

National Cultural Policy Submission

New Quotidian Collective

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the National Cultural Policy to shape the future of the arts in Australia. We are a collective of mature age, emerging visual artists in Brisbane. We engage in sustainable practices to develop conceptual works that question the ongoing overshoot of the world's resources and the injustice and inequality in the context of undeniable climate emergency.

Global comments

As a policy Creative Australia presented ambition for better supporting the arts in Australia, though some actions are now outdated. Reframing the goals to pillars is sensible; however, Creative Australia's structure and length made it difficult to understand how the themes delivered on the goals. The length of the policy is a barrier to engaging with the policy as a whole. Explicit theories of change would enhance evaluation of the validity and potential success of actions and how they will combine to achieve the vision.

Public value of the arts - and of any public good - is difficult to express and shoehorned into terms understood by managerial economics which holds the public purse strings: funders (and the arts sector) have to be much more creative in expressing the value of the arts, in terms that go beyond economic rationalism. Remember Einstein's truism that not all that can be measured counts, and not all that counts can be measured. Perhaps global measures of the success of a truly cross-government, cross-jurisdictions embedded policy are a reconciled Australia, an Australia where diversity is celebrated and racism in all its forms eliminated. As steps along the way we could measure whether artists have living wages from the art they produce, improved mental health of artists and Australians more generally, and increased citizenship through active participation in arts and culture.

With the the Meeting of the Cultural Ministers' Statistics Working Group and the Australian Bureau of Statistics' National Centre for Culture and Recreation Statistics relegated to memory since the launch of Creative Australia, it is difficult to see how the measurement of success will be achieved. Economic rationalism seems inherent in assumptions behind the proposed quantitative measures, for example, that success of investment is a matter of how many people (audience) are directly reached with the outputs of that investment. Is this really a measurement of the entertainment value and popularity, rather than the success of the policy? The measures need to reflect that success is beyond the box office and this narrow concept of success entrenches the idea that arts has no value beyond economic value.

Pillar 1 - First Nations: Recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture - not just stories but First Nations ways of working

We support without reservation and with urgency the need to recognise and respect First Nations peoples and cultures. There will be no justice in this country without reconciliation with our past. As first generation immigrants to Australia, we acknowledge that this country's economic prosperity is built on stolen land and this fact continues to diminish our social and cultural prosperity. Australia's shameful colonial past needs to be reconciled with the impacts still present with us today. Racism, systemic and individual, and blak-washing through so-called corporate social responsibility, continue to work against true reconciliation. With financial support, the arts can play an essential part of achieving this goal, but cannot do the heavy lifting on its own.

Recommendation: Through self-determination processes, arts and culture need to be optioned into all policy and investments in government First Nations programs so the dots are joined in meaningful ways by and with First Nations peoples.

Pillar 2 - A place for Every Story: Reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture - not just diversity, but place

We support the need for government support of the arts to reflect the diversity of Australia. Targeted support for cultural expression by minority groups will prevent this pillar from becoming a motherhood statement, promoting equality of unequals. Similarly, emerging artists need specific supports to enable their story to be expressed and their voice to be heard and developed.

In recent years there has been a tendency in government arts funding bodies to simplify and combine grants programs. While this may be desirable for 'efficiency of grant making', for emerging artists this has a devastating effect because the competition against established artists is too steep. If you can support Tony

Albert, why would you support a no-name with no exhibition experience beyond student exhibitions? In the competition for project funding we are also up against well-funded institutions, who have paid staff with expertise in writing grant applications. Emerging artists should be able to compete on a level playing field against other emerging artists. If generic grant programs are apportioned to specific target groups, this is done without transparency and only emerges after the fact.

Recommendation: Targeted grant funding should be reinstated and programs designed to support emerging artists in fair competition. Criteria for funding should reflect the position and lack of experience of emerging artists.

Some universities and arts colleges are investing in practical ways to support graduate students and alumni artists, for example, Griffith University's Queensland College of the Arts make exhibition spaces available for free for its alumni and run development programs to further develop practice and network. Others tertiary institutions neglect this support and leave graduating artists to fend for themselves in a fiercely competitive environment.

Recommendation: All universities and arts colleges funded by the Australian Government should be required to continue to support visual arts graduates to have their emerging practices seen, evaluated and supported by peers.

Applying for Australia Council for the Arts grant funding is daunting for emerging artists, grappling with responses to the criteria, for example, how their practice is truly 'national' and providing evidence of quality of works and past exhibitions. Living outside of Sydney and Melbourne provides even less prospect of success. Australia Council's data from 2016 to 2022 still shows disproportionate grant approvals for Queensland visual artists, compared with those in New South Wales and Victoria. While the Regional Arts Fund seeks to target funding to regional artists, living in Brisbane disqualifies you. More effort should be made to support emerging conceptual artists who do not qualify for Regional Arts Funding to access national funding.

