

# National Cultural Policy Submission

## Art Monthly Australasia

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

As a non-profit visual arts magazine housed at (but not funded by) the Australian National University in Canberra, *Art Monthly Australasia (AMA)* has consistently championed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to a mixed academic and general readership in Australia and beyond since 1987: the very first cover featured an Indigenous artwork; the 1990s saw a series of seminal Aboriginal art supplements; and, more recently, the magazine has supported and mentored First Nations art writers by sponsoring the annual Art Association of Australia and New Zealand's writing award for an Indigenous Australian, and by launching a two-year 'Indigenous Voices' mentorship program that is currently underway. In September 2022, led by AMA's First Nations Board member Erin Vink, the magazine published its first edition entirely written and edited by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in response to 50 years of the Tent Embassy and employing, for the first time, a specially developed First Nations style guide. With this long history of ethical engagement and by currently helping empower a new generation of First Nations writers and editors, *AMA* is particularly well placed to foster further groundbreaking visual arts publishing from a First Nations perspective and to disseminate this publishing (in print and online) to an engaged and general readership both in Australia and overseas, including bringing a Ngunnawal/Ngambri Elder onto the Board. *AMA's* capacity to do this, however, is based on its continuing ability to lead from its Board of national visual arts peers and small part-time staff, and to sustain itself financially on mainly sales and advertising revenue based on readership and supported by a decreased portion of Government funding. Unfortunately, *AMA* was one of three important visual arts publications that lost their multiyear organisation funding from the Australia Council in 2019 (while continuing to receive a very small amount of VACS funding until 2024). To keep its First Nations-led art publishing program going, the magazine has successfully moved to a quarterly print program and more dynamic online platform, and is now actively seeking alternative funding sources, including from artsACT and private philanthropy, with its future beyond late 2023 not assured.

### A Place for Every Story

As one of the few remaining and active national visual arts publications following progressive cuts to the Australia Council, and the only one based in the ACT, *AMA* has actively championed writers as part of its ongoing mission to elevate the visual arts within the wider national and international arts community, with the launch of a series of partnered writing programs that in the past decade have included: an essay competition with MPavilion and essay series with both the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation and White Rabbit; writing mentorship programs with ANCA and ACT Writers; along with the ongoing two-year 'Indigenous Voices' program that received Australia Council project funding in 2020. *AMA's* capacity to continue delivering these innovative writing programs and the nurturing of new writers who are absolutely critical to the future appreciation of the visual arts in Australia, is again predicated on the magazine's future sustainability as a non-profit arts organisation and its ability to grow audiences/readers/advertisers and Government funding.

**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**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and their art have been central to our magazine since it was established in 1987 (please see above), being the cultural catalysts for Australia's most compelling and authentic visual arts narrative – this is the story *AMA* has long sought to tell, enriched and complemented by an understanding of western art history.

### **A Place for Every Story**

Led by a national Board of visual arts peers, and a series of distinguished editors crossing different states and territories, including Peter Timms, Deborah Clark and currently Michael Fitzgerald, *AMA*'s monthly and now quarterly and online coverage has been informed by a rigorous sense of history, independence and criticality, that has privileged a multiplicity of artistic and writerly voices, new and established, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with a particular sensitivity to cultural difference, and the unique and meaningful context provided by Australia's Indo-Pacific region.

### **The Centrality of the Artist**

*AMA* is nothing without Australia's artists whose work it has been the magazine's particular privilege to champion for 35 years, with regular commissioned texts that seek to individually champion, as well as generating a wider and enveloping critical discourse around practices and collective cultural moments that live on as an invaluable public record of appreciation and achievement. Artists have also taken a leadership role at Board level since 1987, including current member Julie Fragar.

### **Strong Institutions**

A strong and transparent governance has characterised *AMA*'s long history, with an active national Board of visual arts peers helping the magazine navigate through recent challenging times, including the loss of Australia Council multiyear funding and the economic impacts of the pandemic, with the recent adoption of a quarterly print schedule demonstrating the magazine's cultural resilience and ability to change.

### **Reaching the Audience**

In recent years, *AMA* has sought new audiences by looking beyond its printed magazine format to develop a more dynamic online presence, with an increasingly interactive website and social media that has attracted 47,600 Instagram followers, and 60,000 website visitors in 2022 alone. In addition, *AMA* has strategically partnered with biennales and art fairs, from Sydney to Singapore, to expose the publication and the Australian artists and writers that it critically champions to new and engaged audiences here and overseas.

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

As a National Cultural Policy is itself a written articulation of the importance of the arts in the life of a nation, it would be especially valuable to arts publishers such as *AMA* for the policy to acknowledge the vital importance of written discourse to the vibrancy of the arts – not as something added on or seen as an afterthought, but integral in terms of the nation's cultural production, and that in its absence, the visual arts is fundamentally diminished without the critical context that independent art publishing, whether in print or online, can uniquely provide.