

# National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: As an artist

## BEING AN ARTIST IN AUSTRALIA

We are mid career experimental music/sound artists in Australia, with an international practice. Audiences respond to my work and we respond to audiences and ideas with curiosity. We are extraordinarily grateful to be artists: we grew up in regional Australia in the 1970s, with no experience or knowledge of the artistic world, and have managed to support ourselves and our family through arts practice over the last twenty five years. Our practice has been honoured with the prestigious award for Emerging and Experimental Practice from the Australia Council for the Arts.

How has this happened?

This has happened because we have the incredible honour of living on a continent that has the longest continual culture in the world.

Being an artist in Australia, means First Nations first. As artists working in sound and music, we are listeners. As Richard Swain, a powerful Wiradjuri man says, "Country is crying out for people to listen to it."

This has happened through community, long term relationships, trust, values and curiosity. Across disciplines, and sectors, including science and industry And local, state and government funding support.

What have we learnt?

As artists concerned with the experiment of listening, we are continually asking ourselves two questions. Who is not heard, and what I have not heard yet? These questions directly address considerations of who is there, and what are we doing together. By definition these questions bring into arts' orbit considerations of form, comrades, collaborators, and culture. The experimental act in art is a hopeful one, one that continually pushes at the limits of what is possible and for who.

Expansiveness needs to be embodied in the experimental act. Expansiveness of thought, of form, of body, of sense, of culture. We feel in experimental art we are making the future, and we want that future to be as expansive, generous, strange, thoughtful and radical as possible.

What we know now: Art is made by teams of people, creating temporary communities. Your activist self, and art self can be entwined. Experimental arts practice is an international ecology, with an urgent task, whose time is now.

What do we need for the future of art and culture on this continent?

In order to support long term connections/relationships for the development of art and new possibilities that connect art and other sectors, the arts and artists need stable incomes.

## UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

The UBI for artists would facilitate an unknown set of potentials across sectors and age-groups. UBI for artists only as a pilot project, or else UBI as a restructuring of the general welfare safety net, replacing all manner of subsidies, from diesel (primary production) through to negative gearing (property speculators), and various tax concessions. The base level is universally available, with more provision for others in greater need (eg. dependents). It is a living cash credit that anyone can supplant as they wish through business or employment, but that exists at a level to enable extended periods of artist practice to occur.

## STATE VERSUS PRIVATE RESOURCING

Cultural policy shouldn't be subject to the distortion of private philanthropy. Philanthropists should contribute as blind benefactors or pay more tax to the extent of their philanthropic budget. The use of philanthropy as tax concession encourages undue individual influence on the direction/curation/flavour of cultural production that is more desirably formulated through a democratic distributed and community-based process.

## ACCESS TO CULTURAL RESOURCES

With a semi-monopoly that follows the central role for state funding, on the distribution of the cultural budget, a strong, democratic and community-centred, inclusive mechanism needs to be implemented in the infrastructure for distributing resources. The unequal access to the distribution of cultural resources needs to be analysed and redressed. This inequality includes:

- The ability of organisations, including large and small arts companies, and even local government agencies to allocate disproportional resources to funding applications compared with individual artists. This inequality needs a scaled response to achieve a fair inclusivity.
- The varying abilities of artists of different cultures to navigate what remains as a white, settler-defined process of articulating cultural legitimacy
- The self- and socially- censorious or limiting/distorting climate that affects different aspects of cultural production, for examples, from undue influence of commercial operators in contracting for the delivery of festivals, through to the reluctance of many in Australian communities, such as South Sudanese, or Palestinian to engage with the funding apparatus due to a perception that their voice lacks legitimacy.

## INTERNATIONAL AS RELATIONAL

Australia's international cultural policy should reflect the people and cultures that occupy this place, and facilitate the deepening of all kinds of relationships as widely as possible, beyond the present focus on purely mercantile considerations.