



TOWARDS A NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Introduction

The Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) is recognised as a nationally and globally significant cultural asset.¹ It is the only public museum in Australia solely dedicated to contemporary art and the work of living artists. Our financial model is a mixed model comprised of a mixture of recurring and project funding from State and Federal governments, private sources and commercial partnerships and activities. In 2025, the MCA provided employment for over 300 artists, as workers and as creators.

Since opening its doors to the public in 1991 on the culturally significant site of Tallawoladah/Circular Quay on the shores of Warrane/Sydney Harbour, the MCA has become one of the most visited contemporary art museums in the world with an average annual onsite visitation of 1 million people (based on 7 day/week opening). With an exhibiting and programming footprint comparable to the Guggenheim Museum in New York, our collection, exhibitions and commissioning activities provide visibility and employment for artists and arts workers to engage a national and international audience and place Australian art and stories at the heart of global conversations.

MCA Australia is an integral and defining collecting contemporary art institution and plays a leading role within a nation-wide network of visual arts institutions, all of which are stewards, multipliers and amplifiers of artistic and cultural production to audiences locally, nationally and internationally. Our work crosses visual arts, cultural knowledge, cultural literacy and cultural tourism and is a major economic contributor across all of these domains. We provide formal skill building pathways for artists, arts workers and educators as well as formal, semi-formal and informal learning pathways for an intergenerational public.

MCA Australia is recognised for its sustained commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and culture through its collections, exhibitions, commissions, research, learning and access programs, and is considered a culturally safe space for First Nations artists, arts workers and community. A third of our collection and our exhibition and commissioning programs are represented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, established in 2015, embeds cultural principles and perspectives across all aspects of the museum's operations. First Nations cultural and arts workers in identified and non-

¹ *Beyond the Postcard: Unlocking the economic power of Sydney's brand*, Committee for Sydney, May 2026, p20 <https://sydney.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/FINAL-Beyond-the-Postcard.pdf>

identified positions at the MCA constitute 5% of our FTEs, above the national demographic of 3% of the population of Australia represented by First Nations peoples.

Challenges Overview

Visual arts institutions and organisations have been neglected under the first years of the *Revive* policy while facing unprecedented political, social and economic uncertainty, inflationary and cost of living pressures. These pressures have been further impacted by global warming and climate change, geopolitical conflicts, social fragmentation and the technological advances of AI.

Entrenched funding structures in the arts ignore the growth in contemporary art and its role as a major driver for visitors and audience engagement and the need for investment to ensure a sustainable cultural infrastructure. Dedicated contemporary art institutions like MCA Australia engage broader, more diverse and younger audiences. Half of MCA's audience/visitor base is under the age of 35 with 42% coming from CALD backgrounds which reflects the Australian population.

Funding is not following policy for non-government owned visual arts institutions and not-for-profits with a lack of recognition for the important role they play in the national ecosystem and the delivery of the cultural priorities set out in *Revive*. This includes institutions which have an outstanding and longstanding commitment to First Nations Arts and Culture.

Increasing demand for First Nations cultural knowledge and leadership across the museums and galleries sector is creating unsustainable cultural load for First Nations arts workers and professionals along with diminishing resources to invest in new models for professional development and internationalisation of future generations First Nations artists and cultural leaders.

New generations of cultural participants are looking for values-driven institutions that can provide experiences as well as learning and cultural and social connection. The impact of global warming combined with changing expectations of new generations of digital natives and the rapid developments in AI technologies are demanding new and ethically based engagement models for museums and galleries, underpinned by immersive and hybrid museum experiences. This requires investment not only in the technologies themselves but also in governance frameworks, training and new forms of expertise to be able to tell our stories and to evolve and remain relevant.

Revive Pillars and Recommendations

- **First Nations First**

We need investment in professional development and support for for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curators, researchers and educators and to support the internationalisation of contemporary First Nations artists and art professionals. (Pillar 1)

- **Strong Cultural Infrastructure which supports the Centrality of the Artist**

We need a whole of system approach to thinking about the arts with a National Visual Arts Board that can speak to and champion investment in State-based institutions that sit outside the existing structures of State-and federally owned museums and galleries. (Pillars 3 and 4)

- **Engaging the Audience**

The museums and galleries sector needs major investment in new technologies, their governance and training to enhance capability for hybrid museum-experiences that engage current and future generations of museum-visitors and cultural consumers across Australia and beyond our borders. (Pillar 5)