



Visual Arts and Design Section
Office for the Arts
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601

15 December 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Growing the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry

Agency is an Indigenous not-for-profit that was established in response to an identified need expressed by cultural leaders that resonates with government priorities, academic research and the voice of philanthropists who care deeply about Indigenous people, art and Country. Our values align with the foundations of Indigenous resilience, strength and a desire to share, and we believe that ultimately our work has the ability to change the general public's perception, understanding, appreciation, connection with, and support for Indigenous Australian Art and Culture.

Agency receives operational funding from IVAIS in addition to support from the private sector. We are official Supporters of the Indigenous Art Code and are 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.

Current projects include consultations with Google Creative Lab, the Art Gallery of South Australia and TARNANTHI, and Cotton On Foundation, and an Australia Council-funded pilot program in Arnhem Land and the Kimberley in partnership with three Indigenous Art Centres and Melbourne-based immersive tech company Phoria which teaches and employs the use of virtual technology as a means to enhance the digital capacity and audience engagement for remote Art Centres.

Agency is enthusiastic to participate in the development of an Action Plan for the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry, and in addition to participating in a dedicated Round Table, welcomes the opportunity to submit a written response to the consultation process:

Melbourne
Collingwood Yards
Unit 102 / 35 Johnston St
Collingwood VIC 3066

Darwin
Office 3 / Unit 49
12 Charlton Circuit
Woolner NT 0820

agencyprojects.org
info@agencyprojects.org.au
@agencyprojects

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Issue 1: Sustainable Growth

Practical actions to assist to rebuild the market in a sustainable way

1. Increased philanthropic engagement:

Remote Indigenous organisations are currently facing a variety of challenges, including a lack of economic activity related to remoteness, further exacerbated by the pandemic, and limited engagement with philanthropic donors. As demonstrated by a 2017 background statistical paper published by the Australian Government, the support to the arts coming from the private sector is extensive and growing: “Overall private sector support for the arts in Australia is estimated to have grown over a period of six years, from \$221.1 million in 2009–10 to between \$268.5 million and \$279.8 million in 2015–16.”¹ We believe the sector would benefit enormously from being supported to develop meaningful relationships with philanthropic individuals, trusts and foundations in order to build strong, sustainable and ethical partnerships. This would not only result in a more diverse income stream for Indigenous Art Centres, but also less reliance on the Government as a sole funding source. Agency is well-placed to lead in this space, our esteemed board, staff and many members of our advisory committee have the relationships, experience and expertise to encourage collaboration between the public and private sectors, and facilitate ethical and sound investments into Indigenous-led projects and partnerships.

2. Support for digital tourism:

In the time of COVID-19, digital tourism (including online and virtual mechanisms for contact, engagement and sales) has never been more pertinent. Statistics published by the Australia Council for the Arts [fig. 4] show that the demand for cultural tourism activities in Australia had been rising steadily from 2009 to 2018² and the Australia Council’s National Arts Participation Survey (2017) had found that there is a growth in engagement of domestic tourists with Indigenous arts and craft: “nearly half of all Australians are actively interested in First Nations arts (47%) and seven million attended in 2016 – a record level of attendance and double that of 2009.”³

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Woolner NT 0820

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¹ Australian Government, Department of Communication and the Arts 2017, *Private sector support for the arts in Australia June 2017, Background Statistical Paper*, © Commonwealth of Australia 2017.

² Australia Council for the Arts 2020, *Domestic Arts Tourism: Connecting the Country*, Australia Council for the Arts

³ Australia Council 2017, *Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*, June 2017, Sydney. <https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/connecting-australians>, Accessed 24 November 2020.

