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## National Cultural Policy Submission | Lucy Guerin Inc

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**Organisation:** Lucy Guerin Inc (North Melbourne, Victoria)  
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### Introduction:

All dance in Australia sits within the context of a 100,000-year continuum of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. It encompasses practices which include cultural, contemporary, improvisation, conceptual, narrative-based, street dance, dance theatre, classical ballet, physical theatre, youth dance, screen-based work, hybrid, and technology-based. It encompasses dance for and with specific communities.

Australia's professional dance sector produces work that is seen across stages in metropolitan, regional, and remote settings. It tours widely across the country and internationally to festivals and theatres, halls, schools, and firesides. It encompasses work of large, small and micro scale, bespoke, site-specific, and screened.

Dance plays a key role in the promotion and maintenance of physical and mental health practices for all ages and is an integral expression of culture and inclusion for many communities including First Nations, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), Disability, and LGBTQI+.

### About Lucy Guerin Inc:

LGI (LGI) strongly supports the development of, and investment in, a National Cultural Policy for Australia. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the policy development process.

I am Lucy Guerin AO, the Artistic Director and CEO of LGI, one of Australia's leading dance companies and based in Melbourne. I want to begin with some context of how this came about. I began my career as an independent dancer and choreographer, working extra jobs and training and rehearsing when I could. I received small grants from the Australia Council for the Arts from time to time that enabled me to create and present my first dance pieces, often without paying the dancers. Still, this was exciting and some of these works were recognised critically. But it was difficult to develop my artform, as dance requires studio space, dancers who need wages, technicians, venue hire, and the list goes on. It's very hard to work on it at home in the living room. Things really changed when I started my own company and was given a grant for one year of activities. I could really plan and begin to build an organisational structure to support my creative development. I was able to employ a producer one day a week who helped me set up a Board and acquire an office space and tiny studio above a parking garage. I could focus more on my choreographic ideas and I had someone, my producer, with whom to discuss a way forward. And so, things grew.

The company has been operating now for 20 years, and we've toured our productions across Europe, Asia, and North America. We have performed on the world's most prestigious stages including Southbank Centre in London, Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in New York and Theatre de la Ville in Paris, as well as performing in almost all of Australia's major arts festivals. The growth of the company has allowed us to extend our program beyond creating only my shows, to inviting other choreographers to develop projects at our now large two-studio space in North Melbourne. We also host workshops, daily classes, talks, mentoring, and much more. A whole exponential ecology of independent artists has developed around the company.

However, this pathway no longer exists for choreographers; it is now almost impossible to start a small company as I did, and it was tough then. In fact, the sector has shrunk significantly: from 13 dance companies in Australia receiving triennial funding in 2013, there are now only 7, affecting the livelihoods of dancers, designers, technicians, administrators etc. Not all dance artists need to run their own company, but they need structural and financial support to develop their work, and I am truly concerned that this artform will lose the incredible profile it has built over so many years and dwindle to nothing.

In order for this be a reality, there is a crucial need for an overarching national cultural policy that underpins and supports the work of Australia's creative sector.

**Our comments on a National Cultural Policy:**

**1. *First Nations: Recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.***

- Dance is one of the oldest forms of storytelling and has been central to First Nations people and culture for more than 100,000 years. Dance (and the arts generally) is deeply embedded in First Nations identity, community, and knowledge; the entire nation has much to learn from this millennia-old practice in meaningfully placing dance in the centre of peoples' lives. For the First Peoples of this land, it is a human right to have access to and the opportunity to maintain and innovate dance as a cultural and contemporary practice.
- We refer to, and endorse, the submission from the First Nations performing arts sector: Marrugeku, Ilbijerri, Yirra Yaakin, Moogahlin, BlakDance and NAISDA Dance College (three of which are dance organisations). We support their recommended programs and initiatives, and in particular we endorse the key priorities of:
  - a Skills and Workforce capacity building plan;
  - a dedicated First Nations performing arts commissioning fund; and
  - funding for the cost of cultural processes.
- We also refer to, and endorse, the submission from the National Dance Managers' Meeting (of which LGI is a long-serving member), and in particular we endorse the key priorities of:
  - Funding First Nations dance at levels at parity with all other introduced forms of dance.
  - Ensuring authentic representations of the form, led by First Nations peoples and self-determined First Nations organisations, with sustainable investment into cultural processes.
  - Investing in First Nations choreographers, including enabling independent choreographers to move from project-based funding to multi-year funded dance companies.
  - Creating a First Nations Commissioning Fund to provide First Nations choreographers opportunities to make work on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ensemble companies, and to make works of scale for festivals and touring.
  - Developing and securing funding for a 10+ year plan that builds capacity of First Nations companies and dance professionals – including performers, choreographers, directors, class teachers, producers, designers, technicians, production managers, arts administrators.

