

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

To set the scene. I want to share with you a quote from Alice Croghan's piece in the current edition of the monthly magazine, a Melbourne based writer, librettist and critic. She has this to say in 2016, it became clear that Australian art, that Australian arts are facing the worst crisis since before the Australia council was founded in 1967. But that is only part of the story. The past three years have seen an unremitting ideological war on knowledge inquiry and significantly cultural memory. Since the 2013 election, many of our major institutions have reached a point where they are forced to curtail their basic activities. We've seen public funding cut for science authorities, universities, research programs, museums, archives, and galleries. According to one media announced according to one media analyst, the national broadcaster, the ABC has lost a hundred million a year in direct and indirect funding since the election of the coalition government.

Speaker 1 ([01:06](#)):

So these are very sobering words and it underscores the very real crisis confronting arts and culture in Australia today to explore this theme, it now gives me pleasure to introduce our panelists. Each of whom is eminently qualified to speak on this topic, Justin O'Connor who teaches it, who teaches at Monash University and his visiting ship chair at Shanghai Jiao Tong university, Rebecca Evans in the middle, who is the art gallery of south Australia is curator of decorative arts. And my colleague Julian Meyrick, who is a Theatre Director and professor of Creative Arts at Flinders. So I'm going to join you down on the couch and we'll start the conversation,

Justin O'Connor ([01:55](#)):

Just start with you. Good afternoon, everybody. I it's it's a bit of a conversation, so it's not this isn't a formal presentation, but we thought we'd just kind of put our pies in the windows. We say somewhere. I, I was speaking yesterday morning and I referred to the article in the, in the monthly, which is a kind of a very serious article. And I'm really concerned just listening to people at this festival any time culture is mentioned. And I use that in the broadest sense, museums this afternoon, it's clear that something is happening right. There is some not just financial costs, but some devaluation of art and culture going on. I don't want to stand and tell you why it is valuable. I think an my colleagues will say lots about this up after me.

Justin O'Connor ([03:09](#)):

But I'm not going to do that because I think, I don't think there's anybody in this room who doesn't think they are valuable. So I'm not trying to convince you what I'm interested in is why we got to this position and something I've been working on for some time. And, you know, yesterday I spoke about how far, for us, the, you know, certainly in the seventies and eighties, the idea of culture was the next step on, in, in the democratic rights. You know, we'd go from civic to political rights, to social citizenship and onto kind of cultural citizenship. And I think that's still with us. Now there's a big belief in that. And yet somehow it's been moved. It's been turned aside from, from that. And part of that turning us on that has been a kind of dismantling of some of the major areas of public policy.

Justin O'Connor ([03:59](#)):

I think health and education with culture formed some of the, the most important new additions to the idea of the liberal democratic state in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and then our suffering somewhat. And I think so culture for different reasons is suffering more than most. It's almost been evacuated as a site of coherent public policy. Why that's what interests me. And I, you know, it's easy to

say neo-liberalism, and it's easy to say neo-liberalism because that's the answer basically, but what, you know, let's poke around a bit on that. I mean, the early, near the origin of neo-liberalism in the 1920s, it was a big argument about the state versus the market at a time when the Soviet union was just gearing up for its five-year plans. You know, it was a serious proposition, the state run market, and th th the, the debate there was basically that actually the state will deliver car, deliver planning, and it would deliver some bad things as well, such as serfdom and tyranny, et cetera, et cetera.

Justin O'Connor ([05:07](#)):

And their claims were basically that the market is, is is the most, the most viable information mechanism that we have. It's the only really way we can plan it. It aggregates signals in an efficient way. I mean, that's the basic claim of, of that kind of neo-liberalism. And it had nothing to say about culture. Culture was just there. And in fact, the people who, the, the liberals in Germany, the auto liberals, as they were called that they very much were there, right? The way through the forties and fifties, arguing for, you know, a regulated free markets and they saw culture and other kind of social democratic things is essential to kind of keep, they call it social warming to keep the, the warmth of the social around sometimes quite harsh market system. I think the real shift actually happened with in America with the kind of second wave of neo-liberalism that came out of the Chicago school.

Justin O'Connor ([06:06](#)):

And I think there's, there's two key things that, that they, that came out of there. I think the first thing that they did was to extend the idea of market efficiency beyond the market, beyond economics that actually other areas of social life could be determined by market or quasar market mechanisms. And this gives rise to something called new public management, but it, it, you know, we often talk about being counters don't we, oh, they are so taken over by being counters. And then in a way that's not true. I have great respect for accountants. Somebody wants pulled me up by this and so CA accountants great that everybody needs one, you know, they're great. The problem is not counted, but he really, it was the economist who went in to say, not everything must be accounted for, but we can best achieve our goals by reducing all the internal operations of an organization into KPIs and proxy, basically proxy, proxy results, and and quasar markets, that kind of things.

