CAOA Submission
Revive National Cultural Policy

4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (NSW), Adelaide Contemporary Experimental (SA), Artspace (NSW), Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (VIC), Blak Dot Gallery (VIC), Canberra Contemporary (ACT), Centre for Contemporary Photography (VIC), (TAS), Firstdraft (NSW), Gertrude Contemporary (VIC), Institute of Modern Art (QLD), Northern Centre for Contemporary Art (NT), Performance Space (NSW), Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (WA), West Space (VIC)

Contemporary Arts Organisations Australia

Executive Summary

Contemporary Arts Organisations Australia (CAOA) represents a national network of 15 independent, public, not-for-profit small-to-medium (S2M) contemporary visual arts organisations operating across every state and territory. With organisational histories spanning 15 to 51 years, CAOA members are a vital part of Australia's national cultural infrastructure. Collectively, they commission and present contemporary visual art and research, employ artists and arts workers, deliver education and community access programs, support First Nations leadership and artists from culturally diverse backgrounds, and connect Australian artists with national and international audiences through largely free public programming and partnerships.

CAOA organisations are a major engine of contemporary visual arts production and workforce development in Australia. Over the past three years, members have supported more than 6,500 artists and commissioned over 3,200 new works. Collectively, they reach audiences of more than one million people annually through exhibitions, public programs, touring, publishing, education and community engagement initiatives.

The S2M visual arts sector delivers significant public benefit beyond artistic production. CAOA organisations lead in innovation, diversity and access by supporting First Nations leadership and storytelling, amplifying culturally diverse and underrepresented voices, and providing free, accessible programs nationwide. Through strong community partnerships, education initiatives and international networks, they contribute to cultural participation, social inclusion, wellbeing and global visibility for Australian artists across metropolitan, regional and remote communities in Australia and internationally.

The implementation of Revive has helped stabilise the creative sector and establish important national priorities. However, the current policy framework does not adequately recognise S2M contemporary visual arts organisations as key national infrastructure, delivering on national cultural objectives. This limits policy effectiveness and outcomes for artists, audiences and communities and requires targeted policy intervention. CAOA calls for mechanisms that explicitly recognise the visual arts sector and provide sustained funding and tax incentives for the S2M organisations that underpin its creative workforce.

Despite their demonstrated impact, S2M organisations continue to operate within structurally constrained funding conditions. A decade of static or declining investment has reduced organisational capacity, affected workforce retention and remuneration, and limited the sector's ability to expand public, educational and international outcomes.

CAOA's submission calls for a renewed National Cultural Policy that explicitly recognises and invests in the S2M visual arts sector as essential contemporary cultural infrastructure. The S2M sector is the engine room for research and development, innovation, experimentation, commissioning and presentation of independent artists. There is a significant opportunity to directly strengthen opportunities and professional pathways for artists and arts workers, ensuring sustained career development and creative connections with audiences, reflecting the breadth of Australian stories through consistent operational funding to S2M organisations.

CAOA recommends that the Australian Government:

- Establish a legislated Visual Arts Council to provide strategic leadership, advocacy and sustained investment pathways for the S2M visual arts sector.
- Renew and expand multi-year operational investment, including the Visual Arts, Craft and Design Partnership Framework (VACDPF), to secure strong S2M cultural infrastructure, fair remuneration and sustained public impact across audiences, education and community wellbeing.
- Invest in national and international mobility initiatives delivered through S2M organisations to build markets, support touring and strengthen audience connection.

Strategic investment in the S2M visual arts sector will generate long-term cultural, social and economic benefit while strengthening Australia's creative workforce, public participation and international cultural presence.

CAOA and the Role of the S2M Visual Arts Sector

CAOA member organisations are a core part of Australia's contemporary cultural infrastructure. Operating across metropolitan, regional and remote communities, the sector provides the production, commissioning and public engagement infrastructure through which contemporary visual arts practice is developed, experienced and sustained.

Unlike collecting institutions, S2M organisations function as active production and development infrastructure. They commission new work, employ artists and arts workers, provide free or subsidised studio and production space, support emerging and mid-career practitioners, and create pathways connecting local practice with national and international audiences.