Recommendation: National funding for emerging artists should be targeted and made much more accessible, for example, as small quick response grants or venue support to exhibit, with proportional reduction in onerous application and reporting requirements.

Recommendation: Australia Council for the Arts should do more to grow the pool of applicants from outside Melbourne and Sydney. For example, a presence and information and networking sessions in Brisbane.

Arms length arts funding is essential to avoid bipartisan censoring of emerging art forms or art that pushes at the boundaries of conventions and demonstrates innovative practices. As conceptual artists our art challenges hegemony and makes visible what is invisible. This can make for uncomfortable aesthetics and challenging concepts which are prone to politicisation and censorship.

Recommendation: Restore true arms-length principles to Australia Council for the Arts' decision-making by requiring transparent processes for filling Board positions, and return all funding pools from the Office of the Arts.

Pillar 3 - The Centrality of the Artist: Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture - Not just central, but generative

Economic rationalism and performance indications that prioritise the economic value of the arts have devalued artistic labour as a legitimate form of labour and diminished its essential role in creating liveable communities and societies. Building public recognition of the intrinsic and instrumental public value of the Arts and the role of artists in creating culture is an essential piece for the policy.

Artistic excellence is the outcome of hard and often unpaid labour of the artist. That first strum on the stage that excites the audience (and Minister Burke) has taken effort to develop and create. We must stamp out the idea that artists should be grateful for the exposure.

Governments and funders need to work harder to generate public understanding of the role of artists and the public value delivered by artists to sustain community support for ongoing investment. Talk of excellence in the arts - high vs low brow - still excludes many Australians, thinking it is not for them, thinking

they are more footy types, not realising the role of the artist in creating the imagery, sounds and design of the experience. Art needs to be normalised in all areas of public life, not merely as entertainment rated by popularity vote or icing on the cake, but as generators of culture and the yeast in the bread that makes places liveable and lives meaningful. Arts need to be relevant to the communities it emerges from. So-called 'heritage' arts and major institutions that reproduce heritage arts that hails from a different time in a different place are part of the reason so many Australians are alienated from the arts, and does little to embrace a vibrant vision of Australian cultures. Supporting these heritage institution carries the dead-weight burden of subsidy: those who can best afford the tickets are indirectly subsidised by generous government support. Those who can ill afford expensive tickets need extra help, if at all they consider the arts experience to 'be for them'. Too much of arts funding benefits those who need it the least.

Recommendation: Funders need to do more to publicly celebrate the role of artists and justify public investment based on intrinsic and instrumental benefits. Practical steps that would demonstrate public value of the arts include:

- Require ABC and SBS to cover an aspect of the Arts in each news bulletin, like sport and the weather has standard slots
- Provide artist-in-residence opportunities in non-arts contexts funded by other government portfolios
- Require all public infrastructure and development projects to include public art and ongoing art activation budgets
- Require all housing developers and master planned communities to include public art budgets and ongoing art activation commitments
- Require property owners of vacant commercial property to make it available for arts activation, especially in the suburbs to support hyperlocal expressions of culture and improve local vibrance and livability
- Develop housing policies that support artist studios and exhibition spaces in the hyperlocal as part of essential suburban community infrastructure.

Financial security is a key issue for artists and their creative collaborators; covid raised awareness of this fact, if Throsby's research had not done so already. Emerging artists are vulnerable to being overwhelmed by the lack of financial stability and giving up their aspirations. Mature artists suffer a career of underpayment and lack of superannuation savings for secure ageing, often even when they have been successful artists with the excellence brand.

Reality is that many individual artists rely on income support - currently JobSeeker - from the Australian Government to make ends meet. The mutual obligation requirements and non-sensical mandates of activities distract artists from their arts practices. Art making is not considered proper work by the Australian Government, and a key step would be for policy to recognise art labour as professional work. Unless a truly universal basic income is implemented across the community, work could be done to identify the arts UBI eligibility and activity requirements that would suit working artists to receive income support. For visual artists, this could be about professional training, membership of professional organisations, consistent practice and exhibition practice (though a warning must be sounded to not exclude emerging artists who need support to even have an exhibition practice). Learnings from other jurisdictions, in particular Ireland, but also more universal UBI trials, could be taken into account. A universal basic income for artists could give artists the space and time required to do the work to reach for excellence in their art form.

