

Let Us All Be Artists

Culture is bigger than the arts. The arts are bigger than the arts industry. A cultural policy needs to be bigger than just a policy on the arts industry.

We support workers in the arts industry and support a policy that will advance their interests against neoliberalism in the arts industry.

Queensland Institute of Technology researchers found that in 2016 there were 593,840 persons employed in the creative economy (creative production and creative services).¹ The Australian Industry and Skills Committee research (AISC) found that from a high of approximately 51,400 persons employed in the creative and performing arts industry in 2019, that fell due to the Covid-19 pandemic to about 30,900 in 2020 but may rise to about 57,100 in 2024.²

But: More Australians don't make art in the arts industry.

Australia Council for the Arts research has found that:

In 2019, 9.3 million Australians created, produced or collaborated in the making of art, or 45% of the population aged 15 years and over – up from 32% in 2016. ... This includes individual and collective activities, creating things for oneself or to share with others, and community collaboration. It includes all expressions of creativity – participation in organised lessons or classes, hobbyists creating things for fun, and professional artists creating things to sell.³

Of the 9.3 million Australians who made art, there are fewer who work in the arts industry, or creative industries, or creative economy. If we focus only on the arts industry, creative industries, or creative economy then we exclude many of those in the arts who are not in the industry; we ignore what is happening to most of those who make and share art -- we will fail to understand the arts holistically.

There are also issues with how the arts industry is defined and how much money, accordingly, it actually generates for the economy. Justin O'Connor challenges a claim based on a paper by the Australian Government's Bureau of Communications and Arts Research (BCAR) that the Australian arts industry is a \$111 billion industry. He notes that the "\$111 billion figure from the BCAR is the total for 'cultural and creative activity', not industry, and certainly not the arts. After a more accurate definition of the arts industry, O'Connor claims the arts industry contributes \$14.7 billion, or less than 1% of Australian GDP.⁴

¹ <https://research.qut.edu.au/dmrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/03/Factsheet-2-Employment-by-sector-V5.pdf>

² <https://nationalindustryinsights.aisc.net.au/industries/arts-culture-entertainment-and-design>

³ Creating Our Future: Results of the National Participation in the Arts Survey, August 2020. Australia Council for the Arts, p. 132. <https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/creating-our-future>

⁴ Justin O'Connor, "Arts as Industry," June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3R2Yawn>

Yanis Varoufakis says that from a society with markets we have become a market society. He talks about the difference between exchange value and experiential value, where the former creates things to sell and make profit from -- that is, commodities -- while the latter is about goods that are valuable but not created for sale.⁵

The arts industry creates exchange value. The arts create both exchange and experiential value. And from the numbers revealed by the Australia Council, the arts appear to create much more experiential value than exchange value.

And that is good. Art is what makes us human. It is a human right. It is Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

*Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.*⁶

This approach to advocating for the arts may or may not be effective with our governments, even if the Australian Government is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and even if Australia played a prominent role in its inception.⁷

But one can hope. We need a National Cultural Policy also for those 9.3 million Australians.

Universal Basic Income

One concrete thing a National Cultural Policy can contain is a Universal Basic Income (UBI).

Calls for basic income or living wage schemes for artists and arts workers as an outcome of the pandemic must be welcomed and advanced, particularly because artists and arts workers as “people employed in the creative and cultural sector have been disproportionately affected by loss or reduction of employment, reduced income and the temporary and permanent closures resulting from the pandemic.”⁸

These schemes will not, however, support all who are part of the arts sector, or all communities who make art. The schemes are still conditional, though potentially more inclusive than the flawed JobKeeper scheme.

⁵ Yanis Varoufakis, *Talking to My Daughter: A brief history of Capitalism*, p. 37.

⁶ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁷ <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/publications/australia-and-universal-declaration-human-rights>

⁸ Sculpting a National Cultural Plan, <https://bit.ly/3Q0dF80>

Ireland's *Basic Income for the Arts* scheme for example, "requires artists, writers, dancers, theatre makers, filmmakers and authors to prove five years of creative practice and income, and/or membership to a professional organisation such as the Irish Writers Union" and excludes "hobbyists" and "'creative industry' types like graphic designers".⁹

UBI is unconditional support for everyone. UBI "provides all citizens of a country a small monthly or annual stipend, which each person receives regardless of their employment status, income, or any other qualifying factors." It has been debated, piloted, and UBI-like schemes adopted in different countries.¹⁰

David Pledger argues that UBI will be good not just for artists and that it is UBI's "whole-of-society approach that makes the UBI a meaningful proposition for addressing the financial discrimination that characterises our arts sector because, unlike many income support schemes, it includes all of us, all citizens."¹¹

Tiffany Lyndall-Knight, Equity Federal Vice-President, says that a "basic income scheme for artists and other workers in the gig industry would 'reset' the arts and benefit its workers significantly. Also, that UBI is "a strategy that will not only benefit artists. It will connect us with workers across all vulnerable sectors of the economy."¹²

Pledger makes the case for UBI as a way to free the artist from neoliberalism. He says "society has been dispossessed of art as a public good, as art has been turned into a privatised, monetised product" – UBI will provide of level of financial security that would allow artists to escape the so-called 'arts industry' which, for artists, is a mirage, a problematic construction driven by a comparatively well-paid, managerialist class that fetishizes the artist and cannibalises their need to create."¹³

Further, he says "the system is broken for artists and a new kind of thinking and doing needs to be created. Perhaps inevitably, a new kind of artist."¹⁴

If we imagine the arts as more than the arts industry, the arts as that which includes everyone who makes art, whether employed or not to do so, then we move away from the definition of artist as a captive of the arts industry, and see the artist as a citizen who makes art.

UBI will allow anyone to make art if they so choose. The new kind of artist is everyone.

Darwin Community Arts Inc, August 2022. mail@darwincommunityarts.org.au

⁹ Lauren Carroll Harris, "Australia could unleash a cultural renaissance by paying artists a living wage" <https://bit.ly/3JwVaFS>

¹⁰ "Countries That Have Tried Universal Basic Income 2022" <https://bit.ly/3Smhw0V>

¹¹ David Pledger, "The case for a Universal Basic Income: freeing artists from neo-liberalism" <https://bit.ly/3d7BUmm>

¹² Tiffany Lyndall-Knight, "Universal Basic Income – Could this be a solution?" <https://bit.ly/3zXMogN>

¹³ Pledger

¹⁴ Ibid.