

Chapter 14

The future of the market for Indigenous art

Introduction

14.1 The future of the market for Indigenous arts and craft in Australia and overseas is dependent upon many factors, including the continued supply of the art itself, the cultivation of new generations of artists, tourism, the export market, and the level of financial and professional support available for artists to engage in the market. This chapter discusses two of the major sectors of the market, tourism and the export market for Indigenous art.

14.2 Government plays a valuable role in assisting the identification of markets, and in helping ensure that those marketing Indigenous art are able to take advantage of emerging sales and export opportunities. The Commonwealth agency Austrade has provided assistance in developing export sales. Business development and market identification for Indigenous art sellers are activities covered by current arts funding programs. There are also state and territory strategies supporting export markets:

Export opportunities were also supported through direct intervention and funding through the Indigenous Arts Strategy underpinned by the Indigenous Art Strategy and the Northern Territory Government International Trade Strategy.¹

14.3 In terms of the future of the market generally, flexibility in the marketplace is essential to the future success of Indigenous art centres. As Warlukurlangu Artists pointed out to the committee:

We are always looking for new markets. We have some people overseas. We have a regular exhibition program. We have places like Walkatjara that sell to tourists and then we have exhibitions at Alcaston Gallery and Gallery Gondwana where we put more collectible work and we might get exhibitions. So we have more than one way of marketing our work.²

The tourist market

14.4 The tourist market comprises sales of Indigenous art to travellers both Australian and from overseas. There are two distinctions between this and the export market. First, tourism sales take place in Australia, whereas export sales generally (though there are exceptions) are in overseas markets. Second, tourism sales often involve the purchase of art work as a memento or symbol of a tourist experience.

1 Northern Territory Government, *Submission 57*, p. 29.

2 Mrs Cecelia Alfonso, Warlukurlangu Artists, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2007, pp 45–46.

14.5 The tourist market in Indigenous arts and craft covers a wide spectrum of products, from boomerangs and t-shirts through to fine art. The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) explained the market accordingly:

In looking at the whole of the industry, there is a continuum, if you like, from buying a design and putting it on a manufactured T-shirt or whatever right through to the fine art spectrum. It can be art and craft, and sometimes beautiful T-shirts come out of that spectrum. In the middle is art and craft work. Because the Indigenous art industry has grown so quickly and so exponentially, some of those wholesale practices result in work being produced for tourists at a price they can afford and are the sorts of things that they like.³

14.6 The significant growth in the market, as identified by NAVA above, has led to calls for better management of the Indigenous arts and craft industry to protect Indigenous communities from the impacts of tourism and commercial pressures in the wake of market expansion. Ms Jill Gientzotis advised the committee that NAVA's:

recommendations relate(ed) to the need to carefully manage the ways in which this expansion occurs so that Indigenous culture is not undermined by international commercial interests and to ensure that the impacts of tourism are managed and fair returns are made from tourism (domestic and international) to Indigenous creators.⁴

14.7 While the Indigenous art market depends significantly on tourism for its survival, this has an impact on communities and art centres due to its seasonal nature in some areas. Ideas were put to the committee on ways to overcome seasonal impacts on the Indigenous art market, and the Cross Cultural Art Exchange outlined their suggestion to the committee:

One of the major issues with Darwin is the dramatic change from wet season to dry season, and historically there has been a massive decrease in tourism during the wet season. The idea of having an Indigenous art fair during the time of the Darwin festival has been explored. You could have it in the Chan building, although there are issues with that. Just like the Melbourne art fair, you would have segmented areas. Communities could then pay a nominal amount and utilise that time during the art awards. At the moment, there is such limited space here in Darwin—there are only however many commercial outlets—that there is the potential for six to 10 communities to be able to exhibit during that prime time. If there was an Indigenous art fair at one location during that time then everybody could capitalise on the mass influx of people.⁵

3 Ms Jill Gientzotis, National Association for the Visual Arts, *Committee Hansard*, 23 February 2007, p. 30.

4 Ms Jill Gientzotis, National Association for the Visual Arts, *Submission 27*, p. 11.

5 Mr Paul Johnstone, Cross Cultural Art Exchange, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2007, p. 34.

14.8 Another issue affecting the market apart from seasonal fluctuations is the purpose behind the tourist visits to Indigenous communities, art centres, dealers and other sales outlets. Not all tourists are art collectors or wish to buy fine art. There are those who simply wish to purchase souvenirs or gifts, but do not have a particular knowledge of or interest in Indigenous art. Then there are those who specifically travel to Indigenous communities because they wish to experience the communities and art centres first hand with the specific purpose of purchasing art for their collections. One example of this type of collector was outlined by Mayke Kranenbarg:

