

Dear Senators,

I am a freelance graphic designer and project manager, a French tutor, I work part-time in bookkeeping and administrating for a not for profit organisation called Accessible Arts, I'm a support worker for artists with disability, and I am the director of a small Artist Run Initiative. I'm also an artist myself, and I receive a part Disability Pension because my past PTSD illness has put so much stress on my body, I now have a chronic pain disorder.

Finding my way in to the art world has been a significant part of my recovery over the last 5 years and the formulation of my identity, and the very long time it took for me to just stand myself let alone like myself.

I have become very socially conscious and quite disappointed in the political climate, and the media coverage which has on occasion, personally offended me (I am NOT a slacker or a slouchhat, in fact I work harder than anyone I know). I ride my bike when I can (and I follow all the road rules), I grow my own salad ingredients, I care about recycling, I worry about the future of the planet, my favourite place to shop for fashion, is the Salvos store and I get most of my art materials from my council's 6 monthly Bulk Household Cleanup. Many of these things I have in common with my artist friends, because we are an inherently non-judgemental and inclusive community which is the perfect place for people with disability, or people who have been through trauma, or basically anyone who has a certain message they want to share with the world.

Art as self expression is a very powerful instrument. At Accessible Arts conference last year we heard countless stories of how people with serious life-long illnesses like autism or schizophrenia have entered the artworld and are now functioning members of society, some of whom no longer fit their original diagnosis or have been able to stop taking their medication. This is a power the government should be harnessing, not scoffing at.

For me, and for most of the artists I know, our practice is a labour of love, not profit. Furthermore, I consider a lot of the work I do as an "artist" to be strongly beneficial to the community. My artist collective runs workshops and community engagement projects, we support and advocate for artists with disability by encouraging them to become part of our collective, and assist them in applying for grants and making their artworks.

My point is, you can't judge art itself by one or two contemporary exhibitions you saw that you didn't understand and didn't value. Many contemporary artists are generally working to better the world in some way – by changing perceptions of society's tabooed topics, raising awareness about things like gender violence, inspiring homeless people to be part of theatre productions, painting beautiful floral designs on plastic milk bottles to encourage people to reuse as well as recycle, writing poetry with underprivileged youth to get them excited about learning and communication, fishing rusty cars out of a pond behind a Western Suburbs school and turning it into a community sculpture and fête project.

And ultimately, art isn't just paintings on a wall – art is fundamentally synonymous with culture, and has existed throughout history in every civilisation. It is social commentary and communication; it includes journalism, language, history, dance, theatre, comedy, fashion, music, film, television, novels, food and entertainment. Without art and culture – all we're left with is our jobs (if you're

lucky enough to find one), and the housework. Culture and art makes life interesting, it make cities vibrant, and it gives power to the people of Australia.

I'm not a sports spectator, so if sport is government funded, so too should be art. Please restore funding to the Australia Council.

Thank you,

Louise