

## National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Australia is facing a rise in racism. This is not a peripheral concern for cultural policy, but the central one. How a nation tells its story about who belongs, who creates, and whose contributions are remembered is inseparable from whether that nation is safe for everyone who lives in it. The next National Cultural Policy must treat the active dismantling of racism not as a background condition but as an explicit goal. It must create conditions in which cultural workers from marginalised communities can safely make work that dissents, challenges, and provokes.

I write as a scholar, artist, writer, journalist and co-founder of Nongkrong, a Melbourne-based cultural organisation rooted in the Indonesian and broader Southeast Asian diaspora. Over several years, we have produced festivals, exhibitions, community dialogues, and public events that bring together artists, writers, musicians, and community members to create culture, not simply to display it for passive consumption. The distinction matters. And we've been successful in doing so: our last event drew more than 10,000 people to Fed Square who wanted to see not just classic gamelan music, but also koplo electronic Indonesian music.

Despite this success, however, there is a pattern I have come to call the "festivalisation" of multiculturalism. In this model, diverse communities are placed on a stage — literally or metaphorically — as living exhibitions of our difference. We are celebrated for our food, our costumes, our dances and our music. But we are positioned only to be watched safely from afar and as passive recipients of a dominant Australian culture that tolerates and occasionally enjoys our presence. What this model systematically erases is our history as active makers of Australian culture: the Indonesian dock workers in Darwin, the Chinese communities whose labour shaped colonial economies, the Southeast Asian artists and writers who have been creating here for generations, often in exchange and collaboration with First Nations peoples whose stories precede all of ours.

This erasure is not innocent. At a moment when racist violence is increasing, when communities of colour face vilification in political discourse and on public transport, cultural policy that reduces us to spectacle rather than authorship compounds the harm. It tells a story that Australian culture has a centre, and we are not it.

The next National Cultural Policy must go further. Pillar 2's aspiration to reflect "the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture" is right, but aspirational language is insufficient without structural commitment. I urge the government to consider a few things.

First, funding models that support ongoing community-led cultural organisations rather than one-off multicultural events. This will be the difference between institutions and exhibitions.

Second, explicit anti-racism frameworks must be embedded within Creative Australia's investment criteria, so that cultural organisations are assessed not only on participation numbers but on whether diverse communities hold creative authority.

Third, recognition within cultural policy of the long, documented history of non-Anglo communities as shapers, not just recipients, of Australian cultural life. Australia's story has always been plural. The next cultural policy should not merely acknowledge that plurality. It should fight for it.

Thank you for reading this submission. Go well