Justin O'Connor ([07:20](#)):

And it's this intervention that gradually seeps right the way through, not just public administration, but it's a health into education and of course, into, into culture. So that's kind of culture as a collateral damage of the rise of this kind of thinking. So that's why we have to convince treasury and all this kind of stuff. That's one thing, the second thing that came out of the, the, the Chicago school and I think it's something not quite registered. It has been only recently, which is they uncoupled the market from democracy. These were always seen as if not the same, more or less happy bedfellows. There, it's probably a democracy is probably the best system for a kind of advanced capitalist economy. I think what the what the neo-liberals did was to rupture that equation. And in fact, for many of them, democracy was a threat to the free market.

Justin O'Connor ([08:18](#)):

And I think that's in a way that's a second explanation. Cause if the first kind of extension was kind of the, you know, this culture gets caught in the flack, as we reduce everything to KPIs and output driven metrics. And the second one actually culture is much more in the sites, because if you remember when Neil lives near a lib, neo-liberalism really hit the political mainstream with Reagan and facture, and they

were quite conservative. Culturally, you know, Reagan was making America happy again, and Thatcher was waving the flag and let's have a bit of a war. And, you know, it's tea shops in Grantham and women with flower hearts, really England, not all these people in the cities, rioting, that kind of thing. It's very culturally conservative. And I think it's what we've seen over the last two decades is there is a shift of that where actually, what, what neo-liberalism has done.

Justin O'Connor ([09:13](#)):

It's not just hollowed at reduced culture, too. It's whatever metrics fits into its schemata. I think culture has become much more central into its sides. So, I mean, I'll, I'll leave it on this, but my kind of my kind of worry is that when we are out there trying to convince them the government that we are valuable, or as many people have said at this festival and elsewhere, we've got to learn how to use, speak, you know, speak the language that they will understand. And I would say they will never understand that language. They will never, because they actually don't want to hear what it is that's valued. And I think it's not two languages. It's not the language of treasury and metrics and any economy versus some wishy-washy language of culture that the two don't quite get it. I think it's something more disturbing than that.

Justin O'Connor ([10:07](#)):

I think what the culture has become, but as a, as a S as a sense of you know, a responsibility for a social hole for values beyond the pure economic and for a sense of social connection, that's not reduceable to the express preference of a consumer in all these different ways. Culture is seen as a threat to the claims around the free market. And I think that's I think that's something that we're not going to be able to escape from. So we're in a position now, I think where many people have talked about it here at this festival, this technology science, there's a whole world opening up for us in all sorts of way, digital communications around government and things. There's a whole series of possibilities. And yet here we are locked in some kind of sclerotic kind of public discourse where only, only economic value in its translation to metrics counts as a valid argument. And I think culture is being squeezed flat in that context. And I think our job really is not just to describe value in their terms, but to refuse to do that and start to shift the ground somewhat. And that's easier said than done, but I'll handle this for that. Okay. Thanks.

Speaker 3 ([11:36](#)):

[Inaudible] Thanks for kicking that off.

Rebecca Evans ([11:37](#)):

It's setting the scene very nice. And Rebecca, over to you, I thought I would stop my kind of spiel is about five years ago. My netball grand final, very exciting. We didn't win, but afterwards went out to the pub to celebrate just a good, a good season of netball. And I remember one of my friends who was on the team with me, we were talking about work and we're talking about, you know, what we're doing during the week. And they said something like, but you don't have a real job. And I thought, what, how, how don't I have a real job as far as I can see, I get up in the morning and I go to work and I get paid for it. And I pay my taxes, all these good things that define work and their justification was that because I enjoyed my job because I worked in the arts, that my industry was a luxury and not a necessary part of the fabric of our society.

Rebecca Evans ([12:37](#)):

Therefore, not a real job, mind you, this was also a music teacher. But what I thought, I thought just I'd like to start with that story, because I think we've all been in situations whether we're artists or writers or, you know, right throughout the creative industries where we've been told that we don't have real jobs. And I think that great devaluation of what we do is a serious issue. And also this whole idea that art is a luxury. And I thought, I'd say that art is not a luxury. That's where I wanted to start. But I have been in the industry. I've worked as a curator for about eight years and I've recently come to Adelaide. I started at the art gallery of South Australia. The day after Valentine's day, this year, I'm moving from Sydney where I was previously a assistant curator of decorative arts at the powerhouse museum.

