

National Cultural Policy Submission

Phi Theodoros - Ukulele Dream Girl

Submitted:

On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

On behalf of a for-profit arts business

As a worker/professional in an industry who uses arts (e.g. art therapist, tour guide)

As an artist

As an individual

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

As a non-Aboriginal community artist I have seen the First Nations artists I've had the privilege of partnering with deliver powerful and priceless messages through storytelling, art and music. While many initiatives have been running to highlight and support First Nations Creatives, there is still much more to be done to increase access to training, funding and platforms for these artists to regularly share their work. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories and culture ARE part of our history and should be considered core to our national cultural identity. The diversity across First Nations culture communities is also significant and must be recognized as part of the vibrant fabric that is our cultural identity.

We need dedicated, funded positions nationally for Aboriginal Artists to act as liaisons between creatives within Aboriginal communities and the arts bodies as well as other organisations across social services, education and corporate sectors who seek to share their work so all of this is facilitated in a way that is Culturally appropriate, safe, and respectful for all involved.

State-based or nationally supported 'ways of working' protocols would be help non-Aboriginal organisations to better understand how they can partner with and showcase the incredible work of First Nations Artists. Having appropriate resources to facilitate cultural storytelling is a powerful step forward towards truth-telling, healing and reconciliation.

A Place for Every Story

Australia is known as a strong multicultural nation globally, however many stories shared across media in film/TV and other platforms do not wholly represent the diversity of the creatives and storytellers who (regardless of country of origin) call Australia home.

There have been great steps forward towards better representation of artists across different life experiences such as ethnicity, those who live with a disability, religion, economic background, ability, sexuality and gender identity. While there are highly successful specialised events and festivals for specific cohorts within our multicultural nation so much more can be done to add colour to our otherwise predominantly white, cisgender and able-bodied mainstream arts training institutions, performance and exhibition spaces and more. This needs to be well funded and respectfully implemented without being a tokenistic or diversity box-ticking activity.

All people should be represented in 'mainstream' spaces to broaden our understanding of what this multicultural national identity truly means AND build stronger and more empathic communities by

sharing stories. This can break down stigma and misunderstanding and humanise people beyond stereotypes – the power of stories is transformative, and much more can be done to support diverse stories to be shared.

The Centrality of the Artist

Throughout the pandemic much of the arts industry was decimated through lockdowns, festival and event cancellations, closure of training institutions and more. While the government made attempts to offer funding to artists – this was not enough with much of the funding allocated to larger companies or specific industries leaving thousands of independent creative artists struggling. Simultaneously we saw the boom of streaming services with more people engaging in film and television than ever.

Regardless of access to funding, Artists have continued efforts to create and share work to try and make sense and meaning of the world and the changes around us. Even amongst the bleakest moments, they have still been makers and creators contributing to the culture of our nation. For this work they should be supported, recognized, remunerated, and celebrated.

Artists have a central role to play in all parts of our lives – they create work that helps us to understand and process events, to inform us about often misunderstood or forgotten stories and experiences and to entertain us and transport us to other worlds – which many can agree was a welcome distraction throughout the past three years.

Strong Institutions

The Pandemic has led to the closure of many iconic arts venues and institutions. Whether they be small independent spaces or larger venues that could no longer function without international tourism and artists. Many of these venues were spaces where emerging artists began their professional careers and are critical for the arts eco-system across the country.

These spaces must be reactivated, alongside the encouragement for new innovations that bring the arts to unexpected places and spaces all year round. We must activate new spaces in communities, so that we can bring high quality and meaningful arts experiences into communities that may otherwise miss out – be them regional or lower socio economic.

Simultaneously, as flagged above, we need to be mindful of how we can improve the current institutions to provide better equal access to engage in the arts either as an audience or a creative seeking training and professional development opportunities. Exploring how we can embed better disability access and inclusion as well as more culturally responsive and safe venues and training opportunities alike are key.

Reaching the Audience

The rise of screens and augmented reality in our world opens up new possibilities for people to connect and share their work. I would love to see more funding for blended events and projects that offer virtual experiences to improve access to the arts across all walks of life. Supporting artists to develop the technical skills and to access quality equipment will help grow arts access in a virtual space whether this is via social media or paid streaming platforms. Simultaneously we as humans also crave meaningful connections so in-person events are still crucial. These can be innovated too –

bringing arts experiences into non-traditional environments and removing the barriers to accessing high end arts. Arts and creativity should not just be for a privileged few who can afford it – it should be embedded in every aspect of our worlds to inspire creativity, imagination and playfulness in all.

