



UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA

Committee Secretariat House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts

Via email to [communications.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:communications.reps@aph.gov.au)

22 October 2020

Dear Committee Chair and Members,

I write to you on behalf of University Art Museums Australia (UAMA), the peak body driving advocacy and research on behalf of its 22 member organisations, each of which is responsible for a university art collection and public program of changing exhibitions that is presented in a dedicated and professionally run gallery space. These spaces vary in scale from intimate to multi-story sites that host on average seven exhibitions per annum.

University art museums are cultural powerhouses, generating significant opportunities for artists, writers and curators, championing their practices and bringing their work to new audiences. They are also innovative, ambitious and adventurous sites of cultural production that drive new scholarship, enrich education and engage diverse audiences, which in turn enables widespread participation in arts and cultural activity.

Data revealed in the University Art Museums Australia Survey Report (2017-2019) – summary attached for your reference – confirms that university art museums manage combined collections comprising more than 100,000 original works of art. Seen in the context of the recently released [Australian Public Galleries Snapshot](#), this number represents an estimated 30% of art collections held in the small-to-medium public art galleries and museums sector, constituting a significant part of the nation's moveable heritage and distributed cultural collections.

UAMs are major investors in Australian visual art and culture, supporting 5180 artists during the reporting period by presenting 492 exhibitions, commissioning 488 new works of art, and facilitating 57 public art projects and 53 artist residencies on their campuses. Of the total number of artists represented across these activities, the vast majority were contemporary Australian artists, with 42% of this group identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. As part of their remit to serve the immediate communities of their campuses as well as wider audiences, university art museums delivered 4894 public and education programs, and produced 141 publications distributed through bookshops and online, nationally and internationally. More than 1.6 million visited university art museums in person, with many more engaging with collections, programs and resources virtually.

Following is UAMA's response to the inquiry's **Terms of Reference**, specifically:

- **The direct and indirect economic benefits and employment opportunities of creative and cultural industries and how to recognise, measure and grow them.**
- **The non-economic benefits that enhance community, social wellbeing and promoting Australia's national identity, and how to recognise, measure and grow them.**
- **The impact of COVID-19 on the creative and cultural industries.**

Even in the best of times and economies, bridging the arts and university sectors is a unique challenge. In this current moment, with the immediate impacts of COVID-19 apparent and the future

uncertain, this challenge is now greater than ever, as our universities cut budgets and public funds are diverted away from cultural activities.

The impact of COVID-19 on university art museums is significant and devastating. Universities are facing huge budget deficits, which could result in them curtailing all but essential student facing teaching. Our institutions have already lost a core workforce of highly skilled museum professionals due to our ineligibility for the national JobKeeper scheme. University art museums typically sit within the Advancement / Engagement portfolios of their host institutions, although many have their roots in Humanities or Fine Arts departments with their collections established for education and research purposes. The Federal Government's recently announced cuts to Humanities courses will only exacerbate current difficulties by discouraging student enrolment. With significant cuts to these departments likely, it is easy to see how University Art Museums might begin to look superfluous to core business, and at worst be considered an asset that could be liquidated by universities facing financial losses. The loss this would present to Australia's cultural heritage cannot be overstated.

We acknowledge that some state governments have provided stimulus packages for the arts however UAMs remain largely ineligible for these. While obviously one of many sectors severely affected, the arts remains one of the worst hit industries in Australia. The Grattan Institute predicts that 75% of workers in the arts and creative industries will lose some or all work, with 70% of arts businesses affected.

Universities provide best practice and higher levels of success and impact. They are governed by rigorous codes of conduct, ethics, and peer assessment, which provide a degree of reliability for successful outcomes and audience impact, and high levels of support for First Nations artists and culture. University Art Museums are skilled at administering and auspicing grants for individual artists, but in the case of group exhibitions or programs or deceased artists, we are often unable to access funding, and high-quality projects must be abandoned.

Our directors and museum professionals cover a spectrum of professional knowledge and experience, with many of us acting as Peers on assessment boards and offering our help and expertise when needed, yet we seem to fall between the cracks of crucial funding streams. For example, our ability to maximise our impact is constrained somewhat by our eligibility to access funding streams from the Australia Council. Currently, the Australia Council allows one application per ABN per year. As universities are multidisciplinary organisations, they apply to multiple boards and artforms. Within the practicalities of the funding landscape, this has created strange and nonsensical competition between university elements applying for funding for innovative projects across the different disciplines of Music, Dance, Visual Arts, Literature and Theatre.

**UAMA propose the following recommendations to the Committee:**

1. Development of a National Arts and Culture Policy, formed through consultation with Federal, State and Local Government, Australia Council for the Arts, and peak industry bodies, with a response period in which all stakeholders across the wider cultural and creative industries can provide feedback.
2. That the Federal Government recognise the significant impact COVID-19 is having on both the University and Arts and Cultural Industries, and implement long term solutions that support and recognise the role that university art museums play in our cultural life - through training and creating employability for recent graduates and early career arts workers, as well as our role in enhancing community, social wellbeing and promoting Australia's national identity.
3. That application rules for grant funding across three tiers of government be adjusted to reflect the cross-disciplinary nature of universities.

4. That income support eligibility be opened to universities, so that galleries and museums, staff and artists along with the diverse range of workers and small businesses these institutions engage can be supported. It is not only artists, writers and curators that UAMs as a sector support. It is all the employment we provide for a great number of casuals, small businesses, sole traders and the like including graphic designers, installers, freight companies, printers, sign writers, fabricators, caterers, media companies/ community media and so on, that are also deeply affected.

UAMs are vital to the health of arts and culture more broadly in Australia and it's a role that we cherish. We hope that you might consider the major contribution to the nation's cultural and intellectual life made by universities. UAMA believes that with the introduction of the above measures, the sector will survive and sustain our community through these challenging times.

More than ever a strong arts and cultural sector is critical to Australia's future and vital if the nation is to successfully navigate a full recovery from the current health and economic crisis.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angela Goddard', written in a cursive style.

**Angela Goddard**  
**Chair, University Art Museums Australia**  
**Director, Griffith University Art Museum**  
**Griffith University, PO Box 3370 South Brisbane, Qld, 4101**