

National Cultural Policy Submission

Romi Kupfer / COJA (Centre of Jewish Artists)

Submitted: As an artist, On behalf of a not-for-profit arts collective

About Romi Kupfer

Romi Kupfer is a Jewish theatre maker who directs, produces and facilitates live performance. Romi is driven to create spaces that are inclusive and accessible, and leads with authenticity and kindness. She aims to support other artists to claim their creative agency and build sustainable practices. In founding COJA, Romi is determined to spotlight and celebrate the intersectionality of Jewish identity and artistic practice.

Romi was the Artistic Associate at Theatre Works (2018), and the recipient of Critical Mass at Next Wave (2018) and Australian Cultural Fund Boost (2018). She is currently on the ASSITEJ Australia Advisory Group Committee. Romi champions creating spaces where communities can harness artistic practice for personal development and growth, and therefore develops and delivers various programs for people of all ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. Romi has created and facilitated workshops with Regional Arts Victoria, Polyglot Theatre, House of Muchness, Arena Theatre Company and at Back to Back Theatre's CAMP.

She holds a Bachelor of Performing Arts Honours from Monash University and a Masters of Directing for Performance from the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

Romi has produced and presented the following works: Talking Cure (Phoenix Theatre, 2016), Dark Water Rehearsed Reading (VCA, 2017), _CONTROL (VCA, 2018), Get F*ucked (Brunswick Mechanics Institute, 2018), Flesh Disease Rehearsed Reading (La Mama, 2019), definitely not the worst thing in the world (Green Meadows Park, 2021). Her show 'Singing Swallows' premiered at Theatre Works in 2021 and was digitally shown on Classic At Home (2021/2022).

Romi has been successful in receiving funding towards her practice led projects from Gandel Philanthropy (2019), City of Melbourne (2020), La Mama Theatre (2020), Vic Health Foundation (2020) and Besen Family Foundation (2019, 2020, 2021). She has also received private donations through individual donors and crowdfunding.

About the Centre of Jewish Artists (COJA)

The Centre of Jewish Artists (COJA) has been established to support Jewish-identifying artists living and working in Australia to pursue and maintain sustainable artistic careers. COJA connects Jewish artists in a culturally led environment, celebrating the diversity of what it means to identify as Jewish, and as a practicing artist. Through professional development opportunities, networking events, and mentorship programs, COJA supports artists through all stages of their careers, from emerging through to established. Through sector and community advocacy, COJA promotes cultural awareness and cultural safety. COJA strives towards a future with more educated, informed, and equitable workplaces to allow artists to bring their full identity to their artistic practice.

1. What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

2a First Nations

- We support a focus on First Nations voices within the performing arts sector and endorse plans for a peak body organisation for First Nations Arts

- We support cultural consultation for non-indigenous artists and arts organisations, ensuring that there is cultural policy across the industry of how to recognise first nation culture, artists and audiences.

2b A Place for Every Story

- We support inclusive and accessible opportunities for marginalised and under-represented groups including: First nations artists, Deaf and disabled artists, artists of colour, artists from culturally diverse backgrounds.
- We refer to and endorse the submission from a cohort of leading national Young People Arts companies: Arena, ATYP, Shopfront, St Martins and Polyglot. 'A place for every story' must include children and young people, who deserve opportunities to tell their stories and see themselves reflected in our culture. We need stronger youth arts institutions to support children and young people as artists and creators of culture, to create work that engages and appeals to them as audiences, and to improve mental wellbeing.
- Supporting institutions such as schools, councils and universities to provide arts programs and professional learning opportunities. To create accessible opportunities for all people to engage with the arts.

2c The Centrality of the Artist

- We call for the arts to be recognised as a profession by government with award wages, policies and fair work structures to be put in place.
- Long-term stable funding for practicing independent artists. To value and recognise the artistic value they bring to community, institutions and Australian society at large.
- Increase funding for the Australia Council for independent artists

2e Reaching the Audience

- Invest in a young people and culture framework

A cross-department investment combining Arts, Health, Regional Development, Social Services, Emergency Management and Education has the capacity to deliver outcomes across portfolios. A Young People and Culture Framework would provide the guiding principles, the structure, and the mechanisms to facilitate impactful cross portfolio collaboration.

