

artsource

Department of Culture and the Arts

Present State, an inquiry into the visual arts sector in Western Australia 2016

Response from Artsource

Overview

- Artsource welcomes the Department of Culture and the Arts (DCA) inquiry into the Visual Arts in Western Australia. We are pleased to provide this response.
- Our response reflects the structure of the DCA discussion document *Present State, an inquiry into the visual arts sector in Western Australia 2016*:
 1. Professional Practicing Visual Artists page 2
 2. Education and Training page 3
 3. The Visual Arts Market page 4
 4. State and Federal Funding to Visual Arts page 6
 5. Commercial Galleries page 7
 6. Art Museums and Collections page 8
 7. Infrastructure page 8
 8. Public Art page 10
- Artsource members have been encouraged to read the discussion document and submit their own feedback directly to DCA using the online questionnaire.

Artsource

- Artsource (The Artists' Foundation of Western Australia) is the peak professional body for visual artists in Western Australia. We have been operating for over 30 years and now have around 950 members.
- Artsource is centred on the visual artists of Western Australia. These artists represent many different perspectives, but we all share a deep commitment to art and a strong belief in the contribution artists make to the world. Our Strategic Business Plan (2016 to 2018) is available [here](#) (PDF).
- **Our vision** is of a world in which culture and the arts are valued as vital and where visual artists flourish.
- **Our purpose** is to engage with and support Western Australian visual artists with practical, affordable and relevant services. We also work with partners delivering and supporting initiatives that lead the way in creating the environment where art is valued and artists can flourish.
- Further information is available at artsource.net.au.

Introduction

- An inquiry into the visual arts sector in Western Australia clearly presents with a wide remit and the Present State paper brings together a great deal of information covering many aspects of the sector.

- In our response, we make some general observations and some specific recommendations. However, the scale of the inquiry and its fundamental importance to the sector leads us to anticipate further discussion and consultation as the inquiry progresses. We are, of course, keen to be an active participant in this.
- Further, we welcome the opportunity to work with DCA and others in the sector to devise and implement strategies and actions to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the visual arts in Western Australia.

Strategy

- Recommendation: Building on a firm grasp of the intrinsic, social and economic value of the arts, there is a need for the state government to have a funded strategic plan for the arts.
- Recommendation: Nested with this, there must be a strategic and funded plan for the visual arts; supporting professional artists, building audiences, growing the market, investing in infrastructure and supporting visual arts organisations.

1. Professional Practicing Visual Artist

Artsource has operated with its own membership criteria and indicators of professional working artist status (see attached) for many years. We encounter an increasingly wide range of applicants in terms of qualifications, experience and practice in the visual arts community, as well as operators in the market, seeking endorsement or services from Artsource, who may not meet the criteria for membership as professional artists.

There does need to be some flexibility in the application of criteria, for instance, when seeking to represent Aboriginal artists whose qualifications, practice and business structures often differ from those of traditional fine arts graduates. Commitment to professional fine arts criteria for membership is an important aspect of Artsource to our members and is reflected in our selection processes for studios and residencies as well as contracted public art projects.

Artist Employment

As observed by NAVA recently¹, the 2016 census was not helpful to the cause of representing artists in the way it collects data on income earned from professional artist practice. It did not make allowance for additional income (i.e. art sales) to their major income source, thereby making invisible a significant proportion of artists' employment. Very few organisations employ visual artists – the vast majority operate as small businesses, many now under a company structure, which may also distort employment figures.

Artsource has witnessed a reduction in professional employment for fine arts graduates in WA, as tertiary teaching opportunities decrease and the status and salaries for secondary and primary fine arts teachers decline. A significant proportion of the Artsource membership is comprised of members with teaching qualifications, but the paid opportunities for application of those skills has diminished. The transition to private income generation from sale of works is not always an easy one for artists who typically have limited capital.

Artist Income

Artsource is participating in the next round of the Throsby/Zednik economic study of artists in Australia being undertaken by Macquarie University.

¹ Facebook post 9 August 2016.

We can attest to the impact on, especially mid-career, artists of a reduction in commercial galleries to represent them and exhibit their work. We see potential for more consistent, and better designed, employment for artists in local government service delivery and in collection development, dependent on the will of councils to put some strategic planning into how they fund the visual arts.

