

National Cultural Policy Submission

Name: Western Australian Museum

Submitted: On behalf of government or government body

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

First Nations

Language

Particularly important is a commitment to preserve and promote the use of Indigenous languages.

Investment in Creativity

Investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creative industries should be increased, using a broad-based approach, i.e. beyond the domain of traditional areas of visual and performing art to consider indigenous initiatives across a wide range of creative industries.

Employment and training

For too long, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders working in the cultural and creative industries have been employed in positions relating only to their own cultural background and experience. This creates tensions: Firstly, it puts enormous pressure on these employees who are somehow expected to represent the interests of all Indigenous groups and colleagues, creating a culturally unsafe space for them to operate within. Secondly, it implicitly discriminates against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, who are then not considered for many other positions, because they have, in effect been typecast. Key to this is increasing investment in, and opportunities for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to develop their skills. Too many training programs have been short-term and tokenistic and have failed to lead to employment, or even employability.

Cultural materials

The issue of First Peoples' collections held in public and private institutions across Australia and the wider world must be addressed in a rational way. Issues of provenance and ownership are complex and often disputed. There has been significant work carried out internationally on principles of repatriation, restitution (e.g., *Repatriation: A Practical Guide for Museums in England*¹) and decolonisation (e.g., *Supporting decolonisation in Museums*², *Decolonization and Restitution: Moving towards a More Holistic and Relational approach*³) and these should be reviewed. The Australian Museum and Galleries Association's *A Roadmap for enhancing Indigenous engagement in Museums and Galleries*⁴ provides helpful pointers in this respect. The former Ministry for the Arts publication, *Australian Best Practice Guide to Collecting Cultural Material*, is also still relevant, if a little dated.⁵

¹ *Repatriation: A Practical Guide for Museums in England*, Arts Council England, London, 2022

² *Supporting decolonisation in Museums*, Museums Association (UK), London, 2022

³ Rivet, M., *Decolonization and Restitution: Moving towards a More Holistic and Relational approach*, Museum Worlds, New York, 2020.

⁴ Janke, T., *A Roadmap for enhancing Indigenous engagement in Museums and Galleries*, Australian Museums and Galleries Association, Canberra, 2018

⁵ *Australian Best Practice Guide to Collecting Cultural Material*, Australian Ministry for the Arts, Canberra, 2015

Protecting intellectual property and Indigenous industries

There has, as we know, been a long history of reproducing, or even faking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art and craft. It is incumbent on all public and private outlets, whether they be attached to public museums and galleries, or commercial galleries, or retail and tourism outlets, that the intellectual property rights of ATSI creatives are protected. Ensuring such organisations are signed up to the Indigenous Art Code is a first step towards closing down the creation and sale of fake and appropriated materials.

A Place for Every Story

Participation for all

Cultural policies should be inclusive in every sense. Thus, whilst it is important to support exceptional artists (see pillar 3, below), it is more important to ensure that meaningful opportunities exist for the greatest possible number of participants. For this reason, we particularly welcome the commitment to create opportunities for all Australians to participate.

Inclusive

The recently refurbished Western Australian Museum: Boola Bardip involved over 54,000 West Australians in its creation, including representatives of over 60 different Aboriginal language groups. Boola Bardip means 'many stories' in local Nyoongar language and that is exactly what the museum shares – many stories through many voices. The National Museum of Australia's strap line used to be: 'Where our stories live'. Cultural institutions, large and small, public and private, are the places where we can ensure that the stories are shared in an open and respectful way.

Many voices

These are the opportunities to address the issues of perspective and the conspiracy of single narratives. It is an opportunity to build understanding and tolerance, and to explore ideas of identity. Many stories need to be told by many voices, sometimes affirming, sometimes contesting. The mark of a mature cultural sector is when these stories can be told without fear, or favour, and receive a fair and respectful hearing.

Multi-media – multi-platform

The concept and the act of storytelling transcends all art-forms, media and cultural connections. A place for every story should mean exactly that!

Digital futures

Creative industries have both much offer and much to gain from developing digital products, and utilising digital technologies to create, manage and disseminate works.

Respect

Inevitably, and particularly amongst First Peoples, there should be due regard paid to the ownership of stories and the potential sensitivities and constraints regarding their sharing.

The Centrality of the Artist

Who is the artist?

There is, without doubt, a desire and need to see greater support for artists and 'creatives.' But it is important to understand the breadth and diversity of these definitions: of course, we should support the painter, sculptor, playwright, performer, songwriter, musician; but we should also support the technicians, engineers, camera crews, stagehands; and the companies that support the creative industries. This may well be what is meant by 'diverse ecologies.'

