

**National Cultural Policy Submission**  
**22 August 2022**

Submitted by Mitchell Jones, independent circus and physical theatre artist.  
Director of Oozing Future (physical theatre company).



My submission may be made public.

**To Whom It May Concern:**

Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to the conversation around the state of the arts in Australia.

It is a significant and important step to develop a national cultural policy, and one that is long overdue. Having a strategy for investment and planning guided by clear cultural principles is necessary to help the arts sector recover from the twin crises of Covid-19 and 9 years of neglect from the Coalition government.

In the interests of brevity, I will directly outline the contributions that I would like to offer to this policy planning.

**Proposition One** – That conversations about the arts need to enshrine and honour the principles of imagination and lateral thinking in order to truly appreciate the way that art contributes to society.

- There is a tendency from governments to focus on the economics of the creative sector as a quantitative means of understanding it. But the experience and true value of art is not found in these literal explanations of it.
- A more insightful approach is to address the arts from a philosophical framework – what does art do within society? Which qualities does it enshrine and enhance?
- Art and artists are imaginative, provocative and evade easy definitions. We need cultural policy that recognises the inherent value in these things, without trying to transform them into an economic or bureaucratic way of thinking.
- Art explores important philosophical and social questions in a lateral manner, arriving at surprising new discoveries and deepening our understanding of what it means to be human in ways that are not easily traced or explained.
- What does the arts say about itself, when it is heard in its own language? For example – will submissions to this policy be received or reviewed in non-linguistic forms? Could there be a dance submission, or a musical one? When we talk about the arts, how can we encourage and value creative participation within the conversation?

**Proposition Two** – That in order to strengthen the arts sector and provide more opportunities for professional artists, we need to encourage Australians to partake in the arts in ways that prioritise deep thinking, and are not just about enjoyment.

- A key social strategy of the Coalition government, stretching back to John Howard’s administration, has been to disparage the arts as privileged and elitist, somehow out of reach of the ordinary Australian.
- It is important that the arts are accessible to and tell the stories of all Australians, however alongside this we desperately need cultural policy that values the complex and nuanced contributions of art to cultural and intellectual life – even when it is not easy to understand.
- A large advertising campaign encouraging Australian audiences to participate in experiencing art as a discursive, challenging and thoughtful process is essential to break the cultural gridlock of artists feeling that they need to entertain or pander to audiences with watered down work.
- This in turn also addresses the devaluing of the cultural sector – we need government at all levels to correct the ‘elitist’ rhetoric and celebrate the social role of art and artists.

**Proposition Three** – Artists need jobs as artists, that respond to our shared social contexts.

- In order to fully participate in, be valued by and provide value to society, artists need to be treated with respect and the same industrial conditions expected by other areas of the workforce – superannuation, full time employment, annual leave and etc.
- Artists should not have to double as arts-workers, administrators or programmers in order to achieve these things. We need to create permanent employment roles for artists as artists within every day society.
- This could take the form of residencies within public utilities – e.g., a painter with a studio at a library, a dancer in residence at a school, a performance artist making site specific work around a local park.
- Embedding artistic creation which responds to familiar contexts into local communities will go a long way towards addressing the issues raised above in proposition two.

**Proposition Four** – Living wages for artists creates enormous cultural and economic value.

- Jobkeeper (for those fortunate to receive it) was the best arts funding program this country has ever had. A living wage that is not tied to a specific project allows for an enormously productive creative focus.
- The system of finding and applying for grants is exhausting and creatively demanding. Most self-employed artists spend more time applying for funding and doing admin on their businesses than they get to spend as creators. This is an inefficient waste of cultural resources.
- Resourcing artists to simply create work without forcing them through the wringer of the current arts funding model will unlock huge cultural capacity in Australia.

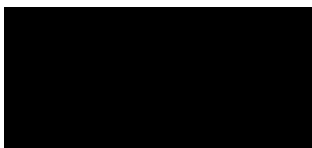
- Systems such as the *Intermittent du Spectacle* in France demonstrate models of how these subsidies can work through existing state welfare systems. One initial step could be for Centrelink to recognise 'Artist' as legitimate employment.

**Proposition Five** – There is currently more artistic talent than there is capacity to show or appreciate it. We need major investment in presentation avenues that create career pathways for the small to medium sector.

- One of the hardest parts of being an artist is competing for limited presentation opportunities in often under resourced venues. Once you have made a work it should be easier to get it to an audience.
- More funding for arts businesses that present small to medium scale work – local galleries, independent theatres, music venues and etc, would again unlock huge capacity in the arts sector.
- This has a dynamic relevance to proposition two above – venues are supported by audiences, and audiences need to be encouraged to seek out and experience art of all kinds.

Thank you for your time in reading my submission and should you have any further queries please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards,



Mitch Jones