Social Security

Artsource welcomes any future initiatives to privilege working artists in the alignment of government arts, labour and business regulation policies (*Present State* p.10) and can attest to the damage policies applied in one sphere, for example, rules for self-funded superannuation schemes, can wreak in another, in this case the visual arts. Note that at the last Federal election only the Greens had the support of artists through welfare initiatives, such as work for the dole schemes, as a policy position.

Copyright issues

The Copyright Agency “Voice of the Artist” research report found that 90% of artists have had their work reproduced but only 21% asked for payment – this is an emerging issue for artists royalties.

2. Education and Training

Artists Residencies

With regard to AiR programs and the value of the visual arts to the education sector, we can confirm some increase in activity, with a pilot being run at the privately funded Centre for Early Learning, in Leederville in Perth.

We welcome the DCA support for our residencies and our attempts to double the budget for residencies via our Global Cities Residencies program. Residencies are of vital importance to visual artists and the collaboration and cross-pollination in practice and ideas internationally is of value to the communities in all participating countries.

Formal Visual Arts Training

Artsource recognises formal training as a key criterion for defining a professional practising artist.

We provide skills development to professional visual artists and can see a benefit in developing learning units that can be accredited, to reduce the overall cost of vocational training for artists.

Artsource maintains a close relationship with the Creative and Leisure Industries Training Council: Future Now, with three staff participating on their board and various industry advisory groups. A key need identified is training for curators and collection managers, which affects the development of public visual art collections, which in turn affects the wellbeing of artists.

3. The Visual Arts Market

The closure of several commercial galleries at the end of 2013, and further subsequent closures has had a significant impact on the marketplace with a notable lack of opportunity for artists to exhibit, sell and build their reputations. Many artists no longer have local representation and we have seen a rise of collectives and ARI's, which had previously been under-represented in Western Australia.

With the international art market at \$3.27 billion and growing it is of significant concern that the market in Western Australia is not benefiting from this growth.

The available data in this area, as the report identifies, is thin. Whilst the underlying reasons for the closure of galleries is varied, the change in the rules in respect of art and superannuation funds is oft cited as a major factor putting the brakes on the WA art market. Its restoration could be a significant market stimulus, together with other measures mentioned below.

With the development of the Artsource Atrium at the Old Customs House, Artsource is looking to provide, amongst other things, exhibition opportunities for professional visual artists.

Artsource ArtLease

Leasing professional artworks to business and to individuals is a core Artsource service. Not only does this bring income for artists, it also supports the market by putting art into places where people work helping to increase understanding, appreciation and engagement. Work often sells through this route. Artsource is working to grow ArtLease. More information on Artsource ArtLease is available [here](#).

Open Home and other exhibition schemes

Engaging with audiences and buyers through open home and open studio events is clearly helpful. At Artsource we regularly host open studio events and our patrons are often invited to meet other collectors in their homes.

Online

The online art market is growing and buyers are clearly getting more comfortable buying online. Whilst the online space is not a substitute for physical exhibition it has become an essential part of the market and a source of information about art and artists.

Artsource offers user-managed space on our website for artists to have a professional online presence, not only to show their work, but also to profile their practice and career with links to their own websites and galleries, where appropriate.

Commercial galleries, arts centres and individual artists often have websites, although their online sales functionality varies greatly.

Art Loan Schemes

International and domestic loan schemes to stimulate the art market have been shown to be effective in respect of bringing new buyers to market and facilitating sales generally. The ability to spread payments over time with an interest free loan is clearly attractive in itself and the schemes implicit endorsement of the quality of the gallery and the artists it represents helps reassure buyers, particularly those entering the market for the first time.

Art Money, the commercially backed loan scheme, is available to galleries across Australia and has recently become truly interest free following the removal of the monthly \$5 'payment administration fee'. Artsource

ArtLease is looking to become registered for Art Money so to offer interest free loans to individuals wishing to purchase works by our members available through ArtLease.

- Recommendation: Art Money, and similar interest-free loan schemes, are seen as positive measures being employed to stimulate the market in Western Australia.

Major International Arts Events

Artsource was pleased to help facilitate the Lotterywest-funded feasibility study to determine the viability of an international arts event. We agree with the recommendation of the consultants that Continuum and Monsoon projects present great opportunity and we also support Synektica with its potential to present a unique event for Western Australia.