**2. *A Place for Every Story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.***

- Dance, in all its forms, fosters an inclusive, equitable, and diverse society. It has the capacity to tell story like no other medium. Its transcendent qualities – beyond the verbal and intellectual and through the body – are inarguably its greatest power. Story is not always a narrative, it can be an exchange of understanding and knowledge, connected to and of the land, the 'telling' of peoples and making of place together. Through dance, story is embodied in diverse minds and bodies and finds a voice in different languages, outside of language.
- We refer to, and endorse, the submission from the National Dance Managers' Meeting, and in particular we endorse the key priorities of:
  - Providing resources to establish, maintain, and deliver, comprehensive inclusion strategies and access services.
  - Enabling more sustainable dance careers with more connected and longer-term pathways, and better employment structures and conditions for individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, Australians identifying with disability and neurodiversity, and Australians in disadvantaged circumstances.
  - Ensuring there is support and investment available for dance makers and presenters to take artistic, creative, and business risks to develop new works, practices, processes, platforms, and audiences.
  - Supporting the development of artistic, creative, and business skills and capabilities, processes, and infrastructure to minimise and manage risk.
- We also refer to, and endorse, the submission from Theatre Network Australia and in particular we endorse the key priorities of:

- Centring First Nations artists, Deaf and disabled artists, and artists of colour in every pillar and sub-strategy of the policy, with a dedicated, funded, and measurable action plan to address the under-representation of these artists in decision making and leadership roles, including at the Australia Council for the Arts.
- Funding the development and creation of a National Digital Strategy for cultural organisations and artists. There is a need for robust digital capacity building within a framework that recognises and addresses inequality and uneven access to digital opportunities.

### **3. *The Centrality of the Artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.***

- The independent sector (dancers and choreographers who are freelance and not employed permanently by companies) are vital to the small-to-medium dance company sector. We employ them on a casual basis as dancers, choreographers, teachers, speakers, and advisors. We are dependent on their wellbeing: otherwise, we have no-one with whom to create our performances and other programs. But they need agency to make their own decisions on how they work, as well as being part of the programs and productions of companies.
- The development of structural models that better respond to this diverse sector would assist their autonomy and creative needs. They need ways to survive which companies like LGI do not have the funds to provide. Following COVID many have been stranded with no work while the industry recovers, resulting in a mass exodus by these crucial contributors to cultural life.
- The cultural sector is of clearly demonstrable significance to the Australian economy. It employs more than 350,000 people and generates \$17 billion in economic activity per annum (2018-19) [Analysis & Policy Observatory]. At its core it celebrates and showcases the place of artists and arts workers. This is the moment to work across many sectors (government, media, industry, philanthropy, education) to build the case that a viable and sustainable career in the arts is achievable; That it is not a hobby or pastime, that performers and creatives are as central to the form and the ecology as administration, technical and production staff.
- We refer to, and endorse, the submission from the National Dance Managers' Meeting, and in particular we endorse the key priorities of:
  - Enabling artists to have the confidence to commit themselves to a career in the artistic, creative, and cultural sector.
  - Changing perceptions that a career in the sector isn't viable, by establishing long-term policies that make the arts more accessible and attractive, create greater engagement in and with the artistic, creative, and cultural sector, and promote and demonstrate the value of artistry, creativity, and culture in society.
  - Developing a mechanism via well-funded, ongoing programs to support the precarious and uneven nature of project-based employment to help protect and advance individual rights, conditions, and entitlements for artists, creatives and other arts workers who are often contracted casually or self-employed.
  - Undertaking a thorough review of arts training across the tertiary education sector to determine what is really required and where – address training needs and attract workers in areas of key post-pandemic skill gaps, particularly for production managers, producers, and technical crew.
  - Addressing mental and physical health needs of individuals in the sector to ensure retention of artists, creatives, and all arts workers. The instability of careers, poor employment conditions, lack of regulation, inconsistent and reduced funding, COVID-19 impacts, changing environments, and insufficient infrastructure and systems have affected the wellbeing of all personnel working in the sector.
  - Coordinating a year-round national touring circuit for works of all scales that ensure the mobility of dance works.
- We also refer to, and endorse, the submission from Theatre Network Australia, and in particular we endorse the key priorities of:

- Calling for the arts to be recognised as a profession by government. This entails changes to what is recognised by Centrelink as 'seeking employment', and the adoption of an annual averaging process for artists' fluctuating income as is done by the ATO.
- Raising the cap on project grants – projects of scale can be made by independents as much as by companies. This will help artists continue as independents and not be forced to set up as a company, just to access bigger grants.
- Increasing the pool of funding available to independent artists through the Australia Council's grants program.

