

**Submission
No 28**

INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN VICTORIA

Organisation: NETS Victoria

Date Received: 30 January 2025

Inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria

NETS Victoria's Response



NETS Victoria acknowledges and pays respect to the Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri) people of the Kulin Nations as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters on which our office is based.

NETS Victoria also pays respects to the Traditional Owners of the lands and seas across Victoria and throughout Australia and acknowledges Elders past and present. Working across Country would not be possible without the continuing custodianship of Australia's First Peoples of their unceded lands. It is our privilege to work on Country. NETS Victoria pays our deepest respects to Country and those who have looked after it.

NETS Victoria works towards supporting regional Victorians and regional Australians and connecting them with extraordinary contemporary art, craft and design. This means that NETS Victoria has the opportunity to work with many First Nations artists, curators, professionals and communities. NETS Victoria thanks them for sharing their knowledge, cultural expressions and stories.

Cover:

Steven Rhall

Taungurung

Ideas of First Nations art practice and late capitalism, 2021

A Mildura Arts Centre and NETS Victoria exhibition, curated by Jenna Rain Warwick, 2022.

Billboard: 8.3 x 1.80 m. East Mildura

This project was assisted by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

Courtesy of the artist and MARS Gallery

About NETS Victoria

As the state's peak body for visual art, craft and design touring, National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Victoria supports extraordinary contemporary art to reach regional and metropolitan areas.

Our vision is to connect and inspire diverse communities, through access to cutting-edge contemporary art that challenges the status-quo and celebrates multiple viewpoints.

We work with an established network of regional galleries to bring new exhibitions to life in new locations and support galleries to capture wider audiences. Our exhibitions are enhanced by educational programs, encouraging increased audience participation and engagement with contemporary art.

We nurture new projects through seed funding via the Exhibition Development Fund grants program. We provide regional galleries with best practice support services for our touring programs including professional development opportunities.

In 2023, we presented 8 physical touring exhibitions. These included 92 artists, 14 curators 339 artworks to 16 destinations with 8 touring partners, reaching 75,624 audience members. 81% of the artists and 64% of the curators in our 2023 program were First Nations.

NETS Victoria adheres to and promotes the principle of First Peoples First. With a strong record of delivering exhibitions by First Nations artists and curators, our touring exhibitions prioritise First Nations artists' perspectives, which often include themes of self-determination, human rights, social and political justice, decolonisation, land rights and care for Country.

About this submission

This submission to the Parliament of Victoria Economy and Infrastructure Committee's 'Inquiry into the cultural and creative industries in Victoria' has been informed by NETS Victoria's significant reach and relationships with regional communities across the state, and our work within the broader framework of national visual arts touring as part of the NETS Australia network.

This submission includes feedback and recommendations on the following Inquiry focus areas:

- 1 and 2. The economic and social impact of the Commonwealth Government's Australian cultural policy, Revive, on Victoria's arts and cultural industries, including the share of national arts and cultural spending going to Victoria and regional Victoria.
- 3. The importance of spending in the Victorian economy and the cultural dynamism and representation in Victoria of government-funded national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, and, in particular, whether these broadcasters are spending in Victoria a share of their budget that matches the size of Victoria's population, economy and unique place within national cultural life.
- 4. The ongoing financial sustainability of the seven national performing arts training organisations including whether Victoria's share of this funding is adequate.
- 5. Whether the Revive policy and relevant state government policies and spending provide sufficient support and impetus to rebuild and sustain Victoria's cultural and creative industries following the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector.



Kent Morris

Barkindji

Barkindji Blue Sky – Ancestral Connections #11, 2021; *Barkindji Blue Sky – Ancestral Connections #3, #4, #8, #7*, 2019

Wallpaper printed and installed by Decently Exposed; giclee prints on rag paper: 110 x 160 cm each

Installation View: Latrobe Regional Gallery

Presented in *WILAM BIIK*, a TarraWarra Museum of Art exhibition, curated by Stacie Piper and toured across Victoria by NETS Victoria, 2021—23.

This project was assisted by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

Photograph: Christo Crocker

1 and 2. The economic and social impact of the Commonwealth Government's Australian cultural policy, Revive, on Victoria's arts and cultural industries including the share of national arts and cultural spending going to Victoria and regional Victoria.