The current public and private funding environment clearly presents challenges to get a new major event established. Further, many existing arts organisations are already financially stretched and the priority must be to get them adequately supported.

- Recommendation: DCA takes the lead championing the findings of the feasibility study to progress the implementation of its recommendations. However, should additional funding for this be unavailable, this should not be done at the expense of increasing financial and other stresses on the existing arts infrastructure and the priority should be on funding existing visual arts ecology effectively.

Arts Fairs

We agree with the conclusion that a developing local arts market leads to developing international markets – it is difficult to have one without the other.

Having WA artists fully represented at domestic art markets/fairs is vital and, as the Present State identifies, getting our artists onto the international circuit, particularly given the opportunities in Asia, calls for a confident policy response. The fast-growing Chinese market and recent agreement for closer cultural collaboration between WA and Chinese governments clearly presents notable opportunity.

Present State mentions Art Basel Hong Kong. It's worth noting that other significant art fairs take place in the territory at the same time: Art Central and the hotel-based Asia Contemporary Art Show. Both provide a distinctive point of entry; with the latter being accessible to individual artists, indeed some WA artists have successfully exhibited in previous years.

- Recommendation: DCA works with the sector to develop robust policy to ensure that WA artists and galleries are supported in developing national and international markets.
- Recommendation: The policy is supported by new government investment to facilitate WA artists and galleries attending national and selected international art fairs so to develop sustainable markets.

Aboriginal art market

The measurement of the value of Aboriginal art centres is not just in sales. They provide opportunities for childhood education by elders, cultural regeneration and social exchange.

Revealed² is a very positive development, largely because it is state-wide and not defined by a resource company's area of interest and influence. Artsource is able to promote it to local councils as a way to select work from across the state for purchase for public collections.

² Through Revealed, the Department of Culture and the Arts provides professional development and exposure for Western Australia's emerging Aboriginal artists.

4. State and Federal Funding to Visual Arts

DCA funding to organisations

Artsource values the support from the DCA's Organisations Investment Program (OIP). This is a vital part of our funding mix that allows us to raise the remaining 80% of our income from other sources – earnings and private sector fundraising. We also welcome the OIP support given to other organisations in the Western Australia visual arts and crafts sector.

However, as we have discussed with DCA previously, Artsource is operating at capacity and, as a service organisation, is faced with additional challenges in an already tightening market for private sector fundraising. Through careful management we have returned small surpluses in recent years, however, our desire to build our reserves and, crucially, invest in new strategic actions to benefit our members and the sector is much restricted. We are confident that Artsource has the vision, strategy and energy to deliver more for the visual arts sector when funding becomes available.

- Recommendation: State government properly funds, via DCA, the visual arts sector strategy not merely to survive, but to thrive, so to ensure professional artists reach their full potential for the benefit of all.

Australia Council funding

The percentage of Australia Council monies distributed to WA visual artists averages at 3.5% over the years 2010-11 to 2014-15, whilst our state population is 11%. This is inequity is unacceptable.

Similarly, the recent awards made by the Australia Council to WA organisations seeking four-year funding amount to 9% of the total; better, but still well short of 11%. However, we note that no WA Visual Arts organisations were successful in this program. We also note that only two WA Visual Arts organisations out of 36 nationally, are funded through the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy.

- Recommendation: The inequity in Australia Council funding to Western Australia must be addressed for the benefit our artists, the organisations supporting them and, for that matter, taxpayers.

Artsource was deeply concerned that the last round of Australia Council funding excluded NAVA, the National Association for the Visual Arts. NAVA provides important services to visual artists nationally and its activities also support the ecology in Western Australia.

Australian Government funding

Artsource joined with other organisations in Western Australia providing written and verbal evidence for the Senate Inquiry into visual arts funding arising from the decision by the then Minister for the Arts, the Hon George Brandis QC, to redirect money from the Australia Council to create a fund administered directly by the Ministry for the Arts. Whilst the inquiry did result in some changes, with NPEA becoming Catalyst, we continue to believe that all monies taken from the Australia Council should be returned and that Catalyst should be funded with additional money. It is also important to ensure that Catalyst money is distributed with due consideration to population size, as noted in the preceding paragraph.

