

UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA: SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

Introduction

Australia enjoys a comprehensive network of organisations and programs dedicated to the creation and exhibition of visual arts. The visual arts sector is a complex territory in which we are connected to and fuelled by each other: contemporary art spaces, craft and design organisations, touring agencies, regional galleries, new media groups, artist run initiatives, state art museums, commercial galleries, art magazines, individual artists, auction houses, collectors, sponsors, indigenous organisations, advocacy bodies, forums, conferences, art colleges and cultural foundations.

In this complex ecology university art museums play a central role in fostering creativity by linking potential to realisation and empowerment through the interface of art and education.

Who we are

Australian university art museums are leading and dynamic contributors to the intellectual and cultural life of the nation. In contributing to the academic and cultural sectors, they demonstrate best practice in visual arts and museum research and practice, educational and creative innovation, and community engagement.

University Art Museums conduct public programs of changing exhibitions in professional art museum environments, and are responsible for art collections of national significance.

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- In Australia, 25 university art museums (UAMs) account for 26 per cent of the country's public art museum sector.*
- Described as 'unique centers of learning', UAMs are situated within university learning environments and their collections are used for research and teaching.
- Because of their unique position, they bring new research and scholarship to aspects of art history and museology and publicly engage with topical issues.
- UAMs attract members of the campus community, artists, those who work in the arts, schools, and a broad audience encompassing the wider community.
- Australian UAMs achieve international museum standards and many have established links with international partners and deliver programs nationally and internationally of the highest standard.
- UAMs contribute significantly to the life of the community through nationally and internationally acclaimed exhibitions and through education, publishing and public programs that encourage critical discourse and debate.

* Whilst this submission reflects university art museums, if faculty and student galleries were taken into account, the contribution and scope would be much greater still.

What we do

- Promote links between professional visual arts practice and the university's teaching, research and community engagement objectives.
- Produce primary research through visual arts practice, history and innovation.
- Develop and maintain significant art collections that play a vital role in enriching the cultural milieu of universities and the nation.
- Showcase emerging and established Australian, Indigenous and international artists through exhibitions, acquisitions, public art commissions, publications and festivals.
- Offer professional development, training and mentorship to students and professionals working within the visual arts sector.
- Initiate collaborative partnerships and outreach activities to stakeholders outside the university.
- Engage the community, research, promote and advocate on behalf of the university art museum sector.
- Facilitate the exchange of ideas, information, exhibitions and staff as well as seminars, conferences and forums, which develop and build strategic alliances with individuals and organisations.
- Promote links between professional visual arts practice and the universities' teaching, research and community engagement objectives.
- Demonstrate best practice and professional standards for the sector.
- Contribute to the public understanding of the significance of university art museums to the broader Australian museums sector.

How we do it

- Care for cultural collections vesting in the cultural heritage of the nation of an estimated total value of over \$300 million.
- Collectively spend more than \$6 million a year on acquisitions of work, largely by living Australian artists.
- Hold an average of 10.5 exhibitions a year each, free to the Australian public and international visitors.
- Are generally open to the public six days a week.
- Collectively attract 450,000 visitors a year.
- Spend more than \$11 million a year collecting, conserving, displaying, interpreting, and promoting artworks.
- Represent all states, territories and regions and have the widest geographical reach of any art museum network.
- Operate to international best-practice standards.

Why we are different

- University Art Museums are the catalyst for the development of new works, new ideas and art histories. Because they play a key role in art education, they also hold a mirror to Australia's art history in a way unlike other public collecting art institutions.
- Situated within universities, UAMs actively engage in both research and teaching. Our programs encourage discourse and debate among current and future generations.
- UAMs link school students with their future mentors and open windows into what is possible for young people around the nation.
- UAMs connect education, creativity, industry and communities in a unique way within the sector.
- UAMs train, cultivate and mentor future generations of artists, curators, writers, historians, collectors and patrons.
- University art collections offer a rich cultural history and the exhibition programs attract university staff and students, members of the art, philanthropic, and media sectors, and the general public.
- Give emerging artists a chance to explore ideas, team up with other artists and work collaboratively in a dynamic environment that encourages critical thinking, play and risk-taking.
- Bring together emerging and established art practitioners and academics from various disciplines in a cross platform discussion that allows new ways of embracing art and ideas in a national context. For UAMs the development process is as important as the result.
- Present a conceptual platform of expression across various art forms and a potential forum for discussion of ideas, the breaking down of barriers and risk taking.
- Are more flexible to experimentation and to use the freedom provided by unconventional environments.
- Provide fertile ground for mutually beneficial partnerships.
- Serve to promote artists through the exhibition and acquisition of their work.