In January 2023, Revive outlined a five-year plan to 'change the trajectory of the creative sector' through dedicated funding and establishment of independent bodies (including a new focus on First Nations arts and culture).

While NETS Victoria welcomed Revive's broad intentions and pillars, we observe that:

- Revive did not include increases to the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy (VACS) and/or visual arts touring programs the sector advocated for prior to its release. The sector has since learned that Creative Australia's Contemporary Touring Initiative for visual arts touring will be discontinued from 2025. As a consequence, the policy's funded initiatives have resulted in minimal or negative flow-on effects for visual arts touring and/or contemporary visual arts practitioners to date.
- Taking inflation into account, the total funding distributed by Creative Australia to the sector has decreased by 11.4 per cent in the last decade. Grants to organisations have dropped by 66 per cent, and grants to individual artists by 88 per cent.¹
- Since Revive, Creative Australia's Visual Arts and the Multi-Art Form funding categories have reported particularly high instability and turnover, with many organisations losing funding while new entrants have been successful for the first time.²
- Combined, Victoria and New South Wales continue to represent 51% of the country's overall funding from Creative Australia, which is relatively unchanged from the years prior to Revive.³ This funding is disproportionately concentrated in Melbourne and Sydney, which creates concerns for artists and audiences based in regional areas.

¹ Alison Croggon, Stage Plight: The state of Australian theatre, The Monthly, June 2024

² David Burton, Creative Australia funding shock results show a sector on the brink, ArtsHub, January 2024

³ David Burton, Creative Australia funding shock results show a sector on the brink, ArtsHub, January 2024

- Like many of our colleague organisations, NETS Victoria’s funding through VACS has not increased in years, even though operating costs continue to rise. With our commitment to always put artists and audiences first, this has required us to dip into retained earnings to continue the standard and breadth of the work we are known for.
- Revive prioritises First Peoples representation, cultural safety and self-determination, but achieving these ambitions will require additional resources, time and community engagement. This includes addressing the challenges faced by First Nations artists and arts workers, such as being isolated or siloed, dealing with racism in public-facing roles, and ensuring health and wellbeing in culturally unsafe settings. Ensuring cultural safety for First Nations artists and curators is crucial, often necessitating the hiring of First Nations staff or involvement of cultural advisors to provide guidance.
- Feedback from our peers and colleagues from across outer suburban and regional Victoria is that increased pressure and competition for underpinning operating and program funding is fundamentally shifting the nature of exhibition programs and access to gallery experiences. Some common strategies that public galleries implement to meet financial shortfall include decreased operating hours, scheduling exhibitions across longer periods of time to reduce expenditure on technical labour, freight and fees, lessening public programming, and in some cases reducing curatorial, conservation and program oversight or combining artform roles across galleries and performing arts venues. These strategies reduce access to visual arts experiences for all Victorians, and contribute to loss of skill from the sector, especially in regional areas, which will further impact the quality of available arts experiences over the long term.
- While we welcome the impact on regional audiences from the Revive initiative to tour works from National and State Collecting Institutions, this must be delivered in addition to visual arts touring of living Australian artists and curators — so as not to further reduce the creative prospects and career viability of contemporary practitioners.
- This focus on touring historical collections will also redirect resources from commissioning and touring of new contemporary works, likely to be much more representative of the diversity of perspectives that constitute modern Australia — and by extension Victoria.
- Access to quality visual arts experiences and exhibitions by living Australian artists also supports the viability of public galleries and surrounding communities, as part of a broader cultural offer that encourages visitation and visitor spend, while showcasing local stories and providing relevant, targeted programming in response to regional community interests and needs.
- These trends appear to be part of a general redirection of resources away from state-based and towards national initiatives. While we support efforts to coordinate between states and territories, we also understand the needs of Victorian communities and cultural institutions can vary greatly from those of our counterparts.

