

National Cultural Policy Submission

1472509

Public

Individual

Madeleine Thornton-Smith

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

My name is Madeleine Thornton-Smith and I am a practising artist, educator, PhD candidate and arts labour activist. I have spent years fighting for better working conditions, fair pay, superannuation and safety for artists and visual arts workers, particularly in the female-dominated field of craft and ceramics.

I would like to express my concerns that the federal Labor government thus far has not done enough to address increasingly unregulated working conditions in the visual arts sector. Artists and visual arts workers routinely face wage theft, sham contracting and unsafe workplaces. Exploitation is the norm, not the exception to the rule. Artists learn at art school that it's survival of the fittest - rather than how to support each other in a healthy, collectivised and unionised sector. The National Association for the Visual Arts has been working with the Fair Work Commission on an award that includes visual arts and craft workers. This has manifested in artists being added the problematic Amusements and Recreation Award - an awkward fit and a missed opportunity to create a new award for a specialist yet highly ununionised and exploited workforce.

I want to live in a country that values the arts. That treats the arts as a human right rather than a privilege. That doesn't charge students several times more for an arts degree than a \,Job Ready\, maths or science degree. That has the courage to undo the damage of previous governments and to regulate the sector, including universities. That centres the artist as worker - not just as a pithy slogan but as a lived reality through providing fair funding, legislated artist fees, an artists' award, a basic income and a pension for artists. That has a union that represents visual artists. I want to see the sector more regulated through better health and safety practices, whether that be of toxic materials, psychosocial hazards or the psychological risks of insecure work or censorship. I want whistleblowers to be protected not targeted. I want to see the end of artists fighting against each other for the scraps, and fighting with each other for better. #artiswork