

National Cultural Policy Submission

Montsalvat

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

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A Place for Every Story

Challenge: The 2020s are a time of increased use of digital technology and dozens of parallel art genres co-existing in the arts sector, as opposed to one dominant trend being expressed through mainstream cultural practice across society. This phenomenon means strands of cultural activity have greater competition than in previous decades; **niche funding and adequate funding to cope with more concurrently active genres is hard to find.** 'A Place for Every Story' typifies this problem; every creative voice is now valued, with equality amongst makers and producers much improved, even since 2013. The story of Montsalvat therefore competes in this environment and it must find ways to communicate effectively to a wide public despite its early twentieth century Eurocentric origins.

Opportunity: There is an opportunity for Montsalvat to **interpret its history** to the public and define its point of difference from peers, competitors and other stories in Victoria and Australia so that it remains relevant and reaches new audiences ready to learn about Montsalvat's core philosophies, artistic mode and key achievements. **Presenting a narrative to the public about Montsalvat is currently as important as the programs run by Montsalvat each year** which include exhibitions, concerts, festivals, open studios, artist demonstrations, tours, ceramic production and art education classes.

The place Montsalvat holds within the Australian cultural landscape is longstanding and powerful. It is currently at a crossroads in terms of how it manages its stories, programs, cultural assets and relationships. It deserves an authentic and careful interpretation of its history and achievements so that new chapters in its story can flow from a current generation of artists and audiences who engage with Montsalvat as a creative place.

The Centrality of the Artist

Challenge: The first artists who founded and built Montsalvat were born in the late 1800s. The next generation of artists to build on its then already **extraordinary legacy** were born in the 1920s. The children and grandchildren of these artists continue to input and impact the creative life of Montsalvat. In addition to this, hundreds of artists have lived and worked at Montsalvat which is laid out like a small village. Many of the structures built at Montsalvat are in a French Provincial and Tudor style of architecture and thus attract creative people who relate to traditional European cultural practice. The challenge is to work with artists from diverse communities in a way that is meaningful and contemporary.

Opportunity: There is an opportunity for Montsalvat to make much more of the presence of artists in its history and in its current Studio Program. Artists such as Kevin White, Simon Baigent, Shinobu Kobayashi, Amanda Grant and Susan Reddrop lease spaces at Montsalvat and interact with its people and programs. They form the key to a bright future at Montsalvat where public access to makers, their spaces and expertise is a highlight and unique in the district. **Recording the stories of senior artists and founding family members who helped shape Montsalvat is critical at this time** before a fourth generation of creatives can no longer hear the memories of elders in person. Making sure that practicing artists remain central to the operations of Montsalvat and that the creative vision of Montsalvat's founders is preserved is a way in which the concept of the centrality of the artist can support a sustainable arts entity into the 2030s.

Strong Institutions

Challenge

- Sound business development in non contemporary/non purpose built arts spaces including spaces that are heritage listed.
- The need for some Australian arts institutions to maintain property as well as presenting the arts.
- The pressure of initial expenditure by arts institutions to support operating costs and senior staff before creative projects are possible.

Opportunity

An opportunity exists for boards and governing groups to reconsider the land and space in which they operate and how this dictates the success of their products and programs. **Conscious co-location of arts businesses, artists and organisations such as at Victoria's Collingwood Yards is of key interest, particularly with carbon footprint management in mind.** Montsalvat has recently introduced the Australian Plant Society as an outdoor tenant and this may set a path for further such tenancies and partnerships, where lateral thinking about what sustains the arts secures an arts organisation's future.

Reaching the Audience

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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

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A Place for Every Story

The story of Montsalvat has captured the public's imagination for decades. Fascination grew as the site where Montsalvat is located developed through non traditional means and with **a workforce that represented counterculture.** Australian men and women have established, built, gathered, resided and made art at Montsalvat for almost ninety years. Their individual stories fed into the vision of Justus Jorgensen and the Skipper family who challenged cultural norms and created a place that was safe for artists to live freely and away from traditional lifestyles.

