

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

Introduction

I am a design educator and academic with over a decade of experience working across practice and pedagogy. My research specialises in practice-based research, marginalised spaces, climate justice, and young people. My perspective is shaped by years of supporting emerging designers and artists, and by my doctoral research (2010–2014) which examined irregular and temporal arts spaces in Sydney's inner west. Climate justice is a grounding principle of my work: the communities most affected by the climate crisis are often the same communities most excluded from cultural life, and any serious cultural policy must reckon with that connection.

What Matters to Me

The health of Australia's cultural future depends on who gets to participate in it. Right now, too many voices are excluded. Young people, First Nations practitioners, artists with disabilities, artists from CALD communities, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds face structural barriers that prevent them from entering, sustaining, and thriving in cultural practice. A new National Cultural Policy must place equity and access at its centre, not as an afterthought. This is particularly acute for graduate creatives, who are entering a sector already disrupted by AI and facing a significant contraction in entry-level opportunities. Without deliberate support for emerging practitioners at this critical transition point, we risk losing a generation of creative talent before it has had the chance to develop.

Irregular Spaces as an Important Space for Culture

My doctoral research offered an alternative way of viewing the city and its cultural entities as zones of temporal autonomy. It sought to demonstrate the vitality of a scene built on experimentation, play, and the freedom to make work that is provisional, evolving, and sometimes deliberately short-lived.

A meaningful National Cultural Policy must acknowledge that creatives need spaces beyond the institutional and the commercial. Sanctioned spaces matter, but so do more experimental ones, where process and development can happen freely, outside of the pressures of outcome and presentation. These spaces don't need to be permanent. Their value lies precisely in their temporality. They appear, they serve a moment, they disappear, and something else emerges in their place. What matters is that they are allowed to exist at all: spaces where artists can take risks, test ideas, and create outside of institutional frameworks and commercial pressures.

It is worth noting that when I completed my PhD in 2014, Sydney was just beginning to develop its first cultural policy. The irregular spaces I had spent years documenting were still, at that point, part of the city's living fabric. In the decade since, most of them have gone. Development pressure, rising costs, licensing regimes, and the wholesale transformation of inner Sydney have displaced the very conditions that allowed that informal cultural life to flourish. The city got its cultural policy, but the culture it might have protected was already disappearing.

This is the tension at the heart of the issue. Policy moves slowly. Informal culture moves fast, and it moves on. The lesson is not that policy is useless, but that it needs to be light-footed enough to respond to what is actually happening on the ground, rather than arriving too late to protect what has already been lost.

For this to happen, government and institutions need to adopt a posture of genuine flexibility. Not heavy-handed formalisation, not prescription, just enough elasticity in planning, regulation, and policy to allow informal cultural life to breathe and self-determine. Critically, this must also mean resisting the urge to censor or constrain what happens in these spaces. Uncomfortable, political, and boundary-pushing work is not a problem to be managed. It is the point. A National Cultural Policy that does not actively protect artistic freedom risks producing a cultural sector that is safe, legible, and ultimately hollow.

Key Challenges

Narrow definitions of arts and cultural practice Design and other cultural disciplines continue to be treated as peripheral to "the arts." The policy must adopt a broad and genuinely inclusive definition, one that recognises culture itself as a form of practice and reflects the full spectrum of how Australians create, not just the forms that have historically attracted institutional support.

Barriers for marginalised communities and underserved regions Emerging practitioners from First Nations, CALD, and low socioeconomic backgrounds face compounding disadvantages: limited access to education, networks, funding, and visible pathways into the sector. Talent is not the barrier. Opportunity is.

This inequity is also geographic. As someone who grew up in Western Sydney, studied at Western Sydney University, and continues to teach there, I see firsthand how cultural funding and infrastructure remains concentrated in the inner city. Western Sydney is one of the most culturally diverse regions in Australia, home to extraordinary creative communities that are chronically underfunded and underrepresented in national cultural conversations. A genuinely inclusive National Cultural Policy must address this imbalance, investing in the regions and communities where the need and the potential are greatest. This does not mean just investing in larger GLAM entities, whilst important, but ensuring that emerging artist run initiatives and performance spaces benefit from adequate funding and support.

What I Would Like to See

- **A broad, inclusive definition of cultural and arts practice** that recognises culture itself as a form of practice, and encompasses marginal and underrecognised disciplines alongside more established ones.
- **Targeted support pathways** for First Nations artists, CALD communities, young people, and practitioners from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **An elastic approach to regulation and planning** that allows temporary, experimental, and informal cultural spaces to exist and self-determine.
- **Genuine investment in Western Sydney and other underserved regions**, recognising their cultural diversity and creative potential.
- **Investment in connecting regional and urban creative communities**, recognising that the climate crisis and First Nations culture do not respect city boundaries. Meaningful cultural exchange and collaboration across these communities is essential to a nationally cohesive and responsive cultural policy.
- **Youth-centred funding and transitional support for creative graduates**, including grants, residencies, and subsidised studio access that provide a genuine bridge between study and sustainable practice. As AI continues to disrupt entry-level creative employment, investment at this transitional stage is not a luxury but a necessity.
- **A strong commitment to artistic freedom**, including protection from censorship and the political or commercial pressuring of cultural institutions.
- **Accessible and inclusive funding and infrastructure for artists with disabilities**, ensuring that physical, financial, and institutional barriers do not prevent disabled practitioners from participating fully in Australia's cultural life.
- **Recognition of climate justice as a cultural issue**, ensuring the communities most impacted by the climate crisis have a voice in and access to Australia's cultural life. Sustainable practice should be actively preferred and supported across the cultural sector, and climate action should be embedded within arts narratives, not treated as peripheral to them.

Conclusion

Australia's new National Cultural Policy has an opportunity to be genuinely transformative, but only if it centres the people and practices that have historically been left out. Culture is not just what happens in galleries and concert halls. It happens in temporary spaces, marginalised communities, graduate

studios, and suburban and regional backyards. It is also one of our most powerful tools for responding to the defining challenges of our time, including the climate crisis. A National Cultural Policy worthy of the name must be bold enough to go where the culture actually is, purposeful enough to ground itself in the knowledges of First Nations people, and courageous enough to elevate the voices of those who have for too long gone unheard.