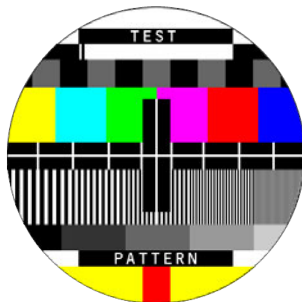


**Submission
No 21**

INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN VICTORIA

Organisation: TEST PATTERN

Date Received: 26 January 2025



SUBMISSION:
**INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURAL AND
CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN VICTORIA**

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THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT AS CULTURAL LEADER

Victoria has long been recognised as Australia's state of the arts. Since time immemorial, sovereign First Nations have cared for land, waters and culture. From the early years of European settlement, public and private investment in Victoria's cultural institutions has fostered significant innovation, investment and civic achievement. Our libraries, museums and performing arts centres have inspired the nation, and our artists have inspired the world.

Unfortunately, Victoria's leading position is now at risk. This inquiry comes at a critical moment for our cultural and creative industries–

- **Declining Victorian Government** investment is curtailing our ambition: no CPI indexation of multi-year organisational grants, cuts to agency budgets such as ACMI, and declining contestable grants, erode trust in Victoria as a desirable arts location or creative base;
- Chronic decline and lack of indexation have **disguised the value of pandemic subsidies**: while these were presented as offering one-off emergency support, they in fact represented a realistic level of investment whose abrupt end has been devastating;
- **Policy and program uncertainty**: Creative Victoria's 2025 grants calendar is as yet unknown, and their current funding opportunities webpage shows closing dates as far back as 2022, which prevents strategic, responsible and courageous planning;
- **Housing and cost of living crisis**: more and more artists are being forced out of their homes, studios and neighbourhoods, diminishing Victoria's creative capacity;
- **Artificial intelligence**: the biggest threat to the cultural and creative industries in world history, AI threatens not only livelihoods but also culture as we know it.

Now is the time for the Victorian Government to act ambitiously.

BEYOND THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

In May 2023, the Economy and Infrastructure Committee resolved to inquire into, monitor and report on the cultural and creative industries in Victoria. The inquiry's terms of reference identify a narrower set of concerns: Victoria's share of national arts and cultural spending; urban and regional disparities; COVID-19's impact. Fortunately, substantial work has already been undertaken in the areas the Committee has identified:

- Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts – Analysis of the Cultural and Creative Sector–Revive: Sectoral Analysis (2024)
- Australian Senate Inquiry into the National Cultural Policy – 76 submissions (2023), transcripts of hearings (2023-24) and Interim Report (2024)
- Creative Australia – use the Electorate Profiles tool for data on attendance and participation, ticket buying, employment, cultural and creative businesses, and venues including cinemas, libraries, bookshops; search grant outcomes by electorate
- ABC and SBS annual reports and specific reporting.

Government inquiries are valuable opportunities to solicit expertise from artists, organisations, peak bodies and the general public – data, experiences and industry advice that is beyond the scope of current government work. In focusing on Commonwealth institutions and policy, the Committee risks overlooking the unique and valuable elements of Victoria's cultural and creative industries that are under threat. To ensure Victoria can restore its leading position as Australia's state of the arts, a more ambitious scope might inform the Committee's inquiries:

- How have Victorian artists' living and working patterns changed as a result of the **cost of living crisis**? Do professional networks, cultural infrastructure and presentation opportunities exist where artists and organisations have had to relocate? How many artists are considering terminating, or have already terminated, their practice in response? What is the cost to their livelihood and mental health, and what is the cost to Victoria?
- How are Victorian artists and arts organisations currently using **artificial intelligence**? How many have had intellectual property stolen – single artworks, or an entire lifetime's work – by tech companies for absorption into generative AI operations? Which sectors of Victoria's cultural and creative industries are most critically at risk of IP and income loss?
- How will **current major capital infrastructure** investment empower artists and Victoria's cultural and creative industries in the future, and how does this accord with any feasibility work or business cases that were prepared ahead of that investment?
- While the pandemic period made arts experiences more accessible for many artists and audiences, how might the Victorian Government best ensure **an ever-increasing level of accessibility** to arts experiences?
- What has the impact of the pandemic been on the **cultural and gender diversity** of creative and cultural industry employment and arts programming?
- Recognising that only a tiny proportion of practising artists and creative organisations ever receive Victorian Government grants, while effective policy empowers everyone's work, what **opportunities and priorities** should guide this year's policy work?
- What level of **Victorian Government investment** is needed to ensure Victoria can restore its leading position as Australia's state of the arts, and how best to target it?
- **Beyond investment, what other levers** – taxation, for example, as in the upcoming NSW Government Cultural Tax Reform Summit – are available to the Victorian Government?