Creative Partnerships Australia

The support of Creative Partnerships Australia through their matched-funding and tax-efficient giving schemes is welcome. However, their resources are thinly spread in Western Australia. The development of a Plus1-type scheme specifically for the small to medium sector / those without full-time fundraising resources would be valuable support for the visual arts and others.

5. Commercial Galleries

The impact of galleries closing has been severe, resulting in a significant quantity of mid-career and established artists with no representation and much reduced opportunities to exhibit and sell their work. Further, representation opportunities for emerging artists are clearly restricted.

Whilst there is an increasing trend towards the online purchasing of art, Artsource supports brick and mortar galleries as pivotal to the relationships between collectors, gallerists and artists. These may be realised through open studios, collector and donor events and gallery connections.

We note the comments regarding the contraction of the corporate market, but at the same time this has increased our opportunities to lease art works via our ArtLease service.

We would welcome the opportunity to participate in the ArtMoney scheme to facilitate showcasing and selling members works, however, the current commission fee structure may be prohibitive. As an added incentive to kick-start the market, a state subsidised version of ArtMoney should be considered (refer to previous recommendation under 3. Art Loan Schemes).

Gallerists provide an additional service in that they cultivate collectors, and therefore their absence also leaves a gap in audience development. There is concern that serious collectors are moving to purchase work interstate and overseas, thus further diminishing the local market. Regular exhibition exposure also maintains demand for artists work and ultimately increases the value of their work.

Independent groups of collectors have formed in WA with groups such as the Collectors Club, and Artsource has developed a good working relationship with them introducing them to our studio artists on a regular basis. We believe there is an opportunity to further develop audiences in WA through leveraging corporate connections, and offering studio visits, artist talks etc. as a package of staff benefits linked to our ArtLease service.

Government actions: No doubt that ongoing changes to Superannuation rules, particularly SMSFs is having a negative effect on the purchase of art works. Similarly Resale Royalty Scheme³ has had some unintended consequences.

The rise of Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs) in recent years has been one response to closure of commercial galleries. It is interesting to note that research conducted some years ago indicated that WA had fewer ARI's compared with other states, and this was largely attributed to the success of Artsource's studio provision. The fact that our studios have continued to grow, as ARIs are now also springing up, may counter this argument. Most ARIs run on tight finances and with volunteer staff, which can make long-term sustainability an issue.

Artsource supports the idea of a visual arts hub, encompassing studios, galleries and ARI's, and the Artsource Atrium project has aspirations to be such a venue.

Writing

There is the lack of visibility in the media, arts writing, etc. about Western Australian artists. Curators, critics and journalists are largely East-coast centric. Refer to "Undiscovered Symposium" ([more](#)) and Professor Ted Snell's subsequent article in The Griffith Review, The Conversation and ArtsHub. "The Tyranny of Myopia", by Professor Ted Snell (available [here](#)).

Note that Artsource and UWA Cultural Precinct will be presenting a second event on 5 November 2016: "Art Cargo", which will build on the "Undiscovered Symposium".

³ Under the Resale Royalty Scheme, visual artists and other right-holders are entitled to 5% of the sale price of eligible artworks resold commercially for \$1,000 or more.

Artsource is working to redress this gap through its Folio Project (more information available [here](#)). This project relies entirely on private sector funding and whilst we have had some success in attracting a number of private patrons, the project has proven difficult to launch without a major financial subsidy/partner.

6. Art Museums and Collections

We endorse the key points raised by Present State in respect of museums and collections. Western Australia holds remarkable visual arts collections of national and international significance. Improving access to these collections should be a priority.

Visual Arts touring infrastructure in Western Australia is thin and ripe for improvement. There are only three Class A galleries in regional Western Australia in stark contrast to 26 in regional Queensland. Without this important infrastructure and professional curatorial support, it will be difficult to realise a vision for improved access to our state and public collections, particularly in the regions.

Support for the development of new exhibitions suitable for touring intra-and inter-state is low. There is a poor record of support for WA touring exhibitions through the Ministry of Arts “Visions of Australia” program. Recent loss of NETS funding by Art on the Move exacerbates this issue.