Rebecca Evans ([13:36](#)):

And during my time there, which was about just over seven years, I saw three restructures. I saw curatorial departments reduced by about a third. The whole team went from about 300 to about one 90, the general trend right across the world curators are disappearing, they're retiring, they're not being replaced. And yet the output and the creative programs that we work for growing and continue to grow, and our visitation continues to grow. And last, I think financial year art gallery of south Australia had over 800,000 people through its stores, which is absolutely phenomenal if you benchmark that against the other state galleries in terms of our budget, in terms of the population of south Australia. And the wonderful thing about the art gallery of south Australia is our collection and our collection. Every year we revalue what we have our most valuable works valued revalued yearly.

Rebecca Evans ([14:41](#)):

And then we do a cross selection, random selection, right across our collecting areas and value those. And we worked out that the collection is worth over a billion dollars, which makes it the single most valuable asset to the people of south Australia. And so working at the art gallery, one of the things we really thinking about the moment, how do we utilize that asset? How do we make it work for the people of south Australia, both in terms of the economy, but other values, which I'm sure we'll go into later. But I was really struck by James Patterson, who is a Senator from Victoria who has recently suggested that we sold blue poles, Jackson, painting the national gallery. And I thought that, that I'm sure we'll bring that up later, but I thought that was really interesting reflecting on, I guess, federal politicians view on culture and the justification for the sale of that work is that we should be spending our arts money on Australian artists and that American art has little to no value in this country and that its value at \$350 million is better spent to dealing with our budget deficit which is much more than 350.

Rebecca Evans ([16:01](#)):

But we should spend it on buying Australian art rather than this American artist. And I think that it's really interesting reflecting on that, you know, that is in the public domain.

Rebecca Evans ([16:14](#)):

What else did I want to say? I guess the other thing I was reflecting on is what will the arts look like for me in 10 years time, I'm at the beginning of my career in many ways, will I be a curator in 10, 20 years time? What will the role of the curator look like? Will I have a job? Will I be doing something else entirely? And I look at sort of the career progression of my peers who are my age and in, in, in many ways, sadly, isn't always going to be a future. So in terms of generational gaps, there is this great generation between those who got to see what I always call the golden days of the bicentennial and I in the non, the golden days of arts budgets. Thank you. Thanks.

Julian Meyrick ([17:11](#)):

And Julian, I have to read my knacks. I was write everything down. I'm a investigator with laboratory Adelaide, which is presenting this panel. Laboratory Adelaide is not a chemistry laboratory for producing illicit drugs. It's a a project which looks into cultures value from a methodological point of view. And the more we look into it, more I look into it. The more I feel that the, that we have is not really with culture it's with value. So what I've tried to do is make some broad remarks perhaps following Justin's lead as always into how we can understand how we've got ourselves into this pickle. So recently I got told this joke two economists were having lunch together. One of them had to make a decision about changing jobs, moving cities, disrupting his family and so on. What should he do? He asked the other, well, his friend replied, you're an economist, a scribe input prices for the different factors apply a discounted utility algorithm and compute the resulting costs and benefits. Oh, come on set. The first economist. This is serious. Yes.

Julian Meyrick ([18:42](#)):

I was in Spain in June earlier this year, attending the 19th international cultural economics conference. When the result of the UK Brexit vote was announced, our Jo claimer, the world renowned economic philosopher was giving the presidential address on the same day. His opening words were well. Now we know that economics is not enough. There's nothing wrong with putting a price on culture. The problem start, if that's all we're doing one way of understanding Brexit or Donald Trump for that matter is to acknowledge the important things have got away from us that our cultural reality has outstripped our economic thinking. I'm using culture in the widest definition to mean roughly our sense of identity, who we think we are. There's a complex network of connections between this and culture in the sense of arts, crafts and creative practices. When we talk about culture, we are usually referencing one definition or the other, but it's the network of connections between them.

Julian Meyrick ([19:44](#)):

That matters because it's this that carries the deeper meaning culture is separable, but not divisible. And so not. Unitizable two paintings. Don't add up to a symphony, five films. Aren't the equivalent of one digital media experience, the weights and measures we use to break up other areas of existence and create choices and cost these choices. According to formulas, like value for money or Pareto, optimality have limited scope in culture for this reason, very quickly price in culture becomes a measure of something that has little to do with the cultural experience I'm offer. Try this thought experiment. Imagine a sum of money, say a hundred dollars at a general good or service, say a meal. We can infer things about their relationship. What a meal costing. \$100 should involve. Our inferences might be different, but they would be rationally defensible. Nothing can be inferred from the statement that a cultural activity is priced at a hundred dollars.

