

National Cultural Policy Submission

Anonymous

Submitted: As 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:

A Place for Every Story

I am disturbed that the Visual Arts seems to have become a sexist environment for males to participate. A common phrase that seems to be banded about in the Visual Arts in South Australia is "stop using your gay white male privilege, sit down and shut up". This type of experience is closing male and gay stories from inclusion in the Visual Arts. It should be noted that much of the statistical data quoted in Visual Arts employment trends or commentary derive from data collected under the Hawke/Keating Governments; the result is the data and strategy development is often compounding male discrimination and disenfranchisement within the visual arts.

Stories from outside Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane are becoming increasingly scarce. Stories from outside NSW, VIC and QLD are almost never heard. Living in regional South Australia, there is a palatable sour taste in many of my fellow visual artists that we are not only invisible, but also get the impression we are seen as an inconvenience by Arts administrations, institutions and policy makers. Dealing with Arts administration and Policy from here in rural South Australia, I am reminded of the Yes Minister episode of the "best performing hospital with is one with no patients"; Arts Policy in Australia would be better if there was no Arts outside the Eastern States. Arts administration has become so centralised that even capital cities like Adelaide are seen as unimportant; if a visual artist in Adelaide struggles to have their stories heard, imagine the deafening silence for those of us in rural SA.

The Centrality of the Artist

Currently the Visual Arts seems to focus upon commercial gallery representation as reflective of the artists role and significance within the industry. This is despite only about 4% of visual artists are represented in commercial galleries. Greater focus needs to be given to Visual Arts spaces that engage with non-signed artists to be reflective of the Artist as Central to the Policy and Creativity. If the Artist is to be central to the Policy in the visual arts, greater support and focus needs to be given to small community, Local Government, and rural galleries who choose to engage with entry or mid level artists. Headline and "big name" visual arts events are great, but do nothing to actually help visual artists engage and build a career. Visual Artists currently need to be financially and asset rich to engage within the industry to build a career. Two things need to happen at once to build visual artists engagement and broaden industry financial equality;

- visual artists need to be able to access a form of income support to help build self sustaining careers.
- Entry level and mid career visual arts venues need to be structured and funded so that

they do not rely upon cost recovery from visual artists to ensure their continued trading. Ideally a Product Disclosure Document should be provided at all visual arts venues to clearly and publicly state the rate of financial return visual artists receive from events and sale of their art. Public and private galleries and agents should be considered similar to Financial Service providers and be forced to disclose publicly their conflicts of interests and the actual rate of return that is received by artists for the sale of their work.

Strong Institutions

Current employees of Educational institutions should be prohibited from applying for the very few Visual Arts Public Arts Grants. Higher education institution employees seem to be supplementing academic research requirements with public grants aimed at artists, forcing artists out of selection contention. This is compounded by most grant selection panels seem to comprise of academic researchers who have a vested interest in ensuring institutions are recognised as grant recipients. There is a general feel in the visual artists community Public Artists Grants have become a "muggin's turn" in exchange for prospective academic recognition or employment opportunities.

Reaching the Audience

Currently Visual Artists in non-Eastern States are not able to access audience engagement due to the lack of funding and commercial requirements by both private and commercial galleries. The sale of artist's works are subject to commissions and short term rental agreements that can range from 30% to 70% of retail sale prices. This leaves artists with no financial resources to engage with the public, and is often a backdoor method of forcing visual artists to subsidise entry or mid level Arts policies particularly at Local Government levels.

Funding to Public and Private visual arts venues should contain contingencies regarding the requirements for public engagement to held with the organisation and not deferred to the artist. This is particularly important in regional and Local Government visual arts venues. Currently regional visual arts are often restricted to being only able to access LGA administered visual arts venues to build careers and incomes. However these LGA venues have no requirements regarding the minimum standards of public engagement they must undertake, and almost always the costs of these strategies are passed onto visual artists diminishing their incomes and career development. This has the result of visual artists in regional and rural communities become unduly dependant upon the local Council Gallery for income and a type of informal servitude is created. It is not uncommon for LGA venues to require local visual artists to not only split their income with the venue via commissions, fees and charges, but to also "volunteer" significant time and labour in exchange for the chance of exhibiting and earning some form of income in the future. This type of informal servitude and obligations "to the only venue within the region" can be a career killer, and is most deeply detrimental to low income, time poor, at risk, or disabled artists.

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:

A Place for Every Story

Most of my art is based upon my experiences and the story of my life and observations.

The Centrality of the Artist

Visual artists mostly work alone and make achievements through self drive. For the Policy for the Visual Arts to be successful, it needs to assist Visual Artists to forge their own path

Strong Institutions

Most Visual Artists actually engage with the sector via Local Government or community developed institutions. For the most part, these types of institutions are neglected in funding strategies and are given very low priority at local government. Similarly these types of institutions almost always function upon a cost recovery basis, forcing visual artists to subsidise Arts Policies.

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

When conducting the Policy can a review be conducted of where the gender employment trend statistics are coming from. It has been my experience that when questioned, it becomes clear the statistics are based upon data collected almost forty years ago under the Hawke/Keating enquiries, supplemented with more recent narrow reach surveys. This is leading to some very clear errors and biases, eg. data states that male employment in the Visual Arts in South Australia at 60%ish of total industry employment, yet when employees in both private and public institutions are actually counted, male employment is at less than 30%.

Please can the idea of Product Disclosure Document requirements be included in the Visual Arts strategies. Visual artists are being used to financially support policies and institutions, yet there is no measure for the financial return received by artists for the sale of their art. There is a common misconception by the public that the ticketed retail sale price of artworks sold at Public and Private galleries and institutions is the amount received by artists. It is not widely understood by the general public that the actual payment to visual artists may be as low as 10% of the retail ticketed price once all commissions, agent fees, display charges and other costs. It should be a requirement of funding that Public and Private visual arts institutions disclose to the public and art purchasers that actual amounts being paid to artists for their art. This is extremely critical in rural regions, where most often the only venue for visual artists to engage and earn income are administered through Local Governments. Local Governments are blatantly phoning in income from visual artists through cost recovery budgeting to support their Cultural and Community Engagement Policies.