Response to the establishment of the National Cultural Policy

- ***Reflecting on the diversity of a 21st century Australia, and protecting and celebrating Indigenous culture.***

University Art Museums play a key role in the development of contemporary art, craft, design, new media and Indigenous visual arts practice. Through their exhibition, publications, educational and promotional activities they nurture the careers of art practitioners and arts professionals.

UAMs provide opportunities for the revitalisation of the work of established artists as well as providing initial professional experience for early career artists and curators. Through their networks they help build audiences, create demand for contemporary art and pioneer new international relationships. UAMs represent a multiplicity of views and constituencies, from Indigenous to multi-cultural contexts, providing a mirror to the complexity of contemporary Australia.

Situated within highly international and multi-cultural university contexts, alongside research and learning environments, the exhibition and collection activities of University Art Museums position UAMA members as especially well placed to promote Australian culture as characterised by diversity, complexity, dynamism and tolerance.

- ***Embracing emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture.***

University Art Museums blend aesthetic practices with innovative distribution platforms, information, and marketing. They mix artistic content within a larger functional brief. This is the definition of creative industries in its application to economic success and public access. Linkages with teaching departments that focus on research and training in Creative Industries provide a publication platform and showcase for new ideas and new possibilities in this arena.

UAMs strongly believe that the National Broadband Network will be a key catalyst for the growth of our creative industries. As a significant piece of cultural infrastructure, the NBN will deliver innovative and diverse content produced by our creative industries to audiences across Australia. UAMs are perfectly positioned through their networks and research facilities to develop and deliver exciting content nationally and internationally.

In recent years, considerable progress has been made on using cutting-edge information technology to create databases that allow for greater access to and distribution of UAM's collections and research activities. Through information sharing via the NBN the potential for collections and exhibitions sharing opens up to the wider community and people from remote and regional contexts.

First We See - The National Review of Visual Education, published in February 2008, urges a reconceptualisation of visual education, with the recommendation that *visuacy* – the ability to create, process and critique visual phenomena – should become a core skill area for all Australian students. The potential of partnerships between schools and university art museums to contribute to visual education is real and must be explored further. We are committed to finding avenues to strengthen links to teaching, learning and audience development; to providing curriculum-relevant activities, training and information sessions as well as access to online programs for the general public.

- ***Supporting excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthening the role that the arts play in enabling Australian artists to tell stories nationally and internationally.***

Our collections and exhibitions inspire new practices, enable research, provide access to cultural property and preserve our cultural heritage.

During the *2020 Summit*, the participants in the *Creativity Stream* agreed that the arts and creativity are a valued and integral part of society and that all Australians should be encouraged to realise their creative potential. Some of the core themes included the reshaping of teaching and mentoring in the creative arts and the link between the Creative Arts and Education.

We support excellence through scholarship, the creation of new works, the calibre of our local creative content and, importantly, through communicating with a wide audience in Australian cities and regional centres as well as overseas, by means of our international networks and students, as well as new media and online technologies. UAMs have a long history of presenting mid-career survey exhibitions of Australian artists and of identifying excellence in Australian visual arts practice through conceptually rigorous thematic exhibitions and researched publications that have charted significant shifts in culture and thought.

- ***Expanding and strengthening the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy***

University Art Museums represent the territory where the creative industries and art-media-design are closely intertwined in their production of cultural, economic and social values. Together they form the horizon of our contemporary culture. These intersecting sectors are being taught, facilitated and practiced in universities. They mobilise the intellectual and practical resources of what UAMs do in a way that is natural to us.