It remains important to preserve and protect the story of Montsalvat, its community, its founders and its contribution to the arts sector throughout major forces such as WWII, droughts, shifts in government and the rise of counterculture and social and political revolutions in the 1960s and 1970s. Significantly, Montsalvat has managed to provide continuity of cultural production and a place for creatives to reside despite multiple challenges including the recent global pandemic. **The work of Montsalvat is immense** and it is now a heritage listed site comprising three galleries, over nineteen studios, a ceramic centre, restaurant, chapel, open gardens and halls for large gatherings. Located in outer Melbourne and at the foot of the Yarra Ranges it forms a central part of the story of semi rural and rustic Victoria; it has become iconic in the region and **emblematic of 'green' philosophy before its time.**

The Centrality of the Artist

Montsalvat is Australia's oldest continuous artist colony, located in the north east of Melbourne in a 'green wedge' shire. Established in 1934 by artist and architect Justus Jorgensen and his wife Lily, Montsalvat went on to become a **home and source of inspiration for thousands of artists between the 1930s to the current day.** For example, artists, philosophers, writers, landscape architects, gardeners and gourmets gathered at Montsalvat to make work, discuss contemporary and historic ideology and sociology and also to assist in its development and operations. Resident and visiting artists would volunteer their time to help build new structures which ranged from mudstone halls, to mudbrick cottages and studio spaces. A forge was established by sculptor and jeweller Matcham Skipper, and Montsalvat became a place where younger artists learned artisan trades alongside their artistic practice and were able to contribute to an active community; building on the vision of founding members such as Justus and Lily Jorgensen, Mervyn and Lena Skipper and their descendants.

In the current day, over nineteen studios are occupied by practicing artists whose mediums range from ceramics to gold and silver smithing, tonal painting and cast glass. This means that the **voice of the artist** and creative people has been central to Montsalvat and its public presentation since its inception. **Life-long careers in the arts by Montsalvat studio artists and residents is common and a hallmark of its identity.** Supporters and Patrons of Montsalvat such as Phillip Adams AO and Morag Fraser AM also represent the creative industries. Visitors to Montsalvat seek out interactions with studio and resident artists and flagship events such as the annual arts festival are founded on an Open Studio program, whereby festival goers gain insight into how work is made and also the places in which work is produced. For example, established artist Susan Reddrop now operates her glass studio from Montsalvat's original foundry space, where she incorporates this historic environment into the workings of her contemporary practice.

Strong Institutions

Many arts organisations operate from rented premises and often feature one primary art form. Montsalvat owns its 12 acre property and has responsibility for protecting, conserving and maintaining heritage buildings and gardens whilst presenting a range of art forms, as well as providing **safe studio space for 22 artists** and teaching spaces for hundreds of students. In particular, expenditure can include the seeking of heritage permits and specialised tradespeople. Another major cost is insurance and Montsalvat incurs high premiums due to the range and age of its built structures plus diverse collection holdings.

By comparison, for organisations occupying rented property the landlord is responsible for maintaining the building. **To become a strong institution Montsalvat must achieve highly on multiple fronts** ranging from property management and business development to program

development and stakeholder liaison including with founding family members. **Now in its tenth decade of operations**, it requires huge focus to fulfill public and sector expectations of this unique Australian entity, often driven by lasting memories of Montsalvat before it became a treasured public entity serving up to 50,000 visitors per year.

Reaching the Audience

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

- Improved recognition that the suburbs of capital cities are places where the arts can thrive and which need investment due to growing populations and the transition of workforces from metropolis to city fringes and rural areas.
- Strategies for longstanding arts organisations to remain viable, valued and competitive amongst more newly established arts organisations using new technology in their programming.
- A strategy for ways to better recognise at a national level, significant Australian families who found public cultural organisations including museums, house museums and galleries in perpetuity.
- A mandate for all public museums and galleries to engage collaboratively with First Nation people for at least one aspect of programming or operations each calendar year.
- Funding allocation for business development by NFPs in the cultural sector with an emphasis on capacity building in retail and product development.
- Recognition that arts organisations such as Montsalvat develop and deliver a cultural program in the context of a heritage site and therefore face restrictions as to the extent of cultural programs and building upgrades
- Recognition that many arts organisations sustain significant operating costs; apart from covering the cost of accommodation (rented or owned), an established organisation must be able to employ a strong leadership team before it is possible to develop and present arts programs.