

Having a National Cultural Policy and acknowledging that it needs revision and redevelopment is an incredible and necessary achievement for Australian society and culture at large.

I am based in [REDACTED], graduated with a Bachelor of Performance from the University of Wollongong and have been working in the industry in both the independent and professional sector for the last decade. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Also, for the past two years I've worked in sales at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I wanted to introduce myself as my background as an artist has direct connections to some suggestions I would make to include in the refreshed National Cultural Policy outlined below.

I am a freelance artist, predominantly a stage actor and director but unlike most people, artists can't rely on having just one job/trade/specialty. We often train in one craft but have to become incredibly versatile and multidisciplinary. This is because there are so few opportunities available that we need to expand our skillset to not be pigeonholed. We are competing with each other due to the lack of opportunities around so we need to be able to do multiple things at once. This is not even considering that we often need to supplement creative work with another job for financial security.

Although I've had the privilege to work on some incredible shows and at some incredible venues, most of the shows I've worked on have been in the independent theatre sector. This means that most shows I work on are unpaid (perhaps profit-share, perhaps an honorarium), requiring rehearsals to occur on weeknights and weekends as most of the cast and crew all have day jobs, often rehearsing in inconsistent spaces as rehearsal venue hire is a large barrier. In the last few years so many venues have shut down, making it even harder to make art and put it on anywhere as everyone is competing for the limited spots available. With so few venues still open, those running them are often risk averse, and this is difficult for freelance artists particularly as it often means they will only consider hiring you if you are represented with an agency, have very specific training, or want to put on work that won't cost a lot (namely plays that require no fees for rights or have diminishing cast sizes). For an artist to continue to hone their craft they can't simply wait around for the next opportunity meaning we often have to work on shows for no money.

Arts companies aren't like other industries that offer internships and yet funding something like the *Artists at Work Pilot Program* would be invaluable as it would be indispensable to work in the field we want to work in in a hybrid-role to inspire creativity whilst earning an income and not having to sacrifice our pursuits. To have artistic/administrative employment is not a step down, but a chance to work alongside artists and upskill while earning a feasible income. So many

artists, myself included, are working in arts administration as it is at least tangential to what we want to be doing, although we often aren't properly trained in these roles.

Universal basic income for artists is crucial. This is not just so people aren't living on the poverty line or sacrificing themselves by working multiple jobs to make ends meet but more so because tertiary education institutions offer art degrees like mine in the first place. By offering these degrees means that the government and those institutions believe once you finish that degree you should be able to go out and get a job that you can earn a living wage from with that qualification, and that there is academic value in what we are studying. Just like drama is offered as a subject in school, there is merit and value in it yet society treats it as a hobby that should've been left behind once we became adults.

Pre-school education has a high focus on arts and crafts as it is vital for our development and entertainment; we can't just survive, we must live. The government understands the benefits of funding large sections of society, both to the individual and to the community, just look at funding for sport. Funding art like sport will make artists and young people that don't associate with sport feel included and that they have something to offer to their community. There are so many different sports, at so many different levels, it's encouraged to participate in sport even just recreationally. There are just as many different arts practices, and the same way there are different levels of sport there exists different levels of theatre (amateur, independent, professional).

Tax reform also needs to be addressed as so much that is required when submitting your tax return doesn't cater to artists. I've personally called the ATO in the past and they couldn't help me because they said they don't understand how an artist is meant to comply with their very black-and-white questions, particularly when my losses are so much higher than my income. If people can prove that they are an artist, whether due to qualification, place of employment, or portfolio of work, the tax threshold should be adjusted as artists earn a lot less annually, especially because our earnings are not coming from art alone.

As well as a generalised cultural policy, there needs to be a review of the state of the Australian not-for-profit theatre sector specifically as too much discussion about the topic currently is anecdotal. Putting strict boundaries on what types of shows can get programmed or who can get funded is antithetical to what art is meant to do. Art is meant to entertain, inspire, challenge, hold a mirror up to society, but how can it do that if society doesn't want to look at itself. Artists are currently having to try and force their vision for a show into very prescriptive outlines of what funding bodies, major companies and venues want to program which is the antithesis of the creative process. Artists need to be given freedom to explore and try things out, they can't know what something is going to be like before they've made it otherwise it's not original or exciting therefore audiences won't be interested either. Art is meant to reflect society and its people as a whole, for Australia that means all Australians, every race/gender/age/sexuality etc. We need different voices to represent our different stories. If we don't put different stories on our stages how do you expect more people to engage with art as a whole? If people don't feel represented

or included they won't participate, and the problem is artists currently don't feel included in Australian culture as art and theatre especially isn't seen as a priority or nurtured.