



MONASH
University

SUBMISSION

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CONSULTATION

8 JUNE 2026

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and pay respects to the Elders and Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which our Australian campuses stand, as well as Indigenous peoples of other places where Monash has a campus or major presence.

We acknowledge First Peoples' connection to material and creative practice on these lands for more than 60,000 years. Monash University supports the continued strengthening and prioritisation of the First Nations First pillar, including recognising the place of First Nations stories and which has seen a strong and important trend towards self-determined futures in creative outcomes.

Monash is committed to fostering a society that recognises, respects and includes Indigenous peoples, cultures and knowledges and has an embedded commitment to working with First Peoples both in Australia and overseas to support the creation of this society.

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Introduction and recommendations

Monash University is a powerhouse of creative practice through education, discovery, production, and presentation in visual and performing arts and creative industries. Academic faculties and cultural institutions employ artists, commission new work, engage with emerging artists and partner with S2M enterprises. This community, associated production and infrastructure contribute to the five National Cultural Pillars from a position of stability within the changing distribution and discovery landscape. Monash's creative capability is based in two academic faculties and two nationally significant cultural institutions.

MADA, the Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture, is a connected community of creative thinkers, makers and professional practitioners. In 2025, it comprised 150 staff and 3,200+ students, all engaged in creative visual and design practice and theory, across undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in fine art, art history and curation, design, architecture and urban planning.

The Faculty of Arts is a recognised global leader of transformative education and impactful research across humanities, arts and social sciences disciplines. Arts collaborates with industry, community and government to drive positive change. In 2025, the faculty numbered 160 staff and 1,500+ students in creative and cultural studies, across undergraduate, postgraduate and higher research degrees in areas such as Indigenous studies, literary studies, languages and cultural studies, creative writing, music and performance, journalism, film and media studies.

MPAC, Monash University Performing Arts Centres, is unique among Australian performing arts centres for the way it brings creative artists and academics together to commission new works and challenge ways of thinking in contemporary performing arts. In 2025 its venues saw 450+ performances and events, including 120,000 box office tickets sold and 200,000 non-student visitations.

MUMA, the Monash University Museum of Art, is recognised for its university-contextualised progressive and engaging programs across contemporary art, artist-led education and research. In 2025, MUMA's curators, educators and technicians engaged with 110 artists and writers, oversaw 70 artworks acquired for Monash Collection, 19 new commissions, 4 new curated exhibitions, and more than 150 education and public programs.

Recommendations

- 1. Monash University strongly recommends that 'First Nations First' remain the governing, foundational pillar of the National Cultural Policy, and that the Commonwealth embed First Nations self-determination and structural oversight across all five pillars of the policy**

The Commonwealth must ensure that First Nations peoples retain agency, custodianship, and self-determination over their cultural and creative practices, languages, knowledges and leadership. First Nations voices should be centralised in all discourse, funding, and decision-making that impacts Indigenous creative and cultural expressions. The first pillar must not be siloed or restricted to First Nations-specific arts and culture. Rather, it must serve as the lens through for the remaining pillars: *A Place for Every Story*, *Centralising the Artist*, *Strong Cultural Infrastructure*, and *Engaging the Audience*. By firmly embedding First Nations leadership at the centre of national policy, the Commonwealth will move beyond passive acknowledgment, fostering a national creative ecosystem where truth-telling, deep respect, and cultural excellence genuinely shape how Australia defines itself to the world.

- 2. Recognition of significant and enduring role of universities in Australia's creative ecosystem**

Australia's next cultural policy should recognise the specific place of universities in the cultural sphere, acknowledging their significant contribution as educators, innovators, producers and engagers.

With reach across local, national and global contexts, particularly across the IndoPacific through our campuses in Malaysia, Indonesia, India, China, and extending to Europe (Italy) and North America (Boston), Monash can be a key partner to build, in the words of the Minister "a cultural landscape that reflects our diversity, supports our art workers, and strengthens the nation we share."

We are delighted that the Commonwealth shares our regard for the essential role of creative practices in better understanding the world and our place in it, while envisioning pathways toward a more just, equitable and secure future.

We support other submissions to this consultation that seek recognition for the full breadth and reach of creative practice, such as Contemporary Arts Organisations Australia, Regional Arts Victoria, Theatre Network Australia and Ausdance National.

Rebecca Coates	Curator, Director of MUMA
Katie Stevenson	Historian, Dean of Arts
Mel Dodd	Architect, Dean of MADA
Paul Grabowsky AO	Pianist and Composer, Executive Director of MPAC

Overview of creativity and culture at Monash

MADA | Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture

The Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture (MADA) is ranked in the Top 1% in the world for Art, Design and Architecture education. Its artists, curators, historians and cultural commentators collaborate nationally and internationally on vibrant, innovative, creative research and practice that addresses the social, economic and human issues facing Australia.

