

RECONCILIATION - OUR STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

The Australia Council for the Arts is committed to reconciliation because it will strengthen our society by increasing mutual respect and understanding between Indigenous and non- Indigenous Australians. We believe that the arts play a key role in addressing challenges concerning identity, expression, mutual understanding and a sense of belonging. We endorse the work of Reconciliation Australia and will work with them to embed the values of reconciliation in our organisation and with our key stakeholders.

1. THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS

Purpose

The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body. It supports and promotes excellence in the arts and community engagement with them.

The Australia Council provides approximately 2000 grants each year to Australian artists and arts organisations in the fields of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts, community arts, dance, literature, media arts, music, theatre and visual arts. Australia's major performing arts companies are supported through specific funding partnerships between the Australia Council and the state governments. In addition, the Australia Council is a major player in developing markets and audiences for the arts in Australia and overseas. The Australia Council conducts arts research and policy development, and regularly advises governments and industry on issues affecting Australian artists and organisations.

The staff of the Australia Council demonstrate shared values including that we embrace cultural, community and individual difference in all its forms.

Indigenous Arts

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture contribute to the richness and diversity that is contemporary Australian culture. The arts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are valued and supported in Australia and on the international arts scene. We embrace the vibrancy and vitality of Indigenous Australian art as a key element in the defining and celebrating of Australia.

The Australia Council has supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts since its inception in 1968. Under the late Dr. H. C. ("Nugget") Coombs, the then Australian Council for the Arts recognised that the arts and culture of Indigenous peoples are integral to Australia's national identity.

For over thirty years we have developed a history of achievements and a structure of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working side by side. We recognise the rights of Indigenous people to self-determination, which we demonstrate through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board.

From its inception the Council has had an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board that provides the organisation with Indigenous leadership and authority. The Board assists Indigenous Australians to claim, control and enhance their cultural inheritance.

As well as supporting the distinct structure of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board, each section of the Australia Council is encouraged to work with the Board and Indigenous artists, artworkers and organisations. In 2005/06 Council supported Indigenous arts to the value of \$9.9 million.

2. OUR PRINCIPLES, BELIEFS AND COMMITMENT

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Policy

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts policy was developed in consultation with Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and communities during 1996. Adopted by the Council in May 1997, and again in June 2002, it is a blueprint for the implementation of policy and programs promoting the artistic and cultural expression of Indigenous Australians.

The policy recognises the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts development to the work of the Australia Council and the broader cultural development of Australia as a nation.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts policy has been promoted to Australia Council staff and externally through the internet and hard copy publications.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts policy principles

Respect

- We acknowledge and respect the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia as the traditional owners and custodians of Australia and its territories.
- We acknowledge and respect the essential connection between the arts, culture, heritage, land, sea and (customary) law in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society.
- We will encourage the awareness and maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural protocols throughout the arts.

Authority

- We recognise that Indigenous authority and self-determination are essential in relation to the arts.
- We recognise the rights of Indigenous people to claim, control and enhance their cultural development and cultural maintenance through the arts.
- We endorse the right of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders to own and control their cultural and intellectual property.

Rights and Responsibilities

- We endorse the rights of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders to fully express their spirituality, integrity and authority through the arts.
- We accept the responsibility of representing the rights and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and artworkers.

Diversity

- We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural diversity and cultural pluralism.
- We acknowledge Australia's cultural diversity and embrace cultural cooperation.

3. THE ROLE OF CULTURE AND THE ARTS IN RECONCILIATION

Culture is the centre of wellbeing for communities, families and individuals. The arts and cultural understanding play a vital part in building awareness and moving to understanding, conviction and action. They are powerful catalysts in progress towards reconciliation.

Community building through the arts addresses local community needs, assisting expression of community identity and facilitating cohesiveness. We believe that the flow-on effect from active artistic engagement with and by communities strengthens Australia's social cohesion by providing opportunities for cultural expression and increasing understanding between community groups. This is an essential aspect of Australia's path to reconciliation.

