

STATEMENT: VISUAL ARTS SECTOR RESPONSE TO OUTCOME OF AUSTRALIA COUNCIL 4 YEAR FUNDING

MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 19 May 2016

Audience numbers for visual art are up. Australian artists are driving the innovation agenda and are recognised globally. There has never been a more significant time to invest in innovation and creativity: and still our arts are in CAOs.

The announcement by the Australia Council that 65 organisations will no longer receive funding under its Four-Year Funding program (previously Key Organisations) delivers a major blow to Australia's contemporary visual arts sector.

We congratulate the 42 newly funded organisations across all art forms, including one in the visual arts sector. However, we raise significant concerns about the overall impact on the visual arts sector, with the loss of Four-Year Funding to 40% of contemporary art spaces and two invaluable support organisations.

This sector statement is in support of Contemporary Art Organisations Australia – or CAOs – a 25-year-old national network of 14 independent art spaces, funded by state and federal governments. Each art space is an engine of innovation, supporting living Australian artists and developing new audiences for art and culture in Australia and globally. CAOs member organisations play a fundamental role building capacity in the visual arts sector – providing crucial exposure for artists and curators who have become leaders at the forefront of contemporary art in Australia and internationally.

They connect and contribute to arts networks, including regional and public galleries; state, national and international art museums; the higher education sector; festivals and biennials; artist-run initiatives; commercial galleries; private collections; and cultural agencies. CAOs organisations demonstrate value for public and private investment on every measure.

Between 2012 and 2014, these organisations presented works by more than 6,500 artists through exhibitions and programs; supported 230 Indigenous artists through programming; exhibited 900 new artworks; toured more than 200 exhibitions to remote and regional communities nationally and internationally; and welcomed more than 3.9 million visitors. These organisations play a vital role in Australia's visual arts ecology providing opportunities that contribute to the vibrancy of the sector nationally and internationally.

Until the Australia Council's May funding announcement, every state and territory in Australia had a federally-supported contemporary arts centre providing consistent, ongoing support and a stable base for artistic innovation in their locales. Of the 14 CAOs member organisations, five have been informed that after 2016 they will no longer receive Four-Year Funding (previously Key Organisations funding).

Four of the organisations represented the only not-for-profit and independent contemporary art space in their particular state or territory – the Northern Centre for Contemporary Art (NCCA) in the Northern Territory, Canberra Contemporary Art Space (CCAS) in ACT; and both Contemporary Art Centre South Australia (CACSA) and Australian Experimental Art Foundation (AEAF) in South Australia.

The two contemporary art spaces dedicated to photography – Centre for Contemporary Photography, Victoria and Australian Centre for Photography, NSW – are also no longer funded through Four-Year Funding, as well as the National Association of Visual Arts (NAVA). NAVA's role as an advocate for artists' rights and wages, and a leader in establishing and implementing best practice standards across the sector is a major loss. Other losses include: Object: Australian Design Centre; Asialink Arts, which has done so much to foster international relations in the region; Next Wave Festival, which plays a critical role in supporting emerging talent; and several touring organisations amongst many others across art forms.

As Rupert Myer AO, Chair, Australia Council, wrote in his 2002 report for the Commonwealth Visual Art and Craft Enquiry:

'Contemporary arts organisations play a major role in the development of contemporary art practices in Australia. Through their exhibition, educational and promotional activities they nurture the careers of artists and arts professionals. They provide opportunities for the revitalisation of the work of established artists and they also provide initial professional experience for emerging artists and emerging curators. Through their network they help build audiences, create demand for contemporary art and pioneer new international relationships.'

Fourteen years on from the Myer Report these organisations are at the forefront of demonstrating the Prime Minister's Innovation statement that Australia should be a 'creative and imaginative nation'.

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Professor Ross Harley, Dean, UNSW Art & Design

The Australia Council has been placed in the invidious situation of being forced to manage a significantly reduced operating budget at precisely the time it needs to invest in the nation's creative infrastructure. These key organisations have played a central role in the broader arts economy, in some case for more than 50 years. Removing their funding will do nothing to improve access to the contemporary arts and culture that is vital to the wellbeing of the general public and the creative sector that serves them.

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE, Director, Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia

I am at a loss to understand these decisions. The contemporary art spaces are a vital part of the visual arts ecology. To give just one example, last year the MCA acquired through Yirrkala Arts Centre a major wall drawing by Barayuwa Mununggurr after seeing the work exhibited at the NCCA in Darwin. It will be shown later this year at the MCA in an exhibition to be opened by the director of Tate Modern. The loss of a significant number of these spaces will have an impact well beyond their scale.