Recent selected projects

- Bangerang descendant, Dr Peta Clancy, has been working closely over nearly a decade with Aboriginal communities to remember the Frontier Wars and its violent, lasting impacts on people and Country. Her photographic and projection works explore how we memorialise and acknowledge the painful histories of Aboriginal peoples.
- Professor Callum Morton created *The Underneath*, two monumentally scaled, glazed-tile artworks, as mirror images at the two entrances to Gadigal Station in Sydney. They suggest two ends of a connected tunnel and the ceramic tiles continue the long visual history of underground train stations.
- Funded by the Australian Research Council, Associate Professor Michelle Antoinette is investigating art-focused projects at key sites in East and Southeast Asia. She aims to “shed light on the role of art in shaping new kinds of public participation, cultural belonging and creativity in Asia. Looking at the new kinds of aesthetic and social issues they emphasise ... [and] better understand current topics of importance to Asian societies and the significance of art”.

Arts

The Faculty of Arts houses over two thousand staff and students engaged in creative and cultural research, practice and education. Staff are recognised internationally for their work across creative practices, cultural policy development, and community-led change-making.

Recent Selected Projects

- Monash Arts’ most recent Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project *Uncovering Aboriginal Culture and Histories through Artefact Collections*, shows how cultural institutions can work in respectful partnership with Traditional Owners. Working alongside Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung Elders and knowledge holders, Museums Victoria and a network of partners, the project is re-examining neglected Aboriginal artefacts from southeast Australia. Many of these items, crafted from stone, bone and wood, have been stored away for decades. They are now being reinterpreted to reveal new insights into Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung culture, Country and history.
- The Monash Art Ensemble (MAE) is a large experimental ensemble that commissions, performs and documents new works of Australian music. A new project is considering how experimentation in improvisation contributes to the development of novel models of composition and vice versa. A conceptual framework will be developed of different aspects of improvisation and Australian Indigenous music and how they inform, intersect and are positioned in the nexus of composition and improvisation.
- By forging strategic partnerships and embracing innovative approaches to analysis of digitised archive records and multimedia historical storytelling, the ARC Linkage project, *Conviction Politics: A digital investigation of the convict routes of Australian democracy*, has invigorated the national narrative. Working with seven universities, eleven partners and eight collaborators – spanning universities, archives, museums, trade unions, a creative digital media company, and a law firm – Associate Professor Tony Moore and his team transformed their research into an online transmedia hub developed by digital media production house Roar Film. It features 100 micro-documentaries, data visualisations, podcasts, image archives, written articles, and original songs. *Conviction Politics* has generated a suite of music written and performed by Australian artists, a book titled *Unfree Workers*, and *Unshackled: The True Convict Story*, an immersive exhibition of rare objects and digital interactive media.

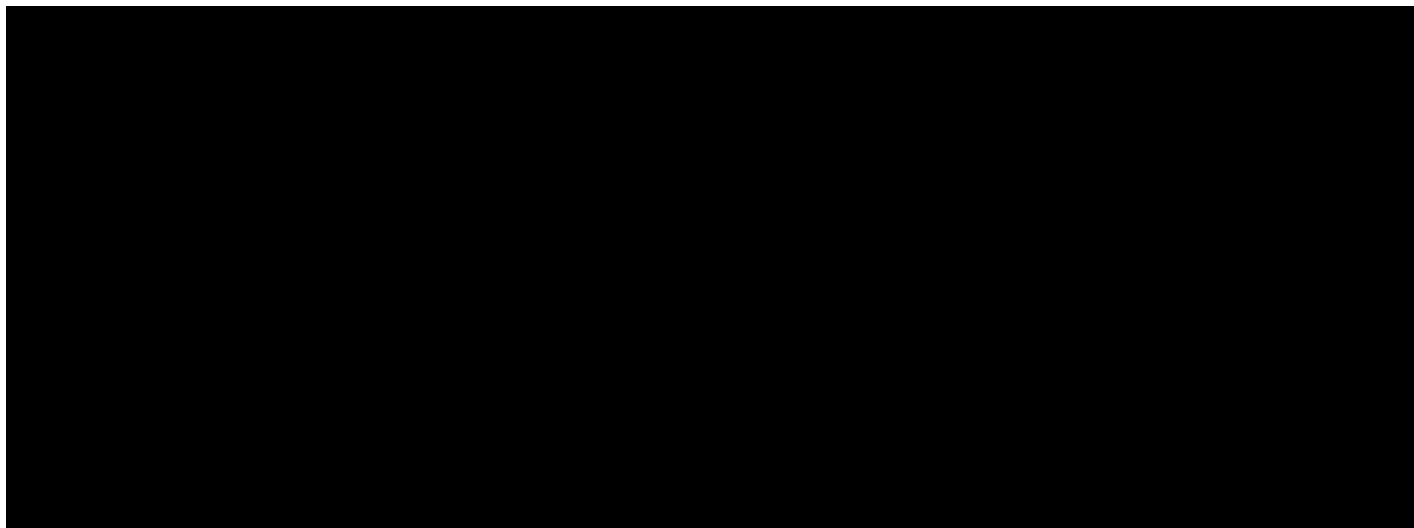
MPAC | Monash Performing Arts Centres

MPAC provides a cultural bridge between the University and the wider community, broadening social impact as well as student engagement through research excellence that meets the transformative power of artistic collaboration. MPAC’s annual program offers space for community, creativity and discovery. Its live music, theatre, dance, experiential shows and festivals are welcoming to all.

