produce art it is another diminishing of diversity in the Arts.

As mentioned previously regarding generative AI “art” has been a massive impact on many of the jobs available to artists. The area I live in is quite happy that AI slop is being seen and used as an “art substitute” – AI generative art proves to the average local person that art is neither a skill nor creative. Recently, the small art gallery in town used AI produced images to promote exhibitions – not even using the artist’s work on the poster. This is seen as acceptable and “creative”. This policy must take a stand for the human practice of art.

Unfortunately, previous attempts to assist disabled artists has taken the same well-trodden paths that any emerging or mid-career, artists can receive. There is no path a disabled artist can take that will allow them to receive an arts education (poverty means most disabled artists are self-taught) that connections can develop from. No opportunities for international engagement (government will remove disability benefits if person is overseas more than 28 days in a 12-month period). Processes that are not disability-friendly or accessible (grants popping up with no notice and only 28 days to complete application).

Proposed Solution –

- Universal basic income for all artists – see Ireland UBI for Artists
- If a test group is needed then an UBI for disabled artists as we are more likely to be below the poverty line and would benefit the most from financial support.
- Ensure that Human-Based art is prioritised and funded.
- I support ADNA’s recommendation that in the next National Cultural Policy, the government establish a dedicated sixth pillar, ‘Access for all Australians,’ to ensure that culture is fully accessible to as many people as possible. A pillar for access will strengthen First Nations cultural participation and leadership; ensure that everybody can access the spaces, conversations and information needed to create and share their stories; protect artists through safer, fairer and more accessible working conditions; embed accessibility into the design of venues, institutions and digital systems and expand audience participation and engagement across Australia by positioning access as the framework through which all cultural life becomes more innovative and inclusive.