

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: On behalf of a for-profit arts business; As an artist

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

The first great injustice on which everything in Australian culture and society is built, must become an integral part of how we think about who we are and what we do if we are to have a fair and honest cultural future for Australia. As a nation, as institutions and as individuals we can do this by constantly examining the impacts and opportunities of our cultural activities and pursuing active engagement with our First Nations at every opportunity.

A Place for Every Story

If we are to genuinely have a place for every story, we must develop much more open definitions of what legitimate places can be for those stories. Technology and our diverse society have created so many opportunities for stories and artists to engage with their audience while the structures and measures of legitimacy continue to lag behind the technological and social reality. In order to have a place for every story, each artist and story must be met not with the question of whether their story has value but instead the question of "where is the place for this story to contribute to Australian culture?"

The Centrality of the Artist

The centrality of the artist runs the risk of hollowness and disposability if it is built on the laurels of those artists who have become the flavour of the month, or the decade or even their times. To have a centrality of the artist that actually means something powerful, it must result in viable career paths for many and diverse artists at all levels. It is not enough to give people the chance to start but also the chance to develop and progress their creative career. It must be built on the assumption that each creative career has value to society as a whole and that it is an honourable and worthwhile endeavour.

Strong Institutions

Strong institutions are the scaffolding, the roads and bridges of our cultural landscape, but they must not be allowed to become an end in and of themselves. When run fairly, progressively and openly our strong cultural institutions have the capacity to facilitate art that is more than the sum of its parts, but only if they are the means and not the ends.

Reaching the Audience

While there are more avenues than ever before for creative work to reach its audience, the opportunity of this is heavily tempered by the risk of getting caught in the avalanche of cultural work that can travel the world in seconds. As the artist and researcher Mike Seymour once said "People think the biggest risk of the digital age is piracy, but the biggest risk of the digital age is obscurity". For many artists, creating their art is more accessible than ever but there is a gulf between being able to create and being able to get it to its audience. For Australia to have a creative sector that is socially, culturally and financially viable into the future, facilitating the path to the audience will have to become a principal role of government and institutions. Leaving this to commercial interests that once performed this role, will severely limit the viability of the entire sector.

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

I enjoy the privilege of working and creating on first nations lands and hope to continue this in ways that are increasingly more respectful and appropriate.

A Place for Every Story

In nearly three decades in the Australian film and tv industry, I have seen too many stories of great value go untold because they have never had the opportunity to find their place. Australians have a tendency to question everyone's legitimacy and the upside of this is an egalitarian edge to the culture, but the downside is an over reliance on gatekeepers of cultural legitimacy, especially ones from overseas. Without dealing with this blind spot, there will never be a place for every story.

The Centrality of the Artist

With many years of experience running creative businesses and using them to support artistic endeavours in the long term, I know all too well how difficult and precarious this is. Australia has a cultural tendency to assume that creative professionals are not doing “real work” and as a result they often work and harsher conditions and with less support than many other industries. The outcome is that creatives are only as good as their last success and because of this creativity becomes commoditised instead of practiced in the sense that other professionals like doctors and lawyers are always in practice.

Strong Institutions

As an active and influential member of the ACS, one of the Australian film & tv industries oldest and most respected institutions I see first-hand how much value they can contribute.

Reaching the Audience

Of all the creative industries, independent film & tv is perhaps most at risk of not reaching the audience. The systemic barriers and global competition are on a genuinely epic scale and ever since Australia allowed our big cinema chains to be taken over by overseas interests in the post WWII era, we have struggled to gain consistency in how we connect with our own audience. The successes that are sadly more blips on the radar rather than a viable foothold. The rebuilding of the industry in the age of streaming provides a unique opportunity to recalibrate this imbalance that will quickly be lost if we as a nation defer again to powerful influences from other parts of the world.

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

I would like to see a National Cultural Policy that is broad, flexible and ambitious. The potential is huge and while many years of neglect have done great damage, they also mean that there is a coiled spring of creative potential that could be unleashed with the right support and opportunities.