These observations have been mirrored and exacerbated by corresponding trends at a state level:

- According to Australian cultural think-tank A New Approach, the Northern Territory consistently leads per capita expenditure on arts and culture among state and territory governments. Victoria is consistently ranked second to last (after the NT, ACT, TAS, SA, WA and NSW, and exceeding only QLD). Per capita government expenditure on arts and culture from the Victorian Government fell by approx. 13.5 per cent from 2007–08 to 2021–22.⁴
- The State's 2024–25 Budget includes a further 1.3 per cent funding cut to creative industries access, development and innovation output compared to the 2023–24 revised figure.⁵
- No visual arts projects were funded in Creative Victoria's most recent Touring Victoria round.
- Through our engagement with First Nations artists and curators, NETS Victoria has found that regionally-based First Nations arts workers and artists experience noticeable disadvantage when engaging with the state's creative sector. Time and cost of travel required to engage with metropolitan exhibitions, institutions and networks are also significant barriers. Without significant resourcing to support First Nations people in arts and cultural roles, current efforts to increase inclusion and representation are likely to fail.

Increased costs, reduced funding and inequitable prioritisation of different art forms (including this Inquiry's focus on broadcast and performing arts) have put Australia's entire arts and cultural sector at risk — particularly for contemporary practicing Australian visual artists and regional communities and audiences.

The lack of dedicated funding for visual arts touring of work by living Australian visual artists is a critical concern for the visual arts sector. These considerations are exacerbated for smaller institutions or those in more remote areas of the state.

In addition to their significant economic contribution, touring exhibitions play a vital role in wellbeing, education and cultural change, including: contributing to critical, creative and divergent ways of thinking, and supporting the mental health of audiences and communities (leading to cost savings in health and related industries).

Additional financial resourcing is required, alongside greater cultural safety measures to create a supportive and productive environment where artists, practitioners and cultural organisations can thrive.

4 A New Approach, The Big Picture 4: Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative activity by governments in Australia in 2007–08 to 2021–22, May 2024

5 Parliament of Victoria Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Inquiry into the 2024–25 Budget Estimates Melbourne, Thursday 16 May 2024

Recommendations:

1. Restore Commonwealth and State touring funding to pre COVID-19 levels, including reinstatement of Creative Australia's Contemporary Touring Initiative for visual arts touring.
2. Increase Commonwealth and State Government funding to NETS Victoria to secure an ongoing First Nations role to support cultural safety in touring exhibitions to public galleries.
3. Transition 4-year State funding to 8-year funding arrangements to promote sustainability, strategic-thinking and innovation within and partnerships across Victorian arts organisations.
4. Increase support for small to medium-sized (S2M) visual arts organisations that centre and provide opportunities for living Victorian artists, including through commission and loan fees that align with the National Association for Visual Arts' (NAVAs) Code of Practice.
5. Incentivise regional galleries to present touring exhibitions as 20% of their programs to ensure regional audiences have access to diverse, relevant and responsive content.
6. Increase requirements for touring funding to ensure a minimum of 20% is allocated towards paying living Australian artists and curators.
7. Support State peak arts bodies to establish a Cultural Safety Code of Conduct for arts organisations in collaboration with First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) experts, including requirements for:
 - Accredited First Nations cultural competency training and initiatives.
 - Accredited anti-racism training, access and inclusion initiatives.
8. Update Creative Victoria funding obligations to require funded organisations to comply with Cultural Safety Code of Conduct.
9. Introduce new centralised, self-determined First Nations advisory support or funding for cultural consultants to ensure arts organisations of all sizes and budgets have equitable access to relevant, culturally appropriate guidance from Elders, artists and communities who are adequately compensated for their cultural/colonial load and time.
10. Support NETS Victoria to offer educational specialists in regional galleries to support children and young people to engage with contemporary art.



Curator of *WILAM BIIK* Stacie Piper gives a Curator Talk at Wangaratta Art Gallery, 2022.
WILAM BIIK was a TarraWarra Museum of Art exhibition touring across Victoria with NETS Victoria, 2021—2023.
This project was assisted by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.
Photograph: Erin Davis Hartwig



Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony for *Between Waves* 2024, Plimsoll Gallery, University of Tasmania. *Between Waves* is an exhibition developed by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), curated by Jessica Clark and toured nationally by NETS Victoria 2021—2023. This project has been supported by Creative Victoria through the Yalingwa Visual Arts Initiative and the NETS Victoria Exhibition Development Fund; and the Australian Government's Visions of Australia program. Photograph: Rémi Chauvin

3. Importance of spending in the Victorian economy and the cultural dynamism and representation in Victoria of government-funded national broadcasters, the ABC and SBS, and, in particular, whether these broadcasters are spending in Victoria a share of their budget that matches the size of Victoria's population, economy and unique place within national cultural life.

