National Cultural Policy Submission

Design and Art Australia Online
Submitted: On behalf of an organisation with arts-components (e.g. community organisation, tourism, venue, health, education etc)

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 open-source database Design and Art Australia Online (DAAO) provides an invaluable record of First Nations visual artists and designers and is consulted by industry professionals and academics. It contains the only easily accessible record of many artists below the Rowley line and also an open-source version of eminent researcher Vivien Johnson's biographies of Western Desert artists. However, its other First Nations records are spasmodic as the DAAO has been unfunded for 7 years. With the right resources to expand and upgrade its content and software the DAAO has the potential to be a gateway to greater understanding of First Nations cultures & artists, giving greater prominence to Australia's Indigenous culture & art.

A Place for Every Story

The DAAO exists to create a virtual space for the raw material (biographical, exhibitions, collections) that enables stories to be told. Due to lack of funding in recent years it has not been able to fully realise this promise.

The Centrality of the Artist

The DAAO records Australian artists and designers: their lives, exhibitions & achievements. It currently contains 30,000 individual entries (1860 Indigenous) making it one of the world's most comprehensive historical databases on artists' careers and works. Australian artists are underrepresented in global publishing and academic literatures, it is essential we record our nation's heritage and culture. Where possible it provides direct links to artists' websites or collection holdings.

Future artists and designers require training in Australian art and design, we note the decline of Australian content in our Universities and art schools and implore the government to prioritise research and archiving of our Nation's traditions and artists.

Strong Institutions

Our public institutions have an obligation to make their collections and data accessible to the community. While state galleries and museums make large quantities of their collections available on their individual websites, the data is often not in a format which can be easily shared or linked with other data sets. Our public institutions could be strengthened by aggregating their collections online to better represent the strength of Australian art & culture the world (for example, https://artuk.org/ & similar initiatives have done so overseas).

The DAAO provides rich data on Australia's exhibition histories and as such hosts irreplaceable information on previous Australian institutions, especially Artists Run Initiatives and commercial gallerists who no longer exist.

Reaching the Audience

The DAAO was founded on principles of open data while maintaining editorial rigour. It has the potential, with further funding and support to be the first port of call whenever anyone (professional or amateur) has a question about any Australian artist, art form, or period in Australian Art History.

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

We would like to see a National Cultural Policy that fully takes into account the 21st century revolution in technology and enables Australian artists to show the world the art that they make, the lives they lead – and have led. We need to be able to show both the deep past (including the legacies of colonialism) and the multi-coloured, multicultural present. The beauty of the web is that it has dissolved all the geographic boundaries that kept many of our artists in relative obscurity. Our Cultural Policy needs to recognise the importance of technology and data to each of the five pillars and commit to ensuring Australian art & artists are well researched and documented.