

Museum & Gallery Services Queensland

submission to

Parliamentary Inquiry into the Indigenous Visual Arts and Craft Sector

1 About Museum & Gallery Services Queensland

M&GSQ's Mission Statement is:

To serve, promote and foster excellence in Queensland's museums, galleries and keeping places, to build recognition of their value to Queensland communities.

M&GSQ provides a range of programs and services in the areas of:

- Information and referral
- Training and professional development
- Exhibition development and touring

2 Introduction

Museums, keeping places and galleries play a vital role in the cultural life of our country. They are an integral and resource-rich component of the communities they serve. First and foremost, museums, galleries and keeping places are a locus of shared cultural knowledge and experience for their communities. They can offer opportunities for communities to explore their past and tell their own stories while being responsive to community needs, such as increasing knowledge and developing life-long learning skills.

The Indigenous visual arts and craft sector encompasses a broad spectrum of activity. It is stressed that decision-making about the role and purpose of Indigenous cultural activity remains in Indigenous hands and that no single response to the questions posed by the Inquiry will suit every context, community, person or organisation. Sustainability is regarded as essential to any strategy for industry development. There has been much research undertaken at federal, state and local government levels. The sharing of information is encouraged so as to enable coherent and cohesive strategic development that will result in diverse options and lasting solutions for Indigenous people in this country. This information sharing should extend to service and resource organisations for the purposes of referral and service delivery.

As a small-to-medium service organisation that works across museums, galleries and keeping places in Queensland, M&GSQ maintains limited contact with the Indigenous visual art and craft sector across artistic production, material culture and cultural heritage. While this important Parliamentary Inquiry emphasises the visual art and craft sector, M&GSQ's professional work with Indigenous communities and artists indicates a tangible connection between artistic production and cultural heritage particularly for economic development and economic sustainability outcomes. Further, there are linkages across these arenas and tourism based on entrepreneurial applications of cultural knowledge.

3 Cultural Enterprise

For many Indigenous communities, cultural activity can be regarded as having cultural maintenance, cultural development and economic development outcomes. Many community-based enterprises have been seeded in culture and many of them involve artefacts, art, traditional knowledge and/or tourism.

M&GSQ has observed a trend where culturally based activities are emerging with the dual and equally significant roles of:

- developing a cultural locus within a community for the purposes of collecting, exhibiting and preserving cultural heritage, artistic works and other cultural activities
- developing that cultural facility as a business with a view to providing employment and training for Indigenous people and/or establishing community-based enterprise such as the sale of artworks and artefacts or education and tourism opportunities emerging from cultural heritage.

In this context, M&GSQ stresses the importance of sustained and culturally appropriate service provision that bridges the enterprise and cultural goals of these entities. Indigenous cultural enterprises seek business advice from or submit funding proposals to arts funding agencies, arts service organisations and other entities that are not equipped to handle inquiries of this nature or assess funding applications with business outcomes. There is limited capacity within arts funding agencies and service organisations to assess business readiness, undertake business planning and provide business development advice. M&GSQ encourages improved linkage across arts agencies (both government and non-government) and business support agencies to ensure that appropriate and high standard service provision in enterprise development is available.

4 Touring Exhibitions

This organisation, and organisations like us in other states, does not take artworks and artefacts to the marketplace for commercial purposes. However, we play a necessary role in educating and developing audiences locally and regionally through our touring exhibitions program. This process also provides professional experience for artists and curators. Museum & Gallery Services Queensland tours between 10 and 15 exhibitions to regional galleries throughout Australia annually. Our touring program includes Indigenous artists and art exhibition projects including projects that have been developed in partnership with Indigenous Art Centres.

For Indigenous visual arts and craft sector, the specific benefits of touring include:

- Audience development, engagement and education about the value and significance of Indigenous visual art and craft. This activity can play a role in informing audiences and potential buyers.
- Promotion of Indigenous artists and artistic practices to a broader cross-section of the Australian public.
- Professional development of artists in exhibition practices.
- Enabling and/or facilitating access to public funding programs in order to develop touring exhibitions.
- Encouragement of public gallery and collection engagement with Indigenous culture and art.