MPAC is committed to artform development, commissioning and supporting new art works by emerging and established Australian artists. Its commissioning strategy forges relationships between artists and Monash research communities, providing opportunities that empower both artists and experts from all fields. By linking them together, MPAC generates new art works, new ways of communicating ideas and new thought paradigms. In 2025-26 MPAC has eleven new works in development across theatre, music, dance, and children’s programming. In 2026, six works have their world premiere as part of MPAC’s annual program, and several children’s works commissioned for MPAC’s *Family Fiesta* have received funding and

major grants for 2026-27 touring and presentation in more than 40 arts centres. The musical *My Brilliant Career*, developed in 2019 through MPAC's Jeanne Pratt Artists-in-Residence program, has gone on to seasons with Melbourne Theatre Company in 2024 and 2026 and Sydney Theatre Company in 2026.

MPAC comprises five state of the art performing arts venues: Robert Blackwood Hall, Ian Potter Centre for Performing Arts, which includes the Alexander Theatre, David Li Sound Gallery and The Count's, and the George Jenkins Theatre on Peninsula campus. Its scalable and versatile venues are hired by the Monash University community, schools, community organisations, commercial presenters, and professional arts companies. Together these venues host 200,000 non-student visitations in as many as 500 performances and events each year.



MUMA | Monash University Museum of Art

In 2025, MUMA celebrated its 50th year of connecting art, research and ideas. It presented 70 artists and collectives and engaged 40 writers in projects that saw more than 18,000 visitors, 119 academic programs to 7,500 university students and 105 education programs to 3,100 students in 50 primary and secondary schools

MUMA's context enables it to advance ambitious, research-driven and globally relevant artistic programs, playing a vital role in contemporary art discourse, and connecting art with ideas that inspire and transform. MUMA's artistic program has increasingly focussed on collaborations with artists across Australia and our Indo-Pacific region.

MUMA is the custodian of the Monash University Collection, which comprises more than 2,800 artworks valued at over \$51m. Established after the University opened in 1961, its role is to inspire audiences on and off the campus. It is recognised nationally and internationally for showcasing Australian art since the 1960s, through diverse media and new artistic practices as they develop. Acquisition priorities include a focus on First Nations artists (especially of South East Australia); reflecting Australia's diversity and communities; gender parity; and artists aged under forty. Nearly half of the collection is on display around Monash or on loan to other public galleries and institutions.

MUMA's involvement in ARC funded projects and its collaboration with Monash faculties enables it to contribute to the discovery and advancement of new knowledge and fosters an ecosystem that encourages and exchange of ideas among artists, researchers and industry professionals.

In 2025, MUMA collaborated with the Faculty of Education, on ART REACH: Learning with the Land - a research project connecting pre-service teachers and students from Dandenong Primary School in art experiences related to Wayapa Wurrkk embodied movement practices and restorative planting and botanical knowledges related to the murnong yam daisy.

Discussion of recommendations for the new National Cultural Policy

1. Monash University strongly recommends that 'First Nations First' remain the governing, foundational pillar of the National Cultural Policy, and that the Commonwealth embed First Nations self-determination and structural oversight across all five pillars of the policy.

Embedding self-determination and Indigenous leadership across all policy pillars ensures that First Nations agency, custodianship, and leadership are maintained, and that Indigenous voices remain central to the systems, decisions, and cultural expressions that define Australia.

Monash University's enduring commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, and knowledges is embedded through the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous), guided by the *Monash Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework (2019–2030)* and *Impact 2030*. This approach aligns with the principles of self-determination articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

The Monash Indigenous Congress is made up of Indigenous leaders from across the University, including representation from MADA, the Faculty of Arts and MPAC, to provide formal oversight of the University's Indigenous strategy. Self-determination and Indigenous leadership operate as a lens across all activities. This ensures that decision-making is guided by those with lived experience and cultural knowledge, and that Indigenous leadership is embedded at the highest levels of strategic direction.

MPAC has adopted 'First Nations First' as the leading pillar of its own strategic framework. Since the appointment of the Head of First Nations Programming & Engagement, Gunditjmara man Tom Molyneux, MPAC has embedded collective Indigenous decision-making through an Indigenous Steering Committee and is committed to providing a number of commissioning and presentation opportunities for First Nations artists/companies over the next four years. Kindred People is one example of how an Indigenous-led festival, new to outer-metro Melbourne, can support not just First Nations artists from Australia and abroad, but also opportunities for diverse audiences outside of the city centre to experience Indigenous stories, truth-telling and knowledge exchange.

