

16 July 2015

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee

**UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA (UAMA) SUBMISSION:**

Inquiry into the Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts

**INTRODUCTION**

Australia possesses a comprehensive network of organisations and programs dedicated to the creation and exhibition of visual arts. Within this complex ecology, University Art Museums (UAMs) play a central role.

Since their establishment more than 150 years ago, universities in Australia have commissioned and collected artworks to enrich their cultural milieu and ensure their graduates develop as fully rounded individuals, with a balanced education that includes a knowledge of the arts through contact with their own and other cultures. Additionally, universities have acknowledged their responsibility as agents in building civic responsibility and social capital, helping communities to better understand and celebrate their cultural heritage.

That two-fold mission of providing a centre for teaching and research, while concurrently enriching community life, continues to guide the development of programs within university-based museums and galleries. Over the past two decades the inclusion of new galleries when refurbishing or constructing facilities for art schools, and the opening of purpose-built or renovated gallery spaces on university campuses, is evidence of a continuing commitment to this mission of universities as custodians and interpreters of Australian visual culture.

For UAMs the recent announcement that Australia Council funds allocated to support artists and small to medium arts organisations will be redirected toward the establishment of a National Program for Excellence in the Arts is concerning. It is a seismic shift that will undermine the entire sector across all arts disciplines, and it will have a serious impact on the future topography of the cultural landscape of Australia; and it will have a significant impact on the work of the nation's UAMs.

While funding for the major performing arts agencies has been protected, the consequence is that individual artists and those arts agencies that support, show and present their work, will carry the full brunt of the ensuing fallout. This undermines the foundations of our cultural infrastructure, the bedrock upon which the major companies are built, and it erodes that solid base of engagement, training, audience development and knowledge that supports this national arts ecosystem.

This submission represents the views of the following University Art Museums, which together constitute UAMA:

Academy Gallery & NEW Gallery, University of Tasmania, Launceston  
Deakin University Art Collection and Galleries, Melbourne  
Charles Darwin University Art Collection and Art Gallery, Darwin  
Flinders University Art Museum, Adelaide  
Griffith Artworks, Griffith University, Brisbane  
Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne  
John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, Perth  
La Trobe University Museum of Art, Melbourne  
Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia, Perth  
Macquarie University Art Gallery, Sydney  
Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne  
National Art School Gallery, Sydney  
UNSW Galleries, University of NSW, Sydney  
QUT Art Museum & William Robinson Gallery, Brisbane  
RMIT Gallery, Melbourne  
Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, Adelaide  
Sydney University Gallery, University of Sydney  
University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane  
University of Sunshine Coast, Queensland  
UTS Gallery, University of Technology Sydney

## **THE IMPACT OF THE 2014 AND 2015 COMMONWEALTH BUDGET DECISIONS ON THE ARTS**

Australian UAMs 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 through their public programs and changing exhibitions presented in professional art museum environments. They are also responsible for art collections of national significance.

While there are many examples of how this redirection of funding will impact on operations and outcomes, the case of University Art Museums exemplifies the potential shock waves of disruption and disjuncture. While the Australia Council does not directly fund UAMs, they actively seek support through the Council's Development and Arts Projects funding categories to deliver their programs and they work with artists who receive support for Art Projects to give their work public exposure through their exhibitions and touring activities. UAMs are also key partners and collaborators with other arts organisations, corporates and private individuals in contributing to a diverse and rich cultural landscape.

Currently the nation's UAMs care for cultural collections with an estimated value of over \$300 million and annually build on that investment by collectively spending more than \$6 million on acquisitions of work by living Australian artists. The nation's UAMs each present an average of 10.5 exhibitions a year, which are free to the Australian public and international visitors, and they collectively attract more than half a million visitors. UAMs invest more than \$11 million a year in collecting, conserving, displaying, interpreting, and promoting artworks, largely by Australian artists and they account for 26 percent of the country's public art museum sector. This constitutes a substantial and vibrant network that spans the nation.

Although not as immediately impacted as those organisations that depend on the Australia Council for administrative and operational support, the UAMs' ability to present exhibitions that contribute to an understanding of contemporary Australian life and support sustainable careers for Australian artists, is significantly impacted by these funding changes.

