



Australian Government
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development,
Communications and the Arts
Office for the Arts (culturalpolicy@arts.gov.au)

15 August 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: A New Cultural Policy

Agency is an Indigenous-led, not-for-profit organisation with extensive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, communities and remote art centres across the country. Our values align with the foundations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resilience, strength and a desire to share.

Core to Agency's objective is to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, culture and people through the facilitation of bespoke learning opportunities, exhibitions, events, publications, residencies and cultural experiences for audiences in Australia and abroad. Part of our work is to forge meaningful new connections between Indigenous-led initiatives and social and ethical giving. We facilitate collaboration and partnerships between indigenous artists, arts centres, government, philanthropists and the arts and cultural sector.

Agency was established in 2019 to fill a gap in the sector and now receives funding from the Indigenous Visual Art Industry Support program to support and service the capacity of the Indigenous visual arts industry. Our collective experience and situational awareness means we are uniquely placed to broker new, meaningful and robust partnerships between Indigenous Arts Centres, private and public investors, corporate, educational and cultural institutions, and to foster ethical, professional, strategic and sustainable opportunities for the Indigenous Visual Arts industry both within Australia and overseas.

Below are our considerations on the 5 pillars of the Creative Australia National Cultural Policy.

1. First Nations:

We believe that acknowledging and centering First Nations voices and perspectives is fundamental for the cultural growth and continuous development of Australia. Agency is deeply committed to protecting, promoting, celebrating and developing the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry, supporting Indigenous leadership and enterprise to thrive and providing new professional development, capacity building and exchange



opportunities for artists and their communities. Our projects respond to requests from Indigenous leaders and feature strong participation and economic opportunities for Indigenous people. All of our programs are designed to benefit the careers of, and economic return for, First Nations artists, practitioners and professionals, and are realised under their leadership.

2. A Place for Every Story:

In order to ensure that government support reflects the diversity of Australia, it is essential to promote First Nations cultures as much as to recognise the diversity and richness existing within them—their multilayered practices and unique stories. Many initiatives in the arts and cultural sector are still often focusing on, and highlighting, specific geographical areas and/or categories associated with First Nations art. Agency has established ongoing relationships with over 50 Art Centres in remote communities across Australia, whose artists, arts workers and further community members we periodically employ through our programs and activities. We believe that, by supporting a conscious investment in the variety and diversity of Australia's First Nations stories, there is a great potential to enhance the knowledge, promotion and awareness of not only First Nations art and practices but the culture of Australia as a whole.

An example of a program speaking to the importance of this point is UNTOLD: a series of talks that bring together leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creative practitioners and thinkers from across Australia and beyond. UNTOLD events have so far addressed a broad range of topics—from caring for Country to the unseen work of women in communities, and the importance of intergenerational learning - demonstrating the interconnectedness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in an intimate live setting, or online, as restrictions and geographical barriers have allowed.

3. The Centrality of the Artist:

We strongly endorse the necessity of supporting excellence and the special role of artists and their creative collaborators. In the First Nations cultural sector, artists located in remote communities are also cultural leaders and therefore often engaged in a diversity of roles that include ceremonial duties and Caring for Country responsibilities. Likewise, while artists based in urban contexts need support for more recognition, commercial galleries do not have the capacity nor the remit to support them beyond the sales of their art. In order to professionalise the sector, it is also important to provide consistent opportunities for visibility and support to those organisations that are able to steward sustainable, long term relationships and build international partnerships as well.

Agency has developed different initiatives that focus on the centrality of the artist. Selected examples are our collaboration with the Melbourne Art Fair and Sydney Contemporary. In 2022, Agency partnered with Melbourne Art Fair Foundation on the

delivery of the Melbourne Art Fair Indigenous Art Centre Program; a new initiative that supported the participation of Indigenous-owned art centres at Melbourne Art Fair with the express aim to promote Indigenous contemporary artists, in addition to providing economic benefits, employment opportunities, access and capacity building support for remote communities. Similarly, in 2021 and 2022 we have partnered with Sydney Contemporary to showcase videos profiling First Nations artists and delivering a series of artist talks and curated panel discussion fully centred on First Nations stories and perspectives.

