

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

4 July 2015

Dear Committee,

I am writing to you to express the reasons I am profoundly against the redistribution of funds away from the Australia Council to set up the National Program for Excellence in the Arts.

I am a Melbourne based independent artist. I create works for children and adults, usually in public space that ask philosophical, social and political questions. My work is empowering for children and invites big-picture thinking from adults.

This is a quote from my writings, which were recently published in the ASSITEJ (International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People) annual publication. It will hopefully give you a small context of the art that I make.

*"For me, the child is equal.*

*They have a mind, a way that I don't have. That we don't have.*

*They have a role in our society. And I don't think we listen enough.*

*Their optimism. Their ability to cut through needless complexity. The freedom of their imagination. Their inherent sense of play.*

*I have created works where the child's voice unlocks the adult's heart. Making the adults think about the future. Seeding responsibility.*

*I am interested in what children can show adults.*

*There are many adults in this world that don't interact with children.*

*We segregate them to schools and child-only areas.*

*I think adults without children around them miss out on something important.*

*It is also difficult, I think, for adults to really listen to children.*

*Even parents.*

*Routine, business and habit – general modern day living.*

*Art, can be the circuit breaker."*

**FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT:**

I have set up my own business called Maybe ( ) Together. This was set up in 2012 when I received an ArtStart grant of \$10,000. This \$10,000 paid for my studio for a year, national conferences, networking, a residency in Brisbane to strengthen networks, a new website and branding.

From the outside Maybe ( ) Together is very successful. In three and a half years I have presented work at:

Sydney Festival

Perth International Arts Festival

Come Out Festival (Adelaide)

Awesome Festival (Perth)

The Arts Centre Melbourne

ArtPlay

The Cube Wodonga

The Albury Library Museum  
White Night  
Summersalt Festival  
Glow Festival  
Heide Museum of Modern Art  
City of Moreland  
City of Melbourne  
City of Melton  
Shire of Nillumbik

I have employed 18 other artists.

I have shared my work directly with over 10,000 children.

My work has directly engaged with over 15,000 adults within Australia and overseas.

If we were to include passersby, who see the art in action (rather than directly engage in it) we would reach beyond 200,000.

If we were to include the online interactions we have through some of our works, our numbers expand into over a million.

I have an annual turnover of approximately \$100,000.

Yet, despite working fulltime, I have earned only \$25,000 in the financial year 2014/2015, which is unsustainable considering how hard I work.

### **The impact of redistributing the Australia Council funds**

Maybe ( ) Together has grown extensively in the last three years. I find myself at a point many small businesses find themselves, where I have to either choose to expand or contract to make the work sustainable.

The options on the table are:

- source core funding to pay myself and my producer a consistent wage to expand
- keep going as is and charge higher fees.
- source other part-time work, decreasing Maybe ( ) Together's output.
- quit, losing the investment of three years
- move overseas and try luck there (while I say this partly in jest, it is a real issue losing Australian creative to overseas)

The first and second options would be my first choice. But these are the two that have been affected by the redistribution of the Australia Council funds. This is due to the following key reasons:

- Maybe ( ) Together is not an organisation. Therefore, as the criteria now dictates, I will not be eligible for the National Program of Excellence funding. This applies to the entire independent arts sector.. And, even if I were I don't think it is good use of my time to write two different funding applications for the same project. This is a waste of my un-paid time.
- any hopes of gaining core-funding were, quite frankly, small. Now they are negligible. The existing small organisations will be fighting to stay alive, let alone allow any room for new entrants. This applies to Australia Council as well as philanthropic funds.
- for every quote I make, I am asked to lower it to "allow" other artists to be presented. I do not see how festivals, councils, venues can support the independent and small to medium sector without support from The Australia Council for our sector. They are unable to fill the gap.

The ultimate result of Maybe ( ) Together shrinking or folding with potentially other arts organisations and independents is thousands of children and adults not being provided with high quality arts experiences.