Creativity and the arts should not be limited to certain artists or audiences – they should all be supported, enabled and celebrated. Arts funding needs to be broad, accessible and greatly increased so we can bring back our storytellers, our creatives and our artists across all mediums to the centre of each community.

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

In all areas of my work and life I know it is imperative for First Nations storytellers to be supported appropriately. With a strong base of support and respect these artists can open new conversations, help educate the wider community about the importance of their culture and engage in truth telling. I have been fortunate to develop positive working relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and have learned so much and grown in both my arts practice as well as how I engage with others inside and out of work as a result. However, there is still much distrust, institutionalised racism and misunderstanding that occurs in all areas.

We need better education around the racist culture that underpins our country and better support for First Nations artists to share their perspectives to provide more chances for this kind of growth.

A Place for Every Story

I am passionate about storytelling and supporting people from diverse backgrounds and experiences to share their voice and their story. I do this through using creative mediums with vulnerable people in my work with Living Arts, through supporting the community initiatives of Ink Pot Arts as a Board member and as a cabaret performer sharing learnings and perspectives that are often overlooked. See below for how this advocacy for diverse storytelling connects with the individual creating work and the wider audiences.

The Centrality of the Artist

Many people I work with are unclear of the value of arts and creativity in everyday life, they see it as an unattainable career or privileged hobby. I would love to see a shift of how people relate to creativity and show a deeper understanding of the value of the artist as a central point of our shared culture and simultaneously how people can better relate to their own artist within.

Strong Institutions

Access and inclusion are core to how I create, plan and play within my own arts practice and my community arts work. I strive to ensure I have considered the best practises available to me for accessible venues, performances, workshops. I am forever learning and growing and would love to see more support for artists to do the same. The arts are for everyone and should be accessed by all. Organisations like Access 2 Arts should be consulted across all levels of arts engagement to strengthen all arts institutions.

Reaching the Audience

As a Bachelor of Media (Drama Major) Graduate from Flinders University I have always been curious about how to engage a broad spectrum of audiences and the role technology can play within bringing people together through creativity and storytelling.

Within my role in Living Arts my audience is twofold – the vulnerable young people with complex needs that I work with and their support teams of carers & workers and then the wider community. Finding a balance between creativity for self-expression and then highlighting the amazing stories from these clients is a delicate practice but I am dedicated to finding respectful ways to offer a platform for their work to help the wider community understand the lived (and living) experience of people with complex needs. By using creative mediums to share these stories we can protect the identity and privacy of our clients where needed whilst simultaneously using the arts as a vessel for sharing stories and shifting stigma to connect with new audiences and transform their pre-conceived ideas about complex behaviour, mental health challenges and trauma.

I am especially proud of the work Living Arts does in partnership with the Mental Health Coalition of SA to offer the mindshare platform – an online community space showcasing the creative work of artists with Lived Experience of mental health challenges.

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

Arts and culture are inherently intertwined, our culture as a nation is something that is reflected, expressed, challenged, and organically transformed by our artists and the work they share. As a western culture we do not always place value on the arts and creative expression unless it is deemed to be a ‘professional outcome’ and even then, this is only recognized by those in the community who actively seek it. We, as humans, seek meaning and purpose in everything we do. This helps us make sense of the world around us, to process the joys and challenges of everyday life. Some people are unable to engage in a verbal dialogue to make sense and meaning, whether this may be due to trauma, disability, mental health challenges or cultural and language barriers.

The work our Living Arts program at Life Without Barriers delivers within the community sector uses the arts and creativity as a new language to help our most complex and vulnerable clients to express themselves to find their voice and safe connections and self-regulate when life becomes overwhelming. Simultaneously the engagement and outcomes from Ink Pot Art’s “Arts for Wellbeing” programs launched in early 2020 have shown the importance of expression, creative and connections during challenging times.

This is something that is greatly missing from the broader culture within Australia – the transformative power of the arts for everyone, not just those with complex needs. We are all born creative, yet somewhere along the way we have been taught that this is not a useful skill in a capitalist society. That ‘art’ is something to be bought and displayed rather than explored and experienced. We need more messaging from the top down around the inherent value of the arts and our own internal creativity to inspire not just the next generation of artists, but to strengthen our culture as a resilient and thriving nation who are proud of their diversity and vibrancy.