Collectively, CAOA organisations serve as:

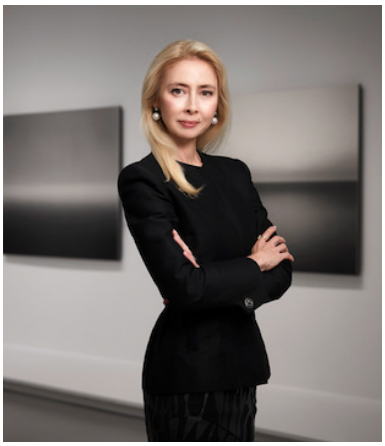
- A national research and development engine for contemporary visual arts and interdisciplinary practice
- A major employer and commissioner of artists and arts workers
- Infrastructure supporting First Nations leadership and culturally diverse practice
- A free platform for public participation, education and community engagement
- A key mechanism for touring, international exchange and cultural diplomacy.

Through free, accessible programming, education initiatives and community partnerships, S2M organisations contribute significantly to cultural participation, social inclusion, wellbeing and lifelong learning outcomes.

Despite this contribution, the sector remains structurally under-recognised within national policy and funding frameworks relative to its demonstrated creative contribution, workforce development and public impact.

A renewed National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to address this imbalance through sustained operational and strategic investment that strengthens artistic livelihoods, public access and long-term cultural sustainability.

CAOA is the backbone of contemporary art in Australia. Artists and arts workers that end up representing Australia across the globe— at the Venice Biennale, Documenta, Guggenheim Museum, Yokohama Triennial, amongst others— have all been supported by the CAOA network through commissions, exhibitions, studios, employment opportunities and mentorships. CAOA is the runway.







1. Melissa Chiu – 2026 Director, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; founding Director, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art
2. Archie Moore – Golden Lion Winner, Australian Pavillion, Venice Biennale 2024; IMA 2025, Gertrude Contemporary 2022; Artspace 2021; ACCA 2019; IMA 2017; NCCA 2014; Canberra Contemporary 2014; Gallery 4A 2010; CAT 2009; PICA 1998
3. Angelica Mesiti – Australian Pavillion, Venice Biennale 2019; Artspace 2017; PICA 2015; Gertrude Contemporary 2014; ACCA 2012; CCP 2010; Performance Space 2010

Key Sector Data

CAOA's annual combined audiences exceed
1,000,000

CAOA organisations have supported more than
6,500 of the **10,000**
artists working nationally over the past three years

CAOA organisations have commissioned
3,200 new works over the past three years

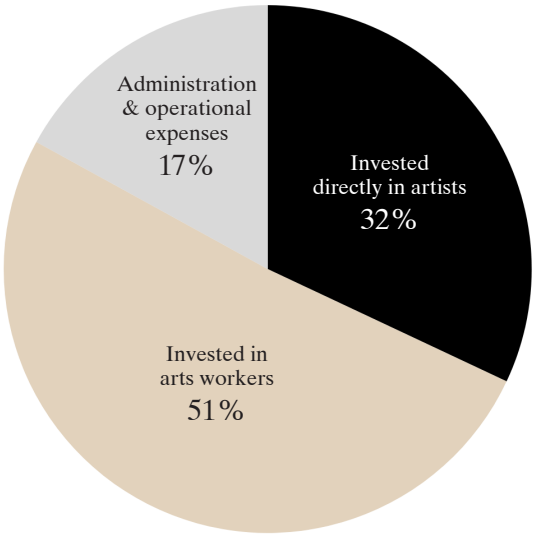
Combined annual turnover of
$17.5 million
is maintained by CAOA organisations

Annual direct investment of
$5.6 million to artists

Annual direct investment of
$8.9 million to arts workers

CAOA organisations also demonstrate strong outcomes in diversity and representation, with more than 60% of participating artists identifying as First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, culturally and racially marginalised, LGBTQIA+ or young people, and d/Deaf and disabled artists.

These figures demonstrate that S2M organisations are not peripheral cultural actors. They are a significant component of Australia's contemporary visual arts workforce and one of the country's most active sites of contemporary cultural production and public engagement. These figures demonstrate that S2M organisations are not peripheral cultural actors. They are a significant component of Australia's contemporary visual arts workforce and one of the country's most active sites of contemporary cultural production and public engagement.



