

National Cultural Policy Submission

Salamanca Arts Centre

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:

First Nations

Australia is a very large country in terms of its geographical reach. The reality is that many Australians may travel overseas before discovering all that our own country has to offer. In many ways discovering what our own country has to offer is all but impossible because of the sheer size of the country, and the remote and dispersed nature of the spread of our national population. To categorise as 'First Nations' the subtle but intrinsic local nuances that different Indigenous groups have from one another is to risk misrepresenting the opportunity that this Policy Priority offers. The issues that Tasmanian Aboriginal people might build into the art will likely be different from the issues that indigenous peoples living in challenging remote communities might build into their art, and in fact those two groups may never meet, let alone seek to collaborate on arts projects. Urban audiences will usually engage with urban indigenous artists so there is an opportunity for indigenous artists from across the nation to travel and meet and begin to engage in collaborations that not only inform one group about the other, but can begin to build a national body of works that rise from indigenous artistic collaboration right across the nation; from Tasmania to the far north west of Australia, from remote central communities to urban audiences. This could be a wonderful whole of nation project that begins to more effectively speak to the diversity of arts practices across and within Australia's indigenous artists.

Practical solution: A national program that supports indigenous artists from across the country to travel to and spend time with other indigenous groups to learn and share their respective artistic traditions of music, visual art, performance and storytelling.

A Place for Every Story

Imagine a 'National Story Project'!! This has the potential to be one of the most important priorities and satisfying achievements to come out of a national cultural policy. Too often labels are applied to individuals because, at first meeting, they present as 'typical' of a group. A Place for Every Story recognises the value and place of an individual within a nation or a town or a demographic group, and can begin to peel away those labels that are too readily applied by others. When we get to know someone, we can begin to understand them; we begin to see their humanity and what we share with them. A Place for Every Story takes a humanist approach, and offers the opportunity to establish, as its integral belief, that as people accumulate experiences, as they live their lives, those experiences have the potential to be inspiring stories about all the ingredients of a life well-lived; of the challenges, successes, loves and losses that are a part of everyone's lives.

Not everyone is a natural story-teller, but many people have stories worth telling. I can imagine a national program that enables Australians, regardless of who they are or where they live, to be able to tell their story, whether it be in print or in pictures, by video; whether it's to a national audience or to their own family or community; a successful national cultural policy ought to have a place for every story.

Practical Solution: A program of support that is administered through state and local libraries and arts organisations that invites all those who wish to tell or write their story to gain insights to the elements of successful story-telling, and to be able to publish / share those stories via digital or print means, and where those books are held for public loan by libraries across the country. Ref to [The People's Library](#) project (2018).

The Centrality of the Artist

The place of the artist in the [Artist → Art → Audience → Art → Artist] equation is critical to the success of those relationships. The centrality of the artist in the creation of works is as obvious as it is integral, and the centrality of the artist in Australia's continuing development of our arts cannon is unquestionable. If Australia is serious about being taken seriously as a nation that supports its artists to make the best art possible - art that is taken seriously around the globe - then a national arts policy needs to include clear strategies to enable that to be achieved. Great art takes time to create; what an audience sees on the stage on opening night can be the manifestation of many years' hard work behind the scenes, with many changes, corrections, improvements. If artists run on passion and commitment, it doesn't mean that their passion and commitment should be exploited. A national cultural policy needs to allow for a number of artist support programs that take a longer-term view, and allow for experimentation and failure, which is intrinsic to experimentation, and for revision, and correction and improvement. One of the best

testing grounds of a work in on the stage in front on an audience. The centrality of the artist needs to be recognised in a National Arts Policy in ways that acknowledge and allow the arts sector's combined skills, resources and infrastructure to support creative development and for that to be tested without having to rely on box office to make it happen or to be seen prematurely as a measure of success or failure. The Australian Taxation system is a nimble and finely tuned mechanism that can be calibrated to increase or slow particular streams of economic activity. The Tax deduction incentives of past decades have helped encourage private investment in a range of industries, including the wine industry, forest plantation, and the Australian film industry. Private investment, via tax incentives, also is a way of funding the arts in a more efficient model; it cuts out the 'middle-man' such as the Australia Council, so public funds do not have to be funnelled via the Australia Council, losing much of their buying power along the way, through the costs associated with administering those public funds.

Practical Solution: To recognise the centrality of the artist there needs to be a broad set of arrangements in place that allow the private sector to invest directly in those artists or arts forms that they choose to support. This lets society choose to support what is important to them. This will also provide important evidence-based data on where the private sector's and individual's interests lie within and across the arts. A register of artists can be established by the ATO (as they are now via various state and federal arts agencies, and just as there is a register of 'peers') and once on that register, a private citizen can choose to invest in that artist (in the way patrons have over centuries) and the patron receives a tax deduction equal to 200% of their investment. The prima face response is that tax revenue is lost via such a transaction, but a more considered response is that as recipient of those funds, the artist, pays tax on what they receive. The next response might be that the patron and the recipient are in different tax brackets. But a more considered response is that the government saves more money by not having to fund Government funding agencies as much (and where well less than 100% of each public dollar would have been received by the artist anyway).

