

# National Cultural Policy Submission

## Blindside Gallery (Artist Run Initiative)

**Submitted:** On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

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:

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

Blindside Gallery is a not-for-profit, Artist-Run Initiative, established in 2004. It is located in the Nicholas Building in Melbourne's CBD – a haven and cultural destination for independent arts businesses, galleries, studios for artisans and crafts people and their small businesses.

Our Vision is to be a leading platform for new and critical dialogues, contemporary art and bold ideas.

We specifically support emerging artists, curators and writers. The first five years post-graduation is a notoriously challenging time for emerging visual arts practitioners, and Blindside is crucial to this grassroots ecosystem.

2017-2020 was an exceptional period for Blindside, characterised by a distinct range of new ambitious and experimental projects, exhibitions, public and education programs and events.

This was only possible due to long term support from Creative Victoria for eight years leading up to 2021, alongside City of Melbourne multi-year support. Blindside also launched an annual fundraising activity, B-side, to address organisational sustainability.

This financial stability enabled Blindside to fulfil its goal of:

- removing hire fees for artists to exhibit in the gallery space
- make payments to artists, curators and writers for their work

Blindside recognises that under payment and non-payment is rife in the arts, and is hugely detrimental to artists' incomes, wellbeing and career sustainability.

This expanded programming included:

- **Debut** – annual group show for graduate students, curated by RMIT and VCA staff
- **First Nations Exhibition Project** – with partners including New Agency, this mob, and West Space.
- **Emerging Artist Mentorship** - pairing an emerging artist with an established practitioner to develop a joint exhibition
- **Emerging Curatorial Mentorship** – 6-month mentorship from an established curator, focusing on curatorial research and the development of an ambitious exhibition project.

- **Partnership projects** – collaborations with **Liquid Architecture** (sound and audio projects), **Screen Series** events with **Channels Festival** and **Composite Moving Image Exhibitions** - solo and group shows - across all disciplines including performance, video, installation, sculpture, photography, painting, textiles and more – selected from open call proposals and curated projects from Blindsight's Artistic Directors
- **Public Programming** – opportunities to program and manage public events, such as talks, performances, readings, workshops
- **Text commissions** – Writers commissioned to develop texts for each exhibition
- **Satellite** – partnership with Urban Screens and Federation Square. A moving image-based public art project that screening in multiple public locations in three countries.
- **Blindsight Mobile** – online programming for digital artworks
- **Regional Residency project** – partnership with the National Trust to offer artist residencies in a National Trust property in regional Victoria
- **Summer studio** - artist or collective residency during January, culminating in an exhibition.
- **Education program** – Host and deliver talks to secondary and tertiary students and art educators across Victoria. Dedicated resources available to download to support learning outcomes.
- **Internships** – 6 month gallery internships offered to tertiary students as part of their coursework
- **B-side** – annual fundraising showcase of 100+ local artists
- **Blindsight Artist Edition** – annual artist commission series

However, in 2022, Creative Victoria support was discontinued. This loss of critical organisational funding resulted in an income loss of \$70,000 for 2022.

To remain viable, we had to make major cuts to Blindsight programs and staff hours. The loss of funding had a direct impact on opportunities for artists, curators, writers, arts workers, technicians – a thriving and ambitious program creating professional development and career progression for emerging practitioners was lost.

2022 cancellations:

- Cancelled: Artist Mentorship Initiative
- Cancelled: First Nations Project
- Cancelled: Blindsight Satellite (video works on public screens across Melbourne)
- Cuts to Emerging Curator Mentorship project fee
- Cuts to fees for Blindsight Mobile (online exhibitions)
- Cuts to gallery staff hours
- Reduced staffing capacity also reduced opportunities to present and manage students and educational visits, internships and partnership projects
- Cuts to technician hours
- Cuts to gallery maintenance
- No fees for project curators

– No fee increase to artists

Looking ahead to 2023, in order to remain sustainable and continue to operate Blindsight is preparing for an even more reduced program.

This means fewer opportunities for emerging artists to exhibit their work or to refine their practice in collaboration with curators and writers. Lost connections with an arts network and community, reduced capacity to develop career potential.

### **Strong Institutions**

Artist-Run Initiatives like Blindsight Gallery, and a range of other not-for-profit visual arts spaces – many of whom have now been operating for decades – are suffering without long term organisational stability. This directly impacts on the available opportunities for artists, curators and writers – now, and for future outcomes in 10, 20, 30 years.

It is well-documented that arts organisations and arts workers were among the most badly affected during the 2020-21 pandemic lockdowns. Arts workers are motivated by passion and vocation, but they are increasingly burnt-out and cannot continue to work for free beyond paid hours.

After a decade of chronic Coalition government underfunding and savage budget cuts – now compounded by pandemic losses and rising inflation – arts organisations need a colossal boost in long-term funding.

Stable, paid staffing is essential to the delivery of innovative programming.

Funding programs for 'projects' and short-term bursts of activity undermines the mission of organisations. We are part of a grass roots arts network – we already know what the community needs from us and we know how to deliver it.

We just need stable funding!