While we applaud existing creative content on the ABC and SBS, NPGA's 2020 Australian Public Galleries Snapshot revealed that Australia's public galleries hold over 300,000 items in their collections with a combined value of more than \$1.2 billion, but only a small portion of these are digital collections that are accessible via broadcast or online.⁶

The 2024 Arts Workforce Scoping Studio from Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA) and Creative Australia further demonstrated a need for new skills relating to digitalisation, with more than half of visual arts organisations reporting increased needs in this area.⁷

Recommendations:

11. Commonwealth and State investment in specialist staff, technology and training required for public galleries to digitise and promote their collections.
12. Ensure local visual arts content is included in public broadcaster programming.

⁶ National Public Galleries Alliance (NPGA), Australian Public Galleries Snapshot: capturing key data from 197 of our country's estimated 408 small-to-medium public galleries, June 2020

⁷ Gina Fairley, Arts Workforce Scoping Study interim findings indicate crisis across sectors, ArtsHub, November 2024



Installation view: *Notions of Care*, at Ararat Gallery TAMA, 2022.
A Bus Projects exhibition, curated by Kathryne Genevieve Honey and Nina Mulhall and toured across Victoria by NETS Victoria 2021—2023.
This project was assisted by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.
Photograph: Keelan O'Hehir

4. Ongoing financial sustainability of the seven national performing arts training organisations including whether Victoria's share of this funding is adequate.

With fewer and more expensive Higher Education and TAFE courses and career pathways for practitioners across all art forms (particularly in regional areas), it is vital Australia's arts education and workforce development be considered as a whole (rather than prioritising performing arts).

The 2024 Artists as Workers Report identified artists as more highly educated than the overall workforce, including three-quarters who hold a university degree (compared to only 36 percent in the wider labour force). Beyond this general education, many artists also undergo specific art form training.

However, inadequate support for such training opportunities means Australia's visual arts sector now faces significant shortages in essential roles – worsened by recent closures of arts courses, which have impacted the sector's operations.⁸

According to the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA), ongoing cuts to tertiary arts courses limit future arts workers' opportunities to acquire essential skills and access entry-level career pathways, further endangering the arts workforce.

"Building a skilled, resilient arts workforce starts with education," NAVA's Penelope Benton says. "We need to ensure that arts workers have access to training, development and career pathways from entry-level to senior positions. For our sector to grow and meet the demands of a changing world, investment in arts education and professional development is crucial."⁹

There is a recognised need for sector-wide professional development in protocols, history and engagement principles in relation to First Nations artworks and practises, and Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property (ICIP). There is also a need for further training across the arts sector in anti-racism, access and inclusion.

⁸ David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia, Creative Australia, May 2024

⁹ Penelope Benton, Arts Workforce Scoping Study interim findings indicate crisis across sectors, ArtsHub, November 2024

Recommendations:

13. Review Australia's higher education system, including changes to student contribution amounts (as per Revive).
14. Targeted Commonwealth and State investment in specialised visual arts training and education programs, alongside policies that enhance career development, improve working conditions, and ensure adequate pay.
15. Invest in new First Nations-led mentorship programs and employment support in the visual arts sector.
16. Support the development of a new, self-determined First Nations visual arts network.



Installation View: Latrobe Regional Gallery

Collective Movements a MUMA exhibition, curated by Kate ten Buuren, Maya Hodge and N'Arweet Professor Carolyn Briggs AM PhD with advice from Professor Brian Martin and toured across Victoria by NETS Victoria 2022—2024. This project was supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria and the Australian Government through Creative Australia, as well as receiving development assistance from NETS Victoria's Exhibition Development Fund, supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

Photographer: Christo Crocker

5. Whether the Revive policy and relevant state government policies and spending provide sufficient support and impetus to rebuild and sustain Victoria's cultural and creative industries following the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector.

Victoria's artists, practitioners and cultural organisations were amongst the first and hardest hit of the COVID-19 pandemic, and have been amongst the slowest to recover — with the sector still feeling the effects of disproportionate lockdowns and other restrictions, changing audience behaviours, and the resulting economic downturn and cultural workforce crisis.

