

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: As an Individual

My submission acknowledges the importance of every aim in the proposed National Cultural Policy but concentrates on the creation of one strong institution to advance these aims.

Art history provides context to the history of global heritage at an international level and for Australia art history gives context to our national patrimony and our collecting institutions.

This document provides an initial statement of strategy and scope. The proposed Institute would be the equivalent of these institutions in other countries, such as the Centre for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) at the National Gallery of Art, Washington; the Getty Research Institute at Los Angeles (GRI); the Institut de l'histoire d'Art, Paris (INHA) and the German institutions in Paris (German Historical Institute), Florence (Kunsthistorisches Institut) and Rome (Biblioteca Hertziana).

No such institution exists south of the equator, so the Institute would play an important cultural role for Australia in the Pacific and the Global South, liaising with museums and universities. Once established it would become the leading art history institute in the Asia Pacific region, attracting research projects of global and national significance, to study Australian art and its images, in those areas of the world that are connected globally to Australia and its collecting institutions.

The Australian Institute of Art History would be the home for APIAH, a proposed newly formed association representing the Art History Institutes in the Asia Pacific region. APIAH would be an equivalent Association to the European and American institutions RIHA and ARIAH.

These institutes have combinations of the following components: research projects, research resources and libraries, scholarships and visiting fellows' programs, seminars, conferences and symposia, publications, and conservation services.

Many art institutions and museums in Australia emphasize the contemporary and often ghettoise indigenous art. By contrast this proposal is inclusive, is not just about presentism but about histories of visual cultures as well as their contemporaneity. The Australian Research Council has supported art history only marginally, so government investment would be essential to realise this policy.

In 2008 I convened the international art history conference (CIHA) at the University of Melbourne, on quintessential Australian themes with a global significance: *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence* (2009), that changed global art history forever. Indigenous Australian art took its place naturally within the global sphere. Marcia Langton and others formed a committee specifically to curate this subject.

At the CIHA conference there was a wish to create a permanent art historical institute as had happened elsewhere. Glyn Davis, then Vice Chancellor at Melbourne, heard the speeches and took the initiative to help create the Australian Institute of Art History with an initial grant. It has had a successful program for more than a decade, but is still seeking to have a permanent endowment, which an enlightened government might consider and create.

The proceedings of the conference, published by MUP, in 2009 is of continuing intellectual interest. (A copy of the proceedings has been mailed to the Minister) As is the *Cambridge Companion to Australian Art* (2011), commissioned two days after the conference ended, to develop the theme in relation to Australia.

The companion to Australian art was the first and (to date) the only book that embraced the idea of developing an inclusive art history from ancient rock art to digital art history. 24 authors from different institutions across our continent, discussed and illustrated works from more than forty collections and sites across Australia.

Art and its history are not only created but discussed in one form or another on all the inhabited continents of the earth. Its study enables greater understanding of how civilisation has developed and provides context to the history of global heritage at an international level.

Art history has traditionally focussed on the study of European art. Whilst the collecting policies of the collecting institutions of Australia for the past 50 years has been non-Eurocentric, research in non-European art history has not kept pace with these collecting policies. As a result, there is a real deficiency of research into Australian art collections history or meaning, despite growing global interest in non-European art and the existence of globally unique public and private collections in Australia.

This is also despite the existence of a large and growing sector in Australia, as evidenced by the enormous growth of museums and the importance of exhibitions as a mode of communication in all areas. For example, the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV)¹ collection, whilst significant, remains understudied. Whilst curatorship is taught in many places, there continues to be an ever-increasing need for specific training of art museum professionals (as opposed to general museum professionals).

Responding to each of the pillars as a guide for future developments.

First Nations: Recognise, respect, and celebrate the centrality of First Nations cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity.

To devise a series of research programs that celebrate Australian visual cultures, to create an understanding of how we have the oldest living culture in the world and what that means today and for our future. It is important to have a wholistic approach to indigenous culture and to empower indigenous leaders to make decisions.

A Place for Every Story. Ensure that government support reflects the diversity of Australia and places immigration at the forefront of discussion. An institute of art history would engage in programs about the multiplicity of artistic migration in the world and in Australia.

The Centrality of the Artist. Support excellence and the special role of artists and their creative collaborators. A program of research that would define local contemporaneity within a global vision.

Strong Institutions. Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy.

This proposal is to create an Institute of Art History that would support national life, community well-being and the economy, for all the reasons detailed above. The appointment of a Minister for the Arts, who has only one portfolio, such as occurs in France and Italy, would be essential. Since De Gaulle appointed André Malraux as cultural minister in 1959 it has been a highly valued portfolio in European countries. In English speaking countries the person responsible for the arts is often given the portfolio as a consolation prize, along with other huge tasks. Deborah Cheetham has been eloquent in proposing a minister for the arts in Australia with arts as the sole responsibility.

Reaching the Audience. Ensure Australian creativity thrives here and abroad in the digitally enabled 21st century. Our collecting institutions have variable websites. Usually, the state libraries are better organised than the galleries. Among Australian collecting institutions only the National Gallery of

Australia in Canberra has a website that begins to represent the collections they curate and to some degree resemble the best gallery websites in the world, for example the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, or the British Museum in London. A program should be devised that encourages institutions to improve their websites.

May I conclude by saying how inspiring it has been to have a government who are achieving what they promised and hope to have a new policy for art in contemporary Australia.