



## Getting It All Arts-About

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At a time when Australia has fallen into its first recession in 30 years, you would hope that the Federal government would be spending the public's money wisely and exercising some vigilance on the behalf of the Australian taxpayer.

Unfortunately, this does not appear to be happening. The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body. It says its focus increasing the visibility of Australia's vibrant arts and culture, and recognising the evolving way that Australians make and experience art.

Since April, the Australia Council for the Arts has handed out over \$7 million in taxpayers' money to 1,101 individuals and organisations under a new grant scheme called 'The 2020 Resilience Fund' in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the Council, the new fund is 'designed to provide emergency relief to support the livelihoods, practice and operations of Australian artists, groups and organisations during the

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COVID-19 pandemic.'

It goes on to explain that although 'the arts and cultural industries, along with all Australians and communities around the world, have experienced incomparable disruption from the impacts of COVID-19, we have never lost sight of the enormous public value of the arts for all Australians.'

It seems however, that the Australia Council for the Arts has well and truly lost sight of what is of value to Australians, and what is not.

Take Sydney-based artist Julie Vulcan for example who has been awarded a generous \$10,000. In one of her recent 'performance instillations' called 'DarkBody', Vulcan inveigled gallery visitors to lie down next three giant mounds she had made from a combination of mushrooms and dirt, and then proceeded to cover their eyes with bags of soil so that they could experience 'the daily activities enacted in the dark around us, are an intricate ecology that are essential to our ongoingness within a multi-species world.'

In another work called 'Taking the Mickey Bliss' Vulcan spent two nights in a glass cube in order to make a statement about 'current political mileage built around conservative ideologies, are vexed problems for artists and free thinkers at large.' Taking the mickey indeed.

Giselle Stanborough, another Sydney -based artist who, in her own words, is 'trapped as a digital apparition at the bottom of the well' has been given \$2000 which she might use to create multi-platform artwork to raise questions 'about the colonisation of our social activities by large corporations and the way social media and dating apps are changing our intimate relationships.'

In the meantime, Mudgee -based feminist weaver, Kelly Leonard, who claims she has shunned traditional galleries for the great outdoors, was awarded \$10,000. Leonard makes giants scarves and stitched texts which she places in various bush locations to 'deliver messages' about coal mining and climate change.

In Victoria, \$10,000 has been awarded to artist Claire Bridge who describes herself as 'Queer Feminist interdisciplinary artist of Anglo-Indian and culturally Deaf Australian' and whose 'work responds to issues of ancestral transmissions, gendered violence, intergenerational trauma and the confluence of these concerns with the environment and queer ecologies.'

Meanwhile, down in Tasmanian artist Willoh S. Weiland is 'concerned with creating epic impossible ideas and trying to fulfil them, working with non-artists, the possibilities of liveness and destroying the white male patriarchy.' She might use some of the \$10,000 awarded to her by the Council to continue to 'explore the relationship between art and infinity by sending artworks into outer space.'

If artists feel that they need to express their disdain for conservative ideologies by sitting in a cube, smash the patriarchy by sending things into outer space, or use needlework to protest about coal mining they are perfectly free to do so. However, on no account should the hard-working taxpayer account be picking up the bill for them to do it. Not by any stretch of the imagination can



these projects be deemed necessary for emergency funding in the middle of a pandemic.

Worse still, some of the recipients are not even in Australia, with \$72K going to artists who are living in the US, the UK and Europe.

The very existence of the 'Resilience Fund', through which millions of dollars have been siphoned from the taxpayer by the federal government to fund an array of nonsensical and quite frankly, risible projects, shows that we now live in a divided nation.

There are currently 1 million Australians unemployed and approximately 1.7 million jobs are at risk of being lost over the next three months due to the lockdown restrictions which remain in place across Australia. We have millions of small businesses in Australia which desperately trying to stay afloat, with people losing everything, yet we are funding 'artists' to literally send works into outer space.

This is both wrong and immoral.

In 2015, the Abbott government cut funding from the Australia Council for the Arts and diverted around \$105 million to a new fund which saw grants decided by the federal Arts Minister. This meant that a democratically elected government could have more say about what was funded, rather than handing out a blank cheque for this nonsense.

Unfortunately, the Turnbull government returned the funding to the Council, which is now run at arms' length by the arts community elite, which because of the 'peer' review process, means that public money is being dished out by the few to fund political and identity politics obsession.

Australia is facing an economic crisis of epic proportions. This is no time for mainstream Australians to be paying for self-indulgent and ludicrous projects which will do nothing to benefit them in any way whatsoever.

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