**4. *Strong Institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.***

- The dance sector is a thriving ecology made up of independent artists; small, medium, and large institutions; commercial arts businesses; arts education institutions; venues, presenting and touring partners. Each of these facets of the sector interconnect, support one another and contribute to the overall health of the sector.
- We particularly note that the dance sector is significantly underfunded compared with other artforms. This is at odds with the artform being one of the most popular, diverse, and significant ways Australian's engage with the arts, including Australian research that shows that 430,000 children aged between 0 - 14 participate in dance.
- Arts and culture are only possible because of thousands of hours of unpaid work by artists and arts workers. They must be paid for their work that creates a major industry in Australia and offers immeasurable value to people's lives. Give it a status apart from infrastructure, transport, regional development and communications – and name it as an industry within government.
- To be sustainable, Government funding must keep pace with rising expenses, rather being indexed at less than CPI. The sector's organisations cannot continue with partially indexed funding from government funding partners. This damages the ability to maintain standards, to employ artists and arts workers, to maintain infrastructure and to keep ticket prices affordable and audiences diverse.
- We refer to, and endorse, the submission from the National Dance Managers' Meeting, and in particular we endorse the key priorities of:
  - Enhancing the overall level of investment in the sector and maintaining it beyond the electoral cycle. This would allow for sustainable rebuilding of capability within the sector, the scaffold to support and nurture ongoing development of artists and artform, and an ability to deliver on commitments to inclusion, equity, accessibility, and diversity.
  - Returning federal funding to the arts, at a minimum, to reach pre-2012 levels, indexed to 2022.
  - Providing longer term funding arrangements across the sector to enable long-terms strategic planning
  - Developing a wide range of measures aimed at harnessing substantial private investment in the arts and cultural sectors.
  - Ensuring the tax and welfare systems are responsive to the needs of the sector, reflecting the varied nature of artists' income generation within years and over different years.
  - Supporting the capacity and capability of Boards across the sector, providing dedicated training on the roles and responsibilities within the specialised industry context.
- We also refer to, and endorse, the submission from Theatre Network Australia, and in particular we endorse the key priorities of:
  - Urgently advocating for a National Portfolio approach to organisational funding of all sizes, including an additional investment through the Australia Council for the Arts, to rebuild the crucial infrastructure of the arts and cultural industry. With the changes to the National Performing Arts Framework (NPAF), there is an opportunity to invest in organisations of all sizes within the same framework, reducing administration, assessment costs, and creating a sector which sees itself as a whole.
  - Pro-actively addressing the under-representation of First Nations people, people of colour and Deaf and Disabled people in leadership roles in the arts. Paid leadership succession (such

as funded on-the-job CEO transitions over 6-12 months) could result in tangible diversification of arts leadership in a sustainable way.

**5. *Reaching the Audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.***

- We need inspiration, joy, togetherness, comfort, provocation and meaning in our lives, especially now. The arts are essential to our social wellbeing and mental health. We need to hear and see our own stories to give us perspective and strength during tough times and celebration during good times. These benefits cannot be measured through economic outcomes only.
- Artists and audiences are at the heart of dance organisations engaged in professional performances, expressed through a full program of major works, commissions, collaborations, residencies, workshops and public and professional classes. These fundamental activities extend the art form and influence the public realm. It increases the visibility of dance as an everyday art form.
- Audience development is critical to meet the needs of arts organisations to develop future audiences and nurture ongoing relationships with audiences.
- Some companies (including Lucy Guerin Inc), generate work, income, profile and networks through sustained global engagement. In the last two years we undertook international touring to 24 cities across Europe, Asia and North America. This aspect of our program had disappeared for the next few years given the long-lasting impacts of COVID-19. The difficulty of international exchange for arts companies has also been a blow to soft diplomacy for Australia.
- We refer to, and endorse, the submission from the National Dance Managers' Meeting, and in particular we endorse the key priorities of:
  - Creating a National Audience Development Strategy and implementation plan that provides organisations a framework to develop individual development plans, develops an 'Audience Finder' online resource to access national insights and audience development tools, and creates Audience Development measurement tools that are not based on numbers alone.
  - Resourcing dance organisations to have the infrastructure and skills to leverage new technologies effectively, efficiently, and safely.
  - Investing in existing cultural spaces and developing new, much needed performance venues which include specialist spaces to support the needs of individual communities. This must include a long-term commitment to programming investment to ensure their ongoing success and relevance.
  - Providing ongoing, targeted support for a national, integrated, and sustainable touring network that sees works of all scales performed across Australia, and particularly outside Melbourne and Sydney, including securing multi-year programming investment for venues managed through Councils and Local Government Areas. These venues are critical to sustainable touring networks for companies of all sizes and enable the breadth of work created in Australia to be seen on stages locally, regionally, and remotely.
  - Investing and underwriting the export of Australian performance and artist exchange into international markets that have cultural and economic relevance. This expands the power of valuable soft diplomacy whilst recognising that there is demonstrable market demand and meaningful history with Europe and North America.