

Australian Craft and Design Centres (ACDC) Network

Submission

A new National Cultural Policy

August 2022

The Australian Craft and Design Centres (ACDC) Network is delighted to make this submission to the development of a new National Cultural Policy for Australia.

Craftspeople and designers solve problems through making and to express themselves and their cultures. They work in small studios and businesses or as sole practitioners. Typically, their working conditions are quite precarious as evidenced by the Australia Council's longitudinal study 'Making Art Work'. Culturally they are as diverse as the entire population, with First Nations practitioners embracing old and new skills and techniques to champion culture, share stories and create economic independence. This work is happening in the most remote of our regions, and in our cities. Likewise, People, newly arrived from all parts of the world, are bringing with them age old traditions of making, while designers, educated in our learning institutions, are innovating with the latest technology and materials. They are contributing to the creative and cultural vibrancy of Australia.

These masters of crafts-based making and leaders in design thinking possess vital skills we as a nation need to harness, celebrate and share in order to navigate and thrive in an uncertain and dynamic future.

The past decade has seen the craft and design sector remain determined and resilient despite the many challenges presented by continuous and unrelenting funding cuts at federal and state levels of government. This has been enacted at the organisation level through major funding cuts to the small to medium sector, as well as significant reductions in grant funding available to independent artists. Combined with enormous changes to the vocational and tertiary education system for craft and design practice in Australia, we have experienced a major destabilisation of the Australian craft and design ecology with whole modes of practice now struggling to exist in several key states and regions.

The ACDC network includes the following organisations from all states and territories.

Artisan (QLD)
Australian Design Centre (NSW)
Australian Tapestry Workshop (VIC)
Canberra Glassworks (ACT)
Central Craft (NT)
Craft ACT (ACT)
Craft Victoria (VIC)
Design Tasmania (TAS)
Guildhouse (SA)
FORM (WA)
JamFactory (SA)
Sturt Centre for Craft and Design (NSW)

These organisations were largely established in the 1960s-70s and are leaders in the field engaging in research, employing artists and designers, developing careers and reaching and cultivating diverse audiences. Each has a national footprint providing opportunities to showcase Australian craft and design to national and international audiences through creation of work, exhibitions, festivals, workshops, retail, digital, publishing and touring platforms. These organisations collectively play a vital role in Australian craft and design practice, although their work often goes beyond these disciplines into other artforms and cross-sectoral work.

The ACDC network calls on the Federal Government to redress the impact of funding cuts of 2016 when the previous government reduced funding to the Australia Council, subsequently threatening the capacity of many organisations to continue. Some of these organisations receive state and/or local government support and project funding from various sources but it is the multi-year investment through the Australia Council that enables real opportunity to grow support for artists. We believe there is a critical need to restore multi-year core investment to these organisations through the Australia Council to a level that allows us to redress the vital work required to sustain and develop a robust craft and design ecology as part of the broader visual art and cultural sector.

We are calling for a coordinated national approach that seeks to build back and look forward embracing all that the craft and design sector has to offer through increased and sustained long term investment.

1. First Nations

ACDC organisations have demonstrated their commitment to First Nations' artists through program design and development. We acknowledge there is still much to be done. In the past ten years there have been many ground breaking exhibitions and career development programs on Country, in regional centres and in capital cities. Many ACDC organisations have employed First Nations artists, curators and producers so that these programs can be led by First Nations' cultural authority. That said, it is difficult to attract and retain First Nations staff in small organisations particularly where funding is often short term or exclusively program/project driven. We consistently hear feedback from First Nations' elders, Board members and Artist Advisory group members that we need to create new ongoing pathways for First Nations artists and cultural workers to lead the way.

We recommend direct funding of at least \$100,000 per annum for each ACDC organisation to employ a First Nations curator/producer in an ongoing capacity – to contribute to a redress of cultural representation in the broader art, craft and design sector, and importantly to create more opportunities to grow and meaningfully develop an ethically and sustainably employed First Nations workforce.

