

# National Cultural Policy Submission

**Alison Fraser**

Submitted: As an individual

**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**

Australian First Nations culture is unique but trying to make 'Australian culture' unique has frequently resulted in cringe worthy claims. Protecting the cultural history of the past (as far back as possible) is important but so is embracing contemporary Aboriginal art in all its diversity. That includes understanding the different cultures within the Indigenous world of Australia, in language, music, stories, art and object making, it's not all the same.

## **A Place for Every Story**

We should be concentrating on making our art and culture vital, accessible and valued. Migration and contemporary ease of movement (well, pre COVID!) means we are a highly diverse nation, which has been overwhelmingly positive. We are part of the Pacific, a beneficiary of European culture and a global entity – our culture is not limited any more by geography and our arts should have free expression. While respect for specific cultural practice and traditions is important, the arts have always been open to influence, borrowings, experimentation with different forms and should continue to be so. Stories are different, how we tell them may be very different, some may dominate, some may need to be re-found. That's fine, that's the way things often work. Not every story can always have exactly the same impact for exactly the same people and we can't force that to happen. But we need to make sure that we can locate the story, that we haven't entirely lost it. Cutting back on funding for museums and archives endangers our stories. To paraphrase a recent article '*How did we forget Spowers and Syme?*'. The answer was we didn't, we just haven't looked at them in the full spotlight for a time. Thanks to good museum practices (thanks Geelong), we can.

## **The Centrality of the Artist**

Let's have an arts policy – a cultural policy embraces nearly everything – sport, cuisine, you name it. What's missing right now is an adequate focus on the arts, which are quite broad enough to satisfy everyone. Every child instinctively responds to music, knows what to do with a paintbrush, but we are restricting their access to a full arts education (while lamenting mental health issues among the young). Drama, dance, music and visual arts are creative, empowering and therapeutic. Literature is both the great leveller and a means of sophisticated education. But during COVID, most artists have seen their expertise and skill ignored, struggled to have their means of self-employment recognised and now (although we are not in the post-pandemic period) are expected to self-resurrect. You can't have an arts policy, a cultural life or the benefits of a culturally rich economy without artists – professional, dedicated, committed and collaborative. It takes years of training and a lifetime of practice (both senses of the word). It doesn't just happen.

## **Strong Institutions**

A former Arts Minister in Victoria regularly infuriated the arts community by referring to small arts organisations as 'the nursery'. While she meant well (at least we think she did), the progression from small to large is not automatically a healthy sign in the arts. A former Director of the Tin Sheds got it right – while being small and poor is not an automatic virtue either, it enables you to do things under the radar – to be innovative, take risks, try out new stuff. When you get too big, which in Australia almost automatically means heavily subsidised by government and/or corporate sponsorship, your risk-taking capacity plummets. Small organisations aren't the kindergarten, they are the yeast in the dough – they keep things fresh, on the edge. Strong institutions should be defined by a proper mix – big, small, edgy, conservative, glamorous, pared back – because, funnily enough, that's what the potential audience is like too.

## **Reaching the Audience**

As above, there isn't one audience. There are endless varieties and just as many mixes. Many people who love the arts (or some of the arts) love one or more sports, go bushwalking, like comedy, have different political ideas (or none at all). You grow audiences by different means, most of which are reasonably well documented but often not employed.

- Cheap tickets available same day of performance. Super cheap standing room is used at the Proms.
- Buy one, get a ticket for something else (maybe an entirely different event) for free
- Pre-concert/performance talks so you don't feel like you know nothing about the music/play
- Festivals (one of the best ways to try something new)
- Online, on request
- Reward your subscribers – recognition, special events
- Open when people can go – what happened to evening gallery hours? If summer only, that's fine.
- Take a friend – subsidised tickets for an 'intro' visit with one full cost ticket

Most of all stop seeing the arts as an optional add on. We don't see sport that way – rightly or wrongly, we consider it as healthy (concussed brains notwithstanding) and fostering a team spirit. The arts are brain food, emotional support and educational.

**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**

Respecting the unique aspect of Indigenous culture requires something more than the half-hearted attempts to date to stop rip offs. A walk through Grenada a few years ago was slightly dimmed by the sheer volume of 'Aboriginal' art being sold in almost every tourist shop – bad enough when it happens here, but now it's international! Earning a living through the production of art is a time-honoured practice, fraud is something else.

## **A Place for Every Story**

Every story? I am not certain what this pillar intends for an individual artist or consumer of the arts. Are all stories equal in value and significance, and to whom? If it's code for valuing diversity, fine. If it

means my five-year-old grandson's paintings are on a par with that of a De Kooning, then no. Intention, capacity and purpose matter in the arts.

### **The Centrality of the Artist**

I trained as an artist. I think an art school education has served me well. I have worked (paid employment) in three levels of government, in the arts, museums, education, events and commemorations. I have not always practised as a visual artist but I still find that the education that assisted me to see, to conceptualise, to question, to place expression in an historic context and to respect the creativity of others, in other media, was vital.

**Strong Institutions**     See above (Section 2)

### **Reaching the Audience**

One of the greatest impacts of COVID-19 for me has been a highly reduced capacity to engage with the arts live. Partly through reduced offerings by organisations unable to function, but partly through the inherent risks in being a part of a large audience. So recorded music, radio, books and TV have served to fill for live concerts, theatre, opera and cinema. It's been a bit of a drought. But I'm not alone in seeing ABC's Classic FM as a bit of a life saver. The audience for the arts is already large and potentially huge. An arts policy needs to view the arts as an active asset and strength, not something in need of protection or a defensive position.

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

As above, let's have a national arts policy – drama, dance, literature, visual arts, music, film, audio, hybrid art, ephemeral art, computer-aided art, land art, street art, graphic art, design (all aspects), architecture.

It's wide enough. The many other aspects of our culture – sport, history, food, agriculture, philosophy, etc - can have their own policies.