Professor Ted Snell AM, Director Cultural Precinct, University of Western Australia, Chair of the Australian Experimental Art Foundation and former Chair of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council

The withdrawal of organisational funding to contemporary art spaces across the nation undermines partnerships that have delivered extraordinary outcomes for Australian artists and the Australian community over decades. Despite claims that no organisation has been defunded, the four-year Visual Arts and Craft Strategy (VACS) awarded to some groups does not constitute ongoing organisational funding and this effective defunding will have a long-term impact on the contemporary arts sector nationally. Short-term it will puncture confidence, reduce opportunity, put many young arts professionals on unemployment and undermine the Government's rhetoric of building 'a creative and imaginative nation'.

Shaun Gladwell, Artist, represented Australia at the 53rd Venice Biennale 2009

It is impossible for me to assess my career without factoring in the CAOs spaces as formative and utterly relevant. All of the CAOs spaces have played a crucial role in my career as an artist from my earliest group exhibitions at PICA, AEAFF, NCCA, ACP and Gertrude Contemporary through to recent opportunities at CACSA, Artspace and 4A. I am in development for upcoming projects with CAOs spaces for 2017. Professional support through the network of CAOs is instrumental in the development of projects that subsequently become seen internationally. CAOs offers a vital platform for my work and I value the professionalism and commitment to experimentation. I represented Australia at the Venice Biennale and I credit that in significant part to the investment in my practice that I received from the CAOs network. It is inconceivable that CAOs should not be in every state and territory.

Tracey Moffatt AO, Artist, representing Australia at the 57th Venice Biennale 2017

The best thing about CAOs is that artists can be edgy with ideas. It was through CAOs that I learnt how to be an artist, where I learnt to organise myself and to understand the workings of a serious contemporary art space. Hail the CAOs of Australia for their fearlessness and guts in exhibiting the 'unacceptable', and for knowing that NOTHING holds back a brilliant idea.

Alexie Glass-Kantor, Chair, CAOs and Executive Director, Artspace

The contemporary arts in Australia are defined by many qualities including agility, responsiveness, passion, professionalism and a can-do attitude. As a consequence of operational funding cuts, it is foreseeable that one third of the CAOs membership will face severe cut backs, jeopardising their ability to support artists, deliver excellence in programming and expand audiences both in Australia and internationally. This is a devastating outcome that undermines decades of investment in sustainability, employment, education and innovation. It is imperative we do better.

We appreciate the difficult decisions that led to funding cuts but cannot understand how one vibrant sector can reasonably lose so much core infrastructure and be expected to continue to thrive.

We call for the allocation of additional funds so that the Australia Council can work with the States and Territories to maintain critical infrastructure in the visual arts.

We call on the Australian Government to consider the long-term impacts of this loss of support and act to preserve the vibrancy of this sector and its significant contribution to the creativity of our nation.

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SIGNATORIES

CONTEMPORARY ART ORGANISATIONS AUSTRALIA (CAOS)

4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, NSW
Artspace, NSW
Australian Centre for Photography (ACP), NSW
Australian Experimental Art Foundation (AEAF), SA
Canberra Contemporary Art Space (CCAS), ACT
Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP), VIC
Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia (CACSA)
Contemporary Art Tasmania (CAT)
Gertrude Contemporary, VIC
Institute for Modern Art (IMA), QLD
Northern Centre for Contemporary Art (NCCA), NT
Performance Space, NSW
Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), WA
West Space, VIC
Alexie Glass-Kantor, Chair, CAOs; Executive Director, Artspace

SECTOR SIGNATORIES

MICHAEL BRAND	Director, Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW)
CHARLOTTE DAY	Director, Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA), VIC
STEFANO CARBONI	Director, Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA)
JANET CARDING	Director, Tasmania Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG)
MICHAEL DAGOSTINO	Director, Campbelltown Art Centre, NSW
MAX DELANY	Artistic Director, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), VIC
KELLY GELLATLY	Director, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, VIC
ANGELA GODDARD	Director, Griffith University Art Museum, QLD
ERICA GREEN	Director, Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia
DOUG HALL AM	VIC
PROFESSOR ROSS HARLEY	Dean, UNSW Art & Design, University of NSW
BARRY KELDOULIS	CEO, Art Fairs Australia and Director, Sydney Contemporary, NSW
MICHAEL LYNCH CBE AM	Chair, Sydney Community Foundation, NSW
VICTORIA LYNN	Director, Tarrawarra Museum of Art, VIC
ELIZABETH ANN MACGREGOR OBE	Director, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA), NSW
NICK MITZEVICH	Director, Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA)
DJON MUNDINE (Bandjalung) OAM	Curator, NSW
KAREN QUINLAN	Director, Bendigo Art Gallery, VIC
CHRIS SAINES CNZM	Director, Queensland Art Gallery Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA)
MARCUS SCHUTENKO	Director, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT)
JASON SMITH	Director, Geelong Gallery, VIC
PROFESSOR TED SNELL AM	Director Cultural Precinct, University of Western Australia
MICHAEL SNELLING	Director, National Art School (NAS), NSW
BEN STROUT	CEO, Biennale of Sydney, NSW