Arts experiences are known as a way for many children to express themselves. To explore the world in intuitive and complex ways. I believe this is something Australia should provide to not only children, but everyone.

The independent and small to medium arts sector needs more money.

Not less.

And the repercussions of this policy will be the end of many amazing projects, companies and artists.

To the detriment of Australia's culture.

### **THE INTERRELATEDNESS OF OUR SECTOR AND DIVERSITY:**

I trained as an actor, writer and director for theatre. I now make works without a script, stage or tickets. I engage people in public space.

I did not know this job existed when I studied.

My work will never be presented by MTC, Malthouse or any of the other "main stage" companies.

Yet, my work engages thousands, is presented by the major festivals around the country and I live below the poverty line.

No employee of any of the AMPAG organisations can say this.

I have *much* more to do with the small to medium organisations. Namely, Polyglot Puppet Theatre, Arena Theatre Company and Hot House Theatre have all provided in kind support and mentoring to Maybe ( ) Together.

I also consider all the children's arts organisations close peers and colleagues. We share knowledge, support and advocacy for children and art. Australia has an amazingly high quality children's arts scene. Numerous of these companies have toured overseas and engaged with hundreds of thousands of children.

The potential of this policy is to decimate the children's arts organisations. This will leave Australia with only workshops by Shakespearian actors, one children's show a year from each main-stage company and no smaller, highly tourable, new contemporary work.

### **UNFUNDED EXCELLENCE – THE REALITY OF MAKING FUNDED WORK IN AUSTRALIA**

Small Voices Louder is a work that has just completed its first development. It is a two part work. The first part is an empowering arts installation for children that asks them big questions – the philosophical, social and political.

*What is love? What is bravery?*

*What does the world need to hear?*

*What are the good and bad things that will happen in the future?*

Their answers are recorded and mixed into soundworks for adults to hear via radio or public installation/interventions.

Their answers are creative, wise, humorous, insightful, honest and ignite in adults a sense of responsibility for the future.

The work doesn't translate so well via written quotes, as it is hearing their intonation and their voice that really touches something in adults. You can listen to some at [www.smallvoiceslouder.wordpress.com/richmond/](http://www.smallvoiceslouder.wordpress.com/richmond/)

This work has been in development for 3.5 years. This length of time is heavily due to unsuccessful funding applications to various organisations including Australia Council. Below are the stages this work has gone through & an indication of where money came from for the work.

Stages	Time & funding
1	2 week seed development at The Arts Centre. Funded by Arts Centre Melbourne (\$3,000) & Australia Council's Jump Start* (\$5000) All artists paid at award rate of \$1000/wk.
2	1 week creative development at Carte Blanche, Denmark as part of Jump Start Mentorship I worked unpaid
3	2 weeks developing work at a school in Brisbane. As part of six week residency at Contact Inc** as part of ArtStart*** grant of \$10,000 (residency was \$3,000 of grant) I worked unpaid.
4	4 week development 2 weeks at Arena Theatre Company**** as part of 130 Residency \$15,000 from Arts Victoria All artists paid award of \$1000/wk Applied to Australia Council for project funding but were unsuccessful
5	2 week development Arts Centre contributed \$3,000 All artists worked for \$500/wk.
6	2 week residency at HotHouse Theatre*** as part of Month in The Country \$1500 from HotHouse \$3,500 from Maybe ( ) Together profits from other shows Applied to Australia Council for second time for project funding but were unsuccessful All artists worked for \$700/wk
7	2 week development at Richmond Theatrette. \$5,000 from City of Yarra Arts Fund Crowdfunding MATCH campaign through Creative Partnerships Australia. We raise \$3,500 which is then matched. (I work two weeks unpaid on this campaign.) All artist worked for \$700/wk
8	Show is ready to be presented and is being pitched at showcases and to venues. I have already spent 1 week unpaid doing this. And I expect to work a further 2 weeks on this.

\* No longer exists. Cut by Australia Council strategic change.

