

## **SUBMISSION TO THE CONSULTATION PAPER ON GROWING THE INDIGENOUS VISUAL ARTS INDUSTRY BY ARTITJA FINE ART GALLERY, SOUTH FREMANTLE, WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Artitja Fine Art Gallery established in 2004 by Directors Anna Kanaris and Arthur Clarke in South Fremantle, Western Australia is a small scale, self funded commercial gallery, operating privately by appointment and publicly via up to six visual art exhibitions in exhibiting spaces, primarily in South Fremantle, and once a year at Gallery 152 in the regional town of York, WA.

From the outset our intentions were always to include an educational aspect to promoting the work of Indigenous artists, and where possible bring the artists to the city for exhibitions. We have had much success over the years in doing so, and have promoted many artists' work that way, including building artist reputations through private and public collection acquisitions.

This aim of this submission to the consultation paper is in support of the importance of galleries in city centres who represent and work closely with remote community art centres and their artists in an ethical and proper manner.

COVID19 meant a quick and abrupt closure of many opportunities for art fairs and artist visits to city centres and beyond. As we know, online became the only means for promotion and sale for many of the art centres.

Indeed in the city, commercial galleries were in lock down for different periods in different States, and also had to up their online presence.

In our case, in WA, we were very lucky to have had a short period of lock down, meaning that business could still continue, and our public exhibitions in March, June, September and November, interspersed with private viewings by appointment, had a great deal of success and financial income was immediately dispersed to our partner art centres.

The uncertainty of the impact of COVID19 did concern us at the outset, and our instinctive reaction was to source new paintings, increase our stock levels and develop new art centre relationships, which we thankfully did successfully.

With the international borders closed, many of the demographic who have the funds to be art buyers/collectors redirected their travel budgets into home renovations and improvements, including purchasing art. We found that during this time, larger works were in demand, with the outcome of sending more income back to our art centres.

It seemed that inadvertently, COVID19, created a greater awareness not just of the beautiful art, but of the importance of First Nations people and their culture, and people were wanting to engage more. With art fairs going online and reports that online art fair sales such as DAAF, REVEALED, TARNANTHI etc had reasonable successes, the added income generated from commercial gallery sales for art centres, we believe has been invaluable and a great boost to the financial wellbeing of the art centres and their artists.

In summary, there is a growing thirst for appreciation and knowledge and understanding of First Nations visual art and culture. There is also a growing response to the Indigenous Art Code of ethics advise on how to buy Aboriginal art. We notice it and it is encouraging to see that people are paying more attention to the totality of Indigenous art, in not just buying a piece of art, but wanting to engage, ethically and knowingly with it.

Our ongoing commitment to promoting the art and culture over the past two decades continues without abeyance and will continue to do so.

With the Indigenous Art Code having visibly increased traction more recently amongst the Indigenous art buying public, as members of the Code, we ask that within the Australian Government recognition of the importance of Indigenous art to Australia and Australians, the role of the commercial gallery is also documented and supported.

Too many times, the persuading argument to the general public is to buy direct from art centres; by implication suggesting that commercial galleries are somehow lesser, or unreputable, without taking into account the important role they have to play, and the operating expenses involved. (In our case we are entirely self funded)

Artitja Fine Art Gallery is not a bricks and mortar gallery. This is a decision we made before we established in 2004 and have retained our status as such. By so doing we have always kept our overheads low; have remained committed to fair pricing, and follow IAC practices and art centre contracts. We have successful and valued relationships with over twenty remote community art centres around WA, SA (APY) and NT including Tiwi Islands.

We support the initiatives of the Government in its efforts to develop a National Indigenous Art Visual Action Plan, and by doing so would like to think that we, and all ethical commercial galleries dealing with Indigenous art are an acknowledged and vital part of the process.