

Professor Carolyn Evans  
Vice Chancellor and President  
Griffith University

Professor Scott Harrison  
Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor  
(Arts, Education and Law)  
Griffith University

December 8, 2023

**Re: Support for the future of Griffith University Art Museum**

Dear Professor Carolyn Evans and Professor Scott Harrison,

University Art Museums Australia (UAMA) represents public art museums and galleries in the Australian university sector. We write to you in response to the devastating news of the proposed closure of the Griffith University Art Museum (GUAM). Our members are responsible for university-owned art collections, we deliver dynamic exhibitions, public and education programs, and play a major role in the cultural and intellectual life of the nation through best practice in visual arts and museum research, production and community engagement.

GUAM is undoubtedly one of Australia's leading university art museums and custodian of the second-largest art collection in Queensland. A catalyst for collaboration, GUAM punches well above its weight producing exhibitions, programs and publications that are exemplars in the sector. Its work engages artists and audiences locally, nationally and internationally, and has been recognised through many industry awards and accolades over the last 50 years, including ARC Linkage Grants that highlight the GUAM collection.

The closure of GUAM is an indictment not only on Griffith University but on the visual arts community in Brisbane and Australia at large. Uniquely placed in the national cultural landscape bridging public and academic spheres, University Art Museums are laboratories for new research, teaching, learning and professional development distinguished by the academic responsibility to take risks in their programming, to push boundaries and tackle controversial and unsettling themes and issues. They are critical to the ecosystem that fosters the development of artists and audiences, they are safe spaces for cultural critique and one of the only sites where groundbreaking artistic and curatorial practices are actively encouraged.

University Art Museums are vital to our nation's cultural strategy, and GUAM is at the forefront of many leading industry practices, including the positioning of First Nations artists and thinkers (such as Tracey Moffatt, Richard Bell, Tony Albert, D Harding to name only a few of very many), celebrating the work of alumni and bringing greater awareness to overlooked practices for the benefit of students and staff of QCAD, CAIA, and the broader Queensland community. University collections are not just adornments for campuses and offices; they are scholarly resources that underpin research and object-based learning, and cultural archives to continually reckon with and provide historical context for audiences and students alike.

We are sympathetic to the space demands that Universities have and while GUAM is not a timetabled space, it is still a site of teaching and learning that is deeply engaged and committed to enhancing the student experience. GUAM delivers programs specifically for the student body, including lunchbox lectures, work placements and internships that fill gaps in the formal teaching program.

We are perplexed that in the lead-up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2032 an institution would decide to close and not bolster its Museum as a vital public platform. University Art Museums are an important conduit between the university and the public, bringing complex contemporary concerns into dialogue. GUAM's physical location for the 2032 Games would offer international audiences significant cultural context and a gateway to deeper engagement with the wider university.

Sadly, it is no shock to us, even in the face of successful ARC Linkage Grants, arts grants and strong industry and community networks, that campus museums are scrutinised and squeezed of resources by university leadership, and at worse, pitted against other higher funded creative disciplines, such as music or film. Creative disciplines should not compete but rather work in collaboration as modeled by University Leaders. This decision is at odds with other Australian universities that are ramping up their investment in culture and the arts, such as Edith Cowan, Western Sydney, and UQ, among others. The proposal also silos the arts disciplines at a local level and divides university audiences and their attention. In contrast, the federal government has recently increased its support of the arts, becoming a bigger, bolder champion and investor in arts and creativity. Creativity is recognised as fundamental to all disciplines, and universities must be fundamental proponents of it through their cultural engagement.

We implore you to rethink the closure of Griffith University Art Museum because its loss will be too great. Its future legacy, its significant collection and its commitment to its publics, notwithstanding the loss of its staff, inclusive of QCAD students and the wider community, will have serious ramifications across the sector. University Art Museums must be flexible institutions that change with the times, but not disappear. GUAM *must* be given the opportunity to reinvent and rethink to serve its audiences because the contemporary museum has always been a civic space that belongs to all.

Signed,  
University Art Museums Australia (UAMA)

UAMA Members:

Justine Ambrosio (Associate Director, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia)  
Joanna Barrkman (Curator, Charles Darwin University Art Collection and Art Gallery)  
Katrina Cashman (Manager/Senior Curator, NAS Gallery, National Art School)  
Karen Cass (Manager, UOW Art Collection, University of Wollongong)  
Caine Chennatt (Director, Library and Cultural Collections, University of Tasmania)  
Rebecca Coates (Director, MUMA, Monash University)  
Michael Dagostino (Director, Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney)  
José Da Silva (Director, UNSW Galleries, University of NSW)  
Rhonda Davis (Senior Curator, Macquarie University Art Gallery)  
Charlotte Day (Associate Director, Art Museums, University of Melbourne)  
Paul Donnelly (Deputy Director, Sydney University Museums, University of Sydney)  
Erica Green (Director, Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia)  
Margaret Hancock (Curator, Western Sydney Creative, Western Sydney University)  
Jane King (Director, John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University)  
Stella McDonald (Managing Curator, UTS Gallery & Art Collection, University of Technology Sydney)  
Anthony Oates (Director, Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University)  
Peta Rake (Director, UQ Art Museum, University of Queensland)  
Helen Rayment (Artistic Director, RMIT Gallery, RMIT)  
Fiona Salmon (Director, FUMA, Flinders University Museum of Art)  
Gilleen Shaw (Gallery Manager, University Galleries, University of Newcastle)  
Bala Starr (Director, La Trobe Art Institute)  
Vanessa Van Ooyen (Director, QUT Art Museum, Queensland University of Technology)  
Leanne Willis (Senior Manager, Deakin University Art Collection and Galleries)  
Sue Starcken (Curator, Edith Cowan University Art Collection)  
Ann Stephen (Senior Curator, Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney)  
Mark Stewart (Curator, Murdoch University Art Collection, Murdoch University)  
Pip Wallis (Senior Curator, MUMA, Monash University)  
Vivienne Webb (Curator, NAS Gallery, National Art School)  
Sue Starcken (Curator, Edith Cowan University Art Collection)  
Mark Stewart (Curator, Murdoch University Art Collection, Murdoch University)  
Megan Williams (Manager/Curator, University of the Sunshine Coast Art Gallery)