There was an Austrian couple that returned to Australia every year since the last fourteen years and each time purchased Aboriginal artworks. As 'diehards' as they called themselves, they liked to extend their collection. What they liked about Warmun art were the natural ochres used and the 'spaciousness' of the paintings. The meanings of the paintings also attracted them: 'We like the way Aboriginal people connect with their land and with nature. It is a beautiful culture that we can learn from.' They preferred to visit art centres instead of buying art over the Internet as they wanted to encounter the artists in person. Visiting the country where paintings were produced also made them feel that they could connect more with the artworks.⁶

14.9 Although discussed only briefly in the preceding paragraphs, the different types of tourist markets need to be taken into account, in addition to all of the other issues covered in this report, if the industry is to continue to be successful. Dealers, art centres and other market participants would be wise to ensure they have continuing strategies in place to plan for, accommodate and educate buyers in different tourist categories, whether they are simply souvenir hunters or experienced fine art collectors.

14.10 Having said that, there are strategies in place, supported by government and other organisations to assist with the tourist education process. The Northern Territory has funded such an exercise:

So through ANKAAA, the Northern Territory government has funded the consumer brochures, which we now have in four languages, to assist tourists coming into the country to get some background and to understand copyright law, intellectual property, moral rights and all the different aspects of purchasing Indigenous art.⁷

14.11 The extent to which such educational initiatives are successful, or whether more support is needed, is not discussed here. A more detailed discussion about the education of buyers of Indigenous arts and craft is found in chapter seven of this report.

6 Mayke Kranenbarg, *Painting Authenticity, Aboriginal art and knowledge in an intercultural space* (Warmun, Western Australia), Cultural Anthropology, University of Nijmegen, June 2004.

7 Ms Stephanie Hawkins, Northern Territory Government, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2007, p. 6.

The international market

14.12 While it is obvious that many Indigenous creative and artistic works are sold within Australia – whether to local buyers or to overseas buyers and tourists who then take them offshore – the international marketplace, where Indigenous products are sold offshore, generates significant activity.

14.13 This section of the report will examine the views of witnesses to the inquiry about the size and scale of the international market for Australian Indigenous arts and craft, how viable the international marketplace really is for such works, the role of Austrade within the industry, and the level of support that is or could be provided by governments and other key bodies for encouraging further development and expansion of international markets.

Size and scale of the international market

14.14 As discussed in chapter two of this report, there do not appear to be definitive statistics showing the size and scale of the international market for Indigenous arts and craft. The Northern Territory Department for the Arts has observed that there is no clear information available on export earnings for Indigenous creative works. While there are categories like the 'export of wooden craft articles' they 'do not identify what is Indigenous and what is non-Indigenous'.⁸ Austrade has pointed out that the size of the overseas market has not been properly established and the monetary value of the market is difficult to assess due to the high level of non-commercial activity that may have been funded through government departments for various promotional reasons.⁹

14.15 In the early 1980s it was reported that around 80 to 90 per cent of Indigenous art and craft production ended up overseas¹⁰ however it is uncertain whether such levels have continued since that time. While this percentage is significant, it is likely that this figure includes both Indigenous products purchased within Australia and then taken overseas by travellers, and those products exported or exhibited and sold offshore to overseas buyers. Because this discussion centres mostly on establishing the size and scale of the international market, rather than looking at what has been sold within Australia's borders, it needs to be determined what proportion of the 80 to 90 per cent of work that purportedly ends up overseas is actually exported first and then sold offshore.

14.16 To come up with some specific figures on the size of the offshore or international market today there would need to be a collation of data from various segments of the market rather than just from one particular activity. The Cross

8 Dr Diana Leeder, Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, Northern Territory, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2007, p. 10.

9 Mr John Odgers, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 25.

10 T. Pascoe, *Improving Focus and Efficiency in the Marketing of Aboriginal Artefacts*, Report to the Australia Council and Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Ltd, June 1981.