2. A Place for Every Story

ACDC organisations are vital creators and promoters of culture. Returning and increasing long term government investment in our platforms will enable us to create more opportunities for artists to tell their stories and at the same time grow awareness and appreciation of this critical cultural contribution amongst the national audience.

Through our exhibition programs, residencies, print and digital publishing platforms, retail spaces and varied public engagement programs, the organisations in the ACDC network provide the most extensive range of ongoing and springboard opportunities for artists working in craft and design media.

Policy recommendation: continued investment in clustered 'centres of excellence' that foster skill development, experimentation, collaboration and sharing of knowledge. ACDC organisations provide vital and necessary infrastructure for the development of emerging practice as well as providing necessary facilities for the country's leading established artists. Over the last two decades, several states and regions have lost such sites of excellence and infrastructure due to funding cuts, and this is having a direct and ongoing impact on the number and diversity of Australians able to meaningfully participate in these vital art forms.

3. The Centrality of the Artist

The Craft and Design sector has a deep, embedded commitment to artist development, creation of new work and artform development. As a collective of organisations, in the context of the broader craft and design community we consistently deliver in terms of creating opportunities for artists to sell their work, reach new audiences and develop necessary skills, both creative and business.

Significant changes to higher education and shrinking commercial avenues for practitioners have placed increasing pressure on the ACDC organisations to meet the demands of artists and audiences. In addition to extensive exhibition and creative development programs, many ACDC organisations have adapted to meet the needs of independent artists and makers through creating mentorships, residencies, exhibitions and retail outcomes. We are a vital pipeline to build skills and reach audiences.

We strongly support an increase in funding available to support individual artists, particularly for professional development (including mentorships), project and fellowship grants and for the purchase of specialised studio equipment, which can be a significant issue for artists working in material specific disciplines.

4. Strong Institutions

An environment of secure, sustainable and ongoing funding for the national network of organisations represented by the ACDC would create a strong foundation for future growth, stability for long term planning and cooperation and more certain career pathways for artworkers in the sector. We strongly support an increase in funding to the Australia Council to enable core multi-year funding to more organisations in the craft and design sector, many with rich histories spanning more than 50+ years.

5. Reaching the Audience

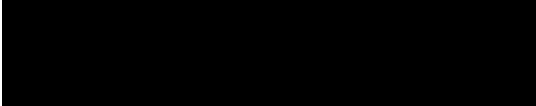
We reach a broad and diverse audience, nationally and internationally. The ACDC network has maintained a considerable impact despite very limited resources – often delivering outstanding return on investment. In addition to attracting our own audiences, the programs we deliver are scrutinised by commercial galleries, retailers, tertiary institutions, magazine editors, competition organisers, architects and others looking to identify and create opportunities for talented artists and designers. An increase in funding to the Australia Council to enable higher levels of multi-year funding for small to medium organisations would rapidly amplify opportunities for artists to reach audiences. In the craft and design sector this would enable our organisations to meet significant unmet demand from a more sustainable base.

Signatories:

Artisan (QLD), Claire Sourgnès, CEO
Australian Design Centre (NSW), Lisa Cahill, CEO and Artistic Director
Australian Tapestry Workshop (VIC), Antonia Syme AM, Director
Canberra Glassworks (ACT), Elizabeth Rogers, CEO
Central Craft (NT), Bronwyn Field, CEO
Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre (ACT), Jodie Cunningham, CEO + Artistic Director
Craft Victoria (VIC) Nicole Durling, Director
Design Tasmania (TAS), Sarah Blacklock, CEO
FORM (WA), Tabitha McMullan, CEO
Guildhouse (SA), Emma Fey, CEO
JamFactory (SA), Brian Parkes, CEO
Sturt Gallery and Studios (NSW), Kristie Phelan, Head of Sturt

On behalf of the ACDC Network, for further information on this submission contact:

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We agree to this submission being published in full.