



National Cultural Policy

Submission by:

John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University

August 2022

John Curtin Gallery

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Highlights 2021



9 exhibitions



56 Public Program Events



33,291 visitors



100 artists exhibited



3,220 total works in Collection



\$22.6M value of Collection

Who we are

The John Curtin Gallery is one of Western Australia's major public art galleries and one of the largest and best-equipped university galleries in the country. Our significant reputation within the community attracts exhibitions by local, national and international artists of great renown, presenting works across a wide range of mediums and interrogating many of the important issues of our day. We capitalise on our location within a research-rich environment to curate exhibitions that bridge art, science and academia in engaging and innovative ways.

Our vision is to be the leading University Gallery in Australia, making tomorrow better through the power of art. We inspire our audiences to reflect on contemporary social and environmental issues and to create a more just and equitable world. We do this through delivering exhibitions and programs making art accessible for all, and through building our collection to reflect our community and the complex and rich cross- and multi-cultural practice in Australia and the Region.

Our small but dedicated team of highly skilled staff have established an enviable reputation in delivering an outstanding annual exhibition program of the highest integrity with transformative impact for local audiences as well as harnessing innovative technologies to extend that impact beyond our shores to the people of the world. Since establishment in 1998 the Gallery has been a core part of the Perth Festival visual arts program, bringing many of the world's most important contemporary arts projects to Australia each year including many national premieres.

Our Collection includes the nationally significant Herbert Mayer Collection of Carrolup Artwork created by Stolen Generation children at a native settlement south of Perth in the 1940's. This collection is the centrepiece of our initiative: the *Carrolup Centre for Truth-Telling*, and we are currently touring an exhibition based on this story to the UK as part of the DFAT/British Council Australia in the UK Season. We have won a number of awards for our work including most recently the Vice Chancellors Award for Excellence in Reconciliation in 2019 and 2021, and MAGNA Awards for Indigenous Projects (2018) Research Exhibitions (2019) and Highly commended Research Exhibitions (2021).

The pandemic turmoil of the last few years has resulted in the loss of sponsors, fewer opportunities to engage with donors, budget cuts, and of course no access to any State or Federal Government support, including job-keeper, as we are considered part of the University sector. Nonetheless we have soldiered on, managing to present three exhibition seasons each year, with the aim to return to a four-season program in 2022, our 25th Anniversary year, as well as commencing new engagement and education programs through our Carrolup Centre funded entirely by corporate and philanthropic support.

Response

These points are a comment on the Arts and Culture in general from a WA and University museum perspective.

- WA's share of federal funding is disproportionately low. Added to this, University Museums and Galleries face an uphill battle to be recognised as eligible to apply, and then are generally perceived to not really need the money.
- We have to deal with vast distances which carry with them greater disruptions to travel and freight schedules, making the development of touring exhibitions almost impossible.
- At the same time, few exhibitions from our east coast colleagues chose to include us, as the costs are too high. Visions of Australia funding has not funded a WA originated tour since 2019.
- WA is in a unique time zone aligning northwards regionally with major populations centres in Asia, and with our key trading partners. We are also the gateway to the Indian Ocean Rim, and well-positioned to capitalise through cultural diplomacy, e.g. through the innovative Indian Ocean Triennial which we presented in 2021, and will again in 2024.
- Recent research has found that significant evidence that involvement and participation in the Arts plays a central role in improving health and well-being, including reducing stress and anxiety, improving depression and promoting a sense of well-being and happiness.¹ The impact on our overburdened health systems is self-evident.
- As a University based Collection and Gallery we fall between the cracks, not being seen as mainstream business of the University, and yet completely overlooked as a key participant in the cultural infrastructure and ecology of the Arts and Culture sector by Governments in particular.
- As a University based Collection and Gallery we are unable to access support through Creative Partnerships Australia, for example the Plus 1 program.

The Five Pillars

Challenges and Opportunities	Why they are important to us
1. First Nations	
WA Aboriginal Art, and in particular Nyungar Art is quite unique.	Little support for urban based First Nations artists, arts workers and curators. Not all First Nations art is created in regional and remote Art Centres.
The WA First Nation Arts sector generates 61% of Aboriginal sales nationally	Lack of access to funding and assistance to stage exhibitions from WA Art Centres in Perth.
Repatriation of cultural material between States, as well as Internationally	We know of significant WA cultural material held in South Australia and other States, which was collected in the 19 th Century before there was a State Museum in WA. This needs to be returned as a matter of urgency.
Ensuring Culturally safe environments for staff and visitors within our museums and galleries	Need for Guidelines and assistance in providing a Culturally Safe workspace for all.
Development of Indigenous Cultural workers who are skilled professionals in the Collections sector, helping transform our institutions and collections	Improved access to training and capacity building for First Nations arts workers, including Art Centre managers, facilitators and curators.

