

Megan Forward

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

RE: Impact of the 2014 and 2015 Commonwealth Budget decisions on the Arts

Dear Senators,

My name is Megan Forward. I live in Brisbane, Australia. I am a full time artist, writer and illustrator.

My first picture book is due to be published through Penguin Books in early 2016.

I have not yet applied for or been the recipient of arts funding so have little first-hand experience in this sector.

But I note the concerns of some artists/art organisations that the new funding model will favour large institutions over smaller grass roots bodies and artists.

The reason for my concern relates to a conversation I overheard in the Queensland Art Gallery cafe in late 2014, between two major decision makers in the gallery. They were planning for an upcoming large Brisbane festival of some sort. The conversation was along the lines of,

“who can we get to make something for the outdoor river display?”It’ll have to be someone who does lights or something like that.....(name of artist) is a bit hard to work with.....maybe someone else....by the way, that’s a lovely little show you’ve got running in the (something) gallery there...we should include some stuff for those who never get to see what’s on in the major international galleries...etc”.

I was so surprised (or naive) at the way the show they were planning was being talked about by such a significant gallery which basically represents the Queensland art scene. I guess I thought they’d be talking about the ideas and concerns of society that are being currently explored by local artists, and how could the art project they were discussing enhance and enlarge the conversation in society at large. How can the arts expand the horizons of us all in our particular context? Not, what’s going to look pretty, or international enough, and dazzle the locals. It would seem that larger art organisations do not always have the deeper concerns and issues on their agendas.

Obviously the larger organisations need funding, but my hunch is that the smaller organisations are better placed to track and support the grass roots art movements in critiquing, and exploring and enhancing our understandings of what it means to be human in this particular time and space. And hopefully these artist’s works then feed in to larger organisation’s exhibitions.

So in conclusion, I think that funding to the arts in Australia needs to be flexible and localised and sensitive to the movements and trends of society, to be able to reflect back to us all, to enhance our sense of wonder and enquiry and to notice what is happening in our world. Because that to me is the purpose and power of art.

Yours sincerely,

Megan Forward