

**SUBMISSION TO THE OFFICE FOR THE ARTS**

August 2022

In the spirit of reconciliation the Head On Foundation acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land sea and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.



Australian cultural and artistic policy-making has long been swayed by the pervasive idea that photography does not hold an important place in Australia's art sector, history or community. Further, there is a troubling assumption that photography is not art or lacks artistic meaning/merit/intent/context, and national and cultural policies have repeatedly reinforced this bias.

We believe that the photography medium and the photographic community are under-used and underappreciated resources that will add significant richness to Australia's cultural landscape and legacy once invested in and embraced.

Head On Foundation outlines the following recommendations for the National Cultural Policy.

### **Levelling the playing field for small to mid-size arts organisations**

Many small arts and culture institutions/collectives/communities/foundations rely heavily on grants and philanthropy to support and produce within the Australian arts sector. However, large arts organisations are applying for the same grant opportunities as smaller organisations. Furthermore, these large institutions often have dedicated teams of experienced workers to write grant applications and acquittals and have substantially more time and resources to invest in philanthropy. We need to level the playing field by:

- Creating more funding opportunities that are dedicated to small to mid-size organisations
- Supporting small to mid-size applicants with helpful resources and practical changes like people to assist with grant writing, extended deadlines and/or simplified applications, and educational resources that provide practical advice on grant writing
- More funding opportunities designed to support arts workers to assist with philanthropic projects

### **Funding guarantees and incentives for photography events**

Head On Photo Festival has provided thousands of photo-artists a world-class platform to promote their work. The Festival has sky-rocketed the careers of several Australian photographers and introduced hundreds of international artists to Australian audiences. While Head On works to subsidise the costs of exhibitions, this is becoming increasingly difficult with the rising costs and lack of space for exhibiting work in Australian cities. Festivals and exhibitions remain one of the most effective ways for emerging artists to expand their portfolios and gain new paid work. Furthermore, festivals and similar events are an extraordinarily impactful method of connecting wide audiences to artistic and cultural stories – they round out a complete experience of cultural appreciation.

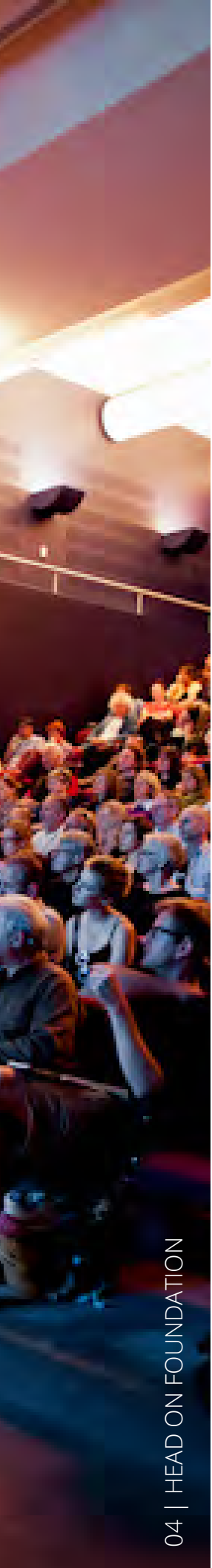


While museums and galleries may preserve our artistic histories, cultural festivals and events manifest the art of the now. The new National Cultural Policy must recognise cultural festivals' significant and enduring impact on the Australian arts sector. Festivals are not just temporary celebrations but important landmarks in artists' and arts workers' calendars that allow them to optimise, expand, enhance and innovate their cultural careers. To ensure cultural Festivals can continue, there need to be financial guarantees that will support organisations to ensure staffing, venue and production costs so that they can focus more on promoting artists, creating innovative events and connecting with audiences.

### **Support the next generation of photographers and photo-based arts workers**

Photography is a medium constantly changing in line with technological developments. This means that photography is an inexhaustible resource for innovation. And more broadly, as photography develops, so too does the whole of the arts industry, as photography is the means through which we view, display, conserve, document, archive and sell art. Photographic developments do not happen in a vacuum; when photography changes, it impacts the entirety of the arts sector. We saw this during Covid, with many museums adopting VR technologies to create virtual tours of their exhibition spaces. Still, many smaller institutions could not adapt to such circumstances lacking resources and/or know-how of these new technologies.