Recommendation: Implement a universal basic income scheme for artists, paying a living wage that enables artists to focus on their practice and give them a chance to reach excellence.

NAVA and other art form peaks recommend artist fees for various forms of engagement. These fees are minimum recommendations creating a floor as a starting point for more experienced artists with reputation to negotiate higher fees from. Grant applications often ask artists to cost volunteer hours as part of their contribution to a project. This perpetuates the idea that artists should be grateful for the exposure.

Recommendation: Implement minimum award pay for artists delivering programs or works, and incorporate minimum pay into grant funding. Avoid funding projects that rely on volunteerism or exploitation of artists.

Pillar 4 - Strong Institutions: Providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture - not just institutions, but interdependencies

Some time ago it was common to speak about the arts ecology, acknowledging that we need to think about and support a whole ecology for arts and culture to remain healthy and strong. This language has fallen into disuse and we now talk about the arts 'industry' as if the mode of art production can be likened to Fordism. The ecology metaphor is far more eloquent for this pillar in that it highlights the interdependencies between the tall trees and the saplings, the insects and the mycelium, the flora and the fauna. Excellence can be likened to the tall trees in a forrest. The artists and arts organisations are majestic and impressive, but to be so they draw up much of the nutrient of the forrest floor, and blocks the sun underneath. Like tall, majestic trees, artists start as a seed, battling for the same support and attention. In the forrest tall trees eventually fall and leave space and nutrients for saplings to emerge. Tomorrow's excellence is created by supporting today's emerging talent and guiding them to the spaces and places where they can grow and flourish. Emerging talent need time and space to develop their practice and support to be visible in a competitive arts world. Patient investment is required and not all investment in emerging or established artists will eventually pay off as nationally or globally recognised 'excellence'. This needs to be factored into the investment pool and the success criteria for that type of investment.

Apart from arts funders, visual arts institutions, commercial galleries and alternative venues play a major role in who is and who is not given opportunities to flourish. Emerging artists are often reduced to putting on 'vanity' exhibitions to create that first showing, which does little to provide critical feedback from peers or to support the artist's development. Commercial galleries are unlikely to seek to represent emerging artists with a conceptual arts practice with challenging aesthetics. More support for spaces could be made available so emerging artists producing conceptual art can show, without having to pay for putting on the show and perpetuating the notion that artist labour is somehow not valuable.

Recommendation: Support models that help emerging artists access spaces and support to exhibit work and make post graduation exhibition opportunities attainable to emerging artists, including mature age emerging artists.

Pillar 5 - Reaching the Audience: Ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad - Not just audiences, but relationships

Artists make art and audiences make meaning in the engagement with the art. Artists provoke ideas, artists push boundaries, artists make art because it is what they are driven to. In responses to the climate emergency, art experiences can empower audiences see something and change something. This is our objective for the New Quotidian arts practice: to engage in hyper-local artistic processes that are sustainable and leave a light footprint, and which make audiences question their own role in unsustainable consumerist culture. The practice links individual, local actions to global consequences, while also challenging systemic structures that prevent change from happening.

To reach audiences we need spaces to exhibit. Our collective is utilising available digital spaces through a website and social media engagement. Our work is anti-spectacle and emphasises the hyperlocal impact of contemporary consumer culture and a digital global reach is not our aim, though with support our model could expand and be relevant globally, essentially because we work with multinationally branded detritus of consumer culture. We consider our art successful when audiences are provoked to thinking about how they are captured by consumer culture and how they can change their own behaviour and the systems that holds us captured as consumers, rather than citizens.

Digital reach will not necessarily shift behaviours and change hearts and minds; we aim for local and hyperlocal engagement, which is difficult to find financial support for, especially because of our status as emerging artists living in a capital city that is not Melbourne or Sydney. In addition, we are late-career-changing emerging artists, which precludes us from any category of support for young people. We do not work for commercial outcomes; we realise our conceptual art is not likely to be sold to private buyers; a

consumer outcome would be anti-thesis to the arts practice we engage in. Yet our art addresses very important, contemporary issues for our country and the world.

Recommendation: Provide targeted support for non-commercial emerging artists, through small grants with commensurate reporting requirements (similar to Regional Arts Fund quick response grants) and venue support to enable exhibition of works in a supported, creative environment to help reach audiences.

Recommendation: Australia Council for the Arts could do more to work to establish and facilitate Renew Newcastle style programs with local governments and commercial property owners to create places for emerging artists to exhibit works, especially in a post-covid world where many city centres are full of vacant spaces. While a Brisbane City Council program does exist, one of the criteria for eligibility is that the proposal is to achieve commercial, not cultural, outcomes.

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