Challenges and Opportunities	Why they are important to us
2. A Place for Every Story	
Valuing the role of Collections as Story Keepers and Carers as an integral part of the Arts and Cultural ecology. Our collections are filled with objects, material, ephemera, and of course art, in all its forms, which together inspires new stories, new art, new writing etc.	Our Collections and Exhibitions inspire new creative output, whether it is new art, writing, poetry, screenplay, theatre, dance, or music. Repositories of these collections need to be appropriately funded and supported to ensure this material and the stories are not lost forever.
Lack of visibility of Western Australian Arts and Cultural sector in the National Cultural Landscape.	WA stories deserve to be told nationally, not just in WA. Access to an expanded Visions of Australia Program would be helpful for touring exhibitions originating in WA.
Being inclusive of all our communities, ensuring all voices are represented.	We are conscious of our perceived role as gatekeepers and endeavour to be inclusive across gender, culture, ability. We seek to acquire works for our collection and further develop our programming in ways that reflect our community diversity.
University Art Museum Exhibitions are uniquely placed to explore issues of Equity, Social Justice, and Empowerment.	Access to funding to enable us to collaborate on exhibitions across disciplines which explore these important themes.
3. The Centrality of the Artist and Arts Worker	
Recognising University based Museum and Collection professionals as key players and contributors to the sector.	Our staff are recognised by their colleagues, contributing across the sector, volunteering on boards and committees of other Arts organisations, and are frequently sought as Judges, selection panellists, speakers and facilitators.
Development of Indigenous Cultural workers who are skilled professionals in the Collections sector, helping transform our institutions and collections.	Need for Guidelines and assistance in providing a Culturally Safe workspace for all. Improved access to training and capacity building for First Nations arts workers, including Art Centre Managers, facilitators and curators.
We need a steady and strong workforce, which embeds capacity within organisations and allows development of strong relationships and partnerships	Collaboration and partnerships are critical, but constantly changing staff disrupts the development of long-lasting relationships. A casualised workforce is also a further hinderance.
Ensuring Equity of Access to Tertiary Training in Curatorial studies.	Currently there is no post-secondary training accessible in WA other than on-line through interstate Universities. Support for post-secondary education and work placements of First Nations students is essential. Development of First Nations facilitators to teach and train. Recognition in the Jobs and Skills priorities.

Challenges and Opportunities	Why they are important to us
4. Strong Institutions	
Recognition of University based Museums, Galleries, and Collections as an integral part of the Cultural infrastructure and ecology, with equitable access to funding and other support.	University based Museums and Galleries benefit from a culture that supports artistic and academic freedom. They are often better placed than most major Public Cultural Institutions to respond to contemporary social issues, that may be in opposition to current Government Policies.
Universities and tertiary institutions are the primary provider of formal training for Arts, Creative Industries, and Cultural Workforces.	Facilities can offer important support for ongoing professional and career development, and business development e.g. through artist residencies, commissions, and teaching positions.
Representation in University Art Collections as significant public collections, is an important career step for recognition as a visual artist.	Graduate exhibitions are often the first opportunity emerging artists have to show their work in public. They also provide ancillary localised opportunities through events, exhibitions, shop sales, publications and discourse.
University Public Art commissions provide important opportunities for emerging and established artists.	Our University Public Art collection is one of the biggest in Western Australia and is freely accessible by the public.
Recognition of the Administrative load on cultural institutions, many of whom auspice funding for sole practitioners and artists.	Recent research by Philanthropy Australia shows that indirect costs/overheads by NFPs are not being covered by funders, eroding critical capabilities. Estimates are that these costs are three times higher than funders are willing to cover. ⁱⁱ

<p>5. Reaching the Audience</p>	
<p>Lack of visibility of Western Australian Arts and Cultural sector in the National Landscape.</p>	<p>WA stories deserve to be told nationally, not just in WA. Access to an expanded Vision of Australia Program would be helpful for touring exhibitions originating in WA.</p>
<p>Equal access to touring exhibitions from other States – WA locations are often left out of National Tours because of the costs.</p>	<p>At JCG we strive to accommodate at least one touring exhibition each year, and appreciate it is an expensive exercise, but we believe it is important that our audiences share these stories.</p>
<p>Alarming Digital Divide still in evidence, particularly in Regional Western Australia.</p>	<p>With the increased proliferation of Digital Content, via online exhibitions, events, and virtual collaborations, it is evident that a whole section of our community is being left behind either through skills, access to equipment, or lack of digital connection.</p>
<p>Invisibility of University collections due to lack of a prominent digital presence which is linked to TROVE.</p>	<p>Investment in the digitisation of University Collections to enable wide community access through TROVE.</p>
<p>Facilitation of Exhibition Tours. Cultural Diplomacy is an important tool in International and Trade relations.</p>	<p>Our focus in on the Indian Ocean Rim, and mirrors the Curtin University global operational footprint in Singapore, Malaysia, Mauritius, and UAE. Through our Art Collections, we have strong links to UK and USA collections. The cost of Touring Exhibitions is exorbitant in the current environment.</p>

¹ Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre, “Creativity at the Crossroads? The Creative Industries in Western Australia”, 2021, pp90-98 [https://bcec.edu.au/publications/creativity-at-the-crossroads-the-creative-industries-in-western-australia]

ⁱⁱ Philanthropy Australia, “Paying What it Takes”, 2022. [https://www.philanthropy.org.au/tools-resources/paying-what-it-takes/]