Julian Meyrick ([20:46](#)):

Other than the fact a hundred dollars is what we are willing to pay for it. Price is not a mark of deeper meaning, but a reflection of a range of external factors that change according to external pressures, somewhere in the muddle is culture itself. But to value it, you need to do more than price. It, you need to culturally critically engage with it. Numbers in culture are often misleading for this reason because they try to substitute for direct experience. What is supposed to be a tool, a means to greater understanding becomes a robotic takeover of our intelligence and the ruin of our categories of sense. What is ridiculous in culture can be sinister in other areas. I've just finished reading Paul Hamm's history

of the battle of Passchendaele in which the lives of some 200,000 British Australian and Canadian troops were lost. It was a military engagement conducted through a lens of quantification.

Julian Meyrick ([21:40](#)):

Three sets of numbers were crucial. First shipping tonnage that determined which country Britain or Germany would start soonest. Second munitions production that determined which country could amass the most artillery pieces and shells at the floundering front third casualty lists that determined which country was losing men at a faster rate. These numbers were revised frequently as a matter of what might be called in military pricing strategy to compute the likely outcome of what was called by generals and politicians though, not crucially, not by the soldiers in the line as a strategy of attrition. Paul Ham writes, I think this is a beautiful quote, quantitative judgments end at the point where individual grief begins, what these numbers did we can see in retrospect was create a scheme of cognitive deadness that stopped certain questions from being asked certain stories from being told at a different understanding from being achieved in early 1917, Germany sent out a piece note, looking for a negotiated end to the war.

Julian Meyrick ([22:47](#)):

In other words, after the Psalm, but before Passchendaele, when it became clear, it wasn't a traditional struggle, struggle involved. There was a chance of bringing world war one to an end. The fact that the note was rejected, relied on the calculations. I've just mentioned to make the numbers publicly acceptable. They were embedded in language in such a way that their distancing nature was not immediately noticeable noticeable world war one was nothing. If not a war of euphemisms, the term that sent a chill through my heart was the one used for describing the dead and the wounded normal wastage. Perhaps my economist joke doesn't seem so funny now, pricing practices distort reality when sticking numbers on things that require a different kind of mental management Brexit and Trump have happened because we live in a world where the kinds of valuation strategies we typically use do not fit the problems we actually face.

Julian Meyrick ([23:44](#)):

These problems are cultural in the broadest sense. But they're also reflected in song lyrics, drama, plots, novels, fashion styles, YouTube memes in this way. Culture takes its revenge on numbers by imposing its own standards of conduct and expectations from thrives in the U S by applying the dramaturgy of the apprentice to his campaign for the white house and rendering obsolete politics as the computation of rational outcomes, and even rationality itself by underestimating how powerful cultural forces are. We render our attempt to optimize their effects, useless and absurd. We are reverse hamlets insisting on a madness in our methods. Culture is not a function. And yet this is exactly in disastrously, how it is described and understood by modern democratic Australia. I'll leave it there.

Speaker 1 ([24:43](#)):

So plenty of food for thought there. I'm going to launch in with a question actually just to set the ball rolling. I'm just wondering, is this a case now of completely redefining the language that we use to talk about culture? Do we need to have a shift in in what we understand by that word value? I mean, given what you've just said Julian do we, do we need to, you know, completely unpack this notion and redefine it for us?

Julian Meyrick ([25:21](#)):

Is it okay if I, I think Justin's right. We have to be very careful about the vocabulary that we use. I mean this phrase speaking the language of government has been around for a while now. And I mean, there are a few problems with it. I mean, one problem is that governments seldom speak one language. And the other thing is that that's a personification that there are no governments, there are people in government. And if you're using a language that vacates the substance of what you're actually trying to communicate, then you're just digging your own grave and we have dug it deep. And we think it is, it is about language and it's, it's really, it's kind of it kind of dead end as a conversation I was speaking to, it was a live in Melbourne. I was speaking to some people from upstate government and some of the local governments then at some, one woman completely committed to the democratic process, you know, she's she said, oh, well, ultimately we were responsible to the taxpayers.

Julian Meyrick ([26:30](#)):

And she was talking about cultural policy, you know, we've got to justify it. And I said, well, actually we were responsible to citizens. I mean, look at the constitution. And it was, it was catchy. It was kind of a shock that somebody would challenge that language, that this is, this is a middle ranking local government officer. Their job was to be responsible to the taxpayers. And I said, well, you know, you, if, if you coach and if in those terms, what about the language of citizenship? And this was, as I say, it was, it was a shotgun. We've even just a raise that becomes a kind of political challenge, which is pretty scary in a liberal democracy. Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([27:13](#)):

I mean, absolutely. We always couch the success of our artistic programs and our collection on numbers and on the value of our collection. And it's a very easy way to portray to the media to say, oh, we've had 800,000 people through our doors in 12 months. That's an 80% increase. We've had 300,000 people go through tiny, which has phenomenal. Our collection is worth this. We've had this number of, of, of bequests and this amount of money come through our doors. It's a very easy story to portray to the media and to, to celebrate victory and to celebrate success. It's much harder to tell the other stories are stories where children who have never been to an art gallery before walk through the doors and experience art from the first time. It's yeah. It's very difficult, you know, in day-to-day to tell those stories to how to do that, how to change that language is not an easy process. And I, I, I, yeah, I struggled with that. My day-to-day, yeah.