The challenge here is ensuring that much-needed skills transfer, training and capacity development are firmly embedded into any project that aims to build online audiences and support this area of growth in a sustainable way. The potential for digital platforms and technologies to facilitate social, educational and economic transactions has long been recognised, but research shows that remote Indigenous communities confront significant digital inequity in this space, and the reality is that in addition to a gap in skills, the type and quality of access infrastructure is often not sufficient to support the digital output that art centres desire or require.⁴

Agency is currently leading a sector-wide consultation and exploration into the digital capabilities of Indigenous Art Centres with Google Creative Lab, in addition to leading an Australia Council-funded pilot program that employs the use of virtual technology as a means to enhance audience engagement for remote Art Centres. We believe our recent application to the RISE fund provides a compelling case for expanding this innovative pilot into a national program with strong national educational, economic and social outcomes for the Indigenous Visual Arts industry, that promises to put remote Art Centres on the map whilst simultaneously providing unique experiences for digital tourists, who will use the platform to engage with Indigenous art, culture, places and people in a COVID-safe manner.

Theme 2: Capacity Building

Important skills and how to build them

As touched on above, we believe that upskilling Indigenous Art Centres, Arts Workers and Artists with digital skills in a sustainable, supported manner is of vital importance and urgency right now. Research shows that remote Indigenous communities experience barriers to digital inclusion derived from the geographic digital divide, and the digital inequity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.⁵ To compound this, access is often limited and inferior⁶ with consequences for the services used and the practices enacted.⁷

Practical solutions - beyond that of improving poor and irregular internet connection throughout remote Australia - include dedicated skills development and training programs that provide practical, hands-on

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12 Charlton Circuit
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⁴ Holcombe-James, 2020, *Digital Inclusion in Remote Indigenous Communities and Art Centres*, RMIT University, School of Media and Design.

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⁶ Park, S., Freeman, J., & Middleton, C. (2019). Intersections between connectivity and digital inclusion in rural communities. *Communication Research and Practice*.

⁷ Holcombe-James, 2020, *Digital Inclusion in Remote Indigenous Communities and Art Centres*, RMIT University, School of Media and Design.

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 digital tourism.

Further to this, professional development that empowers organisations, individuals, boards, and staff to leverage philanthropic growth, build sustainable relationships and interact with the philanthropic sector in an effective and productive way has become an increasingly important skills and capacity building focus moving forward, particularly when engaging with millennial philanthropists whom are often referred to as the 'experience generation'⁸, with donors seeking a closer relationship with those they are giving to.⁹

Agency's Next Generation Philanthropic Engagement program has been developed to connect millennial philanthropists with inspiring Indigenous artists, communities and leaders. Designed to be a high-impact program that will not only see economic return for Indigenous organisations, businesses and individuals participating in the creative sector, but also respond to an identified need expressed by cultural elders for a bespoke, industry-guided investment in the professional development of Indigenous organisations and individuals and offer an invaluable opportunity for professional development around interacting with the philanthropic sector in an effective and productive way.

Encouraging the development of Indigenous-owned and operated business in the industry

The introduction of new skills such as those that enhance digital capacity, in addition to those that empower Indigenous-owned and operated businesses to leverage philanthropic growth are going to be key in setting Indigenous entrepreneurship and enterprise up to thrive in a post-COVID world. Grants and other incentives that are designed to encourage the development of Indigenous-owned and operated businesses need to ensure that real skills training, capacity development and employment opportunities are embedded into the community, in addition to access to support mechanisms around strategic planning, governance and marketing and communications.

For example, research shows there is scope for some Art Centres, smaller start-ups and local initiatives in the Indigenous cultural tourism space¹⁰ (ie.

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⁸ <https://www.openforum.com.au/millennial-philanthropists-stepping-plate-arts> Accessed 9 December 2020

⁹ <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2020/06/look-how-far-weve-come-philanthropy/> Accessed 9 December 2020

¹⁰ Throsby, D., & Petetskaya, E. (2019). *Integrating art production and economic development in North West NT and the Tiwi Islands*. North Ryde, NSW: Macquarie University.

encouraging tourist engagement with Indigenous art and culture), but integral its success will be ensuring that there is a well-planned and adequately funded training strategy that underpins it.¹¹

Theme 3: Access to Market

Use of digital technologies to overcome challenges

Today, in a post-pandemic Australia, digital mechanisms for contact and sales have renewed importance for the sector.¹² All of this year's Indigenous Visual Art Fairs 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 in 2020, but with no other alternative, the uptake from the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry has been astounding. Digital technologies needn't just be reserved for e-commerce opportunities however. 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.

