

PRESS RELEASE 30/10/17

VENICE CHANGES MISGUIDED AND ILL-CONCEIVED. THE BALNAVES FOUNDATION WITHDRAWS FUNDING TO THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL FOR THE ARTS.

Since 2007, The Balnaves Foundation has been the principal sponsor of Australia's representation at the Venice Biennale. We believe the changes announced by the Australia Council for the Arts today, 30 October 2017, especially internalising the role of the Commissioner within the Australia Council are ill-conceived, misguided, and will destroy a successful public/private partnership.

A Commissioner that is independent of the Australia Council has been key to Australia's success at Venice. Not only has it been integral in raising significant funds from the corporate and private sector, but more importantly each Commissioner has brought to the table extensive knowledge and experience in the visual art sector, vast connections and networks, and the ability to advocate globally, something that the Australia Council simply cannot replicate. We believe the proposed Venice Council will not be able to fill the gap, it will be hamstrung by its narrow scope, which doesn't include the role of Commissioner or the selection of the artist.

The Australia Council for the Arts' Board is appointed by the Minister for the Arts, and despite its intention to remain at arm's length, we have seen in the last few years that the Australia Council is vulnerable to ill-conceived policy decisions, short-term political cycles and political bias. Another reason that an independent Commissioner is so important.

The changes announced today also propose a selection process whereby artists submit proposals to the Council for consideration. This limits the choice of artists to those that apply. Many of our great artists would never contemplate putting in a proposal to represent Australia and nor would they desire to take part in such a bureaucratic raffle. As such many of Australia's best artists will likely not be considered. Experience shows that artists often have some trepidation about representing Australia on the world stage at the Venice Biennale and need to be convinced and encouraged to do so - something the proposed model would inhibit.

The lack of consultation with key stakeholders is reprehensible, misguided and renders private supporters to the role of cheque writers. Such consultation would have been best practice and conducive to good decision making. Unfortunately, the Australia Council can operate this way as their funding to the arts sector effectively muzzles criticism from that same sector.

As these changes will be to the detriment of Australia and it's many great artists, The Balnaves Foundation will not be providing further funding to the Australia Council for the Venice Biennale.

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