

21 August 2022

## National Cultural Policy Submission

Guildhouse is a not-for-profit arts organisation.

Initially formed as the Craft Association of South Australia in 1966, Guildhouse has supported a thriving visual arts, craft and design ecology through working directly with practitioners to develop their practice and work with ambition. With a clear focus on creating opportunities for artists and leading sector development, Guildhouse engages and supports artists with creative and career development programs such as residencies, mentorships, one-on-one advice, tailored business skill development, network development and opportunities to create new work. We have a growing membership across diverse areas of contemporary visual arts practice at all career stages, as well as arts organisations, businesses and guilds.

Over the last two decades we have evolved to support and advocate for the breadth of visual art, craft and design practice – working with just as many visual artists as craft practitioners throughout South Australia and beyond. We are aligned with the ACDC organisation network, but also with contemporary visual art practice and recognise the vital inter-relationships with regional arts organisations, education institutions, major collecting institutions and the myriad of arts organisations that exist within local government contexts.

We are a small organisation with a rich 56-year history that operates within the hard working and under resourced 'small to medium' category of the Australian arts landscape. Our team of 9 staff (full time equivalent to 7.1 FTE) punches well above its weight in terms of breadth of initiatives, reach and artist engagement. In 2021, we provided more than 4,000 discrete services/support/advice to more than 1200 individual practitioners.

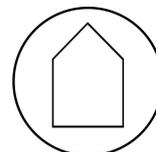
Over the past five years, we have consistently contributed between 76-85% of our expenditure on employing artists, craftspeople and arts workers. We have developed a diversified business model, with a growing network of philanthropic supporters and a burgeoning social enterprise that is creating new forms of revenue for artists and the broader creative industries. Income from membership and our social enterprise, together with philanthropy, comprises the majority of our revenue. We receive important support from state and local government, about a third of our total income.

What have we seen and heard from our growing community of artists? Our role as connector, supporter and advocate is vital to ensuring independent practice can continue to flourish. Reduced funding through Australia Council for organisations and independent artists combined with significant changes to the VET and higher education sector, less esteem for artistic practice across our country and a global health pandemic have left artists feeling more isolated, uncertain of their future and more financially vulnerable than ever before.

### **Pillar 1: First Nations**

We are committed to recognising that we operate on unceded Aboriginal land, and that to honour the breadth of culture and artistic capability of this country, we must first acknowledge and reconcile that this was, and always will be Aboriginal country.

Guildhouse has made an active and purposeful commitment to engaging with and supporting First Nations artistic practice through working in partnership with First Nations led organisations, developing tailored professional development and artistic programs, but most importantly, building trust and visibility



with First Nations artists and communities. This takes time and necessarily so. We seek the ongoing advice of First Nations artists and Elders through our Artist Advisory Group and other mechanisms. We recognise that there is a lot to be done and have made a dedicated commitment to increase meaningful participation in our programs and initiatives, embedded in our Cultural Equity framework and KPIs of our strategic plan.

One of the biggest challenges we face is the extensive, ongoing unpaid labour expected of First Nations' artists to guide and advise non First Nations organisations as to how to be more engaged and culturally appropriate. We consistently hear feedback that the sector needs to create new ongoing pathways for First Nations artists and cultural workers to lead the way.

We urge policy that addresses:

- Consultation frameworks that support and advocate for a sharing of the load, including paying First Nations artists and arts workers for their time and expertise, recognising that small and under-resourced organisations/independent artists may need to access funding to allow them to do so,
- The creation of new pathways for First Nations people to develop careers within the arts and cultural sector through ongoing funding for training and employment at all levels of the sector,
- Additional organisational funding to employ First Nations producer/curatorial staff in an ongoing capacity – to contribute to a redress of cultural representation in the broader art, craft and design sector, and importantly to create more opportunities to grow and meaningfully develop an ethically and sustainably employed First Nations workforce.

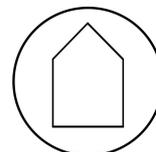
## **Pillar 2 - A place for every story**

Given the sustained and ongoing financial instability associated with arts practice, we must recognise the inherent inequity that exists in our sector. Those who can afford to maintain an ongoing arts practice is not reflective of the broadest Australian population. The Australia Council's Making Art Work longitudinal research study points to the sustained precarity of Australian artists' living wage, and this has absolute implications in the diversity of practitioners, the work that is being created, how it is being presented to and experienced by the Australian public.

Art and culture is a democratic right, something all Australians should be able to participate in and experience. Art belongs in galleries and museums, but it also belongs in the community, in our public spaces, our health and education contexts.

We advocate for:

- Greater alignment in policy between state and Commonwealth government to support bold initiatives across health, education, arts funding and research:
- 'Percentage for art' schemes for government and non government infrastructure/transport/property developments,
- Increased access to quality art education delivered by professional artists at all levels of education, across metro and regional environments. For example artists in residence at all Australian schools, and 'Arts Voucher' schemes where families can access a rebate on children's arts programs (as per some State sports programmes),
- Redress the closure of creative disciplines in TAFE campuses and the diminishment of arts education at universities,
- Redress the increasing costs of arts and humanities degrees at universities,



- Investment in clustered 'centres of excellence' that foster skill development, experimentation, collaboration and sharing of knowledge.
- Support and champion arms length, peer assessed processes that ensure bold, inclusive and exploratory creative developments and research can flourish.

### **Pillar 3 - Centrality of the Artist**

Guildhouse is an organisation dedicated to advocating for and empowering artists to work sustainably. We argue for both the intrinsic and economic value that artists and the whole visual art, craft and design ecology add to Australian life. Artists are embedded in our governance, leadership and operations, and this mindset is key to the way we think and act as an organisation.