- Kindred People is an Indigenous-led gathering of global First Nations artists, Knowledge Holders, Elders, students and community, to be held on Boonwurrung Country at Monash University from 1-5 September 2026. Guided by senior Boonwurrung Elder Professor N'arwee't Carolyn Briggs AM, Creative Director and Gunditjmara man Tom Molyneux, and a Steering Committee of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, Kindred People is a five-day festival and symposium, running across Monash's Australian campuses and on Country. It will be an opportunity to engage First Nations artists, cultural practitioners, thinkers and scholars from around the world through new and ancient paradigms of Indigenous art, research and cultural knowledge, and through a program of yarning and on-Country encounters.

The inaugural program will be launched on 17 June 2026, and features two commissioned world premieres, two Australian premieres, and two Victorian premieres - marking a substantial opportunity for Narm audiences to experience these diverse Indigenous-led artistic works. There are also a range of opportunities for students to engage in the program either as artists, participants, through tailored curriculum outcomes, or as audiences.

A formal relationship with an agency such as Creative Australia would be critical to enhance Monash's substantial investment and ensure future commissioning and presentation opportunities for global First Nations artists and knowledge-holders.

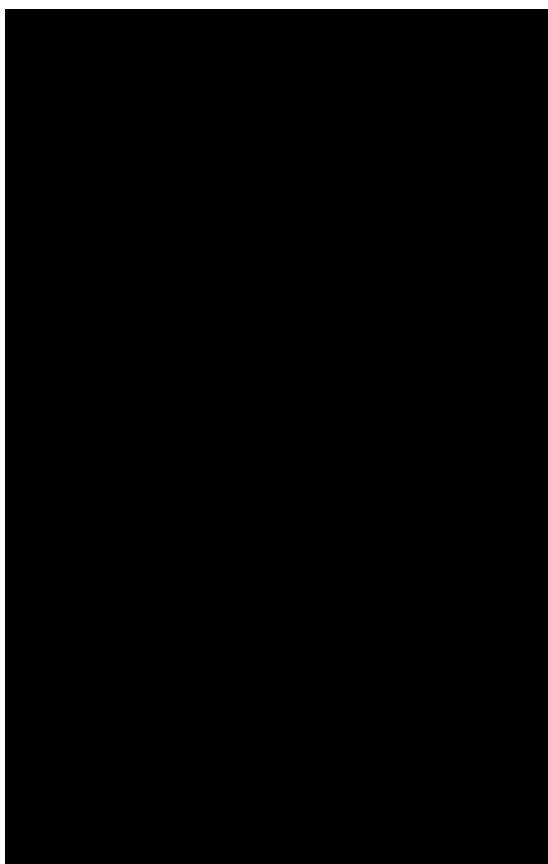
MADA's commitment to elevating Indigenous knowledge and leadership results in meaningful resources and models for creative practice. The Wominjeka Djeembana Research lab is a safe space for Indigenous researchers to explore the synergies between Indigenous ways of knowing and practice-led research in creative practice. It demonstrates the importance of Indigenous knowledge for contemporary society with methodologies premised on the agency of Country and relationality.

- The Indigenous-led core unit, *Indigenous Australian creative practice and ways of knowing*, provides an overview of Indigenous Australian creative practice as a vehicle for the production of knowledge, and equips students to engage with this knowledge in an appropriately ethnographical and experiential way. It is compulsory for all first year MADA undergraduates in art, art history & curation, architecture and design.
- Quandamooka and Wurundjeri man, architect and MADA lecturer Bradley Kerr, contributed to the first Indigenous-led Australian pavilion at the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale, with a participatory installation reimagining the idea of home through the lens of Country.
- In 2025, Professor Brian Martin launched *Relational Return*, a Wominjeka Djeembana project on the repatriation of cultural materials.

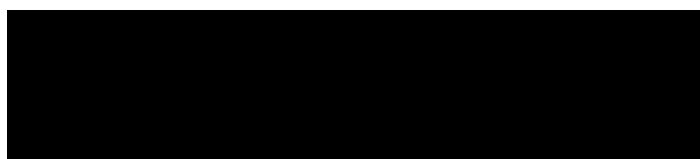
- Wominjeka Djeembana Research Lab member Dr Desirée Hernandez Ibinarriaga's groundbreaking book, *Decolonising and Indigenising Design*, is a powerful conception of how Indigenous futures can be centred across creative disciplines

MUMA's commitment to First Nations artists and engagement is reflected across the organisation and programs. It is a strategic foundation to activities and approach. At a governance level, MUMA is supported by an Indigenous Advisory group, with members from across the Monash community and beyond. MUMA has one identified role, Curator Indigenous, and engages First Nations colleagues in contract roles and on relevant projects. First Nations commitment plays out within MUMA's core activities:

- Artistic program - working with artists and curators including commissioning new works
- Collection - acquisition focus on work for the Monash University Collection, and site-specific installations such as Kulata Tjuata 2012-2014 which was acquired by MUMA for the Matheson Library
- Engagement - general public and schools-specific programs, including Strategic Partnerships Program with the Victorian Department of Education to support our commitment to Koorie kids education, and ongoing programs with the Melbourne Indigenous Transition School



In the eighth year of its partnership with the Melbourne Indigenous Transition School (MITS), MUMA commissioned artist Kait James (Wadawurrung) to work with 22 Year 7 students. Kait's textile practice repurposes vintage 'Australiana' souvenir tea towels to critically subvert colonial messaging with overlaid words and patterns. She provided each student with a tea towel from her collection and worked with them to find a message that connected with their values. MUMA also designed and printed a series of post cards that were featured at the MITS Gala on 23 October.