Artsource supports the comments and suggestions regarding AGWA’s program “WA Focus” and their acquisition policies, particularly the report’s encouragement to include a commissioning element (p50). We also support the suggestion that this exhibition series could tour to Geraldton and Bunbury Regional Art Galleries. Artsource recognises the importance of our rich public and private collections and the strong support for improved accessibility to community collections (e.g. local government and hospitals). Increasingly, however, it is reported that under increasing financial pressures, they are unable to employ suitably qualified curators, and sadly, are increasingly investigating disposing of collections to clear debt.

A collective approach across government agencies to appropriately document, care for, and interpret these collections is long overdue. Victorian Collections is an example of what is possible (see [here](#)). The lack of coordinated support for the GLAM sector generally at both State and Federal levels is further exacerbating an already under-resourced sector.

7. Infrastructure

Studio Practice in Western Australia

As outlined in *Present State* (p55-59), studios are an essential part of the cultural infrastructure supporting the visual arts. As noted, studio provision is a core function of Artsource, supported by the DCA: we currently offer 76 studios in various locations across the metropolitan area, and expect to add another eight in 2016, subject to negotiations with a property owner in the city. The demand for affordable studio space is strong, with occupancy of Artsource studios having been maintained at close to 100% since they were first offered. Artsource negotiates head leases, ideally with a minimum five-year term, with both housing and commercial property owners, has developed a sound approach to site selection and lease negotiation, and advises local government periodically on studio provision. Repurposing ageing commercial sites as artist studios has delivered a number of benefits to property owners involved, both here and in other cities, including; low conversion cost, managed tenancies with good occupancy, reinvigoration of previously unloved sites, and, in the case of food and beverage operators – income.

In 2014 and with the support of the DCA, Artsource worked in concert with an independent consultant to produce the report “Artists’ Studio Provision – a new vision for Western Australia”.

This Artsource report is the most comprehensive and insightful research that has been undertaken regarding the delivery of studio spaces for visual artists in Western Australia. Further, it provides Artsource and the DCA with a roadmap for developing the long-term strategy and action plan for studios in our state.

While some of the key findings in the report may not come as a surprise, they nonetheless underline that the provision of artists' studios is an ongoing and fundamental need for professional practitioners. The research clearly shows that artists' need for a studio is essential to a professional arts practice, regardless of medium or career stage. It also shows that artists highly value the Artsource studios program.

The full report is available to download [here](#). Recommendations arising from the report are:

1. Artsource focuses its studio provision strategy as a core function focused over the long-term so to enable all the success criteria to be met.
2. Artsource increases its studio provision capacity and ensures that it has the necessary skills and expertise to be successful in this area.
3. Artsource moves from providing short-term studio opportunities to long-term provision through the purchase of property; secure lease arrangements; purpose-built complexes and the repurposing of buildings.
4. Artsource is recognised by all relevant parties as the leading organisation in relation to studios provision and acts as a conduit, offering advice and knowledge to third parties interested in setting up their own studio complexes.
5. The strategy must focus on providing studios to professional visual artists in Western Australia and Artsource members in particular.
6. Artsource develops a thorough understanding of the property market across Perth and Western Australia and targets opportunities based on affordability and sustainability that will be relevant to artists' needs.
7. Artsource retains a focus on maximising the use of the Old Customs House building and pursues ownership of the building.
8. DCA works proactively with other departments in government to provide strong and focused leadership for the artist, and wider creative, sector. It also should consider supporting appropriate legislative change to encourage studio development.
9. Through strong advocacy, Artsource ensures that all levels of government understand the needs and expectations of visual artists.
10. Artsource learns from relevant initiatives nationally and internationally which have enabled greater investment in artist studios and spaces and proactively works with the national association and other stakeholders to make such an opportunity relevant to Western Australian artists and state government policies.

Old Customs House and the Artsource Atrium

As part of its contribution to the visual arts infrastructure of WA (*Present State* p 56) Artsource plans to optimise the Old Customs House, to benefit the sector and the community (subject to securing funding). This will involve redeveloping the ground floor to include; a publicly accessible gallery space in the main atrium, additional artist studios, and collaborative project space for both presentation of work and professional development in the visual arts. We see potential for the building to become a destination for both visual artists in WA and the community, contributing significantly to the surrounding cultural precinct in Fremantle.

