

Asialink Arts

National Cultural Policy Submission

Asialink Arts
elevates the
agency and
capability of the
Australian
arts sector to
engage with Asia,
through insight,
connections,
and enhanced
capability.



30

YEARS OF INSIGHTS
CAPABILITIES
& CONNECTIONS



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Submission to A new National Cultural Policy

Prepared by Asialink Arts at the University of Melbourne

Introduction

As Australia's leading centre for creative engagement with Asia, [Asialink](#) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission for consideration in the formulation of the new National Cultural Policy.

Established in 1990 as a joint initiative of the Australian Commonwealth Government's Commission for the Future and the Myer Foundation, Asialink, a not-for-profit, is hosted by the University of Melbourne. Asialink's mission for over 30 years has been driving Australia's engagement with Asia. We develop insights, capabilities and connections to elevate autonomous engagement with the broader region through our programs in the Arts, Business, Diplomacy and Education. Uniquely Australian, Asialink works with diverse communities in Australia, Asia and the Pacific to build a positive, shared future for all.

Arts and culture are fundamental articulations of humanity – they communicate who we are, how we show up and how we are seen. Asialink Arts supports the role of the Commonwealth Government in protecting and promoting the evolving and nuanced diversity of Australia's cultures for our shared prosperity, security and long-term interests. However, we believe in a broad range of actors beyond government to grow and sustain the culture sectors including the arts. Our projected identities and transnational connections play a critical role in influencing perceptions abroad thus shaping public and private partnerships, collaborations and solutions to shared problems.

A confident and peaceful Australia requires the capacity to reconcile and repair its past and present and respond to increasing uncertainty and change with creativity and innovation. With rapidly changing demographics we need to increase cross-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 telling the stories, shaping the narratives and creating those capabilities and communicating our diversity as a key strength of our identity.

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia's creative and cultural sectors have been significantly jeopardised by a turning inwards and insufficient funding support as well as program, project and event disruptions. As a result, transformation, adaptation and recovery of the sector is still very much at risk. As a nation, lack of transparency has eroded trust in the process and the vital role arts and culture in our national recovery has been compromised – as an economy, a community and an important partner in the region.

Australia continues to face 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 and open to a multi-polar future is, however, absolutely critical to our evolution and stability.

That means Australia needs to be more creative and invest more than ever in long term, iterative and open-ended dialogues and engagements to deepen creative capacity and confidence, restore trust and build resilience. The whole ecology must be involved as well as cross-sectoral local, national and international partnerships to find and employ new and inventive ways to cooperate and innovate.

First Nations: recognising and respecting the crucial place of these stories at the centre of our arts and culture.

Our capacity for Truth, Treaty and Voice in Australia will be a key element of Australia's image and identity in the region. Advancing reconciliation to reflect a just, mature and forward-thinking country capable of facing historical and current truths will project a place that is inclusive, respectful, collaborative, open and democratic.

Incorporating First Nations perspectives and knowledge into our international and cross-cultural engagements is crucial to shifting the focus onto community, durational relationships formed over time and the importance of place. Acknowledging historical injustice towards First Nations cultures, prioritising an ethics of invitation and hospitality, considering and embedding the meaning of 'hosting' in Australia and listening to First Nations experience in relations across Australia and our Asia-Pacific neighbourhood is central. We need to accept that hosting is not simply a matter of good manners; ensuring that our partners feel safe, welcomed and encouraged to speak and act freely is necessary for soft power to be of mutual benefit.

Recommendations:

- Elevate and celebrate Australian First Nations artists and cultural workers in Australia's cultural diplomacy and support their active engagement with the Asia-Pacific region.
- Ensure Indigenous cultural capability and reconciliation action plans in all arts and cultural organisations.
- Convene a series of regionally interconnected First Nations led conversations/roundtables with the Asia-Pacific together with broad Australian representation and participation to ensure that issues important to First Nations peoples are widely heard and acted upon.
- Invest in the long-term capacity and sustainability of First Nations led cultural organisations and support Australian First Nations people in key roles.
- Openly invite First Nations governance to guide projects.
- Strengthen ties with First Nations communities and people of colour and engage with them in debates, proposals and decisions.

A place for every story: reflecting the diversity of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

A recognition of the plurality of perspectives that shape and influence culture is required and facilitated by an openness to all voices in Australia and the region.

The pandemic has brought fear and misunderstanding, raising the veil on systemic

racism and inciting nationalism. This challenging environment has reinforced the need to remain open to global perspectives and influences by deepening ties with our immediate region and has emphasised the important role that diaspora communities play in this.

As we transition through the crisis and imagine what is beyond, it is more certain than ever that strong networks of sustained cultural bridges forged over time and through unique family connections can play a significant part in bolstering Australia's relationship with the Asia-Pacific region.

Recommendations:

- Invite Australian First Nations, Asian-Australian and Asian artists and arts workers to co-create and host a majority of public-facing activities in a spirit of creativity, inclusivity and community belonging.
- Elevate and promote Australian First Nations and Asian-Australian artists in Australia's cultural diplomacy and support their active engagement with Asia.
- Create platforms for private and public collaboration on tackling racial injustice to highlight less-heard voices and build equality.
- Regularly invite artists and cultural representatives from the Asia-Pacific region to all parts of Australia and invest in caring, generous reception and hosting responsibilities.
- Involve independent artists and small to medium organisations in conversations with all levels of government, ensuring cross-sectoral participation and the prioritisation of less-heard voices in decision making and policy consultations and formulations.
- Leverage the expertise and capacity of, as well as collaborate with, independent individual and institutional expertise linking to grassroots experience and relationships across all tiers of government and private sectors.

The centrality of the artist: supporting the artist as worker and celebrating their role as the creators of culture.