2. Recognition of significant and enduring role of universities in Australia's creative ecosystem

Tertiary education institutions stimulate and develop the creative capacity of future practitioners as well as supporting key arts workers. Universities such as Monash are large employers of artists and commissioners of new work. Monash has a systematic influence on Australia's cultural landscape, through individual practitioners and by incubating excellent and world leading creative work. This contribution should be recognised in the National Cultural Policy.

Pillar 2 A place for every story

Australia has an enviable record in attracting and accommodating creative talents from around the world, but very few from non-Anglo backgrounds have been able to influence cultural policy making in this country. Best practices of global cultural policy peak bodies such as UNESCO prioritise breadth and experience in the backgrounds of policy makers and this supports greater diversity and resilience in organisations.

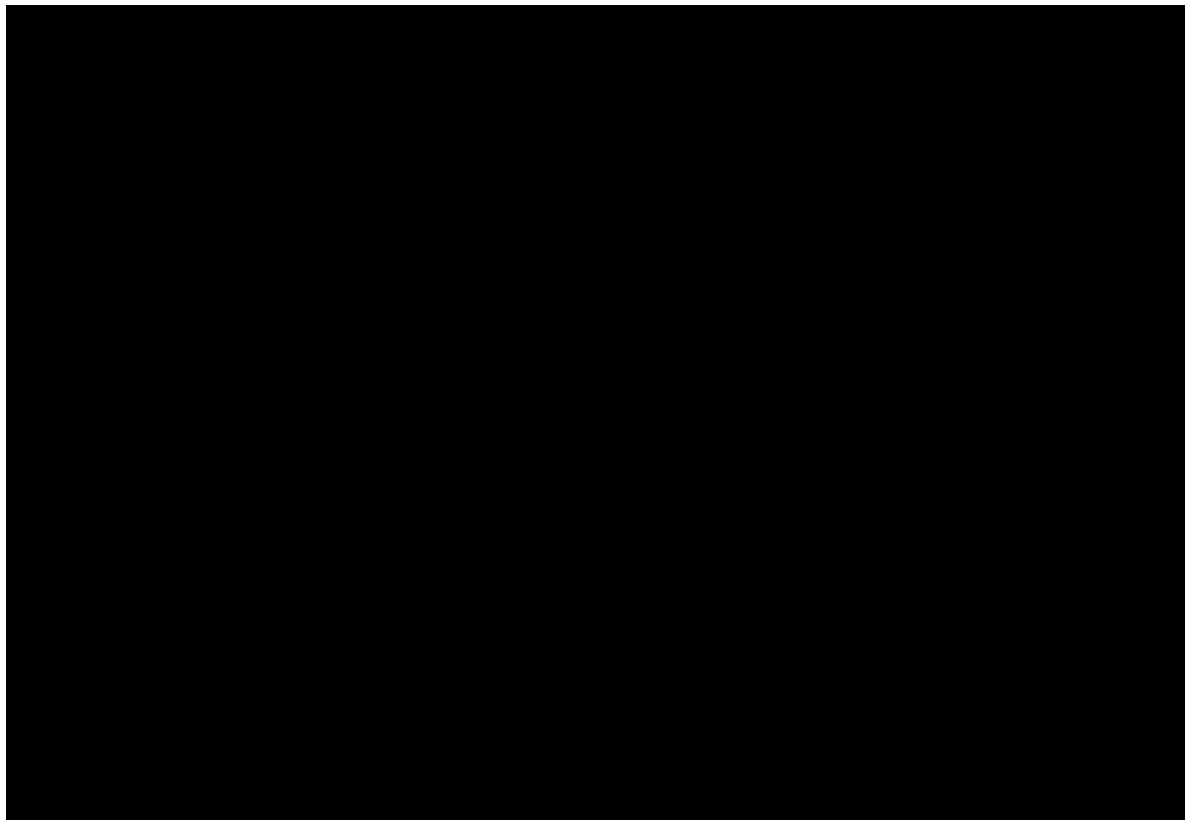
Cultural and creative industries are lacking diversity: class division, gender inequality and racial inequality are significant obstacles for the cultural labour market. Part of the challenge for addressing such issues is how to empower all people to become change makers. Adhering to the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expression¹, we need more people from more diverse social cultural backgrounds to sit around the decision-making table about the creative future of Australia. This requires sustained attention and deliberate prioritisation of diversity in boards and councils.

A place for every story depends not only on which stories are told today, but on which are recorded, preserved and made findable in the national cultural record. *A place for every story* depends on this infrastructure. Unless cultural data actively captures under-represented and First Nations creators rather than reproducing historical gaps, whole communities remain invisible in the national record, a representational question the next policy should fund directly.