Julian Meyrick ([28:18](#)):

I, I think, I mean, obviously I'm not suggesting that there is a direct analogy between the use of figures in world war one and the use of figures now in the cultural sector, that would be absurd. And yet it would be true to say that what you see in that history is a kind of an abuse of numbers to hide other stories. And, and numbers are very good, good, good at hiding stories, you know, because they don't tell a story in themselves. So you know, the question you always have to ask if any set of numbers is what is it not telling you? And the answer is usually quite a lot.

Speaker 1 ([29:02](#)):

Okay. Did we have any questions from the floor at this point? Can I just ask you to maybe find a microphone? That would be great. I think just to get back to your point, Rebecca working in an art museum myself this is something that we we, you know, we have to continually justify our worth also within the context of a of the university. And you know, we have that same struggle in terms of you know, finding the numbers that speak the loudest for us. Have you had any success then in the gallery in

finding other ways to describe your value in, in those sort of more qualitative measures? Yeah, I guess more internally sharing of different, you know, profound stories of, you know, like these students, five-year-old kids, who've never been to a gallery who come from a lower socioeconomic background, but yeah, it's, it's, it's not an easy thing to do. It doesn't look so good in a pie chart. Doesn't look good in a pie chart. It's not a pithy soundbite, is it?

Julian Meyrick (30:10):

If it's like that? I mean, culture's not alone. I mean, something like education, which is clearly, you know, there's a lot of instrumental ways of just fine education in terms of, you know, the educated workforce science, et cetera. But education itself is beginning to struggle to say, to express a value beyond, you know, it's, it's important for the economy. Universities themselves are beginning to have kind of gradually been evacuated of any of the value than, oh, well, we good for industry. So it's not just a culture, other other kind of parts of the public policy are beginning to lose that kind of rationale. Okay.

Speaker 1 (30:54):

Do I question on the floor

Julian Meyrick (30:56):

Question that's opened up that you, I can't expand for me. So if I go digressing, just polo me to politely calm me down and tell me shut up. But I think first of all, I'd like to thank the individual speaking because they are holding this word value there. Now I come from south Wales to the coal mines. So the other Canary falling off the perch and the coal mine, because you were the first ones to see humanity has a problem. It's not because you're dealing with in a way emotion, in a response to an image, as opposed to rationalize in that image has through the thinking mind and against fact scientific facts and money. So when you relate to that as a psychological approach to the external world, I think Western society now, and you're seeing it as dominated totally now almost a hundred percent by the rational thinking mind.

Julian Meyrick (31:59):

And it leaves nothing for the human, the emotional human to respond to in terms of the images that you're involved with in terms of making a living. And when you relate that to the decision making on bury nuclear waste in south Australia, I've spent on I'm involved in the jury, I've tried to explain your approach to life, and it's just falls flat. I can write seven pages trying to explain. There is another side to life, which is decide. I think you're talking about scientific and economic facts. We just bounced back at me. And I think it's important that you guys are holding it and actually seeing it because there's only a very few people doing it. It's not just the art, it's actually a human problem as well. You're just the first guys to pick it up. I think that's absolutely right. I think that I don't know how you two feel, but I certainly feel that the, the issue of how value intersects with culture, the current moment is so obviously a bad fit that we pick it up first, but, but that, I can't believe it's a good fit anywhere, really.

Julian Meyrick (33:18):

And what you refer, I mean, I'm no philosopher, but, but the process of stripping out the emotional response from your intellectual processing of something like value shifts it out of the category of the rational and into, I think a rationalization. So you get basically a thin logic, which is not informed by a proper category of experience. And under those circumstances, things like culture, but not only culture that predominantly are categories of experience. That's what it feels like when you look at a painting or

when you hear a piece of music, it's a feeling in the body. Those things will struggle to articulate themselves to, to get through this tightened sprint, to revalue. That's a bit graphic graphic sorry for that. I take that back. I'll leave. Can I just, thank you. You actually put in words where I've been struggling in certain pages to put in words your, your clarification of thought and what the actual problem is, was much better than mine. I appreciate that.

