Notes towards an Arts Accord:

Submission to a New National Cultural Policy

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CENTRE for STORIES

Centre for Stories submission to a New National Cultural Policy

In light of the evident success of *Revive*, Centre for Stories' submission focuses on a complementary aspect of government arts policy. Today, we highlight the need for an Arts Accord between stakeholders. This is in light of the febrile environment that has seen a number of recent high profile controversies since *Revive* itself. These have been reflective of a wider conversation around social cohesion and productivity, and represent an opportunity for the arts to teach us lessons about our place in the world.

An Arts Accord would inspire the sector even as official arts practice does not represent the depth of cultural activity taking place in Australia today. All too often it overlooks the suburban smoking ceremonies, the rural galleries, the Sunday painters, the garage musicians, the cafe poets, the craft night groups, and so on. We refer to the arts in their professional endeavour and regard it as a public good as funded by the Government. To expand that activity in order to become more inclusive is our own organisational mission, and we see an Accord as necessary for established stakeholders, all in order to support better practice itself.

At present, official arts practice is not globally competitive, and oftentimes organisationally insolvent. It trades on local goodwill, immediate trust, and a handful of tightly knit confidences. This is often represented through peer review and the necessary expertise that accumulates through habitual long term engagement with contemporary work. To re-purpose it requires an Accord with artists and arts workers on the one hand, and donors and boards on the other. It is, of course, the role of arts organisations and their leaders to mediate these different, and often divergent, perspectives through the practice of art itself. The Government has an opportunity to better lead that mediation, especially in light of the rancour that engulfed the Venice Biennale Selection in 2025, Adelaide Writers Week in 2026, Sydney Biennale's Opening in 2026 and many other moments. All manner of politicised protest has become the public face of 'the arts' since *Revive* and too often draws attention away from artistic works. It becomes a function of ideology rather than practice whereby questions of form, aesthetics, and impact are left behind.

Centre for Stories supports the right of artists to speak from lived experience while also advocating for the importance of noble speech during a time of increasing division. The arts then, through appropriate meditation, can bring people together, which is why we see a need for an Accord rather than a set of initiatives that amount to small policy changes. Of the latter, we would support: First Nations truth telling led by arts agencies; ASEAN and Indo-Pacific residencies in a place for every story; schools programs for the relevance and centrality of the artist; greater professional development for infrastructure spending; and philanthropy led subsidies of tickets for engaging audiences. Centre for Stories has conducted research and application across each of these areas and is open to further conversation. However, we take this opportunity to map out what might be possible when we lift our gaze a little higher and consider structural reform that is fit for current and future purpose. National cultural policy can touch all areas of national cultural life, and *Revive* begins with an admirable whole of Government approach. To express the imagination of the sector though, to touch the depth of being we need, requires a project that unites stakeholders around a common national cause.

Notes towards an Arts Accord

The following recommendations are inspired by the Accords between workers and business that were undertaken in the 1980s. Relative to the worker movements of that era, the arts sector is unorganised, maybe even disorganised, and there are no equivalents to the ACTU that can functionally bargain on their behalf. Likewise, the business interests invested in the arts come through philanthropic and donor representatives rather than professionalised corporate settings. The analogy holds, however, and can be instructive for what we build atop *Revive*. The Government's role is to functionally mediate these two sides towards an Agreement that delivers better arts practice for a broader public, and one that better represents public will. This is because it is assumed that Federally funded arts practice is a public good, not a sectional and exclusive set of disparate interests.

From an Accord, artists and arts workers need to gain a 'living wage'. This includes:

Longer term grant investments
Multiyear federal government grants on a 10 year cycle; individual artists grants start at 2 years. This means the cessation of casualised, insecure, and small grant amounts that are not a living wage or a secure organisational runway.

The introduction of stable commercial leasing opportunities for artists
This is the ongoing, generational provision of arts precincts where artists can work in studios without precarity.

An arts pension
This is a demand led, pension top-up to be used only for the arts by every senior. This is a voucher scheme that enables access to concessional rates of the arts similar to free public transport and builds on current ticket pricing.

Tax reform
Removal of taxes on artist prize monies and 17% superannuation on every government grant delivered in line with best practice peer sectors such as university wages and their EBAs.

Employment security
Dedicated investment in mid-career arts practice schemes to protect artists as they pass emerging status and before they have established audience bases and commercialisation opportunities.

Expanded cultural passes to stimulate demand
Voucher systems for the public to spend on artistic works, especially among young people, and all in order to build long term audience appetite for local content and the cohesion it represents.

Streamlining of administration
Consistency of local, state and federal government grant application platforms, calendars, reporting, acquittals to reduce bureaucratic workload on artist and arts workers.

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Artists need to trade off:

Grant demands
The absence of immediate and individual higher grant delivery; and accepting indexation and production discounting to avoid further stratification, particularly after the devaluation of local content in light of global market competition.

Public action
There needs to be a significant reduction in public controversy on issues that are not primarily relevant to the arts. This means a turn towards lived experience advocacy rather than politicising opinion; and a co-ordinated practice of relevant organising.

Decentralised grant making
A shift away from a centralised system of peer review as represented by Creative Australia to practice based bodies that bargain with the sector, which is seen in Music Australia and Writing Australia. This move should result in the eventual shrinking of the role of Creative Australia.

Commercialisation incentives
Restructuring of the sector to encourage a move towards financial viability rather than long term and ongoing government dependence. This is a motive that sees subsidised cultural production only as a runway. It might only allow for a single term of multiyear funding if that were by the decade; or a term lifetime limit on grant amounts; and all in order to value diverse practice, changing taste, and the long term flourishing of a sector that is respected by audiences. It shifts from invention to innovation, from research and development to application, from subsidy to profit.

An Arts Accord is suggested in order to create structural reform in a sector that is currently moribund. As it stands, art that is a public good cannot compete with foreign content, generative AI, nor indeed that which is commercially viable. With a set of agreed upon principles, guidelines and incentives, it can become increasingly relevant, support national interests and foster cohesion through its practice. That means a set of important negotiations and trade offs between stakeholders, all of which leads to a Government mediated Arts Accord that provides stability, certainty and leadership for the decades to come.

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