

National Cultural Policy Submission

St Helens History Room – Break O’Day Council, Tasmania

Submitted: On behalf of an organisation with arts-components

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

I believe this is a given now in the Australian Arts sector where Acknowledgement of Country/Welcome To Country at any meeting/event is the first formality to be undertaken at a gathering. The recent NIMA (National Indigenous Musical Awards) event showcased on NITV presented the uniqueness of that Australian identity for First Nations cultures. Self determination is crucial to First Nations where they must be in control of their own culture. Although this can present challenges to those working within the arts. Selecting the right person with whom to speak about such topics is often the first challenge. Completing the IATSIS Cultural Capability Training program was pivotal in understanding that first contact and fostering relationships with First Nation communities.

A Place for Every Story

Government must support and reflect the diversity that is modern Australia. No longer is a modern Australian likely to be white of Anglo-Saxon descent. Migrant stories and the whole story of immigration must be encompassed within the Arts sector to reflect the stories that make up Australian society. This would also include the Disability sector and the Aged. The ABC now presents an array of presenters for example that reflect the diversity of the Australian population. The commercial networks have been tardy at encompassing that diversity but is slowly coming to the party.

The Centrality of the Artist

The artist should always be centre of any cultural activity and acknowledged for their contribution. All cultural work should be encouraged and protected with proposed works consulted by an array of possible artistic/cultural consultants. Adequate funding for artistic/cultural work is always a challenge, significantly moreso in rural Australia where it is even more difficult to resource philanthropic funding bodies and to make contact with experts within a field of endeavour.

Strong Institutions

Strong institutions reflect a strong cultural community. This has been sorely missing of late with some of our national bodies resorting to funding requests to enable them to continue to do the work

required of them. Appropriate funding and resourcing is critical for strong institutions. They maintain the framework of our national cultural space and are often the only voice for that activity.

Reaching The Audience

Australian creativity is in easy reach within the urban environment, however, once entering the fringes of that Australian landscape, Australian creativity becomes much harder to find. Local museums, historical societies and galleries play a pivotal role in rural Australia reaching that audience. They hold on to local stories and histories as represented in the general displays in country museums. Local galleries and art co-operatives also play an important role in garnering support for local artists by organising art prizes and showcasing work in galleries. Big ticket exhibitions always visit the urban centres but it is up to the smaller organisations to reach that audience not within the urban framework. Travelling exhibitions are one way that special displays can reach rural Australia. Continued funding to our national institutions can support this audience reach. Digital technologies also provide a means of accessing national collection houses without physically visiting urban centres. Such platforms as TROVE and digital collections (GLAM) provide further access to audiences across Australia.

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

This pillar has impacted my workplace in the way we deal with the local Tasmanian Aboriginal community. There must be consultation with them over any local exhibition that we may curate on their community. We have worked together on designing a public brochure to incorporate 'Welcome To Country' that includes some palawa language. I actively seek to curate displays around Reconciliation Week as a celebration of our First Nations people and their history. This is part of a strategic plan within our sector called 'First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries' AMaGA (2018). This pillar is essential to my practice within a small rural museum facility.

A Place For Every Story

Local historical societies/museums often present stories for those voices not normally heard within the bigger sector. This is changing and in recent times there have been exhibitions dedicated to the previous voiceless sections of society. Our most popular installation is 'The Chinese Experience' for instance that tells the story of Chinese miners in the NE tinfields of Tasmania from the 1870s – 1920s. Many visitors, including Chinese visitors before the pandemic, did not realise this history. Rural women is also a story that is often overlooked so there is always subject material that can be accessed to cover the myriad of Australian cultures.

The Centrality of the Artist

This is very important to consider when staging exhibitions or rearranging/redeveloping displays. The artists' opinion can be accessed early to look at space, supply of resources, to work on objects/pieces so that a collaborative partnership/relationship can be fostered.

Strong Institutions

This aspect is particularly important to smaller institutions as the larger organisations are able to support and foster the sector in general in the form of peak bodies. Smaller organisations are time poor and usually poorly funded and so unable to provide feedback a lot of the time to policy reviews for example. Strong institutions provide a voice for the arts sector in negotiations with government and its ministers. Strong institutions are vital for a strong cultural context.

Reaching The Audience

Promotion and advertising can be instrumental in reaching an audience. Larger organisations can support the smaller organisations in this regard by providing training and workshops in how to reach your audience. Many small organisations often have only one P/T worker and relies heavily on a volunteer team that keeps a cultural organisation operating. Reaching your audience can be problematic if you don't even know who that audience is, so targeted marketing can be profitable for smaller organisations where budgets are always tight. Having a space that is friendly for families, those with mobility issues for example all work toward having a user-friendly space that is enjoyed by your community and visitors alike. Digital collections can be instrumental in reaching audiences that cannot, for whatever reasons, attend a facility in the first person, so having a digital 'space' is crucial – think of the pandemic and the consequences of that on collection houses.

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

I am sure a lot of groundwork has already gone into this review of the National Cultural Policy. It is great that all voices have the opportunity of putting in their opinions and perspectives associated with this important element of the arts. Thank you for this work.