Speaker 1 ([34:25](#)):

I just wanted to touch on, I heard the words or I think, or wonder or something in that, in that question. And those two words are something we try and bring in all of our exhibitions and our artistic programs at the art gallery of south Australia and, or in wonder are incredible incredibly important emotions in the arts. And when Nick mitzvah came on board to the art gallery, so almost six years ago, one of the things he did was to redo the whole of the Melrose wing of of European art. And that gallery was previously curated in a chronological way. And it's been redone in thematic displays. So there's a whole gallery devoted to the human condition where we have portraits of, of the very wealthy and elite. On one side of the gallery, I bought eyeballing all these portraits of people who were in positions of, of either death or poverty. We have a gallery dedicated to, to changing ideals of beauty momentum, mores around death. And the Melrose wing is designed to first and foremost derive an emotional reaction from our visitors and to second secondly, consider more intellectual approaches to the art. And we believe that that is an ideal approach in an art museum that spectral in or in one jar are the first thing we want our visitors to encounter. And then we want, she grabbed them in a more intellectual sense.

Speaker 3 ([36:12](#)):

Another question from the floor

Speaker 1 ([36:16](#)):

Hello. My name is Tanya and my husband. I have a gallery in the city and I came from the business world, spent many years in technology and education and started a gallery is my husband. And I understand what you're saying. A lot of people have said that we've retired because I'm not in the business world anymore as such under that definition. But my question is to you is that I do a lot of coaching with other galleries and artists on how to make a living out of their particular artwork. And I agree that the measurement of success is always quite often monetary of whether you're successful in the arts or wherever you are. Do you think that it would help for us to grow culturally and accept arts in the mainstream? If we looked at, or governments looked at more of the Battan measurement where they measure GDP and happiness? I think I had, I had a friend at one point, just thinking about happiness, who was obsessed with creating an app where you would say how happy you were in a certain place, and that you would then be able to find, you know, a cafe or a restaurant where then you could work out how happy people are generally there. And I love that whole idea of, of, of accounting for value in, in, in happiness.

Julian Meyrick ([37:46](#)):

Yeah, we all want to be happy, but actually I lost about not about happiness and love art doesn't make me particularly happy, or if it does, it does it often through a very long Securitas route. I mean, you know, ethical ethics and happiness, don't always go together. I mean, that goes back to Aristotle and, you know, part of what, part of what arts and cultures are part of what art has always attempted to do is find a way of articulating usually through experience through emotion, through very odd parts of what we are unaware of articulate in a deeper ethical concern. And that's often not brought happiness. So I

wouldn't I wouldn't link art and happiness outcomes too much together. I think especially when the happiness is reduced to a series of metrics, is it increasingly is because again, it's trying to say actually it's useful, not economically, but it produces wellness and happiness outcomes, and we hope it does in some ways. And I think it will do, but it's not a direct route. And sometimes as I say, produces own happiness outcomes, and that's why it's really good, challenging,

Speaker 1 ([39:04](#)):

And unsettling. That's what we want in our arts.

Julian Meyrick ([39:09](#)):

The philosopher, John Sewell coined this term, the background to describe the ideas and concepts that fundamentally inform us as human beings on a daily basis. And I, I think probably culture speaks to the background. So it's the most basic thing. So it's very difficult to get an index to go behind that because in a way our very notion of happiness is is kind of culturally informed at the deepest level. You, you, you on a certain basic level, you just have to accept culture around you is the thing that allows you to create other kinds of categories. And that's part of the problem with measuring it. You can, you can measure certain things and it makes sense to do that, but that's not what we're doing. We're not measuring certain things. We're measuring everything and it's nuts.

Speaker 1 ([40:05](#)):

Indeed. And I just want to any more questions and one more up here. Yep.

Julian Meyrick ([40:13](#)):

Excuse me. We appreciate some feedback on this proposition. Firstly, I don't think the general public RAs empathetic towards what's happening to the arts or our cultural scene in Australia and overseas. For that matter. I think Australians do value their art galleries, the museums, the live gigs, the live music, a whole range of things. They value it. The trouble is it's how to galvanize them and get them to focus on the arts community, to grab the attention of politicians. And you've got to use the basis of fear that is every politician wants to keep their job governments successively. In this state, I've said to the police, you can't have this. You can't have that. If there's a March of 2000 coppers and their uniforms down the king William street, the government's boots shake, they tell the nurses, you can only have this, or you can't have that.

