

National Cultural Policy Submission

1472499

Public

Individual

Blake Canham-Bennett



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

My name is Blake Canham-Bennett. I am based in Adelaide (South Australia, and I work as a one of the few and most experienced traditional hatters in the nation.

I've been a hatter based in Adelaide for the past fourteen (14!) years, with my business located in the Adelaide CBD since late 2019. This is my life. I have no other work, nor have I had any other pursuit prior to making hats. There is VERY LITTLE separation between me and my work, and by all means, it is what I live. Practicing a craft in Adelaide, and even by extension Australia, is very challenging, as I find it is not very strongly supported. Most opportunities for support and funding, are inaccessible due to being geared towards performing and visual arts, while little to no support is provided to practical craft and 'creative' trades (such as the textile or 'fashion' industry).

As mentioned, there is little separation between me and my work, so the lack of support on top of an already challenging Adelaide/Australian market, leaves me in a complex and less than ideal headspace, where I find my self-worth brought to question simply because I am not supported here, questioning whether my future is elsewhere if I am to ever succeed. Although I, myself, am in a particularly niche field of craft, I would imagine that I am far from alone in these sentiments.

I also feel that we need a celebration of craft without the need to define it as 'art'; tired of feeling like craft can only be recognised under the guise of it being 'visual arts'; celebrate craft for process, technique, skill, and practical function, not just for how the end result is interpreted or 'how it makes the viewer feel'. Ultimately, with visual and performing arts being purely privileges in their way of being purely aesthetic or for entertainment purposes, a greater support needs to be provided for craft which tend to serve actual practical needs, rather than craftspeople having to thread an inaccessible needle or present their work as something it isn't, simply to gain some semblance of support.

Furthermore, I support the three asks made by the Australian Craft and Design Centres (ACDC) network in their submission to this consultation: a 10-year workforce development plan that addresses skills and training shortages for craftspeople and designers; the establishment of a dedicated craft and design structure within Creative Australia, with its own mandate to advocate for the sector, develop funding pathways, and coordinate across government; and an export and tourism development strategy that positions Australian makers in international markets, including at showcase events like Milan Design Week.