

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: On behalf of a not for profit arts organisation; An artist

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

Challenges:

This is not easy work, it requires time and patience. These essential elements should be reflected in policy around the arts.

There are many contrasting First Nations cultures in Australia and the nature of engagement and creative process will be highly varied. A 'one size fits all' approach to arts policy won't succeed.

Some of my First Nations friends and colleagues have experienced a deluge of offers from companies and artists wanting to 'engage' with First Nations artists in response to the many programs rolled out by funding bodies. Initiatives need to be rolled out with long time horizons.

We need to consider that 'white fella' way is not always the best way! We are driven by KPIs and very particular notions of 'productivity' that can, at times, be at odds with the approaches of First Nations artists.

Opportunities:

There are many incredible First Nations artists in this country and the next generations will produce even more. Policy on how to support these artists should be artist led as much as possible.

The arts really can show the way in this space and provide examples of the power of friendship and collaboration that are healing and positive.

From my experience, if we create space and support for artists to come together to work and collaborate and form friendships then amazing things happen. This is not particularly complicated but it does take time and patience.

The Centrality of the Artist

This is an important principle and should underpin cultural policy and arts funding, which is most efficient and effective when it is led by artists and artistic process.

Art should be considered as an 'end' in and of itself. The extrinsic benefits of the arts are of course important but should not drive funding and policy. Artists need to be able to make the art they want to make and space should be created for that to happen.

Opportunities:

The arts can inspire and represent a social good through expressing principles of friendship and collaboration that bridge difference.

Funding policy should celebrate and promote the 'intangible assets' that art making can create. The assets that are hard to measure on a spreadsheet.

Leadership by artists should be encouraged and promoted. There needs to be more opportunities for artists to develop the skills of leadership.

Challenges:

Funding policy should be responsive rather than 'top down'. It should be led by artists and by art. Didacticism does not lead to strong and vibrant artistic expressions. The arts should 'show' rather than 'tell'.

Without artist leaders the 'centrality of the artist' will not be achievable.

Strong Institutions

Institutions are important but the independent sector is at least as important. The symbiotic relationship between independents and institutions should be recognised, supported, and celebrated.

Opportunities:

Collaborative relationships between independents and institutions should be encouraged and supported.

Artist leadership of institutions in the arts is a huge opportunity and should be encouraged and supported. Artist led institutions in the arts are the strongest institutions.

Challenges:

Corporate structure in the arts in Australia is problematic. Boards are unaccountable and often out of touch with the organisations they manage. This regularly leads to poor outcomes and decisions that are destructive to institutions and the arts more broadly. This needs urgent review.

Reaching the Audience

Funding for touring and sharing of work needs to be increased.

We learned a lot about digital spaces during COVID and they offer tremendous opportunities. However, we also learned the limitations of those spaces and if anything in-real-life sharing of ideas, collaboration, and presentation feels more precious than ever.

We need to be responsible in how we approach touring and travel but we also need to remain outward looking and acknowledge that travel and sharing of work and ideas is the life blood of many artistic practices and artists' lives.

Opportunities:

Digital platforms offer opportunities for more efficient ways to collaborate and connect with audiences and can massively enhance the reach of live performance.

The arts and artists can provide an example for how to navigate the challenges of our times. As an improvising musician I feel like my training in responding moment by moment is useful in these uncertain times.

Challenges:

Environmental responsibility in relation to travel is something that needs to be high in our processes of decision making around connecting with audiences.

Digital platforms should not be seen as a replacement or substitute for live performance. We need to continue to find ways of making in-real-life performance and digital platforms complementary.

The uncertainties of COVID remain burdensome. We need to be responsive and nimble but also optimistic.

We should be mindful that commodification of music and art can be antithetical to the process of creation of music and art. Arts funding should honour process.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

First nations collaboration is core practice for me and for the AAO. We have been working with artists from South East Arnhem Land for nearly 20 years now. Their perspectives and approaches inform every aspect of our practice.

I asked David Wilfred (yiki virtuoso and AAO musician) what he thought about this and he spoke about the importance of time and patience in developing collaborations and new artistic ideas. Sharing requires trust and trust takes time to build and that process is not linear.

Funding policy should reflect this 'non-linearity'.

The Centrality of the Artist

This is a core principle for me and for the AAO, which has been artist led since its inception nearly 30 years ago. The arts at every level of its organisation and funding should embody the perspective of artists.

Strong Institutions

Strong institutions are important to the ecology of the arts. Transparency, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and accountability are crucial for strong institutions.

Institutional support enables me to make works of scale and ambition.

Reaching the Audience

Music for me is something we do together – musicians and listeners. It is about connections.

Reaching the audience through travel and touring facilitates the most meaningful and lasting connections.

For me my priority is to make work that asks questions, that challenges, that expresses complexity, and entertains. Arts funding policy should recognise the difference between art and commerce and the different economies associated with each.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

There needs to be an examination of the paradigm of Major Organisations and what is expected from them in return for ongoing funding. In my view there needs to be much more accountability in terms of what these organisations deliver in the context of contemporary cultural output. In music, the idea that an opera company or symphony orchestra can program almost exclusively the work of dead white European composers and receive massive amounts of arts funding to do that is extremely anachronistic.