Strong Institutions

A realistic and practical national cultural policy needs to recognise the vast differences between jurisdictions; that what is important to artists and audiences in one state or region varies vastly across the country. For all the good work that the Australia Council does, it is widely accepted that it does not work for all artists or all arts organisations; being based in Sydney it simply cannot be expected to understand the different nuances, priorities and peculiarities of artists and audiences across the country. As laudable as the Peer Assessment concept is, we all know even that has its inherent biases and prejudices and failings. A National Cultural Policy

needs to recognise the enormity of Australia's broad arts priorities, and that they vary across the country; from state to state and region to region. A National Cultural Policy also needs to recognise that small to medium arts organisations know their business and their markets very well. They also have arrived at a very lean and efficient operating model. Salaries of arts administrators in small to medium arts organisation are nothing like those paid to the staff in the Australia Council. There is a clear and compelling argument to direct greater funds to the small and medium arts organisations because they are set up to deliver services and support to artists and arts groups in their jurisdiction that facilitate the best connections between artist and audience in a more efficient business manner.

RISE provided a great service to so many artists and arts organisations over the past couple of years, and these funds were offered in a way that it made it clear what the funding aims was and the assessment criteria. One of the best aspects of RISE funding was that it was about the art and not only about the artist.

It has to be recognised that arts funding will also be seen by some as a waste of public funds; whether that is funding from the Australia Council or via the Federal Ministry. It should also be recognised that the Federal Office of the Arts successfully administers the Live Music Fund, Festivals Australia, Playing Australia and other programs of funding support that have and continue to support a diverse array of arts projects across the Country. I encourage the Federal Government to retain RISE funding in some form or other, that supports artists and arts organisations in way that the Australia Council does not; The best model are two parallel funding streams.

Practical Solution: Establish two parallel an on-going arts funding streams that recognise the different needs and aims of each: one via the Australia Council and one via the Commonwealth Office of the Arts. Establish models of funding that reflect international, national, state-wide and local reach; and that enable small to medium arts organisations to have the capacity to take the local to an international stage; that provides five to seven-year funding assurance, that recognises that small to medium arts organisations operate more efficiently than larger funding agencies and hence are able to deliver a greater percentage of their cash and other resources to artists' fees and direct production costs, rather than on administration and non-arts project expenses.

Reaching the Audience

This is the most important part of a National Cultural Policy, because it is with their audiences that artists are seeking to communicate via the presentation of their art. Whilst creative development support the artists and the centrality of the artist, reaching the audience requires actions and behaviour that recognises where our audiences are in their life (geographically and temporally) and the obligation to take the art to them.

Despite what is assumed, it is not an artist's role to educate audiences, or to preach to audiences, or to feel any duty to 'bring the audience with the artist'. Audiences are educated. Audiences are intelligent. Audiences are discerning, and if the audience is unmoved by art, it may speak to a weakness in the art, rather than of any failing of the audience.

Reaching the Audience is the correct description; it places the onus on the artist to reach the audience, not the other way round. Of course there are many artists who choose to adopt a 'take it or leave' approach and that entirely valid; it's their prerogative to do so.

There are recent research findings that suggest audiences are feeling increasingly alienated by contemporary arts; that they feel the arts are not for them. This is most alarming! How has it come to be, that when art is more accessible in terms of who it claims to want to reach, when it is more accessible in terms of the physical spaces and places that art is installed, when it is more accessible in terms of the quantity of art that exists in publicly accessible spaces. This suggests there exists assumptions made by artists or curators or producers or worse still, a degree of disingenuity about what funding agencies, curators and producers say about their audiences and that way they are treated in practical terms.

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:

The Centrality of the Artist

The best relationships are achieved when people get to know each other. The importance of the local in being able to best place the artist as central in the creative development of new works cannot be underestimated. To be able to arrange resources so that Centrality of the Artist can be achieved requires a strong infrastructure, one that pucks up all the various other important components in creative development. It needs to be recognised that in many creative development of new or existing art works, there is more than one artist. To manage the Centrality of the Artist requires experience, art-form knowledge, personal skills, which need to come from those institutions that support artists. Strong Institutions are the conduit between The Centrality of the Artist and Reaching the Audience.

Strong Institutions

Small to Medium Arts Organisations comprise an efficient and effective network that supports artists, facilitates the creation and delivery of new and existing Australian art

works and productions, and is the agent between artist and audience. Strong institutions act on behalf of a broad range of stakeholders; of all levels of government, funding agencies, artists, audiences; and with greater and proper assurance of arts funding are one of the smartest mechanisms available to levels of government to give life to a national cultural policy. When Government properly support practical ways to have strong institutions, the result is broader and deeper arts activities at local levels, that are able to best respond to the aims and needs of artists and the tastes and preferences of local audiences. Strong Institutions are the conduit between The Centrality of the Artist and Reaching the Audience.

Reaching the Audience

Understanding our audiences is paramount to being able to deliver art that is relevant to them. Reaching the Audience goes hand in hand with one of the benefits of having strong institutions. The capacity to get to know one's audiences; their preferences, what is relevant to them; how diverse their tastes and expectations are; are all necessary to successfully facilitating meaningful exchanges between artist and their audiences. Strong Institutions are the conduit between The Centrality of the Artist and Reaching the Audience