

# **National Cultural Policy Submission**

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

**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**

Our current cultural landscape is poorer for not always placing the stories, knowledge and art of our first nations people at the centre of all that we do. The opportunity here is for everyone to benefit and learn from one of the oldest and richest cultures in the world.

## **A Place for Every Story**

Our country is one of the most diverse countries in the world, in language, experience, art and culture. The fact that our stages still do not represent this diversity is outdated and outrageous. This includes deaf artists, artists with disabilities, neurodiverse and neurodivergent artists, CALD artists, young emerging artists and older artists. The opportunity here is for meaningful and proper representation.

## **The Centrality of the Artist**

It is clear, now more than ever, that art as a practice, as an approach, as a way of thinking, simply *is* resilience; the capacity to change in response to challenges. That the practice of art in this country has survived the last decade, albeit at an unknowable cost of attrition, is its supreme qualification as a future source of well-being, diversification and strengthening of our national identity. There is tremendous opportunity here in valuing artists as a central part of our cultural fabric.

## **Strong Institutions**

Strong institutions come in all shapes and sizes. The opportunity here lies in supporting organisations, companies and institutions even if they don't fit the shape or size we're familiar with.

## **Reaching the Audience**

Everyone should have access to art in this country. Live art has the ability to create community, change minds, and confirm existence. The opportunity here is to make sure that art is accessible to everyone, especially children and young people, wherever they live.

**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/A Place for Every Story/The Centrality of the Artist**

As artists, we are always privileged to work with artists, and hear stories, that are not our own. It is our mission as a company to provide platforms for diverse stories and artists. A cultural policy which puts these activities at its centre would be transformative. For Elbow Room, theatre is our life and our livelihood. For the government to recognise and value our profession by acknowledging the independent artist as a valid member of our society and our economy, rather than someone "trying to make it" would change the way we live and work.

We are artists, not policymakers, and we respect the need to separate 'First Peoples', 'diversity' and 'excellence' as categories. However, as artists, as producers, as programmers, as collaborators, and as citizens, we cannot do so.

'Excellence' is still too frequently measured against the artistic output - and particularly the 'technical standards' - of other nations' cultures. While we have every reason to be proud of Australia's European cultural heritage, to limit our measures of our own excellence to these standards - or to seek their permission to do otherwise - is to misunderstand both their art and ours.

This misunderstanding, currently, extends to who is allowed to experiment in Australian art. European-Australians continue to be overrepresented in experimental art, simply because our 'excellence' is allowed to manifest as innovation. It is the lived experience of our frequent and valued collaborators from non-European cultures

that their art is obliged, in a way that ours is not, to conform to institutional ideas of 'merit' in order to justify their inclusion as 'diverse' artists.

We approach art as a way to imagine our shared life more sensitively, fully and, ultimately, peacefully. Celebrating diversity of origin, of experience, of outlook, of aspiration, is fundamental to the excellence of art; and thus to artistic practice. Creating spaces where our contemporary experiences can meet one another on equal footing *\*is\** the best definition of excellence that we know.

## **Strong Institutions**

Independent and small to medium companies in this country are the most innovative and exciting art makers we have. They create work that takes risks, creates platforms for new and marginalised voices, and are leading the way in cultural safety. These companies and organisations achieve so much of this on little to no financial support. But we have maintained our creek beds. We have prepared through a long drought. We know exactly what to do with more water, and where it should go; we have learned not to waste a drop.

## **Reaching the Audience**

The more access our audience has the richer their lives will be, the more informed they will be, the better all our lives will be.

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

- living wage for artists
- more funding opportunities for independent companies and artists
- a commitment to accessibility of the arts