For example, the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery at the University of Western Australia gained support from the Australia Council to present a review exhibition of the work of eminent Australian photographer Anne Ferran in 2014. *Anne Ferran: Shadow Land* was developed in partnership with the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney and Power Publications, the Perth International Arts Festival and Wesfarmers Arts, and with funding from the Council's Presentation and Promotion grant round. Through the efficacy of this partnership, three decades of sustained creative engagement by a prominent Australian artist was introduced to a wider national audience through a major touring exhibition and the publication of a monograph. This could not have happened without Australia Council support and like so many other projects supported by UAMs it was a response to priorities within the visual arts sector that are not otherwise well supported.

Importantly, Australia Council funding enables artists to undertake ambitious projects. At the University of Technology Sydney Gallery, the commitment to showcasing the creative use of technology and the work of artists who demonstrate the value of experimentation and creative thinking has led to very productive collaborations, resulting in exhibitions of new work by Izabela Pluta, Paul Greedy and Michele Barker & Anna Munster, all funded by Australia Council New Work grants. Their funding through the Australia Council was supported by the UTS Gallery through presentation expenses and investment in public programming, including a series of workshops held for students from lower socio-economic and Indigenous backgrounds as part of the Federal Government's Widening Participation Strategy.

The Australia Council also provided invaluable financial support to The University of Queensland (UQ) Art Museum to present a career survey *Peter Hennessey: Making it real* (14 March to 12 July 2015). The first comprehensive analysis of Hennessey's practice, *Making it real* included many of the artist's most significant extant sculptures, including large-scale works such as *My Voyager 2004* and *My Humvee (Inversion therapy) 2008*.

The costs associated with mounting an exhibition of this magnitude would have been prohibitive without the assistance of the Australia Council. The installation and freight costs were, for example, unusually high due to the scale and complexity of many of the works. A documentary film produced by critic, writer, broadcaster and lecturer Dr Andrew Frost would not have been possible without the grant monies. Several aspects of the exhibition, including the catalogue – 144 pages with full-colour reproductions and four scholarly essays – were enriched through these funds.

In addition, Hennessey's new work grant enabled him to make an installation for the exhibition, which was inspired by his residency with scientists at UQ's Centre for Hypersonics who are working with an international consortium on scramjet technology.

Together, the exhibition and the residency expanded UQ Art Museum's existing audiences, creating avenues for skills development and cross-disciplinary partnerships and fulfilled their aim to bring Hennessey's work to wider public notice.

Australia Council grants awarded to UAMs enables this kind of collaboration, research and development and publications that would otherwise be unviable. In 2014, Sydney University Art Gallery received program funding for *Mikala Dwyer: the garden of half-life*, which enabled Dwyer to work extensively with Sydney University's historic Geology Department collection. Dwyer made several new videos that were transformed into sculptural propositions, and created major new wall paintings based on cross-sections of geological formations, which were documented in a major publication on the project.

Australia Council funding also supports international opportunities for Australian artists. Monash University Museum of Art's presentation of *Concrete*, a key project in the Australian Government's Cultural Festival in Istanbul in September, was developed with Australia Council support through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to mark the centenary of the First World War. The exhibition, which features 16 artists, presents a rare opportunity for the eight Australian artists included to gain exposure to a large and varied international audience. Projects like this are only possible through the assistance of the Australia Council.

These examples indicate how small investments in exhibitions and the production of new work can create a significant impact. The imprimatur of the nation's leading cultural agency is an important credential that facilitates other support and generates a national audience. With limited access to that funding, University Art Museums will find it increasingly difficult to maintain their substantial contribution to the development of contemporary art, craft, design, new media and Indigenous visual arts practice and to continue to nurture the careers of art practitioners and arts professionals throughout Australia.

The UAM national network facilitates access to a diversity of arts and cultural programs for all Australians and greatly value adds to the relatively small investment provided by the Australian Government through Australia Council grants. However, this funding is vital, and any reduction in funding to small to medium arts organisations and to individual artists will greatly impact on the work of UAMs and their ability to provide access to significant arts and cultural experiences.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ted Snell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Professor Ted Snell AM CitWA  
Chair, University Art Museums Australia