4. Strong Institutions:

Through our longstanding experience working in the First Nations arts and cultural sector, we recognise that dedicated skills development and training programs are an important step to ensure excellence and to establish strong cultural institutions. We believe that upskilling Indigenous Art Centres, Arts Workers and Artists in a sustainable, supported manner is of vital importance and urgency right now. Research shows that remote First Nations communities experience barriers to digital inclusion derived from the geographic digital divide, and that digital inequity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians persists.¹ To compound this, access is often limited and inferior in remote communities, with consequences for the services used and the practices enacted.² Practical solutions to address this issue include dedicated skills development and training programs that provide practical, hands-on education around the use and integration of sophisticated digital software and hardware that will ultimately aid digital capacity for the individual and /or organisation in the areas of web design, documentation of exhibitions and cultural archives, enhanced e-commerce capabilities and promotional tools around the sale of art, workshop experiences and tourism.

Agency's intersection with the institutional field comprises numerous partnerships and collaborations with arts organisations, including the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), the Tarnanthi Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art held at the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA), and the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. Our goal with these projects is to create stronger connections between First Nations practitioners, remote Indigenous art centres and established institutions to not only promote First Nations art, people, culture and Country, but to also create new opportunities for streamlined and highly professional partnerships with reciprocal outcomes for both parties.

5. Reaching the Audience:

Digital engagement is an essential tool for reaching audiences both locally and internationally. Today, in a post-pandemic Australia, digital mechanisms for contact

¹ Holcombe-James, 2020, *Digital Inclusion in Remote Indigenous Communities and Art Centres*, RMIT University, School of Media and Design.

² Park, S., Freeman, J., & Middleton, C. (2019). Intersections between connectivity and digital inclusion in rural communities. *Communication Research and Practice*.



and sales have renewed importance for the sector. From 2020 onwards, for instance, Indigenous Visual Art Fairs have promoted digital sales, with many building bespoke platforms and others directing audiences to the websites of participating Art Centres. Selling art via the internet is not a new phenomenon, but with no other alternative, the uptake from the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry has been astounding. However, digital technologies should not just be reserved for e-commerce opportunities. With the right skills and equipment on hand, digital technology can support intergenerational knowledge transfer, the preservation of Indigenous languages, cultural learning and provide a safe and secure platform for archiving of cultural images, materials and knowledge, establishing connections with a diversity of audiences.

To specifically tackle digital engagement, Agency has developed a partnership with regional and remote Indigenous Art Centres, to transform their community collections and galleries into interactive and immersive digital experiences. The outcome is an exciting community-owned project that empowers remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to create and share unique and energising arts and cultural experiences that amplify Indigenous voice, leadership and enterprise through online platforms, and to attract new and diverse audiences from across the globe. This project is funded by the Federal Government's RISE initiative and to date involves 18x remote Art Centres and Indigenous communities, with 10x of these digital experiences already in development.

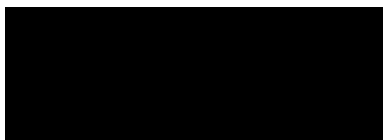
In addition to the considerations raised above, we would like to see the following points addressed in a revised National Cultural Policy:

- Acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is a crucial part of societal development and growth by recognising cultural leaders, artists, arts organisations and projects as essential contributors to the economy (artists, cultural practitioners and leaders as essential workers), therefore increasing the funding opportunities dedicated to them.
- Simplify application processes for First Nations art and culture organisations, including remote Art Centres, who do not always have the capacity to access large funding schemes.
- Rethink the definition and approach to employment of First Nations creative practitioners to allow for greater flexibility, and include and prioritise First Nations knowledge systems and structures.
- Increase funding to support trusted Indigenous-led not-for-profit service organisations who are driving economic investment and return in the sector and have the capacity to steward relationships on behalf of the Art Centres.

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We would be happy to be contacted for further comment as required and wish the Committee all the best for the Inquiry.

Sincerely,



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**New perspectives for
people, art and Country.**