I can't imagine an art world in Australia without CAOA. Early on in my career, several CAOA organisations provided me with a platform to create new bodies of work that were important stages in the development of my practice. They were technical and conceptual leaps – a result of wanting to push my practice as far as I could because I knew that they would be seen by a critical audience. To this day, I take these spaces as seriously as I did when I first left art school. I continue to see work that inspires me.
— Patricia Piccinini, artist

EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

CAOA organisations are a leading national network for arts education and public learning, delivering programs across primary, secondary, tertiary and lifelong learning contexts. Their education initiatives include curriculum-aligned school and tertiary programs, artist-led workshops, public lectures, talks, publications and artists-in-schools initiatives that connect contemporary artistic practice with formal and informal learning environments.

This work is especially significant at a time when arts education within the formal education system has been unevenly supported. In many contexts, CAOA organisations are effectively filling critical gaps in arts learning provision, providing students, teachers and communities with access to rigorous, contemporary, practice-led arts education. The importance of this role is already recognised through state-based education partnerships and funding support for selected CAOA member organisations and programs.

Beyond formal education, CAOA organisations also provide vital professional and intellectual platforms for artists, academics, writers, students and allied creative industries, creating points of entry for new audiences and early-career practitioners while sustaining depth, rigour and long-term engagement with established creative communities and wider public conversations.

SOCIAL AND CIVIC VALUE

The CAOA and S2M sector delivers significant social and civic value through cultural diversity, representation, access and community participation. CAOA organisations are critical spaces for storytelling, dialogue and cultural exchange, supporting diverse communities to see themselves reflected in Australia's cultural life. This is clearly reflected in CAOA organisations' programming, personnel and participation.

Their role in placemaking and civic participation is equally significant. Through site-responsive commissions, local partnerships and community-led programming, CAOA organisations contribute directly to the cultural vitality and liveability of cities, suburbs and regional centres. They create spaces in which communities gather, debate, learn and participate in public life, strengthening democratic and civic engagement, as well as related economic benefits.



Middar Dance Group, season opening, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Boorloo Perth, 2025. Photograph: Col Baxter.

WELLBEING, RESILIENCE, AND INCLUSION

CAOA programs make a substantial contribution to community wellbeing and social resilience. Through inclusive arts participation, accessible public programming and creative learning, the sector supports positive outcomes in mental health, social connection, belonging and inclusion.

At a time of intersecting social, technological and environmental pressures, the sector also provides communities with tools to respond to contemporary poly-crisis conditions, including technological transformation, social fragmentation, misinformation and changing forms of democratic participation. Through creative practice, digital literacy and critical engagement, CAOA organisations help build cultural resilience, adaptability and social cohesion. This aligns directly with Revive's principle that all Australians, regardless of language, literacy, geography, age or education, should have opportunities to access and participate in arts and culture.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

CAOA is a leading platform for international engagement, collaboration, exchange and career development. Member organisations are central to Australia's international cultural presence through artist development, international career pathways, reciprocal peer and organisational exchange, and sustained professional networks globally.

The sector plays a critical role in building artists' and curators' international visibility through exhibitions, publications, residencies, and reciprocal partnerships. Importantly, the majority of the artists who have represented Australia at major international platforms — such as the Venice Biennale — have emerged through the CAOA and S2M ecology.

CAOA organisations provide the professional networks through which international recognition is actually built: galleries, museums, biennales, publications, studios, curatorial exchange and peer-to-peer collaboration. These are the networks that generate enduring international presence, critical discourse and market development, and which often precede and support later engagement by commercial galleries and larger institutions.



Ayesha Singh, Cross-Hatchings: New Delhi-Perth Residency, 2024, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Boorloo Perth. Photograph: Tristan McKenzie



CAOA organisations give artists the space to play, to experiment, to take risks. To meet their audiences face-to-face in a flexible, rigorous and supportive environment. Without them Australia would lose its breeding ground for experimentation and endanger its capacity to generate the 'new'.

— Tracey Moffatt, artist



Paradise, 2025, opening night, Canberra Contemporary. Photograph: Hilary Wardhaugh; *Push / Pull*, 2025, opening night, Adelaide Contemporary Experimental. Photograph: Lana Adams.

CAOA Recommendations
Pillar 1: First Nations First

CHALLENGES

CAOA and S2M organisations frequently outperform larger institutions and the commercial sector in embedding First Nations leadership and practice, and bringing this work to public visibility and professional recognition.

