

6 March 2023

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Phone: [+61 2 6277 3526](tel:+61262773526)
ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Inquiry

National Cultural Policy, [*Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place.*](#)

To inquire into:

- a) the National Cultural Policy released on 30 January 2023; and
- b) any other related matters

Submission from

Onespace Directors – Jodie Cox and John Stafford

Jodie Cox Director

John Stafford Director

onespace.com.au

Organisational History

Onespace was established in 2016. We represent 15 artists including 6 First Nations artists of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage. Over the last six years we have quickly built a reputation for providing a quality contemporary art exhibition program and delivering several significant public artworks.

Our gallery program has been recognised through acquisitions by The British Museum, the National Gallery of Australia, Artbank; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art; Art Gallery of New South Wales; Art Gallery of South Australia; Art Gallery of Western Australia; Museum of Contemporary art (Australia); National Gallery of Victoria; and numerous University Art Museums and Regional Galleries in Australia.

Our represented artists have shown in prestigious international exhibitions at Nuit Blanche in Toronto; the Busan Biennale; the Oceanographic Museum of Monaco; The UN Headquarters (New York); and The Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia (USA). Here in Australia, they have been included in major survey shows and awards including: the Biennale of Sydney; TarraWarra Biennial; the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art; Tarnanthi; Primavera; the Perth Festival; Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Art Awards; and the national Indigenous Ceramic Award.

Since 2017 we have been a regular participant at the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair and since 2020, we have participated consistently in Sydney Contemporary.

Submission content

We congratulate the Government on the introduction of *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*, Australia's new national cultural policy. We were pleased to make a submission to the consultation process on the National Cultural Policy last year, and to participate in a visual arts roundtable hosted by staff of the Australia Council for the Arts and Artbank.

We are seeking three key things we would like the Committee to consider in the ongoing implementation of *Revive*, and outline our reasons further below:

We recommend that:

1. The Office for the Arts ensures that commercial gallery representatives are included in working parties, committees and consultation advisory bodies established by the Department to ensure that this perspective is integrated in an ongoing way into the formation of government policy in the visual arts sector.
2. The newly formed Creative Australia, in partnership with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, undertakes research into the current scale and scope of the commercial gallery sector, to identify ways in which government can assist its viability as an economic generator of sustainable incomes for Australian visual artists. Ideally this research would be conducted before the end of 2025. This should also include art fairs as a point of sale.
3. Urgently investigate the capacity of Australia's regional gallery and institutional art museums sector to sustain and enhance their annual acquisitions funds to acquire works by Australian living artists to enable the development of incentive programs that encourage significant regional collections across Australia and to contribute to the viability of Australian artists and the commercial galleries that represent them.

We read with great interest the policy's strategies for the effective correction of economic injustice for both Australian writers and musicians who have long been discriminated against by structural cultural inequities. These inequities have denied them rightful earnings, such as writers failing to receive royalty payments for their work included in commercial audio books. We applaud the formation of Music Australia and Writers Australia.

There is much to recognise and acclaim within the new cultural policy, with two of the five pillars – First Nations First and the Centrality of the Artist – particularly resonant with us. These foci are essential to the work of our commercial gallery, as we represent 15 living professional artists, six of whom are First Nations artists.

However, we were disappointed to note that over the course of some 113 pages of cultural policy, the words 'commercial gallery' does not appear once. This omission would no doubt have also dismayed the numerous commercial galleries across our country who, day in and day out, work hard to support Australian artists to make some kind of living in our society. We would dearly like to quote current statistics on this sector, but unfortunately no such statistical research has been done in this area since the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported on it in 1999–2000: over 20 years ago.ⁱ

Even back then, the ABS reported that Australia had over 500 commercial galleries. It would be valuable to know how much has changed in the last two decades and consequently what government should do about this sector.

