



COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS

**Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Nature and Conduct
of Australia's Public Diplomacy**

May 2007

Dear Committee Members,

We appreciate the opportunity to make this submission to the Senate *Inquiry into the Nature and Conduct of Australia's Public Diplomacy*. Our comments are directed to two of the four terms of reference (B and D). Our particular interest and expertise arises out of our engagement in museum studies and art/design education within the university setting. Thus, our focus in this submission highlights the merit of public diplomacy as cultural diplomacy played out in the public sphere.

Dr Penny McKeon, (Senior Lecturer) is former head of the School of Art Education at UNSW, College of Fine Arts. She was responsible for the design and implementation of museum education studies at UNSW, COFA and taught in this area for many years. While this experience is largely theoretical, Dr McKeon has maintained a focus on how the Australian art/museum world has used cultural material to educate, maintain and enhance public cultural understanding internationally.

Dr Gay McDonald, (Senior Lecturer) is currently teaching in museum studies at UNSW, COFA. She completed her doctoral and post-doctoral work in the USA. Her research investigated the ways in which the US government worked with the museum sector in the post war era to disseminate American art and culture to enhance its international profile. Dr McDonald continues to research and publish in this area.

(B) *The opportunities for enhancing public diplomacy both in Australia and overseas.*

The value of public dissemination of culture in today's global community resides in its sense of autonomy. The great dividend of cultural activity and exchange for any nation is the capacity of culture to nurture cross-cultural empathy. For this reason, it is important that any organization established to promote Australian culture nationally and internationally remain non-aligned to government or current foreign policy objectives. It is also imperative that representatives from this independent organization play a key role in the formation of policy and in determining cultural priorities.

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The success of such an independent organization depends on there being top down agreement that public diplomacy is a long-term priority of the Australian government irrespective of particular administrations. This recommendation is developed in light of problems encountered within US post war cultural relations programs.

A key priority of this organization should be the Asia Pacific region. Australia, as a developed economy has done well in establishing ongoing trade relations with its near neighbors. This is laudable, given the increasing strength of Asian nations in the global economy. However, more work needs to be done in increasing mutual respect and cultural understanding between Australia and our Asian neighbors. This is a strategic initiative designed to ameliorate negative perceptions of Australia as a eurocentric nation. It is also wise in light of our position as a developed but medium sized player within the international arena.

Submissions to this inquiry span a range of organizations, institutions and individuals engaged in cultural and diplomatic work. We recommend that a useful outcome of the inquiry should be a thorough census, assessing the type and value of extant policy and practices across all domains (i.e., cultural, scientific, and trade).

(D) Need and opportunities for expanding levels of funding for Australia's public diplomacy programs including opportunities for funding within the private sector.

Based on insights emerging from US case studies in which American culture was disseminated by a range of transitory government agencies, we recommend that Australia adopt a model similar to that of the British Council and Design Forum Finland. The type of organization proposed should be permanent with secure funding and with an arms length relationship with government.

Finally, Australia does not have a large population, nor does it enjoy a particularly distinguished track record in the area of cultural philanthropy. Therefore, we recommend that the Australian government establish tax incentives to encourage wealthy individuals, corporations, and foundations to sponsor the implementation of the independent organization recommended above.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on these matters and would be pleased to discuss this material further as needed.

Yours sincerely,



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