Pillar 3 Centrality of the Artist

We support this pillar's inclusion of the workforce systems that sustain creative labour, noting our participation in Creative Workplaces' examination of working arrangements in the creative industries. Resultant focus groups highlighted issues of entrenched precarity, inconsistent and delayed payment, pervasive unpaid labour, and an absence of HR, contractual and compliance support for practitioners. The new policy should resource Creative Workplaces not only to document these conditions but to set and uphold enforceable minimum standards across the sector. We urge that consent, transparency and remuneration for AI training, alongside support for displaced workers, be treated as core to the 'artist as worker' commitment rather than a separate technology question.

Universities are large employers and significant supporters of artistic practice. Monash employs more than 200 creative practitioners and technicians on an ongoing basis. For academic staff, their engagement supports up to two days a week in creative-led, practice-based research which results in the production of new works, critiques and analysis of cultural practice. At MADA, a program of seed grants for creative works are awarded in an internally competitive process, to support new work, production, presentation and to leverage other grants and scale projects. For example, Dr Frances Barrett was commissioned by the Sydney Opera House to develop a live performance in the public realm. Frances drew together state, federal and Monash University funding to support the three stages of the project: research and development (Creative Victoria), presentation and artist fees (Creative Australia) and ensuring future iterations of the work (Monash Creative Works Scheme). The work was performed as part of the Art on the Steps program in 2026 to an audience of over 1100 people.



¹ Monash Associate Professor Xin Gu is an Expert to this convention and also serves on the research advisory for Australian Creative Histories & Futures (ACHF)

Across our international campus network, and particularly in Melbourne's southeast, Monash provides creative education at all stages of life, supporting upskilling and reskilling. We commission and present works supporting local and global practitioners, and we house infrastructure that can be used by local businesses.

Monash's creative students build an adaptable skillset to become creative problem solvers with a truly global perspective. They transition to the workforce with peer networks, confidence to advocate for their own practice and a strong sense of their discipline augment with community, collaborative capabilities. MADA's degrees are grounded in real-world studio practice and state-of-the-art workshops and maker spaces from glass-blowing to 3D printing. Studio leaders are artists, curators, designers and architects. MADA's PhD in Curatorial Practice allows candidates to produce experimental curatorial projects, culminating in an examination exhibition alongside their written exegesis. It supports interdisciplinary and practice-based research that bridges curating, visual arts, as well as architecture and design and has a strong connection to MUMA.

MPAC and the Arts faculty facilitate professional performance and learning experiences for Monash students, particularly across its world class jazz, classical, and popular music programs. This includes the Monash Academy Orchestra and Monash Art Ensemble, and external education partnerships including with the Melbourne Fringe Festival. Students prepare work with artists such as Sarah Blasko, Dan Sultan, Kate Miller-Heidke, Vince Jones, Eddie Perfect and Meow Meow, culminating in public performances in MPAC's five venues at Monash's Clayton and Peninsula campuses.

MPAC's commissioning strategy focuses on forging relationships between artists and Monash research communities, providing opportunities that empower both artists and experts from all fields. MPAC Commissions involve widely publicised call outs for artist expressions of interest to apply for early phase creative developments, receiving space, technical and producing support, and a fee award. In June 2026 MPAC received 94 applications from artists in Victoria, NSW, QLD and WA.

MUMA's artist program is shaped by a number of priorities that reflect its position as one of Australia's leading contemporary university art museums. These include an Indo-Pacific focus, strong First Nations foundations, partnerships that extend the Museum's reach and a commitment to research-led exhibitions that generate new scholarship and knowledge across curatorial models and artistic opportunities. Engagement with education is a distinctive feature of MUMA, pursued through innovative artist-led teaching and learning to support early learners, school students and tertiary students. As well as its artist and public programs, in 2025 MUMA hosted four internships and one work experience placement, representing 446 hours of support for emerging arts workers.

Since 2018, the annual Ian Potter Sculpture Court Commission has invited artists to engage with the site and university context. The 2026 commission, *repetition is a virtue*, by Anna Varendorff resulted from her observations about how people use the space. She reflected on the surrounding built environment, and responded to it as a place of rest, meeting and conversation with a series of sculpture seats, scattered throughout the courtyard in conversational clusters. The 2025 commission, *The Birds*, reimagined public art as a tool for ecological learning and biodiversity support, with a series of rock types taken from and adapted to the surrounding architecture, sculpted to hold water and, in some cases, provide shelter.

Pillar 4 Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Universities are enduring, geographically distributed anchors of community and intellectual life with resources and infrastructure to inspire and inform creative engagement, cultural participation and stimulate economic innovation for greater social prosperity. In a time of geopolitical tensions and local economic pressures, there is opportunity for the Commonwealth Government to leverage the capabilities of Australia's public tertiary education institutions to achieve its creative and cultural goals. Monash University is committed to building Australia's creative capacity and contributing to culture's larger role in national prosperity and community resilience.