\*\* Folded after Queensland Government defunded.

\*\*\* Cut by Australia Council in reaction to budget reallocation by Brandis.

\*\*\*\* small arts organisation currently on Aus Co triennial funding with future funding unknown due to budget reallocation by Brandis.

We applied twice to Australia Council for project development funding but were unsuccessful. Each time we were only a few projects “below the line”. The Australia Council classified this as “unfunded excellence”.

Since its showing we have been approached by a major festival, two arts centres, one children’s festival as well as two regional touring bodies. Not all of these seasons will happen, but it demonstrates the interest and value of the work, despite being under-funded.

### **THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL CUTS AND REDISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS:**

It is important to note The Australia Council had had a restructure and funding cuts before Senator Brandis’ recent Budget Announcement.

Already, the pool of money for the independent and small to medium sector had shrunk. And before even these cuts, there wasn’t enough money to support all the “unfunded excellence”.

Key funding Maybe ( ) Together will struggle to source in the future that would assist in our future:

- attendance of performing arts markets overseas to broaden our touring market
- seed and development funding for new work.
- touring existing work to regional Australia.
- core-funding support

Key things that I have received from Australia Council that the next artists won’t be able to access:

- Jump Mentoring - \$5,000 plus mentoring support
- ArtStart - \$10,000

### **PRIVATE SECTOR FUNDING**

I have now run two crowd-funding campaigns in 3 years. Each has been for \$3,500 (the second was matched by Creative Partnerships Australia). They take immense strain and time. The MATCH funding I just participated in was about 10 days of work, which I was unpaid for.

I have also worked out that 15% of the donations came from my friends/family who don’t work in the arts. And 60% came from colleagues and peers working in the arts. Not my audience nor anonymous benefactors. This isn’t because my work isn’t appreciated by my audience – it’s because there isn’t a *culture* of philanthropy in Australia. And Maybe ( ) Together is not in a position to solve this.

I am increasingly concerned that it is being pushed to the small to mediums and independents to source philanthropic support. As an independent I don’t have the capacity or the skills to broaden an audience for donations, nor the resources to hire a marketing or sponsorship co-ordinator.

It is very concerning to see this being pushed to artists to solve.

## **DO ARTISTS NEED TO BE PAID?**

There is an increasing trend in our industry to pay administrators, venue managers, technicians, marketing staff, sponsorship staff and managers before artists.

There is also a trend to turn artists into their own producers and business managers. (Maybe ( ) Together is an example of this.)

This is all leading to the value of artists' time, ideas and effort being under-valued.

Earlier this year I invited 7 independent artists to say how much they earned and make ends meet. These are published at [www.illshowyoumine.wordpress.com](http://www.illshowyoumine.wordpress.com)

Here are some quotes:

"I know too many people working in this industry who are STRESSED OUT! I've been there before and nearly quit it all in anger, disgust, frustration and for my own safety. Fortunately, my next gig was a super supportive and positive one and I'm still here. But, I'm genuinely worried that some of the talented people I know will not only quit the industry, but will have some seriously unhealthy physical and mental health if they keep up their workloads and carrying such workplace pressure. Again, I want this community to band together to agree that this is not good enough and collectively agree that we won't accept this anymore – it's not worth it if it slowly kills us." – Dan Koop, independent artist

"Personally, I tend to try and take the figure of \$1,100p/w as an award for myself. That covers all the labour, both physical and mental, at my end, and all the joy (or whatever) my work brings for whoever can be rallied to attend it. All other expenses in realizing the work should also be covered and should not have to come out of that figure. When expenses start to come out of that figure then what we have is more of a passionate hobby, the epitome of which is the pyramid-scheme that is a fringe festival where everything is off the artist's back. Not having expenses come out of the figure (whatever it might be), unfortunately, is a privileged position for most. It is a privilege that is worked hard for by both those who have it, and for those who don't have it. However unrealistic it might be for artists to have a successful practice, in the sense that it is their primary way of making a living, this principle should at least be understood and considered by everyone that each individual artist works with on their project (including the presenter)." – Malcolm Whittaker

