

Submission to National Cultural Policy 2022

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Submitted as an individual

First Nations

First Nations artists are ridiculously good. First Nations artists dominate every arts discipline, at every level, without exception.

Why?

Clearly, there is an extraordinary depth of talent in visual arts, film, broadcasting, music, dance, performance, literature, comedy, and all other arts in First Nations communities. But importantly, the arts are a sanctioned space for political discourse. Artists dig into issues, challenge orthodoxies, present new perspectives, offer stories, humour, and forms of expression that subvert dominant narratives. First Nations artists have a lot to say. And the rest of Australia has a lot to learn.

There has also been a history of sustained commitment by Australia's arts and cultural institutions to make space for First Nations artists. For example, Australia's national film agencies and broadcasters have had Indigenous units since the 1970s, commissioning and broadcasting Indigenous content and employing trainees, producers, directors, presenters, actors, camera operators, crew, and administrators.

In 2022, we are benefiting from this sustained investment in First Nations creatives. It works. Quotas, broadcasting requirements, Indigenous program units, targets, awards, employment, training, promotion, investment in art and artists, all work. Adequate funding works. Maintaining and increasing opportunities for First Nations artists across the arts industries is fundamental.

A Living Wage for Artists

Australian artists are unpaid and underpaid. The Australian arts scene is a gig economy, and most artists support themselves with day jobs that they hope will

not impinge too much on their ability to create. It is undignified and ultimately unsustainable. It results in high rates of burnout and a miserable waste of talent.

We should offer a living wage to artists. And if the bean counters object, then a modified Higher Education style loan scheme would advance the status quo—a modest loan for practicing artists that could be repaid through the tax system when and if an artist earns enough.

Mid-Career Support for Artists

While we're at it, bring back Paul Keating's fellowships for mid-career artists. We should celebrate and reward artists who are in it for the long haul and whose work (whether comfortable or uncomfortable) has contributed to making our world a better place. Mid-career fellowships are a gift of time, and time out, to reflect on and deepen artistic practice.

Art and Music Education

Australian children are missing out on art and music education at school. Only about 20 percent of public schools deliver music programs. Yet as Plato said, 'I would teach children music, physics and philosophy; but more importantly music; for in the patterns of music and all the arts are the keys to learning.'

We know that arts and music education help children with maths, science and comprehension, creative problem solving, fine motor skills, language skills, pattern recognition, perspective, critical thinking, teamwork, communication, comparative analysis, and connection with cultures. Arts and music education benefit emotional understanding and growth.

And there are intrinsic rewards. Australian children deserve to be immersed in the experiences, insights and fun that creative engagement brings.

Strong Institutions

Archives, Museums and Galleries store our histories and memories. We need them to be strong, interesting, challenging and well organised—physically and

culturally safe places for our collections. Institutions like the National Library, National Gallery, and National Museum and AIATSIS should be funded well enough to maintain buildings, protect and grow collections, engage in research, generate exhibitions, and make them available to people all over Australia. That means **no more death by ‘efficiency’ dividend**. And no more going cap-in-hand to non-government sources of funding that come with strings attached and influence the exhibitions they mount, the way collections are interpreted, the work they collect and the stories they tell. (Same goes for performing arts.)

All our National Cultural Institutions should be as well funded as the Australian War Memorial.

Bureaucracy with (helpful) Attitude

A long time ago, I worked in the Commonwealth department responsible for the arts, and as an Adviser to the Arts Minister. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] cultural organisations were treated with respect, and it was well established that the government’s role was to help grow, protect, and advocate Australia’s cultural sector—in Australia and internationally. Over the years, the relationship between the bureaucracy and the government-funded cultural sector has become increasingly oppositional and punitive, characterised by lack of trust, and ever diminishing funding. This is counterproductive and stifles innovation and creativity.

It is time inject some good will and generosity.

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