

National Cultural Policy Submission

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The Youth Circus sector in Australia is a strong and growing network of circus training institutions for young people. Representatives from the sector regularly meet on line to discuss issues, to support each others' practice, to collaborate, and to share resources. There are also a number of opportunities for young people and network representatives to gather and share skills and training, significantly the Flying Fruit Fly Circus' annual National Training Project, and the bi-annual National Circus Festival hosted by Spaghetti Circus in Mullumbimby.

The Youth Circus Network published a Manifesto in 2014 that outlined six principles and strategies for advancing the sector. Those principles are

1. to grow participation in youth circus across Australia through greater accessibility
2. to lead innovation and investment in youth arts practice
3. to support high quality and diverse skill development opportunities
4. to create career pathways and life long learning opportunities within the circus industry
5. to collaborate through a national network to uphold an excellent standard of service delivery
6. to increase the awareness of the benefits of youth circus for young people and for circus as a leading art-form in Australia

Why is circus so important?

Circus is intrinsically accessible, and naturally diverse. In circus we need big people to stand at the bottom of pyramids, and small people to stand on top. We need bendy people, fearless people, introverts who are happy to stand in a corner juggling all day in pursuit of perfection, and extroverts to show it all off to the crowd. There is a place for everyone and all are valued equally!

Circus is non-competitive and relies on trust, mutual respect and teamwork. While there is an illusion of danger in the ring, or in front of an audience, circus trains young people to have a realistic understanding of their own capacity and to competently assess and mitigate risk. It has personal therapeutic (fitness, self-worth, achievement) and community building (team cohesion, community bonding) benefits as evidenced by many and varied projects all over Australia. It also does not have the risk profile of most contact sports. In fact it is the ideal activity for physical education in schools and other contexts.

But Circus is not just important in the youth or education context. It's many benefits in these contexts do not detract from its value as an art-form, particularly here in Australia where (arguably) contemporary circus was invented, and has been developed to such a high level by companies such as Circus Oz and more recently Gravity And Other Myths, and Circa.

I applaud the Minister and team for this consultation process and look forward to a Cultural Policy that firstly recognises that art is an intrinsic part of all of the life of every Australian person. Artists need to be supported in order that this intrinsic part of our life is accessible to everyone. The institutions that support artists need to be able to flourish, to open their doors and let audiences in. Our stories need to be told in all of the magnificent ways that we are capable of telling them, and First Nations culture, people and history needs to be central in all of the pillars of the plan.

Thank you for this opportunity.

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