Initiative: Monash's Caulfield Campus as an Emerging Creative and Entrepreneurial Precinct

Monash's Caulfield campus supports about 1,000 staff and 16,000 enrolled students. It is the home of MADA, MUMA, the School of Media Film and Journalism (MFJ), the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, student-led publications such as Mojo News and The Struggle and the site of much of the University's creative and cultural practice and infrastructure:

- The Arts Media Lab, an extensive suite of purpose-built television & radio studios
- MADA's production workshops including digital fabrication, hot glass, ceramics + bronze, wood, metal & jewellery, open access project spaces, and design studios
- SensiLab creative computing facilities
- Monash Business School Banking and Finance STAR Lab, bringing budgeting and forecasting theories alive
- Monash Business School Behavioural lab with laser eye tracking technology to understand external influences on perception and individual decision-making
- MUMA Venues - Foyer, Helen McPherson Smith Education space, Ian Potter Sculpture Court

- The MADA Faculty Gallery
- The Caulfield Library
- The Campus Green, including Soundshell and programmable big screens

Leveraging these distinct strengths and infrastructure, Monash is progressing a vision for Caulfield as a dynamic, networked precinct at the nexus of culture, creativity and entrepreneurship. The University is exploring the retrofit of a former retail complex on the edge of campus, to transform it into an open innovation platform that prototypes new forms of industry-partnered learning, cross-faculty collaboration, creative enterprise and civic engagement. As a temporary 'meanwhile' initiative conceived as a catalyst, it will enable Monash to test new models of teaching, partnership and campus activation, generating ideas, connections and momentum to help shape the development of the campus ecosystem. Embedding arts and culture within a broader innovation agenda is core to this vision, as well as supporting place-based creative practice and cultural participation. We seek opportunities for government collaboration.

Little Blue Dot / Research-engaged commissioning, presenting and touring

MPAC's commissioning role also serves as a model for future leverage. In 2024, MPAC commissioned a new theatre work for children, *Little Blue Dot*. It began as a questionnaire about the universe from a group of children to the School of Physics and Astronomy at Monash University. Fourteen astrophysicists gave written responses, and *Little Blue Dot* was developed into a show created by Lemony S Puppet Theatre, directed by Sarah Kriegler. Two astrophysicists, Dr Rosemary Mardling and Dr Alex Wallace, collaborated closely with the artistic team to ensure the science underpinning the work was accurate, understandable and inspiring for 5-12 year olds and their families. The astrophysicists also made radio and media appearances alongside the creative team to publicise their partnership and the show's premiere at MPAC's *Family Fiesta*.

Monash was then able to secure significant funding from Creative Victoria and the Commonwealth, allowing the production to tour to 23 arts venues and give more than 50 performances to local communities across four states in 2026.

Camping together on a star-lit night Dad and Kid wait for a comet passing by for the first time in 50,000 years. While they wait, Kid explains to Dad gravity, light years, space-time and blackholes.



Grounded in a camping star-gazing adventure between a child and their dad, *Little Blue Dot* tackles the big questions we ask about space, our place in it and why our precious little planet matters so very much.

Little Blue Dot marries accurate astrophysics with a human story of childhood passion, deep parental love, family adventures, camping mishaps, and important human lessons about the uncertainty of life that we all must learn.

The audience experience of *Little Blue Dot* is unique because of its combination of human actors and two specific puppetry techniques: Black light Theatre and Corridor Puppetry. Not often seen in Australian works for families, these techniques allow us to create a sense of wonder and awe, play with scale, create a dark 'void' of space and allow planets, stars, asteroids to glimmer in the dark. Puppetry allows the expression of the impossible on stage. In *Little Blue Dot*, actors are 'propelled' into space to explore the concepts being discussed; entering a black hole to experience 'spaghettification' and driving to a distant star to understand light years.

Little Blue Dot uses space and Kid's passion for it, to reflect on who we are as a species and what our planet means for our survival. However, being a work for children, this is not done through heavy-handedness, nor does it put the responsibility onto children to solve the climate crisis. It is a subtle reflection on Earth's beauty and how recognition of this is important to our survival. *Little Blue Dot* is an example of MPAC enabling work that is timely, important and necessary.

Pillar 5 Engaging the Audience

Revive's commitment to connecting Australian stories with audiences "at home and abroad" remains sound, but the international dimension has been framed mostly as projection, exporting Australian work to overseas markets and audiences. There is an opportunity for the next policy to engage reciprocally: not only reaching international audiences, but building two-way exchange, co-production, and durable partnerships, particularly across the Asia-Pacific region in which Australia is located. This matters because audience engagement abroad is cultural diplomacy, and the soft-power model that has historically underpinned it carries assumptions about whose stories travel and on whose terms. Durable cultural relationships in the region depend on reciprocity and shared authority rather than one-directional promotion². Embedding these principles would strengthen Australia's standing in Asia while better reflecting the diversity of the audiences the policy seeks to reach.