- Potentially enhanced commercial values through exposure and promotional activity.

It is desirable to strengthen these outcomes through a cohesive approach to Indigenous visual art and craft sector development. This organisation does not tour internationally but the potential for international touring and audience development is currently under examination.

Also many artistic careers can benefit through the inclusion of work in touring exhibitions either in solo exhibitions or curated exhibitions. Such touring exhibitions generally include a catalogue, education material, public programs and can result press coverage and critical reviews. Tours to regional galleries can bring the artists and their work to the attention of dealers and buyers.

5 Regional Collections

The museum, keeping place and gallery sector is a buyer of Indigenous art and material culture. There are several art collections in regional Queensland that include works by Indigenous artists. As regional galleries tend to operate under the umbrella of local government, these collections are publicly owned through local government investment as well as through the establishment of trusts and funds for the purpose of developing regional collections.

Regional collections and galleries play a vital role in creating awareness about and developing audiences for Indigenous art and culture. They not only present works as part of curated exhibitions, they also provide public and education programs as well as tour works from their collections. For example, Cairns Regional Arts Gallery's collection includes works from Cape York, a region that now attracts significant attention in terms of Indigenous arts industry development in the state. Other than their regional significance, the works in such regional collections are potentially culturally and historically significant.

As a general rule, publicly owned collections in Queensland, such as those residing in regional art galleries, are managed and developed in an ethical and responsible manner and to a high standard. Issues such as provenance are central to the development of collections. As professional standard facilities, they adhere and are expected to adhere by professional codes of practice. The advocacy of ethical practice has been central to the work of peak bodies such as Museums Australia and M&GSQ.

Potentially there is an opportunity for collections to acknowledge their role in the development of artistic careers and, more broadly, the arts industry through the allocation of funds for purchasing Indigenous artworks.

M&GSQ also applauds those commercial galleries that have subscribed to codes of ethics that ensure fair trade with Indigenous communities and artists. These dealers are well placed to sell high quality work to private collectors and public collections.

6 Access to cultural heritage

As part of the development of Indigenous artistic practices, museums have played a pivotal role in reconnecting communities to their material culture. This has not only included providing artists with access to collections for research purposes but also the

repatriation of cultural objects. In some instances that has renewed artistic practices. For example, several Queensland artists, including Joanne Currie and Michael Anning, have produced works resulting from research at the Queensland Museum (and other museums) into shield designs. As part of a process of reinvigorating cultural motifs and meaning, these works manifest as contemporary reinterpretations of traditional designs. Additionally, many contemporary and/or urban artists work with archival materials. Queensland artists Fiona Foley and Leah King-Smith have used archival photographs and documents in their photomedia works exploring cultural identity and reinterpreting history.

As works are repatriated to keeping places in communities, there are similar opportunities for those communities to actively maintain, reinterpret and maintain their culture in ways that will dynamically inform the development of artistic practices. It is also acknowledged that Indigenous Knowledge Centres, a network of library based services delivered to remote communities through the State Library of Queensland, is also playing a significant role in enhancing connections to history and traditional culture.

7 Conclusion

In summary, this submission identifies several points at which the Indigenous visual art and craft sector intersects with the museum sector. These include:

- the life-affirming connection between art practices, cultural heritage and material culture
- the need to understand economic development issues as they arise from community based and/or cultural enterprise and as they articulate with service provision in the cultural sector
- the value of touring art exhibitions in terms of audience development and career development
- the value of regional art collections particularly given the ethical frameworks for collecting artworks
- the value of access to museum collections in the development or or reinvigoration of art practice, meaning and motif

This brief submission has sought to position museums, galleries and keeping places in relation to the Indigenous Visual Art and Craft Sector and has sought to highlight the contribution museums, galleries and keeping places make (or can make) in the development of the sector. The intersection of these arenas of cultural activity can be mutually and culturally enriching and opportunities should be found to enhance the already potent exchanges that exist.