Cultural Art Exchange outlined what aspects of the industry they felt would need to be accounted for if some kind of accurate picture were to be formed about the extent of the offshore market:

We need accurate statistics on, first, how much of their work goes overseas from individual art centres and, secondly, whether those works go into a retail scenario or into a display scenario—so nonprofit or profit.... You could also extend that survey into all galleries to ascertain how much of the work goes overseas outside of the community arts centres. Then you would have a comparison between the commercial enterprise and the community art centres, which of course are also commercial art enterprises but different.... It would also be fantastic to see how much work goes overseas in general. Then you would have a final result and be able to subtract what goes out from commercial galleries that deal with arts centres, arts centres themselves and then others, and then you would know how much work goes overseas, roughly, that has perhaps come through areas outside of arts centres.¹¹

14.17 Although there is a lack of official data on the size and scope of the international market at this time, various observations have been made by industry participants regarding how large they perceive the market actually to be. These ideas largely appear to be in relation to the traders' own activities. For example, Maningrida Arts and Culture gave evidence to the committee about the extent of international sales within their own business, saying that 14 per cent of their sales were to overseas markets, and that they were happy that this was on the increase.¹² Similarly, Red Rock Art advised that what they considered to be a small percentage of their art 'would go directly overseas; possibly 10 per cent'.¹³

14.18 Others pointed out that their focus was not necessarily on international markets, as most of their activity was essentially domestic but that overseas clients did contribute to some of their business activity. Mr Claude Ullin, a dealer in Indigenous fine arts, explained to the committee that, while he did not think the international market was presently as strong as the domestic art market, it would certainly develop. He said it was attractive and relatively inexpensive to overseas buyers given the strength of the euro and the US dollar. He further went on to say that while the market was not that strong in America at the moment, it was certainly quite strong in Europe.¹⁴

14.19 Some Indigenous art dealers see the overseas market as essential to their operations, particularly in terms of internet sales helping to prop up the seasonal

11 Mr Paul Johnstone, Cross Cultural Art Exchange, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2007, p. 40.

12 Ms Apolline Kohen, Maningrida Arts and Culture, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2007, p. 46.

13 Mr Kevin Kelly, Red Rock Art, *Committee Hansard*, 19 February 2007, p. 36.

14 Mr Claude Ullin, *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 44.

domestic market quiet periods. Mrs Pamela Linklater pointed out to the committee that it was during certain times of the year that overseas internet inquiries were good:

Yes, because of the incredible interest in overseas sales. It is at this time of the year that the internet kicks in, and I always say to the overseas people that it is because they are snowbound and icebound and they are looking at the computer. Whereas our busy time here is when they have got their summer over there and that is when they go away on holidays. But right now is a very good time for internet inquiries.¹⁵

14.20 Thus while there is no complete set of statistics showing the extent of market operations in the industry internationally, it is clear that industry participants each have their own views about what any exposure to the international marketplace means for them. While the percentage of international business may vary for different market participants, it seems to be generally agreed that international trade forms an important part of the industry and that opportunities for international trade are available for those wanting to be involved. As Mr John Odgers from Austrade told the committee:

The potential for return for the Australian experience seems to be there. The sales prices that perhaps are achieved in the primary market, but increasingly over the last few years in the secondary market, have been really quite substantial and if that were to flow into the international market, then the potential might well be for those very large prices to be recorded in the international market as well.... The response to Indigenous art from Australia has been overwhelmingly good. It is seen as a unique art form. Clearly the sort of work that is made here in Australia cannot be made anywhere else, so it is unique from that sense. It has been welcomed in art circles in a number of countries around the world to great acclaim. It is considered at times to be the only new contemporary art form of the last couple of decades.¹⁶

14.21 While the size of the international market and increasing potential for international sales does seem significant enough, the lack of consolidated statistics on the size and scale of the market could make it somewhat problematic for both private and public sector bodies to devote resources to and make decisions about their potential participation in the international marketplace in the future.

Recommendation 27

14.22 Given the importance of and growing interest in Australian Indigenous arts and craft internationally, the committee recommends that the Commonwealth examine the feasibility of compiling industry statistics to record international exhibitions, sales and exports of Indigenous arts and craft, including, where possible, their value in dollar terms.