Some key facts for commercial art gallery businesses were as follows:

- The total income in 1999–2000 was \$132 million (which in 2023 equates to \$234 million*)
- The total expenses during 1999–2000 \$122million (which in 2023 equates to \$216 million*)
- Collectively, there was an operating profit before tax of \$9 million (or an) operating profit margin of 7% (which in 2023 equates to \$16 million*)
- The average gallery wage was \$22,900 (which in 2023 equates to \$40,586.45*)
*CPI Inflation Calculator

Clearly from our profit margin, commercial galleries such as us are not ‘big tech’ or banking. We are formed by culturally driven business professionals motivated by the work and ideas of our Australian artists, and their contribution to the cultural life of our nation and its economy. And we do it for a living ourselves, which we generate through sales. This requires us to maintain good relations with both private collectors and the curators working in numerous government-funded cultural institutions.

Many galleries survive off inherited resources and/or the real estate they operate from, but many also do not. And for those who do not, rent prices continue to go up and freight costs and material costs and other related services (photography, graphic design, printing, etc.) continue to rise along with inflation (7+%). Our key strategy to combat this scenario is the sales of artworks, to both private collectors and public institutions, as well as through public art commissions and any other form of commission we can devise.

Revive announced an important new initiative – the greater availability of our national collection of artworks from the National Gallery of Australia to regional art galleries, museums, and institutions. This is totally commendable, as it will increase the visibility of our shared national collection and enable regional galleries to boost their programming and enhance their tourism strategies. But what will it do for living artists? Will there be any kind of royalty payment for the showing of that work each time? Or will it further increase the profitability of commercial freight companies as they deliver works from Canberra to Hobart, Perth, Darwin, and Cairns?

There is no doubt that these communities deserve access to the best of our national collection, without always having to travel to Canberra. But perhaps these communities and their incredibly valuable regional galleries also deserve access to a stimulus fund that would enable them and their Councils to make empowered choices (acquisitions) to build their own collections. These collections would assist in representing regional identities through works that tell stories about local communities, from both First Nations artists and the broader spectrum of visual arts practitioners, many of whom tell an important migrant experience from our diverse regional Australia. These acquisitions would do many things, but primarily they would build and strengthen local regional collections while injecting valuable cash flow into the economies of living Australian artists and the commercial galleries that represent them. We know from previous sales we have made to regional galleries that many of them have extremely limited acquisitions budgets – or worse, none at all.

In closing, we note the important affirmation that aspects of *Revive* received from key industry bodies such as the National Association for Visual Arts (NAVA), with NAVA’s Executive Director Penelope Benton stating:

Importantly, the new policy’s endorsement of NAVA’s voluntary [Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design](#) is a win for our sector. Mandating the Code in its entirety would have been better, but this is a great start.ⁱⁱ

In her statement, NAVA’s Chair Clothilde Bullen commented:

First Nations First offers a firm infrastructure to complete the necessary work on enshrining protections for First Nations artists nationally to protect art styles and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.ⁱⁱⁱ

Since the demise of the Australian Commercial Galleries Association some years ago, commercial gallery directors are now more disparate and sporadic voices, rarely invited to the table of cultural policy discussions as we do not enjoy operational funding agreements or access to project grants on a regular basis. Our position in the visual arts ecology is indeed our choice, but if ABS research was conducted today, the Committee would know that our work is half of the economic equation that supports Australia's living artists.

We are here to assert that it is not only important to hear from organisations such as NAVA but also the commercial galleries of Australia in finding out about the cultural and economic lives of Australian visual artists. We have intimate knowledge on their circumstances because we are interdependent on their success, working together on a daily basis to further their achievements. We look forward to our voices being heard.

ⁱ ABS, "8651.0 - Commercial Art Galleries, Australia, 1999-2000", <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8651.0>.

ⁱⁱ Benton cited in Gina Fairley, "This is what you've told us: sector responses to Revive", *artshub*, 31 January 2023, <https://www.artshub.com.au/news/opinions-analysis/this-is-what-youve-told-us-sector-responses-to-revive-2608854/>. ⁱⁱⁱ Bullen, cited in *ibid*.