Universities are models of community patronage and have made and continue to make a major contribution to the cultural life of the nation through their support of cultural infrastructure such as theatres, galleries, museums and performance venues; as well as the direct support and commissioning of new works by contemporary artists. The UAM sector is one example of the patronage of Universities and their insight in combining access to the arts as part of a platform of delivery of their core business.

Creative Industries, a Strategy for 21st Century Australia recognises higher education as the key to creating a more prosperous and cohesive nation. Tertiary education is an important pathway to careers in creative industries or helping to develop creative employees for other industries. UAMs provide important linkages between industry and the higher education sector. Students in creative and business courses benefit from an increasing interest in cross - disciplinary approaches. The higher education sector facilitates invaluable research into creative industries.

Recommendations

To ensure a robust and sustainable cultural sector we recommend that the following priority aspects should be vigorously pursued and funded by targeted new **National Cultural Policy initiatives**:

Strategic Support & Recognition

- UAMs contribute collectively to national discussions, explore opportunities for collaboration in research, exhibition development, touring, distribution of publications, sharing information and strengthening cooperation.

We are actively supporting the development of new works of art, are committed to supporting artistic practice and to the dissemination, presentation and public education of visual arts culture. Our sector is a leader in the dynamic growth area of the Australian art museums.

Recommendation: UAMs' contribution to the development of the visual arts and public education, to the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, should be publicly acknowledged as contributing to the National Cultural Policy and fiscally supported by Government through the establishment of a strategic fund to allow our network to develop and expand national exhibition, publication, touring, collection development and professional development strategies.

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Indigenous Art

- Through our collections, exhibitions and public programs university art museums both support and reflect the multicultural reality of 21st Century Australia. The collection and presentation of Indigenous art and culture in particular continues to be a strong focus for university art museums.

Recommendation: With a dollar for dollar acquisitions support fund the sector will be able to generate significant opportunities for Indigenous artists and through a targeted grants program to expand our offering of exhibitions, publications and commissions that link with academic programs in museum, art management and curatorial studies, to provide a training ground for emerging Indigenous curators.

NBN National Partnership

- University art museums are well placed to develop content for delivery via the National Broadband Network, enabling more people to access exhibitions and participate in related public programs. Digitization projects using the web for online delivery of educational programs and to bring collections on line, for virtual exhibitions, podcasts, online forums, are crucial to enabling access and to making our intellectual capital as widely available as possible.

Recommendation: The Federal Government in partnership with Universities Australia, through their UAMs, can provide cultural knowledge to remote, rural and regional people via collections online, virtual classrooms, online tutors and mentors, e-learning and e-exhibitions, democratising access to culture and life-long learning. A national partnership of this kind will have a major impact on the delivery of educational services and in providing access to the cultural richness of the nation to all.

Research & Development Partnerships

- University art museums can be the 'new ways of resourcing our creative industries'. We champion the arts' continuing relation to innovation and would like to foreground their history of influential economic and social engagement. As well as generating fiscal growth, the creative industries are built on core skills that also act as a broad stimulant to development and sustainability. We recognise the need to leverage cross-sectoral innovation and focus on issues such as education, skills, training and commercialisation of research.

Recommendation: We support a 'whole of government' approach to cultural funding through all government portfolios on the basis that the arts deliver social and economic benefit through the establishment of an inter-departmental committee including education, community services, tourism, foreign affairs and trade, industry and innovation to support cross-portfolio initiatives.

As much of the process of creating contemporary art is a process of research and development we recommend the establishment of a national fund for R&D activities in contemporary art, which attracts income tax deduction for the first decade of the program. Developed in partnership with Universities Australia this fund would deliver substantial outcomes for the sector and for the wider community.

Enhancing Artists' Sustainability

- We need to be able to develop a sustainable resource base to properly support the ongoing program of exhibition and public programs through focused fundraising initiatives and philanthropy both within and external to the university system. We have the capacity to broaden the understanding of, and capacity for cultural richness and well-being of society. We have the networks to building relationships with international institutions and organisations to promote Australian artists.

Recommendation: A national partnership between the Federal Government and Universities Australia to support university art museums will enable the sector to continue to play a significant role in the sustainability of emerging and mid-career Australian artists through the growth of collections, acquisition and public programs and through developing world-class international exhibitions of Australian practitioners engaged in exploration of emerging technologies.