

# National Cultural Policy Submission

## Daisy Sanders

Submitted: 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

### Opportunities

- Opportunity for essential local and national truth telling about Australia's colonisation through arts
- Opportunity for self-led First Nations arts initiatives, arts companies and arts projects that can strengthen/empower First Nations communities and preserve ancient culture
- Opportunity for First Nations wisdom about land care and community building to be integrated into arts practice ie. (all artistic companies and projects can operate with more respect, sustainability and collegiality by consulting with Aboriginal artists and leaders)
- Opportunity for arts to promote broad public respect and celebration of First Nation approaches, knowledge and unique cultural contribution

### Challenges

- There can be a disconnect between operation styles of the arts 'industry' and First Nations artists and communities. Sometimes the incidental communication style or community and family focused ways of organising that can characterise First Nations approaches are at odds with best practice (ie. ensuring contractual obligation, artist's pay and hours are fair etc.)
- There is nuance to cultural safety in First Nations arts practice that needs time, resources, care and intelligence to develop. This must be factored in to any and all arts activity that involves or is led by First Nations people
- What are the rigorous testing mechanisms to ensure that funding for ANY First Nations art activities is not given tokenistically, and to ensure that those leading and/or consulting are equipped to deliver within industry standards and cultural safety?

## A Place for Every Story

### Challenges

The artists, audiences and style of work in most of Australia's major arts companies does not currently reflect the diversity of Australia. The Major

Performing Arts framework is a major structural issue here, because it concentrates a large amount of Federal arts money in traditional, European art forms (ballet, opera, theatre) which reach a particular demographic (white, middle-upper class). This means that many of the smaller and most innovative arts companies (those who make and present work that celebrates and reflects Australia's diversity), are severely under funded.

If we are aiming to resource, empower and hear diverse stories, the needs of diverse groups must be considered with great care and attention. ie. A space for mother artists to work and prepare their stories is different to artists with diverse needs/abilities, different to highly conceptual artists, different to community focused arts, different to stories by and for young people etc.

### **Opportunities**

- Opportunity for disability-led arts activities that create empowerment, connection, advocacy AND project outcomes
- Opportunity to radically reimagine the places and spaces where art is both created and presented (architecture, style, indoors/outdoors, suburbs/central city, leaders, access factors etc.). *Where* and *how* something happens often has an unspoken 'code' of who is welcome and able to access it, and who is not. There is a serious opportunity here to activate arts in a way that ensures diverse stories are self-led, and diverse communities are heard in authentic ways rather than asked to conform to existing arts venues/protocols.

### **The Centrality of the Artist**

#### **Challenges**

Consistent erosion of Federal and State arts funding for small/medium companies AND Fellowship-style funding has meant that the concept of investing in *artists* not *projects*, has faded away - we need to rebuild this as a nation.

#### **Opportunities**

- Opportunity to recognise that the essential workers of the arts are *artists*
- Opportunity to recognise that the steady casualisation of the arts workforce means those who are most essential (artists) are most precarious (working freelance, casual, part time) and those who administrate/support artists are more likely to be waged
- Opportunity to recognise that even most large state/national companies and funded organisations in the Major Performing Arts framework work with a large pool of independent and freelance artists. There is an opportunity to address the long term challenges this creates in artist career stability and sustainability.
- Opportunity for initiatives that wage artists (eg. universal basic income, artist stipend, scholarships, fellowships). Australia can look to other nations where arts and culture policies centralise artists as the key drivers of arts. Well resourced and structured frameworks such as those noted above could invite

artists to work generously on both their creative work AND their social generosity (ie. freedom to create with no requirement to demonstrate *product*, but a requirement to connect with community, audience or share in other ways). Be valuing the artist with financial support and respect, and leading the way with a conversation of how arts enriches society, there will be wider and more meaningful engagement in arts.

