

SUBMISSION TO CREATIVE AUSTRALIA

CULTURAL POLICY RESPONSE (Anonymous)

Re: “Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place”

This slogan appears elegant in its reversal, but it is deeply problematic in relation to contemporary arts practice.

“Story” is central to some artforms and traditions: narrative theatre, literature, screen production, popular songwriting, dance-theatre, and most importantly, Indigenous cultural practices. However, for many contemporary artists, narrative is secondary — or irrelevant altogether.

For more than a century, major artistic lineages have explored non-narrative, conceptual, abstract, and formal approaches to artmaking. The influence of figures such as Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Arnold Schoenberg and Martha Graham continues across contemporary visual art, dance, music, media arts, digital practice, and tertiary arts education internationally and within Australia.

Contemporary dance often concerns movement, space, embodiment, and the contemporary body rather than narrative. Likewise, vast areas of music practice — orchestral, choral, instrumental, jazz, experimental, electronic, EDM, sound art, new instrument design, and hybrid forms — explore technology, form, process, structure, and sonic experience rather than “story.”

Yet “story” has become a guiding principle in our policy language and funding opportunities.

In the context of the Creative Australia Creative Futures Fund, this framing unintentionally excludes significant areas of artistic practice across visual art, music, dance, poetry, interactive digital art, and video art. “Story” works strongly for screen production, but it does not adequately represent the breadth of contemporary arts practice.

I would strongly encourage more inclusive policy language that reflects all artforms, not only narrative-led forms.

International collaboration and intellectual property

The Creative Futures Fund stated that it sought ambitious projects capable of international reach and impact, yet its eligibility rules excluded:

“activities that create or use intellectual property that is majority owned by international individuals or entities.”

This policy appears contradictory and out of step with contemporary practice.

International collaboration is one of the most important ways Australian artists contribute to global artistic and social conversations, including climate change, human rights, migration, and technological change. Australian artists are increasingly working within international networks and collaborative frameworks.

I personally received support from Creative Australia to develop international artistic connections that have since led to collaboration with an international writer on a large-scale work of global relevance. Naturally, that writer retains majority ownership of their original text. Under current rules, this excludes the project from eligibility to the Creative Futures fund.

This creates a contradiction: Creative Australia encourages international engagement while simultaneously penalising international collaboration within major funding opportunities.

Australian artists should not only expect the world to engage with “our stories.” We should also be active contributors to international artistic discourse through collaboration and exchange.

Please reconsider this policy setting.

Arts, not hospitality

The words “art,” “the arts,” and “artist” are increasingly disappearing from arts governance language, replaced by terms such as “creative,” “content,” and “creative industries.”

This matters.

Making coffee is creative. Advertising is creative. Politicians are creative in their use of language. None of these activities are art.

Artists make art — not “content.”

The term “content” belongs primarily to advertising, social media, and commercial digital production. Its growing use within cultural policy reduces artistic practice to market output and erases the distinct cultural value of artmaking.

Even the rebranding of the Australia Council for the Arts as Creative Australia symbolically removes the word “arts” itself.

Language shapes value. Exclusion through omission is powerful.

If government truly wishes to place artists at the centre of cultural policy, it must speak clearly and proudly about art and artists.

Reduce bureaucracy and trust artists

There are now too many boutique initiatives and highly curated funding programs shaped by administrative priorities rather than artistic vision.

Artists should not be increasingly required to frame their work through social policy outcomes or bureaucratic language. Art can and does have profound social impact, but artists are not social workers.

Independent artists are highly skilled professionals. They need direct support, time, and resources to make ambitious work.

Reduce administrative layering. Allocate more funding directly to artists and artistic ideas.

Trust artists to determine what art needs to be made.

Responsive and coordinated funding timelines

Federal and state arts agencies should coordinate funding schedules more carefully.

The closing date for this Cultural Policy response falls only 24 hours before the major Create NSW (CNSW) funding deadline. At the same time, artists in NSW were informed that this round may be the only CNSW opportunity for projects planned for 2027.

This creates unreasonable pressure for largely unwaged artists preparing multiple major applications simultaneously.

Better coordination between agencies would significantly improve accessibility, fairness, and the quality of submissions.

The impact of COVID-era policy framing

During COVID, advocacy for support to musicians was necessary and justified. However, the dominant rationale became economic contribution rather than artistic and cultural value.

This emphasis appears to have accelerated a broader shift toward economic rationalism within arts policy: valuing artists primarily through tourism, hospitality, and commercial metrics rather than through artistic knowledge, experimentation, and cultural contribution.

Artists should not be valued by “booze count at the bar.”

Art has intrinsic cultural value.

Be ambitious: establish an artist wage

If Australia genuinely wishes to compete internationally as a serious cultural nation, it must support artists accordingly.

Many artists work at a professional level while living in chronic financial insecurity. Meanwhile, Australia imports ambitious international work that is often created in countries with stronger structural support for artists.

A professional artist wage would be visionary cultural policy.

Be brave enough to name artists, value artists, and materially support artists.