Investment in a Young People and Culture Framework would:

- Directly support the creative expression, mental health and resilience of young Australians,
- Deliver programs that strengthen communities and build community cohesion,
- Prioritise and increase access and inclusion for underrepresented and disadvantaged young people,
- Support contractors and small businesses most affected by the COVID shutdown,
- Build community projects that foster confidence and community connection,
- Provide young people an active voice in their community's disaster recovery,
- Generate creative thinkers, arts consumers and audiences from the grass roots.

We believe that a Young People and Culture Framework should be a central theme or even its own pillar. This would be a way to achieve some of the multi-portfolio outcomes needed and allow the arts sector to remember how to be ambitious and think long term.

Recommendations:

1. Provide an investment of \$15 million per year for four years from 2023 – 2026 to engage young Australians in arts and cultural activities.
2. Include “Young People’s Engagement” as a priority of the Framework with young people’s arts being included into whole of government approaches to learning, wellbeing, mental health, employment, resilience and artistic excellence.
3. Re-establish dedicated funding for young people’s arts and investment in companies and artists whose core business is young people’s engagement, sufficient to allow growth and enhanced impact.
4. Establish a separate stream of funding for young people’s engagement and participation to be made available to other portfolios including Health and Employment – co-managed by the Australia Council.
5. Establish young people’s advisory committees that reflect the diversity of young Australians, as an ongoing standing committee for the Australia Council for the Arts and the Minister for the Arts, ensuring young Australians have a direct voice to the decision makers impacting their lives.

2. Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why

3a First Nations

- It is incredibly important that first nations artists are given the platform to have their voices being heard within the arts industry and country as a whole.
- Performing arts is the perfect way for audiences and the Australian public to connect to our indigenous peoples, voices and stories and therefore it is essential that there is more support for first nations artists.

3b A Place for Every Story

- As the leader of COJA, it is incredibly important that all Australians see themselves represented across our country. By creating spaces and support for diverse cultures and peoples, promotes inclusivity and the celebration of our multicultural nation.
- It is incredibly important to our community that Jewish artists feel that they belong and are able to authentically be themselves. We therefore request that there is support for Jewish artists across the country and specifically in culturally safe environments also promoting best cultural practices for non-jewish organisations presenting Jewish stories.

3e Reaching the Audience

- We want to see a major focus on the legacy we are leaving future generations. There is an urgent need to rebuild morale and wellbeing within the arts industry. The past three years have caused us to curtail our ambitions, to retreat to survival mode, to plan only for six months ahead. Taking a generational view (such as the 7 generations principal of the

Iroquois people of North America, to think of the seventh generation coming after you in your words, work and actions, and to remember the seventh generation who came before you) does something unexpected: understanding your own place in the world as a tiny being on the planet for a tiny amount of time empowers you and allows you to dream beyond yourself.

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

- Treating the arts industry just like other industries, having award awages and rates, penalty rates, expectations around super and work cover etc
- Having a government funded arts wage, providing stable employment for artists who are actively contributing to our communities. This could be done through the local council area.
- More engagement with councils and their local artists, providing residency opportunities
- Linking schools with their local artists to provide residencies
- Encouraging cultural training for inclusive and accessible spaces
- Subsidising arts engagement so it is accessible for all audiences across the country
- Each local council has it's own theatre with multiple theatre companies/groups/collectives that engage with their theatre space and the locals (young people and adults)
- Government investing in independent artists to support them in making art
- Focusing on how art and creativity can positively impact mental health and bring communities together
- Seeing the value in how art can change young people's lives, who are struggling, experiencing unstable housing and unsafe homes. Especially in flexible learning schools.
- Putting creative art therapy under Medicare and Private Health Insurance to support more young people accessing support that has been proven to help.
- Partnering with other industries to roll out creative engagements across the country ie tourism, education, health etc
- Investing in artists in schools, promoting the engagement of different art forms for young people in school environments and bringing in artists to facilitate sessions.
- Support for universities to keep their arts degrees