



National Cultural Policy Submission

UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA (UAMA) SUBMISSION

Members: Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia; Charles Darwin University Art Collection & Gallery; Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney; Deakin University Art Collection & Galleries; Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University; Edith Cowan University Art Collection; Flinders University Museum of Art; Griffith University Art Museum; John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University; La Trobe Art Institute, La Trobe University; Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia; Macquarie University Art Gallery; Monash University Museum of Art; Queensland University of Technology Art Museum & William Robinson Gallery; RMIT Gallery, RMIT University; The University Gallery, University of Newcastle; University of Melbourne Museums & Collections; UNSW Galleries, University of NSW; University of Queensland Art Museum; University of Tasmania Cultural Collections & Galleries; UTS Gallery, University of Technology Sydney; University of Wollongong Art Collection.

Overview

Australian university art museums (UAMs) are found in every State and Territory.¹ They are responsible for art and cultural collections of national and international significance and make major contributions to the cultural and intellectual life of the nation. In contributing to the cultural and academic sectors, they demonstrate best practice and integrity in visual arts and museum research and practice, educational and creative innovation, and community engagement through programs and exhibitions presented in professional art museum environments.

The most recent [UAMA Survey Report](#) (2017-2019) estimates that the 22 Australian UAMs captured by the data are **the custodians of more than 100,000 original works of art**. Encompassing works by First Nations, Australian and international artists, these collections constitute 30% of the total art holdings in Australia's small-to-medium gallery sector as reported in the [Australian Public Galleries Snapshot](#) (2020).

Survey data reflects the critical role of UAMs in the Australian cultural sector as producers, presenters and dynamic sites of participation. In the three-year reporting period, they collectively presented over **5000 artists** across **492 exhibitions**. UAMs engaged diverse audiences with art and ideas through **4,894 public and education programs** and commissioned, produced and disseminated new scholarship in **141 publications**. Through these activities UAMs collaborated with **834 program partners** reaching audiences locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

Many UAM directors and staff sit on peer review boards, yet, despite their value in nurturing the creative sector and burgeoning record of impact and engagement, **the contribution of UAMs to arts and culture in Australian society barely registers in public or government discourse**. Previously observed in Myer's [Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry](#) (2002, p215) and [Wilson's critique](#) of [Arts Nation](#) (2015), **UAMs continue to lack visibility in Cultural Policy at all levels of government**.

In our submission we call for recognition of universities and UAMs in the new National Cultural Policy as vital to Australia's cultural ecology, uniquely positioned to bridge public, scholarly and creative spheres, while having oversight of significant cultural estate. We present opportunities for UAMs to be laboratories for new research, creation, education, experimentation, innovation and professional development that can support a thriving arts and cultural sector, and we call for a mechanism for cross-portfolio approaches at a federal level between Arts and Education.

Responses to Five Pillars:

1. First Nations

Challenges:

- First Nations principles should be integrated across the entire 5 pillars of the Cultural Policy – recognising the integral role of culture to wellbeing, community and Country.

- UAMA strongly advocates for increased support for First Nations creatives and community leaders to develop a First Nations workforce across the sector including at the highest levels of leadership. We fully endorse the establishment of a long-term capacity building and career pathways program that is self-determined, led and delivered by First Nations people. And we encourage investment that enables arts and cultural organisations to appropriately remunerate First Nations staff, and representatives on boards and advisory groups. With known challenges and opportunities as articulated in First Peoples: A Roadmap for Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries, UAMs recognise the urgent need to build cultural competency and literacy in the broader Australian community including through better integrating Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into school and university curricula. This is about learning from, not solely about, First Nations knowledges.

Opportunities:

- The Australian cultural sector must lead the way in truth telling and in museological innovation, reconnecting cultural heritage with traditional owners, embracing opportunities for repatriation and new models of custodianship, and universities have a crucial role to contribute to these processes.
- Training in arts administration can be expanded with the enabling of access to Federal traineeship schemes. For example, [Arts Ready](#) is a model that could be simplified and adapted to the UAM sector, and opportunities could be identified through the [Indigenous Advancement Strategy](#). Additionally, cross-portfolio opportunities exist through adapted pathways of the Indigenous Student Success Program ISSP.

2. A Place for Every Story

Challenges:

- The university arts sector is a leader in introducing accessibility policies, incorporating accessible design in communications, and practicing inclusivity of artists, cultures and audiences. Universities and art/design schools are sites where new technologies and approaches to improving accessibility are discovered, where research is conducted, and data is collected of benefit to diverse communities. However, diversity in Boards and in leadership of major cultural organisations across the country, and to a lesser extent staffing profiles, is sadly lacking. This has a flow on impact on programming and accessibility.
- Tertiary outreach programs improve access to undergraduate courses for people from regional and remote Australia, low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, and Indigenous persons. In 2017-19, UAMA members delivered over 800 programs targeted at K-12 students, with a number of programs directly benefitting from HEPPP and ISSP funding to increase the number of students from underrepresented equity groups accessing and completing university study. In 2020 the Federal Government changed the HEPPP scheme. For UTS and the University of Western Sydney, this represented a \$1 million loss that disproportionately affected future students from Western Sydney.