"I draw annual 'salary' from MKA of \$15,000 self-rationed (with my restraint) over the whole year. I work more than full-time hours most of the year at the company alongside my Co-Creative Director. The company has no real resources to pay for flights, expenses, travel or accommodation unless the project we're working on is funded or commercially viable. This means essentially our 'salary' also subsidises the creative, curatorial and producing work of the company." - John Kachoyan, MKA co-artistic director

"For a while I tried to build in a \$500-1000 company fee that could be used to fund a new project development, or future travel – but this has become virtually impossible due to universal funding cuts, tighter and meaner budgets. Of course haggling is almost always mandatory – with many organisations offering too little money for developments or even ready-to-go works. But each offer has to be considered for the opportunities on offer, how it will impact our work calendar, the development of new projects, our company profile, etc. Compromise is at the heart of all our contractual negotiations. " – Katerina Kokkinos-Kennedy, independent artist

"I work pretty much every day. And many days are long days. And usually I have a duty of care over a bunch of others. And often the quality of my work is under intense scrutiny – both as a boss and as an artist. I don't think there will be many other professions where the amount of work done and level of responsibility is so high, for such a low wage." – Ian Pidd, independent artist

As Zoe Coombs-Marr put it recently in *The Guardian*:

"And before we get into any "but you love what you do, isn't that enough?" palaver, there are plenty of small business owners and HR managers who love their jobs too. But love doesn't pay the bills ... "

And in this I'd also compare this to teachers, architects, graphic designers – all work very hard, some enjoy what they do - but they still need to get paid!

### **FREEDOM OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION**

Artists need to be able to ask the hard questions. To explore complex issues and shine light on things the media or public or government miss. We work together in this –there are certainly overlaps.

We also are not marketing.  
Nor a political party.

The increasing pressure on organisations from Australian governments is extremely disheartening. Our major arts organisations are scared to put a step forward, in case of repercussions to their funding.

Many of the world's greatest artists have been critical of society.  
And they should always be able to.

### **THE AUDIENCE**

Below they describe in their words how Maybe ( ) Together projects have affected them and others:

This project sure touched a nerve with so many people. I have only caught snippets as I missed this event. I absolutely love how events such as these can tap into the feelings, and create a new consciousness through interactive arts. Amazing & AWESOME !!!!

D Eitzen

Visual Arts Teacher Perth about Dear Hope Street.

"To create a safe space for busy heads and heavy hearts is something that should be given the attention and support it deserves. The caravan time was just lovely and gentle and so worthwhile." – John Englezos, audience member for *aMoment Caravan*

"I had a chance to visit last night at White Night. I came out very emotional and so thankful I took the opportunity. Thank you for what you're doing – it's such a beautiful idea." – audience member on *aMoment Caravan*.

"This is one of the ways in which art contributes to society." – Matt, finder of aMoment teacup.

"The Future Postal Service is awsum" [sic] child on *The Future Postal Service*

"I really like that our answers are *really* going to be heard. We don't get heard much." child in development testing of *Small Voices Louder*

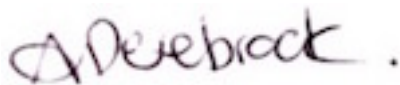
“Having a coffee when a 9yr old lad timidly walks up and hands me this card addressed “to Adult” from “Future Generation”. Made my day! All round the square others were having the same experience. Great for the kids, great for the adults: one tiny step for a better world.” – Richard Dent on *The Future Postal Service*.

### **IN CONCLUSION**

The Commonwealth Budget for the Arts is exactly what this industry does not need. Senator Brandis’ proposal has been without consultation beyond a few major organisations. It has ignored the diversity, impact and value of the independent sector and small to medium organisations.

I urge the Committee to revoke the decision.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "A Desebrock .".

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