But while targeted COVID-19 support was provided by Commonwealth and State Governments at the peak of the pandemic, national support was primarily through JobKeeper payments and the Boosting Cash Flow for Employers program, which most independent artists were ineligible to apply for.

And while the Victorian Government reported an additional \$359.8 million of COVID-19 support for eligible cultural and creative businesses in 2021–22¹⁰ (resulting in some of the largest per-person payments in Australia¹¹), this investment did not last as long as the pandemic's ongoing effects.

As a result, the Artists as Workers report has shown that it's never been harder for Australian artists to make a living — with only 9 per cent able to dedicate all their working time at their creative practice. Overall artist income barely exceeds minimum wage (falling 26 per cent below the national average and 45 per cent less than similarly-educated workers). And while average total incomes have either plateaued or fallen since 2000, the costs incurred by artists to produce work has increased to 73 per cent of their creative earnings.¹² These grim statistics are exacerbated for artists in regional areas and/or other strategically under-valued groups.

10 A New Approach, The Big Picture 4: Expenditure on Artistic, Cultural and Creative activity by governments in Australia in 2007–08 to 2021–22, May 2024

11 David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia, Creative Australia, May 2024

12 David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia, Creative Australia, May 2024

NETS Victoria is committed to supporting sustainable creative careers through commissioning and touring artworks, as well as the provision of professional development and networking. Our collaborations with small- to medium-sized public galleries plays a critical role in the career development of early to mid-career Victorian artists, curators and arts workers. As such, we welcomed the work that Creative Australia is leading through the establishment of Creative Workplaces, along with the recent review of Modern Awards.

Although this shift to recognising the professional nature of creative and cultural work is well overdue, the pressure on small to medium arts and cultural organisations to meet these conditions while remaining financially viable in an increasingly constrained funding and economic environment has reduced the sector's programming capacity. This includes activities such as workshops, artist talks, education programs and community gatherings that provide income for artists and curators, as well as critical professional development opportunities.

Critical professional development opportunities are being lost for emerging artists, curators and arts workers. The decrease in training opportunities for graduates of Fine Arts such as gallery technicians, puts both artworks and careers at risk.

As noted in PGAV's submission for Creative State 2028, public galleries in Victoria also face 'chronic sustainability challenges' as ageing infrastructure becomes increasingly costly to manage and maintain.

Recommendations:

17. Endorse the voluntary NAVA Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design (as per Revive).
18. Provide professional development opportunities for curators, artists and arts workers to support the commissioning of new work.
19. Introduce new funding streams or support to ensure arts organisations of all sizes and budgets have equitable access to business analysts/consultants to support innovation, and collaboration towards resource sharing.
20. Support training of arts workers including gallery technicians, particularly in regional areas so that there are viable career opportunities for regional arts workers.



Installation view: *Conflated*, at Deakin University Art Gallery, 2023

Works featured from left to right are by Christopher Langton, Andy Butler, Eugenia Lim and David Cross.

A NETS Victoria exhibition, curated by Zoë Bastin and Claire Watson and toured nationally by NETS Victoria 2022—2024.

Photograph: Simon Peter Fox



Installation View:

Ash Thomas

Yorta Yorta and Wiradjuri peoples

The Hunters 2022

Billboard: Castlemaine, 2023

Presented as part of *Collective Movements* at Castlemaine Art Museum, a MUMA exhibition, curated by Kate ten Buuren, Maya Hodge and N'Arweet Professor Carolyn Briggs AM PhD with advice from Professor Brian Martin and toured by NETS Victoria 2022—2024.

This project was assisted by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria

Courtesy of The Torch

Photographer: James McArdle

“Best use of a billboard
I have ever seen!”

“I love seeing this every
day. Keep it there!”

Responses from social media to Ash Thomas's
billboard in Castlemaine



Steven Rhall
Taungurung

Ideas of First Nations art practice and late capitalism, 2021

A Mildura Arts Centre and NETS Victoria exhibition, curated by Jenna Rain Warwick, 2022.

Billboard: 8.3 x 1.80 m. East Mildura

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Courtesy of the artist and MARS Gallery

National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS) Victoria is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria, by the Australian Government through Creative Australia its principal arts investment and advisory body, and through the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments. NETS Victoria also receives significant in-kind support from the National Gallery of Victoria.

NETS Victoria is grateful for the generous support of our valued partners.



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