

# National Cultural Policy Submission

**Dr Andrew Blackburn**

Submitted: As an artist, As an individual

**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:**

## **A Place for Every Story**

Culture goes beyond the arts-including foods, clothing and all the facets and practices that together create the sense in an individual that they belong to a 'culture.' There is also a social sense to this that, through the practice of a culture, people belong to a wider society, and a group with whom they can identify. A National Cultural Policy must navigate these parameters, without constraint, but encouraging practices that enhance and cement the sense of both belonging to and accepting a mutual responsibility to the highly diverse society that is Australia. Responding to the pillars defined above the discussion limits this response to 'the arts' in the general use of the term and attendant practices – Music, 2D, 3D Visual, Literature, Drama, Film. This respondent is a performing musician who is a keyboard player working mostly in the contemporary classical music medium, including electronic music and sound-design.

There is a huge range of cultural activity in this country, from artists of the First Nations. Artists—who, from the base of their traditional understandings and practices have adapted arts practices into a modern and contemporary context—to the most recently arrived migrants to the country bring the memories and traditions of their culture, adapting this to the Australian context, creating new practices and enriching our cultural environment. Further there are various minority groups that find validation and understanding through the creation of cultural practices that provide windows to their worlds and challenges. This response aims to assist the development of a policy to meet these considerations.

## **The Centrality of the Artist**

At the centre of every arts project or endeavour is the artist – the person(s) –whose role is to initiate a creative outcome by: conceiving an idea or concept; imagining the possibilities presented by the original idea; shaping the artifact to a form that is coherent, and which is an expression of the culture and which adds to the canon of that culture, designing, refining, building or creating the artifact, continuing its development until it reaches a fruition of the original concept to become a valid, and technically competent manifestation of the artform of the artist(s); and finally, sharing the vision and idea with others through the medium (media) of the artform.

There are many preconditions required to develop works or artifacts that meet these factors – the so-called 'creative process'. Primary amongst these are the ability of the artist/creator to think about and then imagine in ideas of personal and societal importance that can be expressed through their artform(s). An emphasis on the development of ideas and philosophies is imperative, recognising of the importance of lateral and creative thought and looking beyond the established, 'homogenised' or commercial arts 'industry.' Encouraging and celebrating excellence in practice by the independent or outsider artists will assist growth in a uniquely evolving Australian Culture. So often it is here that

authentic cultural movements begin. Like so-called 'elite' sports people who have changed our understanding of sport and competition, elite art and artists strengthens and develops the cultural environment in which it is allowed to flourish, which must be an outcome of a National Cultural Policy. Such an environment would have the opportunity to celebrate the true diversity of our culture – in all its attributes and facets, providing a continual state of growth and mutability—a hallmark of a living culture that draws from its history, tradition, and weaves it into the contemporary environment.

### **Strong Institutions**

Technical competence in that artform—in the multitude of artforms too numerous to catalogue here—is imperative. There need to be educational institutions that will teach the technical skills of creation/re-creation for all who need to pursue this. Artists in any artform must be technically capable of converting their ideas from a concept to a meaningful, technically competent artifact. The pertinent skills are perhaps best learned from 'elders' and more experienced artist practitioners who can pass on the skills and traditions that underpin every artform. Understanding the existing language of an artform, its history and context within the community of artists and our society, and exposure to the elite examples of that artform and practitioners allows younger practitioners to understand their heritage, providing a basis from which to take their artistry forward.

**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**

As a person of Caucasian extraction whose ancestors arrived about 4 generations ago, the precepts of social connection and cultural continuity, as I understand the belief structures people of our First Nations are something that teaches and culturally enriches all Australians. Whilst these are not our understandings, non-indigenous artists/creators artists such as myself are ethically obliged to respect and take heed of the indigenous knowledges and stories which overlay the whole physical continent, and develop Australian artistic expressions which are cognizant of the traditional owners as well as from the practices of we, more recent arrivals.

### **Strong Institutions**

In addition to the usual commercial institutions where art is practised, there is a need for well-resourced institutions in all, but especially regional, areas that cater to more experimental arts spaces including contemporary art-music performance venues, exhibition spaces as well as publishing for literary works. Creating locally based institutions and performance opportunities that focus on presenting works in these categories would develop a richness of culture specific activity that might. As an independent performing musician living in the regions and who specialises in contemporary art-music, the need for suitably equipped spaces that are accessible is an important facility. Not only would the existence of such facilities provide a space in which to present new work, access to such a facility would also reduce the need for self-funding of advanced and high-end equipment that is so necessary for my creative work.

The presence of such facilities within institutions would, in addition to providing a structure for new music-making, create a context in which audiences (though potentially quite small in some instances) can develop a familiarity with artists and performances outside the more usual musical milieu, adding to the development and expression of quite regional cultural expressions. Developing a highly diverse range of local cultural expressions and styles would further assist the materialisation of cultural practices that are already (often nascently) present in this country.

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

As a national culture will never be uniform across the whole country, the diversity and range of local cultures could be enhanced by the inclusion of arts practice and education in all schools. There are arguments against many things, but none have ever been presented against the inclusion of, for example, music education. Its benefits to the child and country have been well documented elsewhere, so I would strongly advocate that music, and general arts education, be included in all primary and secondary syllabuses to Year 10 (A Kodaly-based music education is not expensive to run, requiring an open class space, a (trained) music teacher, and a tuning fork). As in the International Baccalaureate syllabus, arts includes music, visual arts, drama, literature, film. Developing a population that is more musically and arts literate, develops thinking skills far beyond the arts framework, and a National Cultural Policy with the goal a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) focussed curriculum in our schools, with the express goal of developing critical, emotionally empathetic, and creative thinking students would lead to better outcomes for the whole country (there is much excellent research being undertaken in this field, particularly at Cambridge University).