Julian Meyrick ([41:24](#)):

They marched down king William street and they nurses uniforms and it changes overnight. The arts community is a disparate group. I appreciate that. And it's very hard to coordinate. You don't have champions like Dunstan and Whitlam in government or in political parties. You are dealing basically with the draws of the political class on all sides of politics, of the major parties. That is a fundamental understanding. You are dealing with the draws where the accountants have seized control of the policy. So what you need to do, and I'd be interested, I'll close on this point, despite your disparate, disparate nature, all over Australia. And in this state, there are tens of thousands of people who work or volunteer or have some association with the arts. You've got deep roots, you've got to be able to mobilize them and put the fear of Christ into the dross.

Speaker 3 ([42:34](#)):

Okay. Thank you.

Speaker 1 ([42:38](#)):

I quite like the idea of an arts army arts army marching in yeah, my goodness. I think one of the, I guess, reduced funding for another, a lot of cultural institutions and a lot of arts communities has meant that there has been more crossover and necessity to, to collaborate whether it's sharing resources or, you know, something like very basic, like an it manager that, that has meant that has by necessity and be more collaboration across the arts. And most of you, I guess the last few years, I know the art gallery of new south Wales share their storage with, I think it's one of the dance organizations in new south Wales, which is really interesting. And I wonder by necessity because of the reduced funding that they will be I guess, a stronger voice from the community because of that.

Julian Meyrick ([43:32](#)):

I think it's certain, I think there's a space in which the, the cultural sector and I, you know, you include media workers right across the board musicians, et cetera. There is a space where they should get more organized and they do incense census, you know, the, some of the things in Sydney and Melbourne about live gigs and some of the constraints on that were successful, you know, you know the keep music live kind of thing. There are certain very, I mean, in north America, very strong film and TV unions that really, you know, they, they pulled the plug on Hollywood for a long time. So higher levels of unionization would, would, would help. So there are certain things that, that the cultural sector can do to organize and put pressure on things I think they need to act upon.

Julian Meyrick ([44:29](#)):

But it's also, it's, it's more difficult because it's kind of, it's not one of the nurses walk out to the hospital. Things happen within hours, you know, the cultural workers leave culturally. It takes a long time for the thing, you know, for the bad bits to start happening. And so it's not a, it's not an immediate kind of you know, walking down the middle of the street. So it's, I actually, I actually think it's about, it should be about more organizations, self organization, whether that's unions or professional organizations, we need more of them. I think they need to be more assertive. I think there needs to be, get off the back force and start saying, we need to do this and all those kind of things. But it's not going to be, it's not an easy, it's not an easy take. But I think there, there are just other ways in which that, that kind of, you know, the, the, the field can be changed.

Julian Meyrick ([45:25](#)):

I think a more concerted effort to break with the language of, you know just pure economic value at a more direct claim for more from increased funding, a more robust kind of narrative about what the value what kind of value we are. I think, you know, it's, it's kind of, I mean, you know, there's not that those resources there, but the kind of bamboozlement that the mining industry has put over Australia over the last, well, I was going to say 20 years, probably over a hundred years, you know, there's a great statistic where most people asked. I think they were talking about the closing down at the, some of the mines in the new south Wales, the hunter region most people thought the mining sector employed about 35% of the workforce. And it's something like three or four, you know, there's this huge, a huge gap between what people think it is and the perception and kind of the arts is the other way around.

Julian Meyrick ([46:22](#)):

And we have tried for many years saying it's employs this many people and it's got this, it generates this much wealth. And actually that has in other countries that has worked, you know, in, in, I mean, Australia is way way behind Europe U S north America, the UK, where there is some recognition that it's a big bloody sector, you know, its employees more than construction, et cetera. So even those basic things are still not recognized in, in, in Australia now, which to my mind is very bizarre, but so these basic things can be done, but that it won't be enough. It's gotta be over that. And it's things like it is about

Speaker 1 ([47:02](#)):

As well. At the art gallery of south Australia, 98% of our collection has been given to us either through donation or supported through private benefaction. And we think \$11.8 million through private benefaction last financial year. And I was talking to a friend about this and he said, but what did they get out of it?

Speaker 3 ([47:24](#)):

I thought, wow, passion

Speaker 1 ([47:27](#)):

Involvement in the arts. I don't know. They, they love art. They love to support the gallery. They love to be involved in the process. And I wonder if sort of the model, the private benefaction and the way we measure don't measure, you know, the outcomes of that could be a good model for us to implicate in, in the government sense, because, you know, in terms of those dollars and cents the value for them, perhaps, maybe with the exception of tax incentive yeah, it's really interesting. The language used around government funding and the language used around private benefaction, you know, chalk and cheese.

