

## NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY SUBMISSION 2022

The Australian Production Design Guild (APDG) is a national not-for-profit arts organisation that represents designers and their associates in screen, live performance, events and digital production across Australia. Our members include those who work in production design, set design, hair & make-up design, costume design, digital design, animation design, set decoration, art direction and many more areas of the live performance, screen, digital and events industries.

The APDG applauds *Creative Australia's* philosophy, aspirations, goals and strategies. This submission addresses the 5 pillars and is targeted to strategies and policies most relevant to our members. This submission may be attributed to the APDG and give permission for it to be published online.

The APDG supports the need for a comprehensive cultural and arts policy, *Creative Australia*. This policy will need to rebuild national commitment to culture and the arts, after a decade of instability, government neglect and undermining, and finally, exacerbated by the devastating effects of the pandemic.

The APDG understands the social and economic value of culture and the arts and endorse *Creative Australia's* economic rationale for support of the arts. We also endorse, and would like to see amplified, the tying of arts policy to other, non-economic national values such as community, diversity, social cohesion, equality of access and regional relationships. These values represent the true and unique value of the arts within our society.

### FIRST NATIONS

#### **Importance**

*It is really so important to have indigenous people, to have us, at the table when making decisions about our stories.*

- Michael Leon, APDG Member and Set Decorator

The APDG strongly advocates that Indigenous Australians: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's be given a central and unique place within the *Creative Australia* policy. For both our First Nations members and our members who are engaged in First Nations projects, these collaborations are vital and the social and personal dividends of are near impossible to adequately quantify.

#### **Challenges & Opportunities**

The APDG support *Creative Australia* actions on career pathways and argue for a targeted Indigenous strategy for the performing arts, similar to the Screen Australia Media RING Indigenous Employment Strategy. Urgent support mechanisms need to be in place to make affirmative action meaningful and generative.

We advocate for a targeted Indigenous Employment strategy to provide urgent support for developing Indigenous live performance and screen designers. We argue for targeted training and fellowships to facilitate First Nations artists into designing for screen, live performance, events and digital production.

## A PLACE FOR EVERY STORY

### Importance

*I'm really proud of how diverse this team was for this film (All We Have is Time). We had art department and camera/lighting department consist mostly of people of colour which made me so happy and proud, what we achieved together. So, hopefully we will see more and more diversity in the film industry, on bigger productions. Because there are so many other POC creatives out there, so please hire us.*

– Wei Guo, APDG Member and Emerging Production Designer

The diversity of these lands is bedrock. From the existing diversity of First Nations stories through to stories of the newest Australians, each has a distinctive perspective that will educate, enlighten or entertain an audience.

### Challenges & Opportunities

*Creative Australia* needs to create opportunities for every Australian to engage with and participate in our cultural expressions. Strategies for cultural awareness, storytelling and building audiences through education and promotion of culture should be included as goals and outcomes of its policies.

The cultural goals and objectives of *Creative Australia* should be embedded in broader concepts of national renewal, healing and self-reflection through linking with other social factors: environmental sustainability, the Indigenous Voice to Parliament and further national health, education and wellbeing objectives and initiatives.

Capacity and expertise gained by our screen members through the Location Offset scheme has been immense, however, the Australian content quotas for streaming services need to be strengthened, to ensure Australian stories are not left behind in a climate of offshore production – local projects cannot compete with crewing and facilitation.

The APDG commend the current *Creative Australia* arts education strategy. The APDG urge this to be expanded and to targeted public schools and low-funded non-government schools, to compensate for the current imbalance in funding of creative activity in primary and secondary education and encourage greater cultural and socio-economic diversity on future culture. Young talented designers seeking to refine their craft should have greater access tertiary education and mentorships.

In cultural policies, idioms such as 'excellence', 'distinctly Australian' and 'cultural value' need to be decisively defined in terms meaningful to both the artists and arts institutions.

To preserve our stories, the APDG advocates for a National Collections investment in museums and cultural institutions and advocates for a coordinated national performing arts collection and archive strategy. The APDG advocate for the recording of live performance productions as both a performance archive, and as digital broadcast content.

## THE CENTRALITY OF THE ARTIST

### Importance

*What we do isn't merely a job. You have to hone your skills, workshop your craft, prioritise your art if you want it to develop.*

- Jason Baird, APDG Member and Prosthetic Make-up Artist

First and foremost, APDG members are a worker force, and we celebrate their roles in enriching Australian lives through arts and culture. The design process is central and integral to the creation of all screen, live performance, events and digital productions.

### Challenges & Opportunities

*Creative Australia* needs to acknowledge the intrinsic instability of much arts work, and prioritise taxation and other mechanisms to arts workers employed in intermittent work, at or below the minimum wage. We recognise that funding and support (financial and physical) are needed for practicing artists, now and in the future.

