

Dear Senators,

I wish to add my concerns over the recent budget changes to arts funding in Australia.

I am a visual artist and I was awarded an Australia Council residency in Rome in 2012. This was a formative experience for my practice and I have had several national and international outcomes following this residency. I recognize that receiving one of these residencies through Australia Council's peer review process is a validation of my striving for excellence. At the same time I consider myself very fortunate to have been granted such an opportunity. My experience of this award included receiving a \$10,000 sum for covering major expenses such as travel and accommodation for 3 months. I believe the Australia Council's residency program to be of extremely high value for money and it is a terrible shame that this program will no longer be funded for future artists as a direct result of the government's recently proposed diversion of funds away from the Australia Council.

It concerns me (like many others have expressed) that small to medium arts organisations, and particularly individual visual artists, both emerging and established, have been overlooked in the latest budget in favour of larger arts organisations that appeal to the Ministry for the Arts' own sense of 'excellence' in the Arts. If this concern is misguided, then the eligibility criteria for implementing arts funding through the National Program for Excellence in the Arts (NPEA) should suggest otherwise. But as this eligibility criteria is yet unpublished (as at time of writing), my concern is only further reinforced by additional allegations that funding has already been informally promised to some of the larger arts organisations, which suggests that there is already favouritism in arts funding by the NPEA, despite the political rhetoric being flaunted about more funding opportunities being created by the NPEA and that this "public funding", to quote from the Ministry for the Arts website, "will be spent in a fair and transparent manner".

In review of the new budget measures under which the NPEA has been announced, I would think it is pertinent for Senators to consider the following question:

Has any arts funding under the new NPEA been awarded, informally promised or even discussed (with the view to allocate funding to any arts organisation) prior to the eligibility criteria being made available?

If Senator George Brandis cannot provide a legitimate, specific, unambiguous answer to this question, or if the said allegations are not specifically laid to rest by facts that prove otherwise, then this demonstrates a fundamental lack of 'transparency and fairness' in the new NPEA. If these are the actions of the Ministry for the Arts before the NPEA is even operational, then I urge Senators to also consider the following:

On what basis, truthfully, has Australia Council funding been stripped, and in what equitable capacity is the NPEA actually contributing to arts in Australia other than what the Australia Council does?

There are many other concerns I have not expressed here. But in my limited experience as an artist who votes and does pay tax, having been a recipient of arts funding in the recent past, I fear that value for money has certainly not been a primary consideration of arts funding in the current budget measures.

Thank you for considering these concerns.

Michael Needham