It is vital to declare the ways in which soft power is linked to arts and cultural activity through the work of artists (as individuals) as well as institutions (as mediators). By acknowledging the different accountabilities of artists and others, we can effectively develop a nuanced understanding of the diverse roles required for effective cultural diplomacy. With respect for creative sovereignty and the platforming of diverse views, even when critical of the government or challenging the status quo, freedom of expression is upheld as a national value, and a tolerant society is supported and encouraged.

To sustain a vibrant arts and cultural sector it is vitally important that we continue to recognise the enormous impact of COVID-19 on the arts and culture sector. Additional government support packages designed to directly support artists and smaller organisations as well as international facing organisations and those providing supporting services to artists and arts institutions are critically required.

Recommendations:

- Connect and make visible existing networks to benefit artists engaging with the Asia Pacific.
- Advocate the value of artists' ground-level artistic processes, experimental

projects and community engagement with the Asia-Pacific beyond finished products and the usual arenas to advance cross-cultural understanding and sustained activity.

- Elevate the work of internationally engaged artists and organisations through promotional opportunities and support resources sharing and mapping to enable collaboration and efficiencies.
- Support research to inform and build on the priorities of government bodies, foundations, councils and institutes in order to better support artists' and arts workers' endeavours.
- Create paid internships and training opportunities as well as development assistance for artists to support their livelihood and employment opportunities.

Strong institutions: providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts and culture.

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 independent institutional linkages. Through the COVID-19 pandemic negligible levels of support were available for smaller organisations and services and support providers, which has compromised key parts of the arts eco-system and hollowed the fragile arts ecology.

Significant vision and investment in new business models and infrastructure for international arts programs, connectivity, people-to-people relations and co-created creative output is urgent. One example is a platform operating in Korea for advancing international cultural relations. This model could significantly benefit Australia's image, identity and influence through a dedicated platform for artistic co-creation and dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region.

Designated by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, The Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE), has the remit of leading international cultural exchange as separate from Arts Council Korea (ARKO), the equivalent of the Australia Council for the Arts. KOFICE is dedicated to creating, 'a network hub connecting Korea and the world through culture', and by setting up 'mutual cultural exchange', training and capability development, and 'research and study on international cultural exchange'. Through this work they are creating and deepening people-to-people links. Much of this is currently and historically undertaken by Asialink Arts focusing on our critical relationships in the Indo-Pacific - but with significantly reduced capacity since the deep federal arts cuts in 2015.

With the former government's abandonment of the review of The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper - and with it the chance to interrogate and put forward opportunities to leverage and grow Australia's soft-power strengths and capabilities - is timely to re-open discussion of the possibilities to increase Australia's creative partnerships in the region through innovative models of cross-cultural arts and cultural engagement.

Recommendations:

- Consult with institutions that have deep expertise and consider a new departmental architecture for the advancement of Australia's cultural exchange and diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Consult with academics, directors, museum curators, theatre producers etc. in Australian and Asian organisations. Gather primary information about what informs decision-making when it comes to programming Asian content in Australia and Australian content in Asia.

- Prioritise funding for the whole arts ecosystem, including university entities, and the vital services sector who provide support mechanisms and advocate for the sector.
- Priority should be given to independent organisations and programs who foreground—at arm’s length—the artist’s perspective, experience and innovation while bringing the ‘production infrastructure’ and diplomacy along in a respectful way.
- Leverage Asialink Arts’ existing cross-sectoral networks (across diplomatic, corporate, and business sectors) to make introductions, create opportunities and facilitate partnerships between artists, mediating institutions and enablers of Asian engagement.
- Advocate for cultural diplomacy as a multifaceted process and encourage public and private support. Provide matched funding from all private sector supporters.
- Empower and invest in institutional partnerships to host a major international meeting of arts and cultural ministers and key organisations.
- Invest in independent organisations to share resources and insights to develop cross-cultural capability.

Reaching the audience: ensuring our stories reach the right people at home and abroad.

In Australia, our multiculturalism and growing awareness of our global interconnectedness is reflected nationwide yet platforms and opportunities for Asian-engagement tend to bias urban centres. To address this inequity and provide greater access to the Asia-Pacific in isolated, regional and remote places it is timely to provide a scaffold for new creative cross-cultural collaborations which will have direct benefits to local communities. These projects will have strong resonance at home and abroad and will assist in growing and diversifying audiences in regional Australia - strengthening inclusion, cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.

Alongside the cultural benefits - a focus on elevating the capability and autonomy of regionally focused arts activities will showcase connectivity with other industries, SMEs, businesses, government and NFPs to further develop much needed investment opportunities, job creation and community development outside of metropolitan centres. This enmeshing of arts and culture with all areas of society is abundantly visible in small communities. This can be a model for national and international cross-sectoral and cross-cultural engagements that are fostered over time and with significant commitment to building long term iterative relationships.

Recommendations:

- Prioritise long term sustained relationship development well beyond election cycles and annual acquittal timelines.
- Build cultural infrastructure and human resource capacity that fosters grass-roots cultural exchanges within communities, in turn developing new audiences.
- Prioritise invitations to international artists and organisations to collaborate in Australia.
- Prioritise regional, rural and remote engagement with the Asia-Pacific through programs such as Regional // Regional: Festival Alliances Across Australia and the Indo-Pacific.
- Empower and fund artists and arts workers to identify priorities for increasing capability, encouraging ambition and elevating outreach.
- Proactively fund the emergence of digital platforms and skills development that builds audiences and enables our cultural sector to have a cross-cultural

reach.

- Assist with digital skills and literacy across the sector by providing financial and technical assistance towards innovative approaches of digital practice, distribution and platforms.

We would be grateful if these recommendations are considered in deliberations.

Contact

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