## **Strong Institutions**

### **Challenges**

- Funding to arts organisations does not necessarily filter down through artists
- Arts institutions across Australia are pitted against each other in funding rounds and asked to justify their worth at regular intervals - this creates high stress and a sense of 'competition' - instead of collegiality and a sense of all belonging to a united sector

### **Opportunities**

- Opportunity to review how large organisations allocate their funding to fair and waged employment of artists, to arts practice and sector development
- Opportunity to promote partnerships between Australia's population of artists (largely working in freelance and independent arrangements) and arts organisations rather than perpetuating a dynamic in which artists are vulnerable and in service to arts organisations ie. make it clear on a policy level that artists and organisations need and serve each other equally

## **Reaching the Audience**

### **Challenges**

- Arts have been devalued and given significantly less media air time than other industries (eg. sport) - it will take huge collective resources and energy to increase the widespread recognition of the value of the arts, and to rebuild awareness of and accessibility to arts in the general Australian population

### **Opportunities**

- Opportunity for community building and social impact to be integrated within all high quality performance and arts events ie. make art works of a high standard *and* be more rigorous and qualitative in how we measure social impact (not just number of tickets, but deeper engagement measures)

**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**

- As a descendent of colonisers I am conscious and constantly, actively building my awareness of First Nations wisdom and culture. I work in a variety of projects which are focused on empowering First Nation's voices. Even when that is not the focus, I ask the question of how to acknowledge where we are, the landscape, the existing stories, successes and pain in that place, how to work with humility, respect and awareness. We can go so much further than just acknowledgement of country - artists are sensitive, listening, powerful, socially aware thinkers and doers who can lead the way on how we integrate First Nations approaches into our cultural character.
- Personally I had a challenging experience with cultural safety and losing my income in a First Nation's led project. There is a fine balance between investing necessary money in First Nation's artistic endeavours *and* making sure that the skills and mechanisms required to deliver these in a culturally and financially safe way are sound.

## **A Place for Every Story**

- Lack of diversity in our arts may reflect the fact that participating in arts comes from financial privilege. If Australia wants a cultural policy that can ensure a vibrant cultural life for all citizens, a powerful image of Australia being communicated out to the world, and that both of those things truly reflect the diversity of our nation, then equitable access to arts participation needs to be invested in. Arts needs to be prioritised in all levels of education and scaffolded as an essential, well-funded Government service along with education and health.

## **The Centrality of the Artist**

- I have worked in arts advocacy for the entirety of my 12 year career. Analysing the experience of independent and freelance artists while *also* making work as an independent artist has been exceptionally confronting, tiring and challenging. The voices and experiences of individual artists are so often unheard because they don't operate within company structures. Representation, rights and effective, sustained income models for the essential workers of the arts (the *artists*) is to me, the single most urgent thing to address for ensuring that Australia's cultural policy is effective going forward. I say this from my personal experience, from observing many highly accomplished yet financially precarious professional arts peers AND from a 2020 research paper I led through The West Australian Chamber of Arts and Culture under then director Shelagh Magadza. There is a resounding need to explore new models of artist income to ensure health and efficacy of individual artists and thus the arts sector as a whole.
- Jobkeeper (during 2020) was the best income I've ever received, and it allowed me to work in an exceptionally supported, generous and productive way.

## **Strong Institutions**

- The Major Performing arts framework is problematic. In my direct experience numerous invaluable small to medium institutions have been decimated in terms of their funding and resources BUT they often deliver the most innovative, diverse and current art work, the best support for artists and the most valuable contributions to sector development.

## **Reaching the Audience**

- I believe audience development is a key challenge for Australian cultural policy. We need to normalise every day engagement in arts. We need to make the cost and location of arts more widely accessible. We need to welcome audience into the artistic process at all stages. There is a lot of work to be done here and artists can lead the way if given the effective resourcing and support.

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

- A focus on devised and new Australian work being favoured over outdated classics.
- A focus on interdisciplinary work ie. mixing art forms being celebrated and supported.
- A focus on flexible producing models for arts ie. initiatives that draw independent artists together and/or small to medium companies are invaluable and more able to adapt to fast changing practices than big institutions.
- There should be a well-funded peak body in every state who are in dialogue with the arts sector and can lead the way on professional development, sector building and government consultancy within arts.