*Creative Australia* correctly identifies the subsidising of the arts sector by voluntary or underpaid work and the experience of our members reflects this issue. A system of tax credits should be considered for unpaid or under-paid arts workers. A minimum arts wage for the unemployed working artist along the lines of the French *égime salarié intermittent à employeurs multiples* (system for intermittently salaried workers with multiple employers) should be investigated as a priority.

There need to be strong pathways into the profession that don't leave new practitioners fending for themselves simply as sole traders who must rely on the gig economy to fund the application and development of their craft.

The APDG supports the development of creative industries across our communities in screen, live performance, events and digital production. We support the establishment of grants for digital arts to develop convergent screen/live performance skills and content.

The APDG support investment by the Regional Development Australia Fund and argue that this investment is preferable when it funds infrastructure around local creative initiatives, performance groups (such as Spare Parts performance venue in Fremantle, currently at risk) and strategic renewal of existing infrastructure.

The APDG support a national arts curriculum and access to the arts for all students - investing in future arts workers and as consumers of culture. We argue for the funded provision of specialised visual arts, design, drama and screen media teachers and technicians to support the arts curriculum.

New infrastructure priorities need to be properly researched and prioritised outside of a political lens to ensure equity.

## STRONG INSTITUTIONS

### Importance

*I didn't have the guts to cold call and talk to my mentor directly. I'm really thankful to the APDG for supporting a younger generation of designers and pairing the old with the new! I found this an invaluable experience.*

– Benjamin Brockman, APDG Members, Lighting Designer & MENTORAPDG participant.

The APDG endorses the integration of arts policy across all levels of government, private institutions, programs and initiatives. Strong nationwide institutions must ensure our national membership has equal opportunities for work – the right to sustainable and predictable work.

It is essential that the independence and arms-length relationship to government of national arts institutions be legislated so arts institutions, like the Australia Council Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Screen Australia are protected from political interference.

### Challenges & Opportunities

Arts training needs to acknowledge the value of practice-based conservatoire-model learning, and recognise that training needs are often very 'discipline specific'. We have observed the effects that stagnant funding for tertiary arts training has on the skill and diversity of emerging artists, and argue that appropriate support for these institutions is inseparable from a thriving national culture.

All productions that have government funding should have mandatory trainee positions. The APDG support the Australia Council funding of private sector mentors (such as MENTORAPDG). The APDG argue for the linking of the Young Stars initiative with elite training institutions to provide continuity of creative development.

The employment of Australian designers and technicians is paramount to a strong arts sector, therefore government funding needs to be tied to a genuine and documented commitment to this strategy. The APDG notes several current examples of institutions routinely employing designers and technicians drawn from overseas. These companies need to be brought to account and not funded for those activities.

The APDG have observed the effects that stagnant funding for tertiary arts training has on the skill and diversity of emerging artists, and argue that appropriate support for these institutions is inseparable from a thriving national culture. Performing arts education institutions are rapidly losing their relevance, are increasingly directionless and are absorbing considerable funding through boards and administrators applying business only principals to the running of these cultural institutions. The APDG advocate for the majority of board members of cultural entities to have a recognised arts industry background, demonstrate commitment to the value of the arts and be appointed on merit.

The APDG recognise the devastating effect the funding cuts of the last decade have had on the small to medium sized companies and individual artists, and strongly advocate for this balance to be remedied through flexible, fluid and diverse support. The APDG recognise the reporting burden placed upon smaller companies – we recommend additional resourcing so that the cost of fulfilling their reporting obligations does not neutralise their funding.

## REACHING THE AUDIENCE

### **Importance**

*A successful design should create a unified world for the characters to live and inhabit that is convincing and supportive of the story and style of the production.*

– Wendy Cork APDG, Accredited APDG Member & Costume Designer

Genuine Australian stories created by Australian designers and technicians, should reach people in every corner of Australia, and be shared with overseas audiences. Prevalence of cultural cringe and out dated notions of ‘australianness’ continue to stifle our local industry.

### **Challenges & Opportunities**

The APDG argue for caution around national funding incentives for foreign productions made in Australia through initiatives such as the Producers Offset; these incentives need to be tied to clear training support outcomes and agreed industry conditions.

The APDG recommend that the Australia International Cultural Council exchange program should include live performance as well as screen exchanges and collaborations.

The APDG support the digital and emerging technologies strategies (such as Web 3) but argue that these should be framed as complementing and not supplanting traditional technologies.

The APDG support reform and strengthening of copyright protection of artists' content, both analogue and digital and recommend penalties (eg of withholding funding) for companies or producers who fail to comply.

The APDG support well-designed strategies to protect local content in an international digital marketplace.

The APDG support initiatives for integration of design-oriented thinking in public and private institutions, for example collaborative arts practice could be productively modeled in institutional scenarios.

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The support the goals and objectives of the 2013 National Arts and Culture Accord, an additional pillar, that of *environmental sustainability*, should be applied to all sectors of the arts and should be a priority of the 3-year Accord Work Plan.