

National Cultural Policy Submission

The Association of Sculptors of Victoria, (ASV)

Submission to the National Cultural Policy project by
The Association of Sculptors of Victoria, (ASV)



This is submitted as a Not for Profit organisation.

Written by Michael Meszaros, OAM, who has lived as a full-time professional sculptor for over 52 years and is also a qualified architect (retired). He has been President on 11 occasions.



The considerations the ASV would like to submit cover all aspects of the five pillars listed so this submission does not aim to make separate points under each of those headings.

The ASV has existed in various forms since 1932 and has always managed its own affairs and finances with only one State Government grant, in 1985.

Its functions cover all aspects of the five pillars in that we would welcome first Nations members and would include them in all our activities if they joined. Similarly, we have members from a wide range of cultural origins and we welcome the work they exhibit which grows out of these origins.

We hold several exhibitions each year which allow exhibitors, both member and non-member, the opportunity to convey their messages to our audiences without limits on content, style, technique, cultural origin, sexual orientation or identity, race, disability or any other categorisation. Public safety and offence are the only areas we retain the right to control. Members with disabilities would be welcomed.

From our experience, matters we consider need addressing are the following:-

Better training of artists in art schools to teach them techniques, business practice, quotation skills, communication skills, knowledge of working with outside advisors such as engineers and architects and how to work with subcontractors such as foundries and fabricators.

Training in preparing works for exhibition – safety and stability of exhibits, engineering knowledge to ensure this, preparation of pedestals, skills in setting up complex works.

These considerations span all pillars as they are basic for any artist to negotiate, make, engineer, present and exhibit their work.

It is our perception that art schools have progressively eliminated the teaching of technical skills and populated themselves with theorists, so that graduates come out with little technical knowledge, little business training and little knowledge of how to make a career from their training.

The value of the ASV to the community and to Australian cultural life is that it offers the opportunity of sculptors of all types, origins and status, to show and sell their work in a professional setting, utilising the depth of experience our organisation possesses to enable these shows to take place. There are many other arts organisations fulfilling similar functions which deserve government support in various ways.

This need not be in the form of direct financial support. Well managed groups like ours often are self-supporting financially, but need help in finding exhibition venues.

For many years we have held exhibitions in the foyers of major city buildings, but this has become increasingly difficult, and we have had to find other, more expensive venues for our shows.

The Government should examine the funding of municipal galleries where artists and artists groups could exhibit without punitive fees and extortionate commissions on sales. Some local councils already do this, and these galleries are of enormous value in enabling artists to show their work with reasonable costs. Boroondara and Banyule in Melbourne are good examples of such galleries. However, some limit the use of their galleries to local artists, which means that there needs to be a network of similar galleries in most local municipalities to give such opportunities to most artists. However, the ASV has members from many municipalities and regions which may disqualify it from getting access to these galleries for exhibitions. Some consideration should be given to this matter, which would affect many arts organisations similarly. These galleries would be of most benefit to young, disadvantaged, financially limited artists who are trying to get established. However, many established artists would also still need such opportunities.

The problem with the commercial gallery system is that the sales commission taken, up to 50% of sales, makes it completely unviable, particularly for sculptors, to have a chance of selling their work at a price that gives a fair return for effort and production costs. Effectively, two people are trying to live on one person's income. Galleries misusing artists and their work are not uncommon, causing loss and anxiety to artists so affected.

A current issue which is affecting the ASV is its status as a tax-deductible charitable organisation, meaning that donations to the ASV are tax deductible. The ASV has had this status for many years, but recently the regulations have changed, making it much harder to retain this status. It appears that the new regulations were instituted by a new commissioner of the ACC (Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission), who was installed by the previous Government, and who was reputed to have a most unsympathetic attitude to charitable organisations. It seems that he retired/resigned/was dismissed as soon as the new Labour Government was installed.

The current regulations appear to make it unacceptable for an arts organisation to sell art works on behalf of its members because doing so would mean that the members are gaining financial benefit from being members. Somehow it needs to be established that the charitable function of the ASV in presenting art works for benefit of the public and showing artists' works without financial gain is the primary object of the ASV.

This completely neglects the basic facts of life, that such organisations must generate funds to function, and artists must have the chance to sell their work to be able to finance the production of further work and to maintain their practice.

Enabling artists to show and sell their work is a basic function of the ASV and many other arts organisations which accrue no financial gain to its members in terms of dividends from profits or any other financial reward to members. Any profit from sales commissions remains with

the ASV for future projects. All office bearers are volunteers and receive no financial reward for their very considerable voluntary work. All accounts are tabled and are publicly available. We have just had a consultation with a specialist lawyer regarding this problem, for a fee of \$1500, and their quotation to work through the whole issue with them is for \$10,000, with no guarantee of success. This is a totally unrealistic impost on a small voluntary organisation for what appears to us to be a completely unnecessary problem.

It is reasonable to assume that other similar arts organisations are facing similar, artificially created problems.

This issue reduces the effectiveness of the organisation, its ability to provide its core services to its members and the public, its ability to attract volunteers to positions within the organisation and its ability to fund its other key functions. For example, the ASV's website (www.sculptorsvictoria.asn.au) is a major benefit to the public as well as to its members and costs a significant amount to maintain. It is currently in need of a major rebuild and the funds the problem with our charitable status will devour will severely impact our ability to fund this rebuild. This will adversely affect our ability to benefit the public.

Paradoxically, we would need our charitable status to be able to apply for a Government grant to fund the website rebuild, if we needed the assistance, so the problem is doubly counterproductive. Any donations to the ASV are generally dependent on being tax deductible.

The drop in volunteering in the community generally is a Government concern, and stressful, Government-produced impediments like this are certainly no encouragement to people to take on voluntary positions.

It can be seen that tax deductible status has a major impact on our organisation and its and this issue must be urgently addressed as it significantly affects our ability to fulfil our core functions.