15 Mrs Pamela Linklater, *Committee Hansard*, 19 February 2007, p. 4.

16 Mr John Odgers, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 38.

Viability of the international market

14.23 It is argued that the international export market for Indigenous visual arts and craft is very successful. Mr John Odgers from Austrade pointed out during the hearings that he knew of galleries operating overseas that were 'constantly touring exhibitions of Aboriginal art or going to arts centres' and that they would not continue to do this unless it was profitable.¹⁷ The National Indigenous Council (NIC) also recognised the viability of the export market for Indigenous arts and craft, telling the committee that forging links into the international market 'was a good way to go'.¹⁸

14.24 The Northern Territory Government pointed out to the committee that some art centres feel that involvement in the overseas market is actually necessary for their survival in what is often a difficult market due to the isolation of Indigenous communities from the marketplace in general:

Even for those few art centres that have direct access to an urban retail outlet (for example, Maningrida in Darwin and Papunya in Alice Springs), this accounts for only a fraction of necessary sales volumes. Interstate and more recently, international, export is an obligatory marketing mode.¹⁹

14.25 The Cross Cultural Art Exchange is one enterprise that places significant emphasis on international sales and exhibitions, having recognised this as a viable marketplace for Indigenous arts. Mr Paul Johnstone explained to the committee how he became involved in this area:

I went on a trip to China about two years ago to have a look at the potential of exporting Indigenous art. I was horrified to see that three of the exhibitions I found in Hong Kong and one in Shanghai were basically carpetbag shows with no provenance. I requested to see the coding on the back of the paintings and I was denied. When I relayed that information to the community arts centres where these artists usually painted, they had no knowledge of the work going overseas at all. I realised that one of the problems that is going to exist in the future is that, as Indigenous art becomes more and more popular worldwide, the same issues that we are talking about today will be replicated on an international scale. So I wanted to then set up a company that would maintain quality, integrity and ethics through the arts centres to set up high quality shows overseas, particularly in America.²⁰

14.26 The Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) is a government agency the role of which is to support and assist Australian companies, individuals and organisations who want to become involved in the export market. The services that Austrade

17 Mr John Odgers, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 38.

18 Dr John Moriarty, National Indigenous Council, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 46.

19 Northern Territory Government, *Submission 57*, p. 28.

20 Mr Paul Johnstone, Cross Cultural Art Exchange, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2007, p. 33.

provide include giving practical export information and advice, the identification of overseas opportunities, on-the-ground exporting support overseas and in Australia, a comprehensive trade exhibition program, services to identify potential overseas business partners and to research and access high potential markets for Australian companies, and strategic export planning and network formation services. They also offer financial assistance via their Export Market Development Grants Scheme, where eligible businesses may be reimbursed for some their export costs.²¹

14.27 Some of the ways in which Austrade has supported the Indigenous arts and craft sector in particular were explained to the committee during the hearings:

Looking at Austrade's approach to promoting and developing the Indigenous art sector, currently there is a variety of approaches for exporting Indigenous art. Some of these include supporting buyer visits from Europe and the USA... Another way is through assisting with exhibitions at venues in overseas markets that have often been negotiated directly by Indigenous arts centres. Another way is assisting Australian galleries attending art fairs.²²

14.28 Austrade also outlined to the committee the difficulties they had encountered and concerns they had in dealing with the sector. They claimed that it was difficult to promote the sector without having 'consolidated data' and that there could be inconsistencies in the production, supply capacity and quality control of Indigenous arts. Also, they explained that in general micro businesses lacked the 'financial resources and time to devote to the export market'.²³ Austrade also identified that there could sometimes be a lack of art centre marketing skills suitable to deal with the inbound tourist market. Other issues that Austrade identified were:

The remoteness of production centres, a lack of understanding of business processes, and the affordability of Austrade services to develop long term marketing strategies.²⁴

14.29 While there are clearly Indigenous art and craft industry participants who see the export market as suitable for them, there are others who feel that the initial set up costs are prohibitive, and that ongoing involvement in this area is a financial challenge. As mentioned above, Austrade has recognised this as a problem for some, advising the committee that:

The challenge that appears to us from what has been reported to us is that the arts centres or the galleries do find it financially challenging to be involved, for example, in art fairs, which is a very significant way that art is sold internationally, because [of] the cost of those art fairs. The cost of the

21 Austrade web site, 'Austrade Services', <http://www.austrade.gov.au/Austrade-services1396/default.aspx>, accessed 8 May 2007.

