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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts  
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Dear Committee Chair and Members

## **Submission to the Parliamentary inquiry into Australia's cultural and creative industries and institutions**

### **Introduction**

As Australia's leading centre for creative engagement with Asia, [Asialink](#) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Parliamentary inquiry into Australia's cultural and creative industries and institutions.

Established in 1990 as a joint initiative of the Australian Commonwealth Government's Commission for the Future and the Myer Foundation, Asialink is hosted by the University of Melbourne. Asialink's mission for the past 30 years has been driving Australia's engagement with Asia. We develop insights, capabilities and connections with Asia through our programs in the Arts, Business, Diplomacy and Education. Uniquely Australian, Asialink works with diverse communities in Australia and Asia to build a strong, shared future for all.

Committee Chair, Dr David Gillespie MP's comments that 'Australia's cultural and creative industries are at a point of significant change as Australia adapts to life in a pandemic' could not be understated. Asialink, an impassioned and significant investor in Australia's arts and culture engagement with Asia, has been significantly impacted by COVID-19.

Asialink Arts both understands and fully supports the role of the Commonwealth Government in protecting and promoting the diversity and role of the arts for Australia's future health, prosperity, security and long-term national interest as a key and unique identifier of 'national identity'. We will also need engagement by a broad range of actors beyond government to grow and sustain the sector.

A robust Australia requires the capacity to respond to increasing uncertainty and change with creativity and innovation. We will also need cultural awareness, inter-cultural capabilities and relationships both at home and in the region to help us navigate a more complex future. Our arts and culture sector will play a vital role in creating those capabilities.

Through the COVID pandemic, Australia's creative sectors have been significantly jeopardized by insufficient funding support, program, project and event disruptions. As a result, transformation, adaption and recovery of the sector may be at risk and as a nation we may have compromised the vital role it could play in our national recovery – as an economy, a community and important player

in the region. The COVID-19 crisis cannot be couched as an 'opportunity' for arts and culture - we have to face the very real loss of livelihoods, intellectual property and very significant investments.

Australia's prosperity, well-being and security in our region requires a diversity of relationships and interactions between Australia and other countries which is best served by flourishing arts sectors, buoyed by people-to-people and institutional linkages. The scale of the micro support packages, through competitive grants programs to date, have not provided stimulus nor the meaningful long-term transformations necessary for successful transformation and to support the continued complex relations between artists and entities. The relatively low levels of support available for smaller organisations and services and support providers, who have not been prioritised, has compromised key parts of the arts eco-system and risked hollowing the fragile arts ecology.

COVID-19 has brought fear and misunderstanding, raising the veil on systemic racism and ultra-nationalism - threatening collaboration and communication. This challenging environment risks our community turning inwards rather than staying the course on deepening external ties with our immediate region – and an increasing sense of individuality and competitiveness. At Asialink Arts, as we transition through this crisis and imagine what is beyond, we are more certain than ever that the arts can play a significant part in bolstering Australia's relationship with the Asia Pacific and expanding opportunities for innovation and recovery.

As we transition through the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia faces a complex and uncertain international environment. Continuing US-China strategic competition, the shifting power balance in the Indo-Pacific and economic impact of the pandemic together present major challenges for Australia. Ensuring Australia remains actively engaged in the region is, however, absolutely critical to our national interests. Cooperation between the countries of our region will be a vital part of the solution to overcoming COVID-19 and rebuilding our economies together when we do.

That means as a country Australia needs to be more creative and invest more than ever to deepen creative capacity and build resilience. Whole of ecology as well as cross sectoral local, national and international engagement is essential to finding and employing new and innovative ways to cooperate and innovate.

We have provided four key areas of recommendation below on ways forward:

### **The non-economic benefits that enhance community, social wellbeing and promoting Australia's national identity, and how to recognise, measure and grow them.**

Arts and culture are a key element of Australia's soft power Asialink Arts seeks to play its part in advancing Australia as an ambitious, forward-thinking country while increasing its reputation globally as a collaborative, open, democratic country. The University of Melbourne and Asialink is internationally connected, drawing on relationships built over many years that span the globe in the pursuit of the world's best collaborators.

Recommendations:

- Recognize the vital role which arts and culture plays in Australia's engagement in the Indo-Pacific, and the uncertain regional environment.
- Advocate the efficacy of soft power in international relations.
- Elevate and celebrate Australian First Nations and Asian Australian artists in Australia's cultural diplomacy and support their active engagement with Asia. Provide appropriate payment and administrative support.
- Highlight the importance of the sector in the government's soft power review and provide new and additional support for efforts across the sector to engage our region, build inter-cultural understanding, capabilities and linkages.
- Create space for critical discussion on soft-power values to recontextualise relations.
- Convene a series of regionally interconnected conversations/roundtables with Asia with broad Australian representation.

- Host a major international meeting of arts and culture ministers from across the Asia Pacific to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the sector and strategies for recovery.

### **The best mechanism for ensuring cooperation and delivery of policy between layers of government**

A recognition of the plurality of voices in shaping and influencing policy is required and facilitated by an openness to a diversity of voices in Australia and the region. So too is a keenness to network at many levels of society, and a deep commitment to developing the capabilities and knowledge across sectors necessary to seek out the shared opportunities for Australia and the Indo-Pacific should be foremost in our creative recovery and future.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Involve independent artists and small organisations in conversations with all levels of government.
- Ensure cross-sectoral participation and prioritise less-heard voices in decision making and policy consultations and formulations.
- Leverage the expertise and capacity of, as well as collaborate with, independent organisations such as Asialink Arts who have significant grass roots experience and relationships across all tiers of government and private sectors.

### **The impact of COVID-19 on the creative and cultural industries;**

Recognizing the enormous impact of COVID-19 on the arts and culture sector, develop additional government support packages designed to support smaller organisations, international facing organisations and those providing supporting services to artists and arts institutions.

#### Recommendations:

- Prioritise the whole arts eco-system in funding and stimulus packages, including the vital services sector who provide support mechanisms and advocate for the sector.
- Elevate the work of internationally engaged artists and organisations and support resources sharing and mapping to enable collaboration and resource efficiency.

### **Avenues for increasing access and opportunities for Australia's creative and cultural industries through innovation and the digital environment.**

The potential for digital innovation cannot be met without significant vision and investment in new business models and infrastructure. International arts programs, connectivity, people-to-people relations and co-created creative output is significantly disrupted due to uncertainty with the re-opening of international borders.

#### Recommendations:

- Research within our region sophisticated digital eco-systems and economies and introduce new trends and capabilities training to Australian SME arts organisations and arts businesses.
- Prioritise training in cutting edge immersive technologies and digital capabilities that cross-cultures.

We would be grateful if the Committee would take into consideration these recommendations in its deliberations.

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