Opportunities:

- Implement diversity quotas for boards and senior leaders across the sector.
- Recognise the role UAMs play in supporting first in family students and students from low SES backgrounds by returning HEPPP funding quotas to universities.
- Increase access to funding streams that service NDIS participants.

3. The Centrality of the Artist

Challenges:

- Universities are arguably the largest employers of arts workers, practising artists, and educators training the next generation of artists in Australia – yet many were severely

impacted by the ineligibility for the national JobKeeper scheme, and consequent restructures. Several art schools and UAMs are currently in crisis.

- While the Australia Council does not directly fund UAMs, they actively seek support through the Council's project funding categories to deliver programs, and they work with artists who receive support for exhibitions and other activities. The increasingly limited access to that funding means a great diminishment to the substantial contribution of UAMs to the development of contemporary art, craft, design, new media and First Nations visual arts practice and the careers of art practitioners and arts professionals throughout Australia.
- UAMs provide high-level training to key arts workers and administrators to help build sustainable professional careers in the arts sector.
- Arts subjects are currently actively discouraged in senior secondary schools - Data from the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) found there was a drop of more than 44 per cent in the number of students enrolled in arts subjects (music, visual art, drama, dance and film) [between 2012 and 2021](#).

Opportunities:

- Restore and increase peer assessed Australia Council funding to artists for research and development through fellowships, new work, project and quick response grants
- Remove the scaling penalty to Arts subjects and/or implement consistent alternative entry modes to university courses such as interview or portfolio.
- Create cross-portfolio opportunities through access to Federal Employer incentives and subsidies for traineeships
- Investigate pathways to encouraging the purchase of art by living artists, including through tax and superannuation systems.
- Incentivise commissioning of new work by public institutions such as universities, for example in a percent for art scheme or match funding.

4. Strong Institutions

Challenges:

- UAM collections in Australia comprise some of the most valuable, globally renowned cultural collections in the world. Without adequate support these significant cultural assets cannot be maintained, and it can be difficult for communities of origin to access material. UAMs actively collect and commission works by contemporary artists across the nation, and regularly research and publish on their substantial holdings.
- UAMs fall between the cracks, straddling both the Arts and Education portfolios.
- Time is against us, in terms of preservation of the cultural assets of this country (including some of the most historically important art and cultural objects of our First Peoples), while demand has never been greater for access and transparency.
- Preservation and communication of First Nations cultural heritage is tied not just into the care of art and cultural objects themselves, but the discoverability of these objects by communities, in order for bodies of knowledge to be linked to them. This is connecting of story to cultural object is crucial. Digitisation and discovery are central tenets to custodianship of cultural collections, along with direct community consultation, to facilitate First Nations-led community access, cultural heritage preservation and knowledge transfer.

Opportunities:

- Develop strategic relationships between universities and government to digitise and make accessible cultural collections for community access (especially communities of origin), research and policy development. A national approach to protect cultural heritage and history has never been implemented – it's time for a national database such as Trove for art.

- Formalise best practice approaches of digitisation and discovery, and pathways for their implementation to be supported on a national level. Innovation in this area will always be lacking if a piecemeal approach is taken; a national strategy will encourage major national and international industry partnerships to develop solutions to care for and make widely visible our unique culture and cultural assets.
- Establish a cross-portfolio strategy between Ministries of Arts, Education and Workplace Relations at a Federal level.
- Restore and index funding to the Australia Council grants system as well as maintain the central principles of arms-length and peer review.
- Create a funding stream that jointly supports new artists commissions and their presentation in public galleries and museums.

5. Reaching the Audience

Challenges:

- There is a perception that university museums and galleries serve an internal tertiary audience, yet UAMs attract broad audiences bridging their respective institutions and the wider world.
- Publications in Australia are expensive due to geographical remoteness, and printing and paper stock costs are often prohibitive.
- University art museums have extensive collections, but are not easily accessible by researchers, curators, students.
- Many UAM's play a crucial role in serving diverse regional and urban audiences, yet struggle to access regional funding streams.
- UAMs maintain strong international networks and relationships and play an important role in the export and global recognition of Australian artists and our culture, yet funding streams to support these activities are limited.

Opportunities:

- A considered, nationwide strategy for funding, nurturing, and developing arts publishing and critical art writing could be led by university art museums. Australian UAMs have the cultural collections, scholars, expertise in bringing complex ideas to wider audiences, and proficiency in publishing at the highest standards.
- A nationwide art collection digitisation project to create a Trove-type database would bring greater accessibility to our collections and our understanding and appreciation of our cultural history.
- Harness the potential of UAMs as cultural drivers in regional communities as well as bridging local, national and international contexts.

Any other things you'd like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

- That another pillar be added to the policy – Arts and Culture Education and Research, and a cross-portfolio strategy be developed in this area with the Education portfolio.