

National Cultural Policy Submission

Sculpture by the Sea Incorporated

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

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

We enjoy and celebrate providing a platform for Indigenous artists to present their artworks to a broad section of the Australian population through Sculpture by the Sea, Bondi (Sydney), Sculpture by the Sea, Cottesloe (Perth) and the Snowy Valleys Sculpture Trail (regional NSW).

Our major challenge is securing funding from the public and private sectors to engage directly with sculptors in remote Indigenous communities to work with them to exhibit in one of our exhibitions. Given the number of visitors to our Sydney and Perth exhibitions Sculpture by the Sea presents a tremendous opportunity for Indigenous artists from remote communities to a far larger audience than would normally be available.

A Place for Every Story

We enjoy the diversity of the artists we exhibit and the public which engages with the artists artworks through our exhibitions. With annual visitation to our Sydney and Perth exhibitions estimated to be 600,000 – 650,000 people our audience represents the broadest cross section of Australian society, including tens of thousands of visitors from every Australian State and Territory. Likewise, the artists represent a very broad cross section of practising artists in terms of genre of sculpture, gender, cultural background, age, sexuality, disability, geography and economic ability.

The biggest challenge for our organisation is securing meaningful Federal government funding through the Australia Council for the exhibiting artists to create

their artworks and our organisation to stage the exhibitions and to provide practical support to the artists.

The direct financial support for artists from across Australia in our exhibitions from the RISE Fund has been greatly appreciated by the artists and seen a noticeable increase in the artists seeking to apply to exhibit. This demonstrates the opportunity that reasonable funding for the artists presents for the development of the exhibition as an avenue for artists to create new artworks to reach a large and diverse cross section of Australian society.

The Centrality of the Artist

The artists are the core of our organisation. The professional and practical support we provide to the artists to exhibit before hundreds of thousands of people in stunning physical locations, where they would not otherwise be given approval to exhibit, is a key reason why Sculpture by the Sea continues to receive some 500 submissions by artists from across Australia each year. Year in year out since 1997 our exhibitions have presented artworks by a large number of the leading senior to emerging sculptors in Australia, providing a platform for the artists that generates significant income from sculpture sales, scholarships, awards and subsidies and which has launched the career of many artists who are now recognised as among the most important artists in Australia.

Our greatest challenge is securing reasonable funding for all of the artists (not just those who secure significant sculpture sales or scholarships and awards) and our organisation to provide professional and practical support to the artists.

Strong Institutions

The most substantial challenge our organisation has faced is the lack of funding and support from the Australia Council as the Federal government's principal Arts funding body to directly support the artists to create their artworks and our organisation to stage the exhibition as a platform for the artists to engage with a large number of Australians from a broad cross section of society. On the occasion separate Federal government Arts funding has been available from alternative sources, such as the Federal Ministry for the Arts Catalyst or RISE Funds from which our organisation has received significant funding, our grant applications have been successful. This alternate Federal government funding has been fundamental to the financial viability of our organisation and the direct financial support we have been able to provide to the artists.

There is an opportunity to provide better and fairer access to Federal government Arts funding if a second substantial source of Federal government Arts funding is made available. In this way those organisations which rightly or wrongly believe the Australia Council will never provide them with reasonable funding will have the opportunity to secure Federal government Arts funding. While the Australia Council is the only source of Federal government Arts funding it needs to be removed from any perception of bias, this is not currently the case.

Reaching the Audience

There is a real opportunity for the Federal government's Arts funding bodies to ensure Federal government Arts funding is at least partially focused on those Arts organisations that engage with a large and wide cross section of Australia society.

The lack of interest from the Australia Council in Sculpture by the Sea and the large number of visitors to the exhibitions from a broad cross section of Australia society is baffling and appears to support the widely held belief that the Australia Council's Visual Arts funding is managed in such a way that it is provided to those organisations and artists which the managers of those funds personally favour.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

Indigenous artists from remote communities represent a major means for building connections between First Nations peoples and the rest of Australian society. We would like to bring the artworks from remote communities to the exhibitions we hold in the cities of Sydney and Perth.

A Place for Every Story

The artists greatly appreciate and enjoy the opportunity provided by Sculpture by the Sea to create their own artworks without the need to comply with any curatorial brief or any curatorial oversight that controls their freedom of expression.

The Centrality of the Artist

One of the main reasons for starting Sculpture by the Sea and for continuing the exhibitions for 25 years is to provide a means for a large number of artists to present

their artworks to a large and diverse cross section of Australian society. In doing so we have actively assisted Australian artists in the development of their practices and professional networks in Australia and internationally.

Strong Institutions

If our organisation was not a strong institution able to afford to employ the minimum number of staff required to safely manage the considerable workload to exhibit some 150 new artworks each year for an estimated 600,000 – 650,000 visitors it would not be possible to stage Sculpture by the Sea. Once our RISE Fund grant expires we will face a significant shortfall in funding that will threaten our viability if an alternate Federal government Arts grant is not forthcoming.

Reaching the Audience

To reach a large and diverse audience, and the widespread benefits to society from the Arts, is fundamental to the purpose of our organisation. It is for this reason that we have created Sculpture by the Sea in both Sydney and Perth and the Snowy Valleys Sculpture Trail which was launched in May 2022.

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

1. A second significant source of Federal government Arts funding to make it possible for those organisations which consistently fail to secure Australia Council funding to receive funding from another Federally funded source. This will have the added advantage of negating the perception of bias that the Australia Council for the Arts has for some organisations which are otherwise successful in grant organisations from other sources of public funding.
2. Clear public disclosure of the people nominated to sit on the peer assessment panels to allow for public feedback on those nominated prior to Ministerial approval of the members of the peer panels.
3. Ministerial oversight and approval of the peer assessment panel funding decisions to ensure there is proper oversight of the assessment process and the removal of the perception that the system is controlled by the bureaucrats who nominate or select the peer panel members.