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Creative Australia  
National Cultural Policy

What should the future of arts look like in Australia?

Submission by CreateA

*CreateA* is a contemporary arts company based in Bendigo, Victoria. We create new works across diverse visual and performance based practices. *CreateA* was established in 2002 with the purpose of providing opportunities for people with disability to engage with contemporary arts practice and to present their work publicly. Since then we have developed partnerships and working relationships with artists, arts organisations and community groups that are interested in developing inclusive practices that represent the diversity of our community. *CreateA* is a program of Golden City Support Services.

The future of arts in Australia must be inclusive and represent diversity for audiences, artists, performers and creative workers. The future of arts in Australia must offer pathways for participation that are accessible and diverse. As well as recognising individual achievement the arts must recognise the creative and cultural importance of collective art making and participation that is built with long term commitment to communities, places and the future.

This submission seeks to reinforce the importance of diversity and representation. It also seeks to highlight neglected aspects of arts practice that have eroded access and participation.

While there has been progress in recent years in building greater representation of diversity in the arts, this continues to require conscious attention and advocacy so that gains are consolidated and further development occurs. Social and political fluctuations can easily erode the commitment to addressing representation and diversity. The arts are uniquely placed to demonstrate and lead inclusion.

The new policy has opportunity to embrace the National Arts and Disability Strategy that exists. This document is comprehensive in its scope and should be embedded within National Cultural Policy.

In promoting representation and participation, strategies that focus solely on individual achievement risk reinforcing celebrity culture. Celebrity culture, which by its very nature is non-inclusive inherently separates people into achievers and non-achievers. Embedding inclusion and diversity in a culture of participation and the recognition of everyday culture, builds stronger commitment to the importance of arts for all people. This enriches and strengthens communities and generates resilience.

The previous Cultural Policy that has been circulated as a basis for the new policy contains reference to "regional development and social dividends through community-based arts and cultural programs" The policy aims include:

- Increased participation in the arts and cultural activities by a broad demographic to recognise its place at the core of a just, inclusive, vibrant, prosperous and resilient society.
- Widespread application of arts-led approaches to complex social and economic challenges across all levels of government.
- Recognition that culturally vibrant places attract people and business, are more competitive and are inclusive and better places to live.

These are important aims to retain in any new policy. In addition, policy needs to address the specific needs of community based arts practice. Community based, socially aware arts practice, like other areas of the arts has been significantly impacted by COVID-19. It has been far harder to work with other people over the last two years. However, even prior to the pandemic, the field of community cultural development has been struggling. Some of this is a result of restricted and reduced funding pools with increasingly competitive funding rounds. The Regional Arts Fund is one example that has direct impact for companies like *CreateA*.

The other significant change has been the decrease of activity in the university sector. Arts practice needs arts education and arts research. The only dedicated school of community cultural development at a university level closed in 2016 (Centre for Cultural Partnerships, Victorian College of Arts and Music, University of Melbourne – see appendix 1). The impact of the loss of activity like this can appear incremental in the short term but in the longer term it represents certain demise. It is not an overstatement to say that art transforms lives. There is much documentation to demonstrate this. It is a concern that there may be a lack of more recent research, documentation and activity in this area that ensures community based arts practice delivers the kinds of transformative outcomes that are possible. The essential nature of research and tertiary level education for community based arts practice needs to be central in cultural policy.

Regional areas are particularly at risk of losing community based arts activity. Arts funding has typically gone to larger arts and cultural institutions that can be shown to have direct and immediate economic returns for regional centres. Local artists cannot assume that they have access to these institutions and many rely on working in community based practice as an adjunct to their own practice. Institutions such as Footscray Community Arts Centre in metropolitan Melbourne do not exist in regional Victoria. Place based arts activity allows communities to tell their stories, evolve their own cultures and build local resilience. The longer term health of individuals (both mental and physical health) and the health of communities is ensured by both economic and cultural prosperity.

Support for collective art making that extends into the long term is needed. Arts companies (except for major orchestras and national dance companies) typically are made up of Artistic Directors and arts administrators who contract artists in short term projects. The concept of an ensemble working together over time is extremely rare. Where it does exist we see the emergence of some of the most ground breaking and impactful current arts practice. Two examples to give are Back To Back Theatre and Ilbijerri Theatre Company. The potential that results from artists working together over time is one that is relatively untapped.

In conclusion cultural policy needs to address the values and needs of communities, including regional communities, to recognise diversity in all forms, to be healthy and resilient and to recognise the importance of communal as well as individual achievement.

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## Appendix 1

CCP [Centre for Cultural Partnerships] is Australia's only dedicated graduate teaching and research centre for community arts and social practice. It offers specialised graduate programs that attract both local and international students and researchers. Through research and practice, the Centre creates a space for artists, cultural workers, policy makers and intellectuals to think out of the box in approaching the role of art in the community. CCP trains artists to make work with a social conscience.

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