## **Notes from the first NSW Aboriginal visual arts practitioners to be heard at the workshop:** What does the NSW Aboriginal visual art sector look like in the future? (Sustainable growth)

11am - 12pm AEDT, Tuesday 1 December 2020

**Introduction**

This conversation has been floating around for so long.

We have a problem in regard to lack of visibility for NSW Aboriginal visual arts practitioners and we need to make change.

Important to add your voice to these inquiries and consultations and tell personal stories to give context to your perspectives and contributions.

**Telling your story**

Dennis Golding, Kamilaroi/Gamilaraay artist spoke of his experience living in an urban environment. Growing up at The Block in Redfern, which started to emerge as an Aboriginal community from the late sixties. This was a place for connection. A place for healing. A place for protest and it was the birthing place of civil rights movements for Aboriginal families.

He recognised and acknowledged the history of Aboriginal controlled organisations, such as the legal service and the childcare services being part of that community and having a story connected to this place. Very inspired about what we can tell as story-tellers through our artistic practices and how we can visualise our culture and identity in new ways.

Went to art school to do painting, having this idea that painting is what you do to be an artist but realised through tertiary education that there's no limits of what you can do. So branched out into other mediums, such as photography, video installation and sculpture. Also at university, he found a great interest in curating, through mentorship with leading curators and educators in the curatorial field because it is another form of storytelling.

Dennis also spoke of his experiences of gentrification. Families, communities being removed or evicted from their homes. These continuing practices of removal and dispossession inform his practice.

**What’s needed to support sustainable growth**

Hannah Donnelly, Wiradjuri writer and producer, reflected on structural things she’s seen from some of the work she has done over the years, noting an under investment by the federal government in the South-East Aboriginal arts sector.

Hannah noted that the model in other states and territories is really successful, self-determined, First Nations led Aboriginal art centres supporting critical engagement and development, and artistic output for local communities.

In NSW, the Aboriginal Arts Development Officers (AADO) or other First Nations roles in the regions fill this role in different ways but they don’t have enough support at a state and federal level.

It’s important to think about comparable investment in communities here. One way to do that could be looking at existing organisations that are engaging in cultural enterprise development and artistic outcomes.

The presence of artists in this part of Australia is really strong. It’s important that South-Eastern stories and narratives are told, shared and celebrated.

**General points raised in discussion**

Finding a structure that fits NSW.

The NSW model works for NSW but it’s not recognised.

Artists here are quite successful, that’s also not recognised.

There’s a diverse range of artists creating incredible works and their practices are critical.

It was acknowledged that Boomalli has played a critical role in the development of many artists’ practices and careers offering professional development help with writing grant applications, artist statements, what paint to use, the dos and don’ts, etc.

Boomalli doesn’t get funding to support artists enough. A lot of scope for growth here.

Discussion about connection to other artists and in some ways art school can provide that sense of community and networking experience but the experience of university for First Nations practitioners can also be traumatic.

Going through art school doesn’t make us any less or more legit as an artist.

Tokenism needs to be gone.

Still a frontrunner in how things are assessed.

Indigenous art is a colonial construct.

Urban based artists get categorised as urban because we don’t come from the central desert.

Not much has changed in 30 years, there is still a big focus on early career and very late career artists, while mid career practitioners are largely ignored. There’s a massive gap which means the practice of being a career artist is not sustainable. We need to get rid of the age definitions.

It was noted that young people are really immersed in the 21st Century technologies and this influences how they produce their art. It’s still Aboriginal. But it’s not recognised the same.

To wrap up it was discussed that there’s a lot more questions than answers. It was noted it’s important to raise these questions in your submissions to the consultation as areas for the government to invest in for research and development.