RESTORING THE STATE OF THE ARTS

The *Creative Victoria Act 2017* recognises that:

- the arts have an intrinsic value that contributes to the cultural depth, diversity and life of Victoria
- the arts and creative industries contribute significantly to Victoria's wealth and prosperity
- the arts and creative industries are means to improve the quality of life for all individuals in Victoria and improve the community of Victoria as a whole
- all individuals in Victoria are equally entitled to access opportunities and participate in and contribute to the arts and creative industries in Victoria
- all individuals should be free to express their ideas and opinions through the arts and creative industries.

A new arts race must now begin between states – matching the boldness of the capital expenditure contest between AGNSW and NGA. Victoria cannot afford continued attrition. Our urgent challenge is to invest in the people and the organisations who create the work that astonishes us. It's time for Victoria once again to build on its record of innovative, nation-leading policy, programs and reforms, including:

- Artists in Schools program (Arts Victoria and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 1981-2000s) and Creative Learning Partnerships (2021-2024);
- *Small Town Transformations* (2012-2014), delivered by Regional Arts Victoria;
- 'Agent of change' principle introduced into planning law (2014, Planning Scheme Amendment VC120 at Clause 52.43) to protect live music venues and performers.

The Act's assertion that "all individuals should be free to express their ideas and opinions through the arts and creative industries" is particularly timely given the career-limiting consequences being faced by artists expressing deep concern for atrocities across the globe. Artists are the inspiration as well as conscience of the nation. Their work creates our future. It's vital that our political leaders make it clear that attacks on artists' livelihoods, career prospects and representation are not acceptable, speaking personally wherever possible to those who systematically harass artists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Welcome a **more comprehensive scope** of expertise to contribute to the Committee's work by considering the set of questions outlined above;
2. **Champion the voices of artists** and welcome the expression of their opinions and ideas;
3. Approach budget considerations with great confidence and pride, aiming at **truly ambitious levels of funding** that restore Victoria's position as Australia's state of the arts.

ABOUT TEST PATTERN

Test patterns demonstrate the formal, technical and imaginative capacities of programs currently in development. Established by Esther Anatolitis in 1999, **Test Pattern** provides strategic and policy consultation services to the private and public sector. Our five key practice areas: Creative Places, Policy and Strategy, Industry Advisory, Critical Reflection, and Advocacy and Public Value. Clients include municipal, state and territory governments across Australia, as well as arts and media organisations, industry service and peak bodies, advocacy consortia, universities, boards and board chairs, and individual artists.

Esther Anatolitis develops the ideas, the platforms and the places where creative practices lead public agendas. This work spans the arts across all artforms, including publishing and broadcasting, and spatial and experimental practices.

Esther is Editor of *Meanjin*, Council Member at the National Gallery of Australia, Hon A/Prof at RMIT School of Art, and Co-Chair of the Australian Republic Movement. She is a former CEO of leading Victorian and Melbourne-based national arts and media organisations including the National Ethnic & Multicultural Broadcasters' Council, Express Media, the Emerging Writers' Festival, Craft Victoria, SYN Media, Melbourne Fringe, Regional Arts Victoria and the National Association for the Visual Arts.

For the Victorian Government, Esther has served several industry roundtables and policy committees including the inaugural Creative Industries Strategy Expert Reference Group, and was a ministerial appointment to the board of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image. Esther is a former chair of the Arts Industry Council of Victoria.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any further information I can provide.



Esther Anatolitis

Monday 13 January 2025