22 Mr Patrick Donaldson, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, pp 32–33.

23 Mr Patrick Donaldson, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, pp 32–33.

24 Mr Patrick Donaldson, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, pp 32–33.

freight, the cost of the travel and the people being involved and so forth has to come out of the profit made at the art fairs, and that is not necessarily happening. There is not enough profit being made overall to actually allow those businesses to go back to those art fairs regularly... The further challenge is with the arts centres in that they do not have the appropriate infrastructure or staffing and they are very remote, so there are things like freighting from the middle of Australia to Darwin. So all of those issues obviously require some sort of financial resource from some area, but we could not put a figure on it.²⁵

14.30 While Austrade has recognised the need for additional resources in the area, it has been suggested that Austrade needs to do more to assist art centres in that regard. For example, Warlayirti Artists in their submission to the inquiry pointed out that Austrade could help in more practical ways by having a program that would fund airfares and overseas accommodation to support art centres whilst they were developing international links and export opportunities.²⁶ Some art centres appear to have been afforded travel support by Austrade, but the financial extent of this support is unclear. Maningrida Arts and Culture advised the committee that Austrade had been good to them in assisting with travel, and while that support was more moral than financial, it was better than no support at all.²⁷

14.31 The perceived viability of the international market for Indigenous arts and craft seems to vary depending on the individual views and circumstances of each dealer or art centre. As discussed above, some see it as a highly viable activity, while others are constrained by financial and resourcing considerations. The scope seems to be there for further forays into international markets, but it appears that more needs to be done to support and encourage those organisations that might otherwise shy away from expanding into this area.

14.32 While financial support for such ventures is always helpful, it is not all that is required. As pointed out by Professor Howard Morphy, sponsorship of international exhibitions needs to be better supported with the appropriate expertise:

This is an area where one really needs to work in association with knowledgeable and expert curators. It is no good sponsoring exhibitions of poor quality Indigenous art, which quite often happens because the person happens to know someone who knows someone who has persuaded someone, without there being the proper interrogation or the proper reference group and so on. It is not difficult at all to create great exhibitions of Aboriginal art from Australia, but we have been very bad at generating those and sending them overseas.²⁸

25 Mr John Odgers, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 37.

26 Warlayirti Artists, *Submission 10*, p. 3.

27 Ms Apolline Kohen, Maningrida Arts and Culture, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2007, p. 45.

28 Professor Howard Morphy, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 71.

14.33 Ms Brenda Croft of the National Gallery of Australia also raised concerns about the quality of overseas exhibitions of Indigenous art being impacted upon by a lack of communication with appropriate experts in the area:

There is not enough discussion that goes on with, for example, embassies and coming to somewhere like the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board, which is made up of Indigenous people. You will find out that an exhibition or whatever has been promoted through that embassy—I am speaking from first-hand experience here—which is perhaps not the best representation of what should be coming out of our country, or the person who has pulled it together is not someone that we would deal with here. There is a lack of information that is out there overseas by the people who purport to be promoting Indigenous culture from Australia and that has concerned me and my colleagues at the Arts Board of the Australia Council for quite some time. We are here; come and ask us. If there is a proposal or a project that comes to these places, then why isn't there a standard way of just going to the people who do know and then they can say yes or no, that this is going to be a good representation of what comes from this artist.²⁹

14.34 This suggests that if what is represented in overseas exhibitions of Indigenous arts and craft is questionable, then this can in turn have an impact on the viability of the future market. In other words, if what is being represented overseas as Indigenous art is not of sufficient standard or is not authentic then this has the potential to affect the reputation of the industry and Indigenous artists, and to deter international investors and collectors from buying it in the future. In recognition of this, calls have been made for better industry controls and regulations. The Cross Cultural Art Exchange discussed this issue in their submission to the inquiry:

This year saw an increase in major exhibitions presented internationally, amplifying the need to control the integrity of the industry, the quality of the work and to ensure the fair distribution of money back to the artists and their respective communities. As interest in Indigenous art grows globally, it is imperative for exhibitions to be ethical. There is a risk of national issues being transferred to the international market. The wildly fluctuating prices being generated between auction houses and the commercial outlets only increase consumer confusion of the market. Regulation is paramount to prevent international markets becoming apprehensive.³⁰

14.35 Further supporting this call for better industry controls, Dr Diane Mossenson pointed out the perceived lack of focus by Austrade in ensuring the quality and ethical acquisition of the Indigenous arts and craft that were being exported or exhibited overseas:

Also, I think that Austrade, because of their brief to take any company overseas that is export ready, in some ways, do not really screen the quality, quantity or sourcing of the Aboriginal artworks. So, at this moment, there is

29 Ms Brenda Croft, National Gallery of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 59.

30 Cross Cultural Art Exchange, *Submission 16*, p. 5.

a large proportion of B-grade and C-grade work, in my humble opinion, that is going overseas and is sourced through less than ethical situations where the artists themselves are not getting any real major benefit from it.³¹

