

## Drawing support for fees

Hundreds of artists, curators and supporters gathered outside public art galleries around Australia for 15 minutes on Saturday in a bid to establish a standard national artists' fee, payable when their work is included in public gallery exhibitions. While such a fee was introduced by the Australia Council in the mid-1980s, it ceased to be mandatory in 1997 and is now a discretionary payment made by only some publicly funded institutions. A petition of more than 700 signatories is to be presented to Federal Parliament later this month demanding that artists receive a minimum of \$2000 for a solo show and \$500 when their work is included in a group exhibition.

Sydney artist Lisa Kelly, who helped co-ordinate the artists' protest and petition, says that although the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy (announced last December) provided a \$39-million funding injection to the arts and craft sector over four years, not enough of that money is going directly to artists.

Tamara Winikoff, of the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA), agrees the Australia Council should make the payment of artists' fees a mandatory condition of providing funding to institutions. While the Australia Council supports the payment of fees, Winikoff says it does not appear as a "concrete requirement" in the organisation's literature.

"In Australia, we still have to come to grips with the fact that art is a profession and people who make art and provide artistic services need to be paid like anyone else. It has to be understood that the artist is not the lowest in the pecking order," Winikoff says.

Since 1997, the Australia Council has recommended that "in any funded activities, artists receive pay and conditions appropriate for their work and skills." The council suggests that organisations look at NAVA's code of practice (which has two sets of fee scales, depending on the number of artists and venues involved, the standing of the artist and whether the work was specially commissioned and is site-specific) for the recommended benchmarks. A spokeswoman for the council said this week that the council would also ensure that payment and conditions for artists were part of the negotiations for any three-year funding agreements with art organisations.

But Winikoff maintains there needs to be an agreed mandatory standard of practice across the industry. She says the payment of fees to artists varies "enormously" between institutions and that low or no fees to artists was "due more to a lack of capacity than a lack of willingness".

The artistic director of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Juliana Engberg, says ACCA leads the way in paying fees to artists. She says that because much of what ACCA shows is specially commissioned, the institution pays higher fees than those recommended by the Australia Council. "I am supportive of artists lobbying various government organisations, such as the Australia Council, and state governments to try to encourage a better divulgement of funds to artists," Engberg says. "Artists remain the biggest sponsors of their own work in most instances and public institutions have a responsibility to help redeem that situation."

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