Another advantage of digital technologies is the opportunity for access to and engagement with national and international art markets. Ultimately, our proposed project for RISE will provide a highly curated national overview and promotional tool for the sector that could equally be utilised to promote the Indigenous Visual Art Industry on an international scale.

Engagement with international markets

A key aspect of Agency's business is to promote the global recognition and appreciation of Indigenous Australian art and culture, with a particular focus on the export of Indigenous art and artists to the US. We have strong working relationships with the Australian Embassy in DC, The Met in New York, and the Kluge Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection in Charlottesville Virginia, amongst others, and recently appointed Richard Klingler, Political Lawyer in DC and one of the most active Indigenous Australian art collectors in North America to our Advisory Committee.

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¹¹ Throsby, D., & Petetskaya, E. (2019). *Integrating art production and economic development in North West NT and the Tiwi Islands*. North Ryde, NSW: Macquarie University.

¹² Holcombe-James, 2020, *Digital Inclusion in Remote Indigenous Communities and Art Centres*, RMIT University, School of Media and Design.

We have recently been successful in receiving an Australia Council grant to promote and celebrate contemporary Indigenous Australian artists on the international stage, and facilitates cross cultural dialogue between First Nations artists and curators in a global context through a bespoke series of publications that profile three contemporary Indigenous Australian female artists who are yet to be the subject of sustained critical inquiry. The result will be three unique profiles of prominent Indigenous Australian artists which will serve the dual function of providing a timely response to the critical vacuum surrounding contemporary Aboriginal art, and nurturing relationships that influence acquisitions for collecting institutions and private collections across North America.

As pointed out by this timely publication's Editor Henry Skerrit (Curator, Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia) in his letter of support to the Australia Council: "This project will occur at an incredible moment of growing interest in Indigenous Australian art in the United States... with an increasing thirst for rigorous intellectual content that can help situate Indigenous Australian art in the global context. Major exhibitions such as Ancestral Modern, Marking the Infinite, and Everywhen: The Eternal Present in Indigenous Australian Art, along with high profile endorsements from celebrities such as Steve Martin, Beyonce and Jay-Z have created an incredible opportunity for Indigenous Australian art to break into in the US artworld."

Agency is well placed to support this growth by maintaining education around investment in international markets. We recognise that if more overseas activities were to be supported, this would assist in further engaging the international market. We would ideally like to appoint a new position to oversee our North and Central American relations, and build the international market, and are currently seeking funding to support this integral role.

Theme 4: Legal Protections

Framework protecting Indigenous cultural expression

Agency takes protecting Indigenous cultural expression very seriously, and applauds the work of the Indigenous Art Code, the Arts Law Centre of Australia and others leading practitioners in this space, and the recent release of the Australia Council's protocols for working with First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts. Educating people about the importance of protecting Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property, and ensuring protocols are met as a condition of funding are important steps in managing the practical application of these protections. Agency recognises that establishing strong governance and legal structures for all of our projects is of paramount importance in building ethical partnerships.

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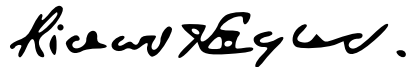
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In conclusion, Agency is deeply committed to growing the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and their cultural and economic interests in innovative and ethical ways. We are taking active steps to assist the sector to rebuild following COVID-19, including the initiation and facilitation of a number of high-impact Indigenous-led projects that build capacity, create employment opportunities, strengthen international relations, and help raise the visibility of the sector as a whole. With further support and operational investment, Agency can increase private and corporate capital in the sector, increase Indigenous employment, help bridge the digital divide and support a growing interest in ethical investments, partnerships and advocacy. As an Indigenous organisation we are perfectly positioned to amplify the voice of Indigenous artists and facilitate access, engagement, ethical investment and awareness of the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry on a national and international stage.

We wish the National Government success in creating a National Indigenous Visual Arts Action Plan and would be happy to be contacted for further comment and / or to discuss how we can help, as the Plan progresses.

Yours sincerely,



Richard England
Chair



Kade McDonald
CEO

Melbourne

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