14.36 During the hearings the committee questioned Austrade as to whether any assessments were conducted by them to determine the ethical behaviour of businesses wanting to export Indigenous products overseas, or to assess the provenance of the Indigenous art and craft products. Austrade advised the committee that whether or not a company acted ethically or morally was not part of their assessment process. However, they advised the committee that they were not aware of any problems in this area:

We can fairly safely say that across those arts centres and galleries with whom we have had dealings, we have not been made aware of any ethical problems or issues related to those particular business clients that we deal with. If, for example, we work with a gallery that wishes to promote its art overseas, part of the success, it would seem, of those galleries is the correct provenance of the artwork. That is an accepted process across the world in terms of selling art. We have not been made aware of there being any irregularities with the provenance of the work from those galleries. They have been relatively successful, so we can only assume that the provenance of their work is correct.³²

14.37 Austrade went on to further advise the committee that there was also a considerable amount of commercial activity in relation to the international export of Indigenous Australian art in which Austrade had no involvement. They pointed out that some Aboriginal arts centres had been independently exporting for some time, and that there were also things like non-commercial international cultural awareness programs run by other government departments and organisations that did not involve Austrade at all.³³

Recommendation 28

14.38 The committee recommends that, once the Indigenous Art Commercial Code of Conduct is introduced, Austrade consider a policy of only providing assistance to businesses that have agreed, either directly or through an industry association membership, to abide by the Code.

14.39 Despite such concerns, the international marketplace for Indigenous arts and craft is currently still a viable consideration. As Austrade reinforced, there would not be a large number of exporters in the industry if it was not profitable to be involved.³⁴ While Austrade recognises that start-up costs are significant, they state that over time

31 Dr Diane Mossenson, Australian Commercial Galleries Association, *Committee Hansard*, 23 February 2007, p. 9.

32 Mr John Odgers, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 33.

33 Mr Patrick Donaldson, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 33.

34 Mr John Odgers, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 25.

these costs will balance out and profits will eventuate. Initially when art galleries representing Indigenous artists or art centres start in export it would not be unusual for them to experience a negative return, and in recognition of these difficulties, Austrade has an Export Market Development Grants Scheme that allows any business that is starting in export to claim a reimbursement against its costs.³⁵

14.40 Desart is one organisation that has recognised the support that Austrade offers art centres and other exporters to assist them with getting involved in the international market:

We have been very encouraged by the interest shown by Austrade, and we have worked closely with the Northern Territory government and Austrade in the inbound trade missions. This is the third year that they will operate. Important connections have been made with international markets. The trade mission that we hosted with Austrade and the Northern Territory government last year led to direct sales in excess of \$100,000 and the organisation of some seven exhibitions overseas. We also worked with Austrade on a consultancy to develop pathways.³⁶

14.41 However, Desart also highlighted the difficulties for art centres wanting to take up Austrade's Export Market Development Grants Scheme. They argued that not many art centres had been able to take up the scheme because the payments were limited to particular categories and the payments were retrospective, so people who did not have the funds up front were finding it difficult to get started.³⁷

14.42 Despite such obstacles, it was pointed out to the committee by the Northern Territory Government that the export market provided growing opportunities in the area:

In a sense, the establishment of a growing international export trade, with art centres marketing directly into these markets, is a fulfilment of the historic task of the Aboriginal visual arts and craft industry: it has always embraced economic, community and cultural development. It is an industry that is now taking these ideas on to the world stage.³⁸

Further developing the international market

14.43 There are those who believe the international market for Indigenous arts and craft could most certainly be expanded.³⁹ There has been much discussion throughout the inquiry on how this expansion could be achieved. While there are existing programs that might assist Indigenous artists and their representatives to further

35 Mr John Odgers, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 38.

36 Mr John Oster, Desart, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2007, pp 28–29.

37 Mr John Oster, Desart, *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2007, p. 29.

38 Northern Territory Government, *Submission 57*, p. 30.

39 National Association for the Visual Arts, *Submission 27*, p. 11.

penetrate the international market, some argue that these programs may not go far enough. Ms Hetti Perkins, an Indigenous Art Curator from the Art Gallery of NSW, advised the committee:

We believe there should be enhanced support for existing institutions, in our instance, state or national fine art institutions who have best practice models, in order that we can pursue opportunities for artists internationally through exhibition, publishing and programs.⁴⁰

14.44 Similarly, Mbantua Gallery stated:

I honestly don't think the Federal Government does anywhere near enough to promote the art overseas...Our gallery has been travelling overseas for the past 6 years now on our own initiative to promote the art (and this benefits all galleries). It is hard work to be quite honest.⁴¹