Artist as worker

We have heard Minister Burke use this phrase – and we endorse it wholeheartedly: it is about fair remuneration for endeavour. Too often, artists and creatives are not viewed as *bona fide* workers.

Artistic freedom

Artists and creative producers must have the freedom to create (within the bounds of good taste), free of political or sponsor intervention.

A level playing field

In an environment where aspiration is boundless, but funding is limited, there will be keen competition for funding and other resources. This creates a culture of haves and have-nots, based on the resources and ability of the few who are better equipped to bid for grant and fixed-term funding. Efforts should be made to encourage and reward any quality applicants and not just the usual suspects who are better resourced to succeed in competitive bidding.

Sustainable support

The short-term nature of many grant and support schemes means that recipients have no sooner started a project, than they must begin searching for the next source of funding. Whilst in some ways, this is the nature of the commercial world, it puts great pressure upon artists and creatives, particularly as many of the schemes are far from lucrative.

From cradle to grave

Opportunities to participate, to learn and develop should be available from the earliest age. The presence of art and cultural studies in the national and state curricula should be strengthened, as should the capacity to teach and develop these subjects. The decline in this area of teaching experience has been catastrophic in many areas.

STEM, STEAM and the swinging pendulum

There is no doubt that the emphasis of increasing resources and opportunities for STEM subjects has been, in part, responsible for the demise in the teaching of arts and cultural subjects. This and the mistaken perception that STEM graduates are more employable, has been responsible for the 'cost-bias' against arts, humanities and social science degrees in universities. Ironically, data shows that there are many more jobs for students emerging with HASS degrees than with STEM degrees.

Strong Institutions

Sustainable and accessible

Australia, both at Federal, and State levels, is blessed with strong artistic institutions. These are essential as the foundations of their respective art-forms or cultural activity. They should be resourced adequately to perform their duties, to innovate, and to ensure they can provide access to the widest possible audiences.

Collegiate

With power comes responsibility. Large, publicly funded institutions have a leadership role for their sectors and a duty to seek ways of collaborating with others to add value and strengthen the sector as a whole: the true meaning of creative partnerships. Privately funded institutions also have a moral responsibility to seek partnerships, providing resources allow.

Social Impact

Whilst remaining an ill-defined concept, social impact is what the large and strong institutions wish to achieve, as do their funding bodies, both public and private. Indeed, this is surely now the main driver for public sector support of the cultural and creative industries. It is also the justification for public funding of those institutions.

Research funding

For collecting institutions in particular, lack of access to research funding can be frustrating. Two initiatives that could address this dilemma would be, firstly, re-imagining priorities and distribution of National Research Infrastructure Funding (NCRIS) which has traditionally been focused on medical, engineering and scientific research. Secondly, a review of the Australian Research Council funding rules, which would allow any major institution (i.e. rather than just universities) to lead ARC linkage grant applications and projects, and their staff to become Chief Investigators on such projects.

Reaching the Audience

Creating value

The considerable social and economic benefits of a strong creative sector are manifest. Whether, through generating tourism, creating exportable product, innovating, or supporting stronger, more cohesive communities, the value of cultural and creative industries should be recognised and maximised.

Maximum access

Study after study (e.g. *Creativity and the Crossroads?*⁶) shows that one of the major barriers to cultural participation is cost, whether it be ticket prices, admission fees, or tuition fees. All efforts should be made to minimise the cost of participation and maximise breadth and depth of engagement.

Sustainable and accessible

See under Pillar 4, above.

Global markets

Cultural and artistic products and programs should always be developed with consideration of a global market in mind: whether through touring, digital presence, or retail selling. It is good for GDP, and good for Australia's profile overseas. There is understandable focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander works in this respect; however, there are also much wider possibilities as our performing arts companies, museums and galleries and screen industries regularly demonstrate.

Cultural diplomacy

In an unstable world, the power of cultural diplomacy should not be underestimated. This is not 'soft diplomacy,' as it is often characterised but is often the first and primary method of building mutual cultural understandings, and for re-setting strained relationships. In some cases, this may involve repatriation of collection items that may have been, or perceived to have been, 'stolen' from the country or communities in question.

⁶ Dockery, M., Duncan, A., Hailemariam, A., Salazar, S., Seymour, R. *Creativity at the Crossroads? The Creative Industries in Western Australia* Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, Perth, 2021