A new generation of photographers encouraged to embrace new technologies and think in lateral multi-disciplinary ways will create a more innovative and adaptable Australian arts industry. We need committed and bipartisan support to nurture and grow the emerging generation of photographers and photo-based arts workers to ensure Australia continues innovating and utilising this constantly developing tool. This support must be both financial and educational, providing emerging photo-based practitioners with the space and resources to experiment and expand their practices.



## Develop and support the local culture

In Andrew Taylor's article *Move over Melbourne: Sydney's push to be nation's culture capital*, (Sydney Morning Herald, 14 August 2022), Taylor wrote "a report [*Creating Australia's Arts and Cultural Capital report*] commissioned by Business Sydney says the harbour city is missing out on tourists and risks being a "second division" city because it relies too heavily on the Opera House, harbour and beaches while downplaying arts and culture." The report in question determines that "A shift in the emphasis and focus of Sydney's destination brand appeal is needed... Historical over-reliance on the 'icons' (which appeal more to international visitors) has disconnected it from the things that motivate Australians to visit."

Sydney's cultural tourism has been too heavily concentrated on promoting attractions of a monumental nature, like the Harbour bridge or travelling blockbuster exhibitions that speak to an ahistorical international appeal. While the Harbour Bridge may be a timeless icon, it does little to represent the living culture of this place and its people.

Place attraction is not maintained through architectural icons or exhibitions of dead artists; we need to foster an engaging, dynamic and, most importantly, self-sustaining local arts and culture scene that represents our living culture.

To do this, we must develop our unique cultural identity through funding and infrastructure that supports local talent that already feeds into Australia's cultural economy. The national policy needs to fund and support cultural projects that utilise and respond to the unique cultural topography of Australia here and now, and the most effective tool in this endeavour will be visual media like photography. Photography parallels film and music in its unique ability to evoke and represent a place, a time and a feeling. We witness such strong, vibrant cultural output from places like America and India, due mainly to their sustained investments in Hollywood and Bollywood productions. They understand that visual media is unrivalled in creating cohesive cultural stories. We are beginning to see this in Australia's burgeoning film production industry with films like *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *The Nightingale*, and *The Babadook* – movies that took the world by storm for their creative capturing of Australian life, nature and culture. Australia should focus on creating a vibrant visual media industry that is rallied around creating meaningful visual evocations of Australian culture, perspectives and stories. Photography will be at the heart of this mission.



## **Create national recognition of photography through art collections, cultural dialogue and education**

Most Australians confidently recognise photography as art and engage with the medium more than any other art form. This suggests a major discrepancy between the lived reality of many culturally-engaged Australians and what federal and state governments suggest through their policies and spending. Cultural policy and dialogue miss the recognition that photography, videography and digital media are among the most powerful and popular of all cultural and artistic expressions.

- We need to recognise photography as a pillar of Australian art firmly. Public and national museums and galleries need a more significant proportion of photography in their collections, and these collections should receive equal dedication, promotion and research to other traditional media.
- Commercial galleries require more government incentives to buy, show and sell photographic work.
- We must invest in producing more comprehensive photography education in schools and tertiary institutions. More syllabi should explore and express the importance and richness of Australia's photographic history and Australia's contemporary photography community in thoughtful and engaging ways.

## **Diversifying grant opportunities and selection criteria**

The local photography community keenly feels the lack of investment into photographic projects in Australian policy, which is currently supported mainly by small not-for-profit organisations that lack resources and funding. Australian funding bodies rarely support photographers and photography-focused projects, often transparently opting for arts projects more neatly or comfortably fit into a traditional bourgeois understanding of what art is and who can make it.

Photography is not embraced for its potential to highlight issues, express complex perspectives, and represent the under-represented. And when photography is used, it is often done in a way that devalues the medium and/or the photographer. Grant opportunities and the selection criteria of these grants need to expand their framework to include different definitions of what is considered culturally valuable and worth funding. We recommend a sustained commitment to diversifying the backgrounds and experiences of grant juries, adjudicators, committees and advisory boards to ensure that a plethora of perspectives on arts and cultures inform grant funding selections.

For more on what we do, visit  
[www.headon.org.au](http://www.headon.org.au) or find us @HeadOnPhotoFest.



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