14.45 There were various suggestions put to the committee about what more can be done to assist with expansion and further development in the area. Better education of buyers in the marketplace was one area where a number of witnesses saw the need for improvements:

When we look at the international markets, my personal view is that we should be focusing first on educating those markets about the diversity of the Indigenous art industry so that people are making informed choices about how they invest and how they engage. Before we invite them to invest, we need to do all of that work. We need to think about what that market is and how we want to grow it.⁴²

14.46 Improvements in education were also supported by Maningrida Arts and Culture, who told the committee that in order to help access new markets, more educational and promotional efforts were required 'to make Aboriginal art better known overseas'. They further pointed out that 'exposure to good quality works through educational shows' would provide encouragement for art centres to establish new markets.⁴³ As was outlined in their submission:

There is a need to educate the international market about Aboriginal art. Too often, the commercial shows one can see overseas are of poor quality and do not reflect the quality of current art production. I have seen many shows organised by carpetbaggers in Europe that give a poor name to Aboriginal art. Only a handful of successful arts centres such as Papunya Tula Artists and MAC have been able in recent years to organise quality shows overseas. This year, MAC had successful shows in the Kingdom of

40 Ms Hetti Perkins, Art Gallery of NSW, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 53.

41 Mbantua Gallery, *Submission 24*, p. 3.

42 Ms Jill Gientzotis, National Association for the Visual Arts, *Committee Hansard*, 23 February 2007, p. 21.

43 Ms Apolline Kohen, Maningrida Arts and Culture, *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2007, p. 43.

Bahrain, France and United Kingdom. MAC is National finalist in the 2006 Export Awards and is planning to dedicate more energy to expand its presence on the international art scene. However, a lot could be done to further developing international markets for Aboriginal artists through intelligent funding programs.⁴⁴

14.47 Austrade also recognised the need for increased investment in education, informing the committee that, for the export of Indigenous art to be successful in the long term, a significant investment was required in education and cultural awareness promotion.⁴⁵ As Mr John Odgers told the committee:

There was the opening of the new museum in Paris, which has quite a lot of Australian Indigenous artwork in the building as well as in the collection. That type of non-commercial exposure certainly helps potential collectors and buyers to understand Indigenous arts. Therefore it helps them to be confident in purchasing the work, but that type of promotion and education needs to be expanded quite considerably if we were to reach a point where we said that the export of Indigenous art was at a very high level and was continually successful and sustainable. That is the first stage thing.⁴⁶

14.48 The Australia Council suggested a strategy that would assist in this area of education by building on current successes, such as the new museum in Paris mentioned above. They proposed an initiative called 'Showcasing the Best—Indigenous Australia to the World' as a strategy to provide funding to promote and profile Indigenous arts and craft internationally. The Australia Council argued that it would:

Particularly build on the interests and opportunities created by the opening of the Musee de Quai Branly in Paris and by Undergrowth—Australian Arts UK, in which Indigenous arts had a significant presence.⁴⁷

14.49 Some art dealers have already become more involved in exhibiting overseas, with Papunya Tula Artists telling the committee that the level of interest overseas has increased in line with the growing exposure of Aboriginal art, and that this year:

PTA has been involved in very successful international exhibitions in France, United Kingdom, United States, Korea, Germany and Singapore. Whilst five of these exhibitions were selling shows, there is enormous benefit to be gained through non-selling shows in public galleries or institutions. Simply making the work accessible to the general public through an international touring exhibition program increases the exposure

44 Maningrida Arts and Culture, *Submission 51*, pp 4–5.

45 Mr John Odgers, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 36.

46 Mr John Odgers, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 36.

47 Dr Chris Sarra, Australia Council for the Arts, *Committee Hansard*, 23 February 2007, p. 90.

of the work and provides a platform to open up and establish new markets.⁴⁸

14.50 Another issue raised during the inquiry was the need for increased funding in order to encourage the growth of the international market. Aranda Aboriginal Art argued in their submission that to promote the Aboriginal art scene internationally, 'more aggressive funding, financial assistance and promotion' was required, and that new markets such as Asia should be the focus.⁴⁹

14.51 Art curators were also concerned about insufficient funding for the area. Ms Hetti Perkins told the committee:

One of the issues that has come up in the ability of institutions to create these international opportunities is the lack of financial support. In the corporate sector, the philanthropic and also the government sector, there is just not the funds required to mount these major exhibitions overseas and to reach those very high art audiences that are really the taste makers or decision makers for the consumers of art all around the world.⁵⁰