There are a number of ways in which the arts have value for reconciliation:

- arts and cultural practices can be valued as an integral part of everyday life
- communities can be valued as creators and active participants
- cultural diversity can be valued as a foundation of innovation, creativity and artistic excellence
- creativity and innovation can be valued as a means of engaging communities, building capacities, responding to issues and generating change.

Our cultural diversity is a foundation of innovation, creativity and artistic excellence and this is one of the important ingredients in strengthening Australian communities.

The arts and cultural activities make significant differences to people's lives in many different ways including:

- inclusiveness (making art together and exploring each other's cultures, teaches people to live together with respect and tolerance)
- belonging (creating distinctive places through arts and cultural activities generates a sense of identity and shared ownership)
- community building (making art together builds and strengthens communities in neighbourhoods, suburbs, towns and rural areas)
- identity (making art and engaging in cultural activities in and with communities produces art that is relevant to people's lives)

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- diversity (respecting and interacting with cultural diversity, makes arts institutions more relevant, dynamic and reflective of Australian communities)
- dialogue (providing diverse communities with access to cultural resources strengthens their public voices).

4. RECONCILIATION AT THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL

Awareness Building

In 1996 the Council began an initiative to help implement the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts policy. The internal operational needs of the Council resulted in the:

- appointment of a policy advocate to the Council
- identification of ongoing training needs planning for an Indigenous employment strategy for the Council.

To address the needs of the arts industry the development of protocols for working with Indigenous artists and communities was undertaken by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Division and published in 2002. (See Appendix One)

Working Side by Side

The activities leading to reconciliation fall broadly into two areas at the Australia Council which are described below:

1. Support for the Arts

As well as opportunities to apply to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board, Indigenous clients are encouraged to apply to all sections of the Australia Council in seeking support- literature, visual arts, music, dance, theatre, inter-arts, major performing arts, community partnerships, artsupport and international- These clients range from major performing arts companies, such as Bangarra Dance Theatre, to small to medium arts companies, such as Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre and to individuals.

The Australia Council recognises the achievements of Indigenous artists through their awards and recent successful examples include the 2006 Red Ochre Award to performer, Tom E. Lewis, the 2006 Visual Arts Emeritus Award to ceramicist, Thancoupie and the 2006 Literature Emeritus Award to author, Ruby Langford.

2. Working together on Strategic Solutions

In 2006, the Australia Council identified four key areas of strategic attention over 2006-2009, Indigenous Arts, Artists Earned Income, Whole-of-Government and Industry Development.

The business planning process of the Australia Council provides opportunities for all sections to identify strategies to address particular issues. A comprehensive list

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of current Indigenous arts strategies is at Appendix Two, with several examples included below:

- Ten Indigenous art books

A partnership with Melbourne University Press will publish ten books over the next three years on contemporary Indigenous visual art and artists.

- Infrastructure support for Indigenous music

This is a research project comprising an audit of the networks of support for Indigenous music.

- Appointment of an Indigenous philanthropy specialist

The Australia Council has supported a three-year program to build philanthropic capacity for Indigenous arts organisations through the delivery of one-on-one mentoring programs over 2006-08.

- The Generations Project

Connecting Through Three Generations of Time will use arts and cultural activities to bring together landholders and non-landholders from the local Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in order to address a range of local social and economic issues.

5. GOING FORWARD – OUR OBJECTIVES FOR RECONCILIATION

The Australia Council Reconciliation Action Plan objectives over the next three years will:

1. ensure that all decisions related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and reconciliation within the Australia Council are informed by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts policy
2. involve Australia Council staff and peers in generating and implementing ideas, to achieve reconciliation through the arts
3. develop opportunities for cross-cultural understanding
4. Increase awareness of reconciliation in the way we do our business
5. develop increasingly effective ways to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, artworkers and arts organisations
6. build links with other key stakeholders
7. maintain and improve networking opportunities
8. acknowledge the level of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts activities, through building awareness.

Indigenous Arts Protocol Guides

In 2002, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board (ATSIAB) of the Australia Council published the protocol guides on Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights.

