

Senator Katy Gallagher, Chair  
Senator James Paterson, Deputy Chair  
Senate Select Committee on COVID-19  
via: Committee Secretary  
Department of the Senate  
covid.sen@aph.gov.au

Thursday 28 May 2020

RE Senate Inquiry Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Senators Gallagher and Paterson,

University Art Museums Australia (UAMA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate's Inquiry. As a membership organisation UAMA currently represents 22 university art museums (UAMs) which are located across the nation's states and territories.

Data from UAMA's most recent membership survey (January – December 2019) indicate that UAMs are responsible for collections comprising some 88,000 artworks. These collections embody a rich cultural history representing mainly Australian artists – Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Over the reporting period UAMs presented 164 exhibitions, more than two thirds of which were new projects engaging Australian artists. In addition, UAMs facilitated 22 public art projects on their campuses and supported 15 artist residencies. Through these activities UAMs commissioned 99 artists in the production of new work.

In addition, UAMs delivered 857 public programs – most of which directly employed artists – and produced 62 publications distributed through bookshops nationally and internationally.

On these figures alone, UAMs can be seen to represent a significant segment of the museums and gallery sector in Australia and play an active and pivotal role in the intellectual and cultural life of the nation.

In response to the Inquiry UAMA is concerned about significant **gaps in the Australian Government's COVID-19 response** that leave artists, arts workers, and art museums and galleries in Australia among the most severely impacted in the current crisis. This is on top of the economic pressures affecting the university sector more broadly to which we belong, which is also of grave concern to us.

While issues regarding accessing payments and the lack of an arts targeted strategy for support have been articulated in detail by the National Association of Visual Artists (NAVA), we would like to also draw your attention to the tenuous state and fragility of the arts ecology.

In the main, our sector operates from 'hand to mouth' relying on a combination of institutional support, government grants, donations, sponsorship, earned income and ticket sales, along with a lot of good will and volunteerism. These income streams are for the most part inaccessible to UAMs in the short to medium term, and there is no doubt that there will be flow on effects especially in relation to sponsorship and philanthropy in the longer term.

There is another issue here too. It is not only artists, writers, curators and the like 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 affected.

UAMs are vital to the health of the broader arts in Australia and it's a role that we cherish. But we are **concerned that income support eligibility has not been opened to universities (or local government) jeopardising hundreds of galleries and museums, thousands of staff and artists along with the diverse range of workers and small businesses these institutions engage.**

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.

A federal strategy that better supports the various museums and galleries in the art sector during this time, recognises their economic and cultural value more generally, and also works to ensure the health of the arts in the longer term is desperately required.

UAMA joins colleagues across the sector in calling for immediate and targeted support and urging delivery of a coherent policy and strategy for the arts going forward to prevent collapse.

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

Sincerely,

Fiona Salmon  
Chair, University Art Museums Australia  
  
Director, Flinders University Museum of Art  
Flinders University, GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001