

National Cultural Policy Submission

FORM Dance Projects

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-indigenous small to medium organisation, our capacity to engage First Nations artists and artworkers is constrained by a lack of resources, but not only. Small organisations have neither the time nor the resources to train or add-on new recruits to an already overworked and underpaid small number of staff (2.6). Paid traineeships, subsidised culturally safe courses in all aspects of production and arts administration, would facilitate recruitment. To achieve positive collaboration outcomes, organisations need time, capacity to take risks and adapt that are not always compatible with current frameworks of funding where outcomes often need to be predetermined and deadlines are paramount. Obstacles for first nations artists and artworkers are compounded by the general poor state of support for the performing arts. As an example, we have the opportunity to publish a First Nations Award winning dance artist's writings, offering unique critical dance discourse from a First Nations point of view. There is no publisher for the performing arts we can find to support the publishing of such a book.

A Place for Every Story

Ours is of Western Sydney, based in Parramatta, and the tremendous opportunity the diversity of cultures living in this place offers to create Australian narratives in a unique context. To quote a Western Sydney artist recently interviewed, our role is to bring to light an "unspoken mutual voice of resilience" as a result of migration, displacement, low economical social background. This voice is young and emerging. How do we ensure it receives the support it needs to thrive? We are witnessing a generational change that requires an enlargement of resources to accommodate the old alongside the new, the many versus the dominant. We cannot reflect our diversity in a context of shrinking resources as has been the case for more than a decade.

The Centrality of the Artist

The artist's voice is what inspires, informs, interrogates our relationship to the world, how can it not be central? For their voice to be heard, artists ought to be supported and given the living standards that anyone deserves...and more! Artists should not be just paid when they are in the rehearsal studio or in the theatre, provided they are granted the odd and rare successful funding application. The artistic process is continuous, in conversations, solitary research, writing, reading, consulting...How many unpaid hours in writing grants, meeting with producers, advising peers and younger artists, etc. Like unpaid domestic work, when will we finally acknowledge and reward the invisible work of those without whom our life would not be liveable. A scheme ensuring a Universal Basic Income would not only support the artists, but also the organisations that support them, their families, the vast majority of us whose lives are enriched by the artistic experience, who isn't?

Strong Institutions

We acknowledge the importance of a sound arts ecology by giving equal attention to independent artists, producers, small to medium organisations, larger companies and funding bodies. A strong "institution" alone will not survive. But without strong funding bodies acting with integrity (at Minister's arms' length not the opposite), the sector will keep drying out. How many artists have left the field after years of neglect, compounded by two years of pandemic? The slashing of Australia Council funds by Brandis is still felt across the sector, we haven't recovered from the slaughter. We

are crying out for better local-State-Federal efficiencies, and guarantees of multiyear commitments that allow the time and security for driving innovative thinking, building strong connections with our communities, and enabling the creative process to flourish. Where are the Dance Institutions comparable to Art Galleries, places of memory, collection, curation, exhibition/presentation, education and publishing dedicated to dance, an art form as old as human history?

Reaching the Audience

You drink the water you are offered when you are thirsty. If the majority of performances in theatres are music or theatre based, then audiences will keep coming for these. How many times and for how long do we have to hear that “dance doesn’t sell”, therefore isn’t programmed in our theatres. It’s a vicious circle of invisibility and ignorance. In addition to dance dedicated venues, there should be a dance quota as part of the programming of every subsidised venue/presenter. The demise of Mobile States has been a blow for the touring of contemporary performance. Seasons are short and rarely given a chance to be repeated elsewhere. The waste of financial and creative resources is immense. Dedicated touring/remounting schemes for independent dance productions to reach out more audiences and extend the life of works beyond their premiere season would be a good place to start, whilst dance producers are so rare.

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

We curate, produce, present dance on the unceded lands of the Burratamagal people of the Dharug Nation. Engaging with First Nations isn’t just a matter of how many seasons by Indigenous artists we present, how many Indigenous artists or art workers we engage, although that is front and centre of our objectives and challenges are ongoing, what matters is to recognise that unless First Nations arts and culture are prevalent and guided by self determination, we will not succeed with the above. First Nations people are the whole, not a percentage or fraction. Engaging with First Nations artists is a process of collaboration, that requires space and time and adequate resources to allow cultural consultation and we currently lack all. Dharug people still do not have a permanent space for culture in Parramatta.

A Place for Every Story

Diversity and inclusivity are core values of FORM. The City of Parramatta population forecast for 2022 is 283,339, and is forecast to grow to 469,247 by 2041, a growth of 65.61%. More than 140 languages are spoken in the LGA. Unless resources for organisations such as ours follow the same pace of growth, our capacity to reflect the diversity of our community will be diminished.

The Centrality of the Artist

Our strategic goals are to represent, support and advocate for Australian independent dancers and choreographers, as well as create performance opportunities and career pathways for artists at all stage of their career in Western Sydney and beyond. The artist is at the centre of everything we do.

Strong Institutions

Over the past twelve years, FORM’s studio space story resembles an Agatha Christie crime story, from 5 studios, there were 4, then 3, then 2, then 1, then almost none. The promise of a hub for dance in Parramatta is just that and has been for too many years for lack of local-State and Federal coordination. Meanwhile the gap between Sydney and Western Sydney in dance infrastructure keeps widening. Let’s be ambitious, imagine a Strong Dance Institution for dance in Parramatta. At a minimum, a dedicated studio space and black box presentation space doesn’t seem too much of a

big ask for an organisation which has fostered dance in Western Sydney for more than 20 years. Without space, there is no dance practice.

Reaching the Audience

Without an audience, there is no work. Dance is known for its ephemeral nature, it is to be experienced in the Here and Now. Having an audience makes artistic, societal, economical sense. Yet, we cannot do this on our own. Reaching audiences is a complex alliance of trusted relationships supported by connected infrastructure. As it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a collective effort of artist/producer/presenter/venue/city infrastructure/institutional partnerships to bring an audience to the theatre. The pandemic has shattered the trust. It will take years to rebuild. Artists ought to be invited at City planning tables, paid to be in residence in schools to build the next generation of audiences, paid to collaborate across sectors of health and sciences. The audience will only grow if artists can be present in every aspect of our lives.

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

Restore and grow the space of arts in education as a priority!