

Nick Schlieper, [REDACTED]
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Dear Committee

Thanks for the opportunity to make this submission. I'll keep this short, but am happy to discuss further in more detail.

I have been a freelance theatre designer for over 35 years and although I have always returned to Australia, my practice has included a great deal of international work. As a result, I've had ample opportunity to observe the role that the arts are accorded in other western countries. I also sit on the boards of Malthouse Theatre and Belvoir St Theatre Ltd.

I think the economic benefits of the arts are well known and documented, but the less tangible benefits tend to be overlooked. I refer to the sense of a community, a culture, that is engendered (and projected to the world) by the arts. Put simply, culture is the difference between a society and just a group of people who happen to live in the same place. Culture is the very thing that makes us who we are, that defines us. As such, I find it inexplicable that it isn't central to our every policy decision, but rather marginalised to the realms of entertainment or diversion. That we have no over-arching plan for it. That it isn't a discrete ministerial portfolio. That it has ceased to be a department of our bureaucracy.

As is the case in many other fields, the current pandemic has served to reveal and in this case accelerate longstanding structural flaws. I refer to the appalling lack of public investment in the arts. Not only has the pandemic battered our arts institutions, it has revealed the fundamentally flawed basis on which they have long operated. Our largest theatre companies receive a subsidy that reflects only 7 or 8% of their costs. A measly \$2.5 million dollars a year. Their utter reliance on box office (usually around 80%) along with flaky private philanthropy means they aren't in any real sense subsidised at all. They have become businesses operating on an unsustainable business model, rather than public institutions for the enjoyment and benefit of all.

The longer we put off properly funding our arts organisations, the quicker will be their decline. The arts are not a peripheral plaything of the wealthy few or a bit of light entertainment for a night out, they are a fundamental building block of a civilisation. They define it.

The clock is now ticking for the future of our culture.
My hope for this inquiry is that it becomes a first step towards saving it.

Yours Sincerely,

Nick Schlieper.