The five guides reflect the complexity of Indigenous Australian culture, and provide information and advice on respecting Indigenous cultural heritage. The topics and internet addresses are:

*New Media Cultures –
Protocols for producing Indigenous Australian New media*

Author: Terri Janke with Jenny Fraser
http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_resources/publications/new_media_cultures/

*Performing Cultures –
Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Performing Arts*

Author: Robynne Quiggin with Wesley Enoch
http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_resources/publications/performing_cultures/

*Song Cultures –
Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Music*

Author: Robynne Quiggin with David Milroy
http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_resources/publications/song_cultures/

*Visual Cultures –
Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Visual Arts and Craft*

Author: Terri Janke with Doreen Mellor
http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_resources/publications/visual_cultures/

*Writing Cultures –
Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Literature*

Author: Terri Janke with Dr Anita Heiss
http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_resources/publications/writing_cultures/

Strategic Initiatives supporting Indigenous Arts

In 2006, the Australia Council identified Indigenous as one of the four key strategic areas of attention for 2006-2009. Some of the work in this area includes:

Research into support for Indigenous music

A research project will undertake an audit of networks of support for Indigenous music. It includes an investigation of opportunities for Indigenous musicians for live performance and recording, training patterns and opportunities for Indigenous musicians, and the broadcasting of Indigenous music in Australia.

Ten Indigenous Art Books

This partnership with Melbourne University Press will publish ten books over the next three years on contemporary Indigenous visual art and artists.

The series would allow for a substantial update on the way the general public is growing in its own appreciation of Indigenous arts. The purpose of the series is to create a coherent connect between what we 'know' and see in the course of receiving many grant applications, and the public's own engagement with more mainstream Indigenous arts, thus creating a critical dialogue that is well informed and exciting. The books will be reasonably low cost, well illustrated and scholarly and aimed at the secondary and tertiary education markets as well as art bookshops, collectors and the tourism market.

The publications will capture the recent developments in Indigenous art and present this culture as a living one of significance to all Australians.

Creating Pathways and Treading the Pathways

Creating Pathways was a National Indigenous Dance Forum for mid-career dance artists held in October 2005 at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra that led to the Treading the Pathways initiative. Participants came from all over Australia to discuss issues such as identity, training, the question of contemporary Indigenous dance, career opportunities and professional practice. A national Indigenous Dance Coordinator is being hosted by the national peak organisation, Ausdance. The co-ordinator will work with Indigenous dancers throughout Australia to assist in the development of national networks, enhance professional development and career opportunities and promote their work internationally

The Indigenous Philanthropy Program

The Indigenous Philanthropy Program commenced in October 2006. The two components of the program are the appointment of a Northern Territory Manager based at Arts NT, Darwin; and the Indigenous Philanthropy Mentoring Program that involves eight selected Indigenous arts organisations:

- Kurruru Youth Performing Arts Co - Port Adelaide
- Ilbijerri - Melbourne
- Woomera Aboriginal Corporation - Mornington Island, Qld
- Gadigal Information Services - Marrickville, NSW
- IAD Press - Alice Springs, NT
- Magabala Books - Broome, WA
- Euraba Paper Company - Boggabilla, NSW
- Desart - Alice Springs, NT.

The Generations Project

Generations project is working with five local Councils in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. One of the projects is with the Dalrymple Shire (QLD). *Connecting Through Three Generations of Time* will use arts and cultural activities to bring together landholders and non-landholders from the local Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in order to address a range of local social and economic issues. The project has commenced with Dalrymple Shire holding meetings with the communities, graziers and State Funding bodies across Arts and Primary Industry.

The Arts in a Multicultural Australia Policy 2006-2009: Cultural Exchanges

This objective aims to encourage creative interfaces between Indigenous and non-English speaking background artists by facilitating cultural exchanges.

Showcasing the Best

This initiative builds upon the success of the UK Undergrowth program and the Australian Indigenous Art Commission at the Musee du quai Branly, Paris to develop market entry, development and consolidation strategies for Indigenous artists in target countries such as Europe, China, United States, Canada and China.