However, current policy and funding settings do not adequately resource the long-term infrastructure required to embed First Nations leadership and ICIP protocols as core operational practice. Much existing support remains short-term and project-based, limiting continuity, cultural safety, workforce development and long-term cultural impact.

While *Revive* identified First Nations arts and culture as a national priority, investment mechanisms have disproportionately focused on performing arts, leaving significant gaps within the visual arts sector.

POLICY RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS

The renewed National Cultural Policy should expand investment in First Nations-led visual arts practice by providing sustained operational support to S2M organisations with demonstrated leadership in this area.

This includes:

- Increased and indexed operational investment through the VACDF and other multi-year frameworks
- Expanded commissioning support for First Nations visual artists
- Long-term career pathways and leadership development
- Support for culturally safe governance, ICIP protocols, remuneration and programming initiatives.

Strengthening this infrastructure will support enduring First Nations cultural leadership while expanding public access to First Nations contemporary visual arts nationally and internationally.



Archie Moore, *Comic Paintings*, 2025, installation view, Institute of Modern Art (IMA), Meanjin Brisbane. Photograph: Joe Ruckli.

CAOA Recommendations
Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

CHALLENGES

CAOA organisations already deliver strong outcomes in cultural diversity, inclusion and representation. Their programs reflect the breadth and complexity of contemporary Australian identities and experiences, and consistently provide platforms for artists and communities frequently underrepresented elsewhere in the sector.

The primary policy challenge is not the absence of inclusion-focused activity, but the absence of sustained operational investment in the organisations already delivering these outcomes.

Short-term project funding models create instability, reduce organisational capacity and limit long-term community engagement.

POLICY RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS

The renewed National Cultural Policy should prioritise sustained operational investment in S2M visual arts organisations as key national delivery infrastructure for inclusion, access and representation.

This includes:

- Increased and indexed operational investment through the VACDF and other multi-year frameworks
- Long-term support for community engagement and education programs
- Recognition of non-commercial cultural outcomes as a core public benefit.

Investment in S2M infrastructure will immediately strengthen access, participation and representation outcomes at a national scale.



House of Iman, *Soft Touch: Pattern/Perception,* 2023, performance documentation, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Gadigal Sydney. Photograph: Anna Hay.

CAOA Recommendations
Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

CHALLENGES
Artists remain structurally underpaid and frequently work within insecure conditions despite being central contributors to Australia's cultural and economic life.

CAOA and S2M visual arts organisations are among the sector's primary employers and commissioners of artists and arts workers, delivering direct income streams and public platforms through commissioning and co-producing new work, studio provision, and providing full-spectrum career pathways for artists from early practice to established names on the international stage.

However, static and declining operational funding over the past decade (2015–2025) has resulted in effective cuts to operational capacity and reduced opportunities for artists. Without stronger policy intervention and investment, the sector risks continued workforce attrition and reduced artistic sustainability.

POLICY RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS
To genuinely uphold the centrality of the artist, the renewed National Cultural Policy must recognise and resource the S2M sector as essential infrastructure supporting artists' livelihoods, professional development, community engagement and sustainable career pathways.

This requires:
- Increased and indexed operational investment through the VACDPF and other multi-year frameworks
- Federal commitment to match state investment principles
- Expanded VACDPF Major Commissioning programs and artist fee support
- Tax incentives and welfare reform to support sustainable artistic careers, including increased tax incentives for philanthropic support; fringe-benefit tax exemptions or salary-sacrifice arrangements for arts workers; Universal Basic Income or Living Wage arrangements for artists; and an affordable artist studio strategy and lease-stabilisation subsidies to mitigate rising real-estate costs.
- Recognition of artistic success beyond purely commercial metrics to include critical, peer and international channels and platforms (such as exhibitions, publications, etc.)

Supporting artists requires supporting the infrastructure through which artists work.



Elyas Alavi studio tour, Gertrude Open Day, 2025, Gertrude Contemporary, Naarm Melbourne. Photograph: Machiko Abe.

CAOA Recommendations
Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

CHALLENGES

Current cultural infrastructure policy settings remain disproportionately focused on major collecting institutions and capital projects, despite the S2M sector's substantial role in artistic production, employment and public engagement. The S2M sector continues to operate with discipline, efficiency, enterprise and innovation, but it is doing so under increasing structural pressure and constrained capacity.