14.52 Financial support to promote and exhibit overseas was not the only element considered to be critical to the success of the Indigenous art market internationally. As Lauraine Diggins pointed out, financial support also needed to be combined with other improved forms of assistance to help promote the success of the sector:

It would be extremely advantageous for dealers intending to exhibit overseas to have sensible government support. This is best applied to both financial support and professional assistance in regard to lobbying to assist the dealers where appropriate. I have found that Austrade, while friendly, needs to earn its income, it is usually unskilled in regard to assisting in the arts area.⁵¹

14.53 Austrade was well aware of the need for improved assistance for Indigenous artists to market and promote their work overseas, and advised the committee that they had recently commissioned a report by ANKAAA and Desart to ascertain potential alternative routes to that market.⁵² While Austrade appeared to be assisting with developments in the area, some groups felt the need for more involvement by Austrade. For example, the Australian Commercial Galleries Association was keen to work with Austrade, the government and other bodies in the industry to further develop the area, telling the committee:

We also look to the government to involve the ACGA in developing the overseas market either alone or in conjunction with Austrade and the

48 Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd, *Submission 14*, p. 6.

49 Aranda Aboriginal Arts, *Submission 83*, p. 14.

50 Ms Hetti Perkins, Art Gallery of NSW, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 53.

51 Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, *Submission 26*, p. 4.

52 Mr John Odgers, Austrade, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 38.

Australia Council. Many of our ACGA members have had experience in the international market, and I think for that reason they know some of the requirements to enable successful export of the product. I think they could be a valuable resource in assisting you in coming to some conclusion, particularly in the arts industry.⁵³

14.54 Ms Perkins also felt that Austrade's services in helping create export opportunities for Indigenous art could be enhanced by making use of the initiatives established by other organisations with experience in the field:

Insofar as future opportunities go and particularly with the international markets, just to reiterate, we feel that national, state and regional galleries, keeping places et cetera can and would take a lead in this regard and create initiatives to create a platform for Austrade and others to encourage people to export or to promote their work overseas. We feel that would have a very strong flow-on effect in terms of people in Australia sitting up and really taking notice. It is always that you do not see what is in your back yard until someone else tells you that it is there.⁵⁴

14.55 The Australia Council is one organisation that has taken a lead in creating such initiatives, advising the committee that they were, among other things, targeting funding towards international marketing strategies and other arts and culture related areas.⁵⁵ The committee also notes the Government's 'Australia on the World Stage' initiative, a commitment of \$20.4 million over four years to 'showcase Australian arts and our other cultural assets to the world'.⁵⁶ This will be implemented through the Australia International Cultural Council, the membership of which includes a representative of the Australia Council, as well as Ms Hetti Perkins, Senior Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts, Art Gallery of NSW.⁵⁷

Recommendation 29

14.56 The committee recommends that the Commonwealth support increased efforts to showcase Indigenous visual arts and craft internationally.

14.57 In conclusion, it is apparent that many witnesses to the inquiry feel that there exists a thriving international market for Australian Indigenous arts and craft, and that this market has significant potential. However, they generally believe that more support is needed in order to continue to promote and exploit the significant

53 Dr Diane Mossenson, Australian Commercial Galleries Association, *Committee Hansard*, 23 February 2007, p. 6.

54 Ms Hetti Perkins, Art Gallery of NSW, *Committee Hansard*, 9 February 2007, p. 53.

55 Ms Lydia Miller, Australia Council for the Arts, *Committee Hansard*, 23 February 2007, p. 91.

56 The Hon. Alexander Downer MP and The Hon. Warren Truss MP, Joint Media Release, *Budget 2007–08*, 8 May 2007.

57 DFAT, Members of the Australia International Cultural Council, <http://www.dfat.gov.au/aicc/paca/members.html>, accessed May 2007.

opportunities that are available in the future, and that both education and funding are key elements in the future success of the market.

14.58 The committee agrees that there is great potential, underpinned by both domestic and international markets, for this industry to both grow steadily and be sustainable. It hopes that the implementation of the recommendations in this report; the progress made by NAVA and other groups on a Commercial Code of Conduct; and the fruitful labours of the many people in Indigenous arts and craft, first and foremost the artists, will ensure that one of Australia's most extraordinary contributions to culture worldwide will continue to grow and evolve.

Senator Alan Eggleston
Chair

