

Kate Baker

Submission - National Cultural Policy

I am an Australian artist working in glass and mixed media, and I understand this country as a nation of makers.

Creating and sustaining opportunities for artists, craftspeople, designers and specialist makers is central to the future of Australian cultural life. As Artificial Intelligence reshapes the world, the value of the original, the handmade and the materially embodied becomes even more critical. I believe this new environment will increase public interest in work that carries evidence of human touch, technical skill, material intelligence and cultural authenticity. This is already evident in the growing international recognition of Australian makers, including through platforms such as the Loewe Craft Prize and Premio Arteria at Venice Glass Week.

Australia's craft and design sector is grounded in the deep cultural traditions of First Nations peoples, and has also been enriched by generations of new Australians who have brought specialist skills, techniques and knowledge to this country. Sustaining these traditions, skills and material practices is essential to national identity, social cohesion and cultural distinctiveness. In an increasingly homogenised world, Australia's handmade, design-led and craft-based practices offer a powerful point of difference. This is culturally and socially important, and it also has significant economic potential.

My submission focuses on three key areas where national cultural policy can better support artists, makers and designers.

Pillar 3: The Centrality of the Artist

The Creative Workplace Scoping Study Report identified an acute shortage of designers and makers, and noted the loss of specialist education and training as a barrier to participation, workforce development and industry potential. From my perspective as a practising artist, this shortage is not abstract. Specialist material knowledge is difficult to acquire, expensive to maintain and often dependent on access to studios, workshops, mentors, fabricators, technicians and professional networks.

Investment in skills and training pathways is essential if Australia is to grow and sustain a community of artists, makers and designers whose work is locally produced, culturally distinctive and economically valuable. When artists and makers are supported to develop their practice, income circulates through Australian communities, local manufacturing knowledge is strengthened, and the market for design-led artisan production expands. The Government's Creative Workplaces initiative has provided important support and advice, and there is now an opportunity to build on that work with a longer-term strategy.

I support the development of a 10-year workforce plan that strengthens skills and training pathways for artists, craftspeople, designers and specialist makers.

Pillar 4: Strong Institutions

Craft and design infrastructure in Australia is fragile and limited. Artists working with specialist materials rely on a broader ecology of institutions, studios, workshops, galleries, training organisations, design centres, fabricators and professional networks. These structures underpin career development, technical excellence, public visibility and business sustainability. Without them, individual artists are left to carry too much of the risk and cost of maintaining specialist practice.

Long-term market development, professional development, training, exhibition opportunities and links with related sectors such as tourism, architecture, manufacturing and public art are all essential to a strong cultural ecosystem. National infrastructure enables artists and makers to continue producing work locally, which matters both economically and environmentally. The closure or weakening of key craft and design organisations further reduces the capacity of the sector and places additional pressure on independent practitioners.

I support the establishment of a dedicated structure within Creative Australia to support Australia's artists, designers and makers. This body should work strategically across the whole sector, in partnership with practitioners and organisations, to strengthen infrastructure, develop markets, support professional pathways and realise the sector's full cultural and economic potential.

Pillar 5: Reaching the Audience

Research consistently shows that hands-on creative participation reduces stress, builds social connection, and supports mental health and wellbeing. Expanding audiences for craft, design and material practice is therefore both a market development opportunity and an investment in wellbeing, education and social cohesion.

The uniqueness of Australia's craft and design sector has been undervalued. There is significant unrealised commercial, cultural and tourism potential in supporting artists and makers to reach broader audiences nationally and internationally. As an artist, I see audience development not only as a matter of sales or visibility, but as a way of deepening public understanding of material practice, process, innovation and the cultural value of handmade work.

I support a market development strategy that increases exports, grows audiences and promotes Australia as a cultural tourism destination. This should include support for export market development, representation at international trade and cultural events such as Milan Design Week, and expanded opportunities for international residencies, exchange and presentation.

Summary

Australia's artists, craftspeople, designers and specialist makers contribute to national identity, social cohesion, cultural innovation and economic development. In a world increasingly shaped by automation and digital replication, the handmade and materially original carry renewed significance. National cultural policy should recognise this value by investing in long-term skills pathways, strong sector infrastructure and ambitious market development for Australian artists and makers.