



BROWN'S MART'S SUBMISSION TO A RENEWED NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

INTRODUCTION

As the Home of Territory Performing Arts, Brown's Mart is dedicated to supporting the development and presentation of performing arts practice and new work from artists across the Northern Territory. We urge the federal government to consider the following recommendations in creating its new Cultural Policy. If implemented, these recommendations will see self-determination for the regional creative sector, and for First Nations and diverse cultural practitioners, and will positively influence and support those making art and creating change in regional and remote areas such as the Northern Territory as well as connect artists and arts product from the NT nationally and internationally.

BROWN'S MART & OUR CONTEXT

Unique in the Northern Territory, Brown's Mart supports emerging, mid-career and established artists and artsworkers from across the NT to generate ideas, develop new performance works, present these works in fully resourced productions, and diversify their skills. We position these artists and their work to achieve local, national, and international reach and we play a key role in resourcing sustainable arts pathways across the spectrum of arts practice.

With only moderate funding from the Northern Territory Government as a Leading Arts Organisation, and with the ongoing impacts of the still recent loss of our 4-year Australia Council funding, we achieve all the above whilst also managing a vibrant arts precinct in the Darwin CBD and launching works of unique national significance.

In addition to the vital role we play in the Northern Territory, we also have a deep understanding of the distinctive factors associated with the cultural life of the Northern Territory which must be taken into consideration in effectively developing policy for this region. The NT has a significantly lower population density and age demographic relative to the rest of the country, with no major city. We have the highest representation of First Nations people per capita; our communities are recognisably culturally diverse, and Darwin especially is often described as Australia's gateway to Asia.

Unlike many other regional areas nationally, when considered in comparison to their metropolitan hubs, the cost of living across the NT is high. Access and services are restricted, and costs are prohibitive, making it difficult to travel and connect within the Territory and, for the same reasons, equally difficult for NT residents to connect with the rest of the continent. Both despite and because of these challenges, the Territory is complex, and the art that is made here contributes a rich, distinct voice to our country's cultural identity.

Brown's Mart develops our programs in recognition of these factors and in the context of NT artists and their practice. We also do so in the context of an arts ecology that has been, until the formation of the NPAPF, solely made up of Small to Medium entities and independent artists. The NT arts sector faces ongoing funding cuts such that organisational core funding insecurity, combined with a highly competitive project funding landscape, whilst destabilising across the country, has specific ramifications in an NT context. If a single NT organisation loses funding or a project is unsuccessful in securing funding, this can potentially result in the loss of an entire artform in our community, oftentimes for thousands of kilometres in every direction. Consequently, we are operating in an incredibly precarious position.

This funding environment also limits capacity for remuneration that is equitable with other parts of the country and leads to significant challenges in attracting and retaining artsworkers. There is also limited access to training, so this responsibility falls on our arts organisations, many of whom are already operating beyond capacity.

If a strong Cultural Policy recognises “the centrality of creativity and culture across the whole of society” (pg. 9, Creative Australia), then the voices of those living in each of the regional and remote areas across the country must be considered in determining how a National Cultural Policy can be meaningful. Further, adequately resourcing those organisations and institutions already taking leadership - particularly in regional and remote areas - results in greater direct investments in artists, approaches which consider the whole of their respective communities, and change that is strategic, responsive, and self-determined.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Brown's Mart calls for the federal government to consider the following recommendations. These recommendations, in most instances, address needs across one or more of the five pillars and reflect gaps, priorities, and urgent considerations that we feel are essential for the artists and arts organisations in our community to have confidence that the new Cultural Policy has heard their needs, reflects their unique creative and cultural circumstances, and demonstrates that they are recognised as a vital part of our national cultural identity.

Australia's new Cultural Policy should:

- Prioritise and resource self-determination for First Nations and culturally diverse creative organisations and independent artists across Australia.
- Recognise and review the inequity of federal funding mechanisms, infrastructure investment and strategic development that are driven from certain geographical centres, and establish new mechanisms which prioritise self-determination for the regional and remote creative sector. These new mechanisms would be backed through increased targeted investment in regional programs, driven through regional consultation and delivered via the Australia Council for the Arts and Regional Arts Australia.
- Recognise that inclusive access to the arts for all members of our society is a priority and address the urgent need for programs and other initiatives which can comprehensively improve access, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- Acknowledge the intrinsic and essential contribution made by artists and arts organisations across the independent and S2M sectors to a richly diverse cultural ecology. Introduce urgent and substantial measures to redress the depletion of resources under which these valuable cultural contributors are operating and address the serious impact on wellbeing that these limited resources have had.
- Recognise the role played by many arts organisations in regional and remote areas in filling the dire gaps left by a lack of tertiary education and introduce measures to better resource them as they fill a remit above and beyond their funded activity.

- Identify and articulate the needs of artists, particularly those living in regional and remote areas, for professional and skills development that is accessible and that is subsidised without compromising or reducing those same artists' access to project or other funding.
- Reflect an understanding of the economic and cultural benefits of connection and collaboration between artists from larger centres and those living and working in regional and remote creative communities, and establish agreed conditions and resources for these collaborations to be instrumental in a culturally inclusive creative sector.
- Address the very concrete economic vulnerability of artists and arts workers and the commensurate increased pressures they face when the companies and organisations which secure funding and provide them with employment are unable to offer CPI increases or indeed a reasonably expected standard of living.
- Review and invest in the essential craft of technical workers for the Live Performance industry and investigate expanding accreditations and training into this essential part of our industry.
- Ensure arts education is accessible to all school children in primary and secondary schooling across the country, and that access to arts inside and outside of the classroom is invested in as an essential part of growing empathetic, creative, culturally aware Australians.

FOOTNOTE

Brown's Mart would like to make special mention of the vital role that Regional Arts Australia already plays – as an advocacy body and organisation that genuinely supports the creative sector in regional and remote areas and understands within its core the nuances of living in regional and remote areas. Their commitment and positive impact cannot be overstated.