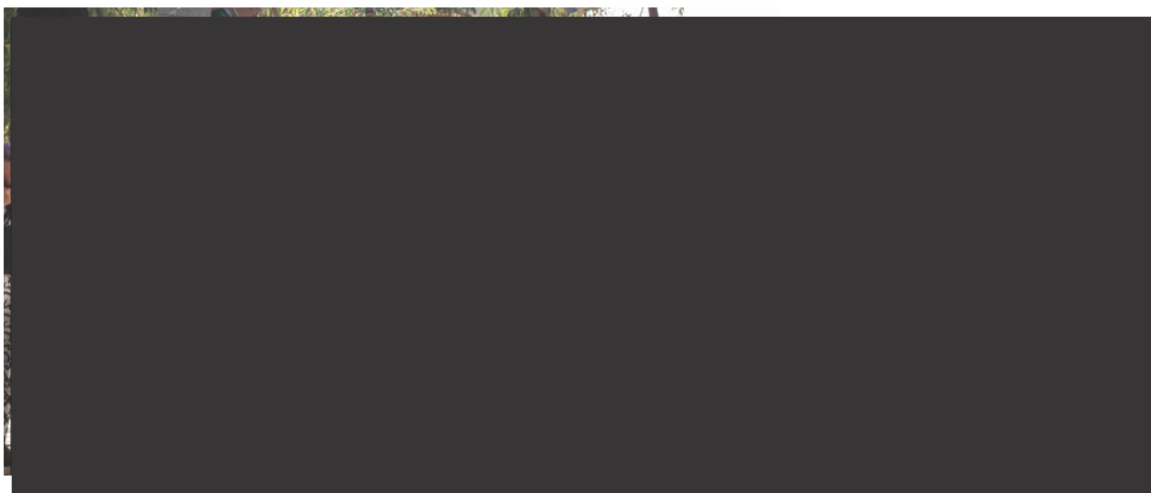
For example, MUMA's 2025 exhibition program opened with *Image Economies*, a major exhibition examining the power and complexity of images in contemporary digital life, inviting audiences to consider how we interpret and navigate the visual landscapes that define our networked world. *Image Economies* brought together artists and collectives from Australia, Aotearoa-New Zealand and the broader Asia-Pacific, in a focus on economic, social and political forces underpinning image culture. It also served as a valuable teaching resource for students across disciplines.

A partnership with Monash could support cultural diplomacy and genuine reciprocity across campus networks and global knowledge systems.

Awakening Histories / integration of research, education and artistic programming into audience engagement

Informed by Monash University's ARC Laureate project Global Encounters & First Nations Peoples: 1000 Years of Australian History, and co-presented with PICA in Perth, the MUMA exhibition *Awakening Histories* traced the deep connections between First Nations peoples and Southeast Asian seafarers from the port of Makassar in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, celebrating enduring relationships that remain prominent in art, language and material culture.

Featuring new commissions and key loans, the twenty-seven artists and collectives presented in the exhibition shared stories of migration, trade and cultural exchange, highlighting the roles of *trepang* or sea cucumber, trochus and turtle shells, tamarind trees, palm wine, seafaring technology, metal tools, textiles and patterns in histories shared across the ocean. Artworks reflect on stories and songs of the interactions that have taken place across the north of this continent, now known as Australia, from the Gulf of Carpentaria, around Arnhem Land to Garamilla/Darwin—an area known as Marege to the sailors from Makassar—and beyond to the Kimberley region, or Kayu Djawa.



² Strengthening Solidarities & Decolonising Collaboration: new ethical frameworks for artistic & intercultural exchange in the Asia Pacific Region (ARC Discovery Project, 2026-2029, Associate Professor Xin Gu)

Associated events included curatorial and self-guided tours, academic programs, and an educational resource for schools. MUMA also published a free and downloadable A1 poster featuring Dhambit Mununggurr's (Djapu, Wandawuy and Dhuwa) bark painting *Gunyanjara Makkassans* 2025, and which brought together artist statements, stories and connections from the exhibition.

The exhibition toured to Perth Institute of Contemporary Art and featured in the 2026 Perth Festival. In December 2026 it will also tour to Cairns Regional Art Gallery.

Further afield, the annual Monash Prato Visual Residency, unique in Australian higher education, supports an Australian creative practitioner to spend three months at Monash's Prato centre in Tuscany to undertake a new project or enquiry that relates to the local context. Artists and designers engage with Monash students, local art organisations, and general publics in Italy and Australia.

Also in Italy, Monash Urban Lab and Baracco-Wright Architects represented Australia at the 24th Triennale Milano International Exhibition. The exhibition received the patronage of the Australian Embassy, Rome, and was opened by Consul General, Rachel White. In their exhibition, *Land Use Inequalities*, responding to the Triennale's theme, *Inequalities*, Monash Urban Lab and Baracco-Wright Architects demonstrated how, in the rush to address one inequality, the inequality of land use between species deepens. On the edges of Melbourne outdated practices of land clearing and site scraping carry on. This inequality of land use intersects, displaces and destroys ancient remnant ecosystems, habitats and culturally sensitive sites.

As the next National Cultural Policy develops, we would like to engage directly on how to unlock the full potential of university engagement, leveraging Commonwealth investment for the greater benefit of all Australians. This could involve formal partnering on a university commissioning and presentation package, combining research with practice, across the National Cultural Pillars.

Further information

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