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FOR ALL ENQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT

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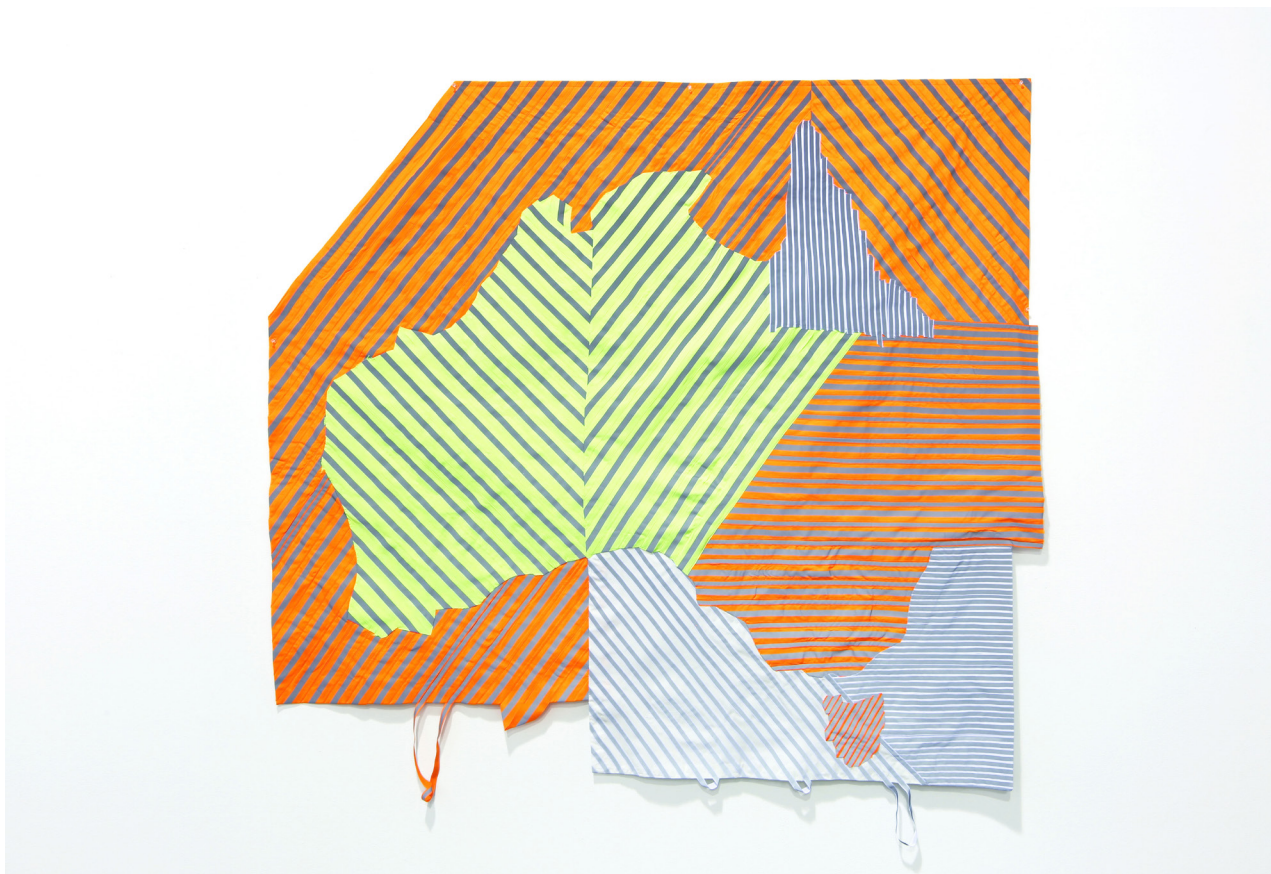
AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW

Alexie Glass-Kantor
Chair, CAOs; Executive Director, Artspace

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor
Director, Museum of Contemporary Art

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Raquel Ormella
Golden Soil #3 2016
Acrylic hi-vis and poly cotton
186 x 186 cm (irreg)
Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane
Photo: Sam Cranstoun

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