

National Cultural Policy Submission

Anonymous

Submitted: As a worker / professional in an industry who uses arts (e.g. art therapist, tour guide), As an artist, As an individual

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:

A Place for Every Story

As a worker primarily in the creative writing sector, I see significant risks for access to education and training as well as publishing and exposure for writers of lesser socio-economic means or writers from minority backgrounds. A lack of government funding, as we have lately seen, for example, among Australian literary journals, puts a hostile pressure on the writing community which could lead to the self-exclusion of writers without the means to sustain long fallow periods and writers whose formal or thematic contributions may be vital but which lie outside the bounds of the more narrow and – by necessity – conservative output of those publications which have managed to stay afloat. Likewise, we need to ensure equitable access to educational programs to ensure that poor writers are not excluded from the wider industry.

The Centrality of the Artist

If the artist is to be taken seriously as a worker and a figure of value in Australia it is vital that a sustainable architecture is developed to reward artistic labour economically. At present too many of our industries run on prize or grant culture, and creative output itself remains tremendously difficult to monetise for a variety of reasons. Basic incomes for artists, expanded and inclusive residency or apprenticeship programs, long-term government jobs for artists of various stripes; things of this nature could be important in creating a sustainable model of the arts career. For the wider culture, art does not succeed or thrive in a lean and competitive model – the work is compromised to make ends meet and the logic of the profit motive leads to a mindset which regards artistic output as somehow illegitimate or trivial. The collective production of worthwhile art relies on security for its practitioners and the understanding that the best work will emerge from and in

relation to a surplus of cultural output. It is not an efficient process, but then neither is truffle harvesting and people seem to go nuts for that.

Strong Institutions

It has been repeatedly demonstrated that the arts industry as a whole makes money; for this to continue in a genuine way it requires strong support at the roots where that money might not always be so free-flowing. The TAFEs and unis where practitioners learn their craft, the small galleries, music venues, independent presses, theatres, little screening rooms and indie cinemas and so forth – none of the big ticket Arts Centre/National Gallery/stadium shows happen without these tributaries feeding them. The establishment and maintenance of publicly funded institutions to support the work of artists – which cannot otherwise thrive in the buy low/sell high logic of the market – should be one of the benefits of living in an allegedly wealthy country. Rather than being the first to drill yet another hole into an over-tightened collective belt, it would be nice to see the tremendous artistic potential of this place be supported in its sometimes inefficient but inevitably worthwhile efforts rather than squandered, again, as it has so often been.

Reaching the Audience

I don't know how policy can fix this but it would be nice if the wider populace took any Australian artist in any discipline seriously before the Americans told them their work was cool.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

I do not come from a First Nations background. Nevertheless, I see it as vital that "Australian" art organises itself around the fact of Indigenous sovereignty and legal and moral right to the land. First Nations art must not be held up just as an object of cultural fascination for the descendants of settlers, but as the heart of the human history of this place, as the unbroken creative lineage of the oldest group of civilisations in the world, and as the centre around which Australian art must be organised — not vice-versa. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

A Place for Every Story

I have been very fortunate in my access to education, programs, community, etc. I cannot tell you how much the presence of artists from a variety of backgrounds enriched my time and my work. When only the wealthy or the kids of the wealthy have access to a role in the arts – and this has always disproportionately preferred white Australians, also – the work suffers, becomes more insular and less interesting. There is no group in the world more exciting and inspiring to me than a group of creatives from different walks of life. A “national voice”, our misguided Northern Star for so many decades when it comes to arts funding, does not arise from finding the most perfect creator. It comes collectively; it’s a harmony, not a melody. Our industrial, educational and institutional architecture has to reflect and enable that harmony.

The Centrality of the Artist

I have been pretty lucky – not super lucky, but pretty lucky – when it comes to having the time and resources to work on my own stuff. Even so, it has always felt like a second fiddle kind of thing to the less personally meaningful work I was doing to support it, both inside and outside the arts industry. If there were genuine, stable support programs or career paths that enabled creatives to work on their own output at least some of the time in a way that was acknowledged as the work it is, rather than as glorified lottery tickets in the grant and prize economy, this would be life-changing to me and countless others like me. It’s not enough to centre the artist in culture. They must be able to centre their creative practice for themselves.

Strong Institutions

I would have given up both my primary writing practice and my secondary music practice ages ago without the support of educational institutions, arts bodies, writers centres, live venues, groups, etc, and the colleagues and friends I have met there. It is a cold and solitary landscape without these collective places of work and sharing. The community will probably always sustain itself at some small level, but we need more than crumbs and the cycle of voluntary labour to succeed.

Reaching the Audience

Bring back Recovery.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

It's really the economic side of things that we need. It comes down to money, there's no way to streamline it so that the artistic wunderkind spring out of the pack and land an internationally lauded show at some NYC gallery. Institutions need funding, vectors for production and distribution need funding, and most of all artists need funding in a reliable and stable way. We've been fed like seagulls for too long. Our ability to snatch the chips from the beaks of our colleagues is no metric for judging the merit of our output.