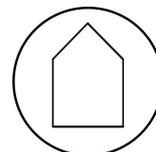
We need to redress the increasingly precarious conditions in which artists work, with average incomes remaining below the poverty line since research studies in this area began four decades ago. The arts ecology, including artists themselves, are 'economically generative,' with some 50,000 practising professional artists and 600,000 artswomen in Australia, each artist is responsible for the creation of a dozen additional jobs. (citing Esther Anatolitis, Arts Hub 2 August 2022).

If we want a culturally rich community, Australia must address the workplace protections artists and arts workers need.

In recent research Guildhouse commissioned with the University of South Australia to investigate the impact of mentorships on artistic career development, we unearthed some interesting insights into what could be achieved with a Universal Basic Income for artists. Our study, which took place throughout 2019-21, found that for many artists who were able to access Job Keeper during COVID-19, Job Keeper became an almost substitute UBI, providing basic but vital financial support to support creative and business development and collaborations with other artists.

We advocate for:

- Artists being seen and valued as workers,
- Artist's Intellectual Protections and Copyright being upheld,
- Artists being paid as per a national, sector endorsed Code of Practice,
- Industrial reform that gives the Fair Work Commission powers to set minimum standards for artists and art workers and address "employee-like" forms of work,
- Arts practice being recognised by Centrelink as a valid form of work, including through the new points system,
- Portable entitlements, recognising that the majority of artists and arts workers are not employed in secure, ongoing work, which minimises their access to entitlements and often leads to low, or no, superannuation to support retirement,
- Exploration of an UBI model for independent artists, including visual artists and craftspeople,
- An increase in funding available through the Australia Council to support individual artists, particularly for Projects, Fellowship and Professional Development grants and for the purchase of specialised studio equipment, which can be a significant issue for artists working in material specific disciplines.



## **Pillar 4- Strong Institutions**

The robustness of our arts and culture sector is reflective of the collective strength and diversity of our ecology. From artist run initiatives, education providers, local government run community spaces through to our major institutions, our creatives and our audiences need it all.

Guildhouse is at the 'smaller' end of small-to-medium organisations, and like most of our counterparts across the country, we do a great deal. The needs we are seeking to address are vast and we often find ourselves stretched very thin. The loss of core funding from the Australia Council in 2016 had a significant impact on our capacity and took us the best part of five years of absolute grit and drive to build back up. The consequence of a decade of challenging policy for artists and COVID-19, demand for our services and support continues to rise.

We partner with other organisations to deliver almost every initiative/program we offer. By collaborating we leverage collective strengths, amplify outcomes and reach, and build the interconnectedness of our sector – for us as organisations but most importantly for artists. But this also takes work and considerable energy. If the entire ecology is only just 'hanging on' how can we be ambitious, visionary and truly supportive of the independent practitioners that are working under even more unstable conditions?

An environment of secure, sustainable and ongoing funding will create a strong foundation for future growth, stability for long term planning and cooperation and more certain career pathways for artists and arts workers in the sector.

We support:

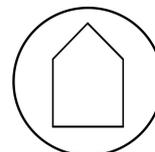
- an increase in funding to the Australia Council to enable core multi-year funding to more organisations in the visual art, craft and design sector,
- Coordination between Commonwealth, state and local government arts and creative industries funding to maximise impact and minimise the burden of administration,
- A redress of significant funding cuts and downsizing in arts and humanities higher education offerings in metropolitan and regional Australia,
- Strategic incentives to encourage a culture and practice of philanthropy in Australia
- A more holistic understanding and funding support for the breadth of organisations and entities that underpins excellence in Australia's visual art, craft and design sector, including initiatives that specifically nurtures collaboration between organisations and artforms.

## **Pillar 5 - Reaching the audience.**

We are deeply committed to building the profile, reach and visibility of the diversity and strength of Australian artists and their work, and assisting them to connect with audiences.

Access to art and culture should be a basic right for all, as enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is necessary then, that art and culture is treated as essential and embedded across Government, and not just restricted to arts policy.

For example, the Arts (and Creative Industries) should be included the Department of Industry, Science and Resources' industry growth sectors and therefore able to access important sector development initiatives. Increasing Australian screen and film content quotas for streaming services will indirectly benefit visual artists, craftspeople and designers as there are many intersections of practice and skills. Likewise, increased support for the ABC and SBS is vital for a healthy, diversified cultural offering for



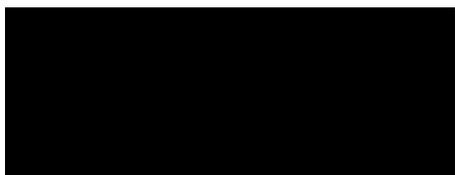
audiences and creators. In addition, we want our diplomatic representatives to feel more confident in putting Australian art and culture at the forefront of our international diplomatic engagement.

We support policy that addresses:

- Supporting artists to reach national and international audiences. Touring grants, international residencies, support for significant costs associated with travel and transporting works and insurance,
- more independent journalism to support broader writing and dissemination about important work and ideas being created across our country,
- Deepening local engagement alongside touring exhibitions with programs that connect with schools, businesses and local artistic communities, building connection, skills and participation,
- New funding to support increased arts and cultural activity in health, education and community contexts,
- Greater recognition and visibility of the importance of arts and culture to Australians.

I give my permission to have this submission published online and words attributed to me.

Yours sincerely,



**Guildhouse**

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