

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted:

On behalf of a for-profit arts business

As an artist

As an individual

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

The culture of First Nations people across Australia are central to the story of this land. The First Nations artists and their communities need to be supported to continue to express their culture through art, dance, story and to strengthen the cultural practices that keep the culture alive, connected to the past and moving forward. Ensuring that this movement is First Nations led is vital. As with First Nations communities all over the world, the arts are part of everyday life and this needs to be supported alongside the celebration of excellence.

A Place for Every Story

Every place has a story – and of course has a story from the First Nations communities who existed in any place prior to the rest of the diverse communities who also call Australia home. These layers of stories must be acknowledge at all time.

The diversity of the Australian community must have a voice expressed through the arts. It is important that this is supported through our education system, through our arts organisations and through community activity at a local level. Sharing story is an important vehicle for community cohesion and understanding of difference (and similarity). Stories told through all arts mediums reach the heart of the community. This can be supported through local government programs as well as other not for profit community organisations. Ensuring that these organisations are able to access arts funding is important. So often, organisations that have a focus on other elements of life miss out on funding to use arts as a delivery vehicle, yet there are thousands of studies proving the power of the arts to bring people together, share skills, connect to the places in which they live, and express their concerns, solve problems and share their aspirations.

We have such a focus of aiming for excellence and separating the arts from our everyday life, that many people feel it is not for them. How many of us working in the arts regularly hear, “*I wish I was an artist, I’m just not creative*”. We remove the syllabus of arts from our schools at an early age, unless we are aiming for excellence.

I have been a member of a community group that has produced a weekly, live to air radio show on 3D community radio in South Australia, called the Hillbilly Hoot. Performers of all musical abilities, ages, and walks of life present songs and music to a small audience in the park in which we meet and to the radio audience that is now streamed globally. The sense of community and the joy that it brings the performers and the audience has sustained us all, every Monday night, for over 25 years. Sometimes is sounds magnificent and sometimes pretty awful but the ethos is that everyone gets to participate. It’s the music and the making of music and community that brings up together.

As a community cultural development worker, as a practitioner and as a local government arts worker, I have been very interested in the research on the benefits of participating in the arts to people's physical and mental wellbeing. The research is compelling:

- People who regularly get a 'dose' of arts have lower anxiety and are less subject to depression.
- Attendance at cultural events has been found to significantly reduce diastolic blood pressure in participants.
- Singing improves mood and cognitive stimulation.
- Those who read for pleasure are more likely to report good health.
- Engaging in artistic, craft and social activities in both midlife and late life reduces the risk of dementia.
- Listening to favourite music and stories can significantly decrease post-surgical pain in children undergoing major surgery.
- Children who engage in arts build resilience and self-esteem.
- Creativity and creative problem-solving skills are developed significantly through arts involvement.
- Participation in arts activities builds a shared sense of community identity.
- Arts and culture based activity addresses broader social concerns beyond local belonging or identity, including the integration of migrants, impacts of gentrification, the restructuring of rural economies and a fear of constant change and insecurity.

Pro-actively building strong connections between our arts and health sectors can help address the struggles we are facing in the health sector as well as preventing health problems developing.

References to the studies finding the data above are available on request.

The Centrality of the Artist

This is an important theme. Ensuring that arts education is valued and improved is vital. Tertiary arts education has faced the razor or been made to be seen not vocationally driven. This must change to ensure we continue to foster the development of our artists.

While there are numerous studies showing the value to the broader employment sector of an arts educated employee, many of these people are working in other industries because it is difficult to make a living wage in the arts. Some of this is due to the episodic nature of the income generating parts of an artist's life – the exhibition where sales can be made, the theatre production, the sale of music CDs, the release of a novel for example. But what of the time taken to produce these works? – the practicing of the skills in making art, the yoga classes an actor attends to tune their body as an instrument, the dreaming and visioning and research that all artist's do to develop their ideas. To ensure we have a range of artistic expression we also need to value the process, not just the product.

A basic income program would ensure that artists are able to make art as a profession and not as often a part time activity supported by part-time work in other industries. This would also extend to other worker entitlements such as sick leave, long service leave and the capacity to build their own superannuation on a regular basis.

Strong Institutions

Ensuring that all communities have places where they can experience and participate in the arts is important. Funding for regional communities to develop arts facilities is important.

The cost of attending many of the established arts institutions is prohibitive to the general population. An opportunity could be to reintroduce the arts/business philanthropic approach to assist in subsidising access to the larger institutions that are expensive to operate both from a programming perspective and to maintain the buildings that they are housed in.

Reaching the Audience

There are many ways to do this:

- Improving arts education
- Embedding arts into everyday life
- Influencing media to tell good news arts stories more (image arts pages like we have sports pages...it's not like there isn't the material to fill it).
- Telling the stories of all of the community through arts
- Subsidies to attend arts activities so it is not just the privileged audiences that get to attend.

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

- Firstly, congratulations to the Labor Government in working towards reinstating a National Cultural Policy. It has been a long time coming and this process is a statement of value which is much appreciated.
- It would be great to see a national measurement tool developed that looks at the cultural, social, and economic outcomes. Reinstating the ABS arts data collection would be a start. These measurement tools assists communities to make the case for how the arts has impacted on their lives and to attract further funding and support to continue.
- Starting to use the language of the value of arts in its intrinsic nature as well as health and wellbeing outcomes, social cohesion outcomes, education outcomes, etc. We do a lot of talk at present about the economic value of the arts and while this is also true we don't talk enough about the human value of a society that values arts for its own sake.

- Reinstating state based organisations that support community and cultural development. These organisations were such a support to both artist's working in this field and the communities that were looking to develop arts activities in their own communities. There has been a big hole left in the sector since they were defunded. Much of the support now comes from local government arts workers who in themselves are often underfunded or working as sole practitioners in local government organisations (large and small) and need the expertise of a broader sector based organisation to support their work.
- With all of the benefits of arts participation as highlighted above, the use of arts to assist communities to deal with the huge changes that will be coming, and are already coming due to the climate crisis is important. The benefit of using arts in recovery from the trauma from, what was once called, extraordinary climate events but which are now more common, is well documented. Ensuring that arts is used as a tool to prepare our communities for these changes and to be able to share the stories of this change, both the anxiety derived from it and the stories of survival and hope. Using the arts to regenerate the broader culture of society is one of the strongest ways we can face this global challenge.