- Recommendation: DCA continues to support and facilitate the redevelopment of the ground floor of the Old Customs House to optimise its function as a major visual arts infrastructure component in WA.

Regional Exhibition Spaces

State Government has recently provided significant funding via the Creative Regions package to upgrade regional performing arts venues and to improve their programming to maximise use of this valuable cultural infrastructure. Incorporating exhibition spaces (for example, Mandurah Performing Arts Centre) assists in providing a wider range of experiences for audiences and visitors especially at times where there is not a performance. This would also go some way to redressing the extremely small number of A Class exhibition spaces in regional Western Australia compared with those in other states.

- Recommendation: Maximise the opportunity offered through Creative Regions to ensure that high quality exhibition spaces are included in Regional Performing Arts Venues.

8. Public Art

Percent for Art Schemes

Artsource welcomes the review of the State Government Percent for Art Scheme and we have already previously provided comment on this ([here](#)).

Generally, Artsource has, for many years, effectively advocated for a universal percent for art policy across all levels of Government and has been pleased to see this has been adopted by a large number of local government authorities both metropolitan and regional.

Through Artsource Consulting we have been actively involved in all aspects of the delivery of public art in Western Australia including:

- The management of Public art projects with budgets over \$50,000 for both local government and private developers;
- Development of Public Art Policies, Strategies and Masterplans for both local government and developers;
- Designing and delivering Public Place making initiatives.

A vital part of our work is to promote and be an advocate for practices that are fair to artists and deliver quality outcomes for all concerned. Whilst Artsource does not yet undertake State Government Percent for Art Projects as Consultants, we often assist our members involved in these projects.

In 2014 we undertook a full independent review of our Public Art Consultancy Services. Some of the key recommendations, which we have since implemented, include:

- Improved dispute resolution processes;
- Regular professional development for artists;
- Regular benchmarking of completed projects;
- Improved information provided in briefs;
- Introduced confidentiality agreements at concept development stage to protect artists' intellectual property.

Both the summary of our independent review of Artsource Consulting and our recent feedback to DCA regarding the review of the State Government Percent for Art Scheme may be accessed via [this page](#) on our website.

In Conclusion

The scale and breadth of this inquiry is large and is of fundamental importance to the visual arts sector in Western Australia. The *Present State* discussion document is a welcome first step towards developing a comprehensive and funded strategy for the visual arts, as part of a broader arts and cultural government strategy for Western Australia. We look forward to further discussion and consultation as the inquiry progresses and we are, of course, keen to be an active participant in this.

We look forward to the opportunity to work with DCA and others in the sector to devise and implement strategies and actions to ensure the long-term success and sustainability of the visual arts in Western Australia.

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Attachment

Indicators of an artist's professional status

These indicators are used by Artsource in considering an artist's application for PLUS or MAX membership. They are indicators, and are not all required, but applicants are encouraged to consider whether, on balance, they can demonstrate a range of the following:

- Dedicates time, on an on-going basis, to the development of their art practice.
- Can articulate a clear idea, narrative or concept for what they make.
- Can demonstrate strong skills in the use of a medium or construction method and has visual documentation to back this up.
- Has a history of public exhibition or presentation either in solo, group shows or invited exhibitions.
- Has had work acquired for collections of private and public institutions.
- Has been a recipient of an arts industry or government grant.
- Has had industry recognition in published works or critical text.
- Rents, owns or works in a dedicated art space
- Has secured work or opportunities on the basis of expertise as an artist eg. commissions
- Has been recognised by industry or professional peers as an artist as demonstrated by
 - Successful grant application/s
 - Invitations to exhibit
 - Success or involvement in nationally recognised art award/s
 - Relevant board membership, or professional association based on their status as an artist
 - Endorsement of conceptual practice (where material evidence is limited)

Current student applicants will be deemed to have professional status if they can demonstrate a range of the indicators above.

The making of art for its creative, cultural, intellectual or philosophical value, as much as, and sometimes in preference to, its commodity value. Most professional artists seek ways to place their work in the public domain in some way and many sell to private and public collections – Acme Studios⁴

⁴ <http://www.acme.org.uk/studios/othercreativepractice> viewed 24 March 2016