

CULTURAL OMNIVORE

National Cultural Policy Submission

by Kiriaki Zakinthinos, Cultural Omnivore

August 22, 2022

Bio:

I am a Sydney-based arts professional and writer. My driving purpose in all my work is a desire for a fairer, more inclusive, more democratic cultural landscape, which reflects our plurality of cultures and lived experiences. Work in the creative industries is most meaningful to me when it is purpose-driven towards outcomes that lead to access, inclusion and deep engagement, and the empowerment of marginalised or minoritised people and communities. Full bio on [LinkedIn](#).

Email: [REDACTED] Website: <https://culturalomnivore.blog/>

Submitted: On behalf of a for-profit arts business, As a worker/professional in an industry who uses arts (e.g. art therapist, tour guide), As an artist, As an individual

First Nations

I am not of First Nations Australian heritage and so only offer a non-Indigenous perspective here. The challenges I see faced by First Nations artists, arts workers and arts/cultural products and practices include the commodification, homogenisation and exploitation of Australian First Nations concepts, knowledges, practices, cultures, labour etc. by non-Indigenous people and organisations/systems.

There is an opportunity for the Albanese Labor Government to utilise the vehicle of arts and culture as well as this new policy in development to enact and embed the values they are espousing through the work that the Hon. Linda Burney, Minister for Indigenous Australians, and others are undertaking towards a successful national referendum that will enshrine an Indigenous voice to parliament.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart could also be incorporated into this new policy. First Nations Australian artists and arts leaders could lead on the writing of the new cultural policy itself. Non-Indigenous artists and arts leaders could move over and make space for Indigenous leaders and could learn/be guided by them in their work in the arts sector.

The Albanese Government has further opportunities to address injustices of the past with reparations such as:

- Cultural repatriation of artefacts/significant objects
- Providing long-term core funding to organisations that are Aboriginal-led and operated, such as Moogahlin Performing Arts, to ensure their operational sustainability into the future
- Consulting with Indigenous arts/cultural leaders on how to re-shape colonial and inherently biased structures in the arts; on cultural and creative wellbeing frameworks; on interdisciplinary cultural practices and design-thinking approaches to complex issues in the sector.
- Ensuring that grant funds that are ear-marked for First Nations initiatives are only awarded to First Nations-led orgs and projects.

A Place for Every Story

I'd like to see a move away from the language of "stories" and "storytelling" as this connotes "extraction" and "cultural mining" in my mind. This language also reinforces and plays into the notion of cultural and social narratives, which can lead to stereo-typing and essentialisation. The language around "diverse storytelling" is too easy to co-opt and exploit (whether it be in a grant application, on marketing material, or in policy).

Instead, I'd like to see a move towards language that is nuanced and descriptive. Instead of "diverse stories from Western Sydney" let's describe in detail what the offering is, name the author and maker, include only relevant location and demographic details.

Let's also understand what "community-engaged", "socially-engaged" and "culturally relevant" really mean by ensuring that culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) and People of Colour (PoC) artists and arts leaders are leading these processes.

I encourage the Hon Tony Burke, Minister for the Arts, to read and take note of this brilliant article by Ana Tiwary, tireless advocate for equity and inclusion of CaLD and PoC creatives in the arts and screen sector specifically: [How Authenticity Can Thrive in the Screen Community](#), commissioned by Screen Australia

For authenticity to thrive, cultural safety needs to be ensured. For cultural safety to be ensured, arts organisations need to scaffold CaLD and PoC artists and staff with other CaLD

and PoC creatives and administrators. Most importantly, we need to ensure representation at the leadership level. Quotas and targets can be very effective tools to encourage cultural/systemic change quickly. We've been talking about the lack of diversity in leadership for decades. We can't keep talking, we need action and mechanisms to bring about change.

This report by Diversity Arts Australia that measures the lack of diversity in leadership in the Creative Industries and makes recommendations to address the issue is essential reading: [Shifting The Balance Report](#)

The Centrality of the Artist

There is implicit bias towards artists in our nation's consciousness. We need to value the Artist as worker, as valuable contributor to society, to economies, to making meaning – to the way Australia views itself and to how it is viewed from afar.

Representation in the media is key to this. We've had a gutting of arts media in recent years. Government has a huge role to play in funding independent media organisations, in ensuring local content quotas are set, and in bringing the arts into the consciousness of Australians – through our screens, stages, newspapers etc. Why don't we have equal air-time for sports and arts stories on mainstream news?

There is also an opportunity for this Government to lead on innovative new economic models for practising artists. One example could be grants that support artists to take up long-term salaried positions within an arts organisation. Currently the only grant opportunity offered by the Australia Council for the Arts that approaches something like this idea are the fellowships, which are incredibly competitive and far too few. A designated "salaried artist" funding category where the Council partners with organisations in the small to medium sector to embed creatives within them, could be one way to trial such a model. If artists can be supported to move from surviving in the gig economy, to enjoying job security and long-term engagement within a well-resourced environment, I've no doubt we would see innovative, robust, meaningful, and engaged cultural products emerge naturally, and we would see a flourishing, reinvigorated sector.

Strong Institutions

More long-term core operational funding is essential to the sector. We don't need any more infrastructure and capital works grants in the small to medium sector. We need operational funds, secure salaried positions for artists and more opportunities for knowledge exchange and resource-sharing with like-minded peer organisations and companies.

We also need more accountability when it comes to the performance metrics of publicly funded orgs, especially the Major Performing Arts (MPAs) and Peak Bodies.

A healthy arts ecology needs both MPA's and small to medium (S2M) orgs. S2M is all about innovation and on-the-ground connections. They are agile and lean. Bigger orgs have capacity to up-scale projects and provide additional resources, venue, staff etc. Collaboration between these two is essential for the health of sector. Resource-sharing from MPAs to S2M is essential. Perhaps KPIs around partnerships and collaborations, as well as sector development (mentoring, paid internships etc) should be introduced to funded MPAs to ensure a fairer dissemination of public funds across the sector.

Some big issues we don't talk enough about in the cultural industries are bullying, harassment and burnout, which are often present at the same time in toxic cultures. Publicly funded organisations should be held to account for these sorts of behaviours. I want to reference the incredible work of Music NSW and other orgs in establishing the [Contemporary Music Industry Review into Sexual Harassment and Systemic Discrimination](#). We need more such opportunities to speak up. We need reform to come from these. Could requiring publicly funded organisations to demonstrate their health by evaluating their internal culture and reporting on this publicly bring about swift and sustained change?

We need transparency in process in publicly funded orgs. We need more transparency and better peer review processes in grant making decisions (particularly at the state level in NSW).

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

I'd like to see *Ethics* embedded into policy. Accountability and transparency of publicly funded orgs and projects, especially MPAs, peak orgs and larger orgs is key. KPIs and quotas attached to funding for these orgs to ensure diverse representation in leadership roles in line with what is reflected in the demographic make-up of the areas they operate in is important. KPIs attached to funding that require reporting into the internal health of orgs – measured by mechanisms such as Board evaluations, organisational cultural reviews - could be circuit breakers for the all too pervasive toxic cultures that exist in the sector. The systemic problems facing the arts: overwork, burnout, unsafe environments, harassment and bullying, are all serious issues that need addressing in policy.