Static and declining funding – combined with rising costs, increased governance, HR and WHS compliance responsibilities and risk liabilities, growing community expectations and shifts in philanthropic support – has eroded organisational sustainability and undermined safe workplaces, workforce retention, governance capacity and compliance with fair pay standards set by the National Association for the Visual Arts. At the same time, S2M organisations continue to absorb increasing expectations around education delivery, inclusion, wellbeing outcomes, community engagement and international activity.

POLICY RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS

The renewed National Cultural Policy should formally recognise S2M organisations as essential contemporary cultural infrastructure.

This requires:

- Establishment of a legislated Visual Arts Council
- Increased and indexed operational investment through the VACDPF and other multi-year funding frameworks
- Federal commitment to matching state investment principles
- Implementation of reforms to allow for exemptions from fringe benefits tax to ease pressure on wage growth in S2M organisations
- Enhanced taxation incentives for philanthropy to 125% as per Myer Enquiry recommendations
- Investment recognising the sector's contribution to education, wellbeing and community participation and inclusion

Stable operational funding will strengthen workforce sustainability while expanding audience access, public learning and community outcomes nationwide.



Artspace at The Gunnery, 2023 reopening event, Gadigal Sydney. Photograph: Jacquie Manning.

CAOA Recommendations
Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

CHALLENGES

CAOA and the small-to-medium contemporary visual arts sector play a critical role in connecting Australian artists and ideas with audiences locally, nationally and internationally. However, there remains limited policy recognition and investment in S2M-led audience development, education, social inclusion and international activity. Existing international engagement frameworks prioritise short-term diplomacy outcomes over sustained artistic exchange, touring and market development.

POLICY RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS

The renewed National Cultural Policy should position S2M organisations as key delivery partners for audience engagement and international cultural visibility, market development and exchange.

This includes:

- Dedicated investment in CAOA-led touring, mobility and residencies
- Increased investment in international engagement and exchange
- Stronger CAOA and S2M sector involvement and representation in major international forums and exhibition platforms
- Targeted support for community education, wellbeing, inclusion and social cohesion initiatives delivered through the visual arts
- Cross-portfolio partnerships linking arts with health, education and community wellbeing

Investment in audience engagement through the visual arts delivers cultural, educational and social outcomes that extend well beyond the sector itself.



Mandy Quadrio: Kukunna Wurraweena, 2026, VACD Major Commission Project, installation view, Institute of Modern Art, Meanjin Brisbane. Photograph: Katy Bedford.

CAOA recommends that the Australian Government

CAOA and the S2M visual arts sector form a critical component of Australia's contemporary cultural infrastructure. The sector commissions and produces new work, sustains artists and arts workers, supports First Nations and culturally diverse practice, and delivers significant public outcomes through education, participation and community engagement. The sector is the key platform for contemporary art research, innovation, experimentation, presentation, education and global exchange.

Despite this contribution, S2M organisations continue to operate within structurally constrained funding settings that limit workforce sustainability, public reach and long-term artist and sector development.

A renewed National Cultural Policy presents an opportunity to address this imbalance through targeted structural investment that recognises S2M organisations as key arts infrastructure and delivery partners for national cultural objectives.

- Establish a legislated Visual Arts Council to provide strategic leadership, research, advocacy and sustained investment pathways for the S2M visual arts sector
- Renew and expand multi-year operational investment, including the Visual Arts Craft and Design Partnership Framework (VACDPF), to secure strong S2M cultural infrastructure, fair remuneration and sustained public impact across audiences, access, education and community wellbeing
- Invest in national and international mobility initiatives delivered through S2M organisations to build markets, support touring and strengthen philanthropy, enterprise and audience connection.

Strategic investment in the S2M visual arts sector will generate long-term cultural, social and economic benefit while strengthening Australia's creative workforce, public participation and international cultural presence.

Revive 2.0 presents a critical opportunity to correct structural imbalances and secure a sustainable future for Australian contemporary visual arts and wider cultural communities. Strategic investment in CAOA and the S2M sector will enable a more equitable, resilient and internationally connected arts ecosystem.



Mithu Sen, *mOTHERTONGUE*, education program, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Naarm Melbourne, 2023.

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