Julian Meyrick ([48:09](#)):

Well I think about I spent a lot of time in Hobart around Mona and I'm really struck by the kind of dividing line because I mean, obviously David Walsh is it's not really getting any money out of it, the opposite. He's getting lots of things out of it. I mean, it's, it's an interesting thing to do rather than just on a boat and rent it, buy a big house in Sydney, I suppose. But the people in Hobart and in Tasmania, it's clearly energized them, change their attitude to the island in a, in a very, very powerful way. If you go there, it's, it's completely changed. I people speak about where they are. And it's very funny to me. I think when you speak to the high government levels that they, they know this, they can see it so well from every taxi driver, right.

Julian Meyrick ([48:58](#)):

The way through they can see this, and yet they still insist on, well, yes, but how do we quantify it? Even though everybody around them? He said, yeah, is it overnight stays Quantas, increasing Quantas flight, all these beverage per head. And he said, just go out to LA. And so it's very, even when it's shouting and staring them in the face, they find it very difficult to acknowledge it. I think that that's the problem. It's the displacement of a political or a policy or a social problem into a methodological register and it's chronic and it's ongoing and it doesn't work. And so at a certain point, you go, wait, why are we doing this? Why, why this, this this need, or even obsession, you have to say to, to pretend that you can answer a broad Bates question, like, why are we engaging in these activities by trying to find the number of beds that have been slept in on the Tuesday night? Okay. Now the question,

Speaker 4 ([50:00](#)):

Yep. I have a little bit of a challenge as well. More of a challenge than exactly a question, but I think you might like to speak to it. I find often the way artists and social scientists talk about culture is quite different. And they mean a different thing when they use that word, like in a social science perspective, culture is more what people are doing from day to day, like what is their normal activities? And I think in our culture, the default for a while has been work nine to five and then get home and watch TV. And I wonder if perhaps there's a way in which that cultural default speaks to the problem that we have with valuing art and perhaps turning off the television might be one way to go and change people's perspective.

Julian Meyrick ([50:52](#)):

I just wonder what you want to say. I kind of got the first half of that question a little bit more clearly than the, than the second half. So I'll, I'll just address that. I trained as a social scientist before I came a theater director and my perception is it depends which social science you're talking about. So if you're talking about anthropology and certain strains of sociology, and I've been very influenced by another Chicago school, actually Chicago school sociology, then they seem to me social science traditions with a great interest in creative practices and crafts. One of my problems with economics and with economists is they don't have that interest, even when they have it as individuals. It doesn't translate into a sufficiently robust, empirical understanding when the rubber hits the road and they roll out their theories. So my, my perception of social sciences as kind of a practicing artist is, is they're quite fun to play in, but be careful who you get on the climbing frame with.

Julian Meyrick ([52:01](#)):

Cause my, my time at the cultural economics conference in Spain was awful. I really hated every single moment of it because I thought it was arrogant. Short-Sighted methodologically confused, politically naive and and misreading everything. And the, and the Brexit vote was a sort of superb symbol of that. Cause I was sitting in a room of 200 economists who could not believe what had happened and, and their only answer was, well, people in England must be really stupid. And I had been in England just the year before talking to my cousin. So I call them the yeoman of England and they are many things, but stupid is not one of them.

Speaker 1 ([52:49](#)):

Okay. We've got five minutes left, which means probably time for one or two more questions if there's anybody else. Robert, thanks.

Speaker 4 ([52:59](#)):

This harks back, I think to something that Justin was saying a couple of minutes ago about the turn of the millennium, we were going to be saved by creative industries and the idea and you know, a lot more about this may I know Justin and that we were going to treat the arts as a serious aspect of the economy and then it would be properly valued and everything would end up being good. My perception is that has largely failed. And the thing I would like perhaps all of you to talk to is what sorts of, why don't we go back to what we're good at in the arts and culture, which is narrative telling stories, what sorts of stories of value, what sorts of ways of framing value might work when it is fairly obvious that the economy, the kind of mystic one has failed?

Julian Meyrick ([53:57](#)):

I'm not sure. I'm not sure if this is a direct answer, but it's something that has always drove me nuts, which is Muslim's hierarchy of needs, right? Whenever people talk about, they always go on about it and it's this idea that you start with a shelter and then I can't remember it, no set shelter, then it's food and then it's love and then a kind of affection. And then finally, once you've got that sorted, it's, it's kind of a self-realization time. And this, the fact that this was written by a Russian markets market analyst, you know, a bogus kind of anthropologist, but I always thought how amazing that model is that it's rolled out it finally Western society can be involved in self-realization the creative industries, cultural consumption. And in fact that is, it singles us out as the most unique civilization in history because every other civilization and some of the oldest such as those in Australia start the other way around culture, is there absolutely before anything else or at the same times and else, you know, going go into a cave, you know, there's pictures of tigers and things like that.

Julian Meyrick ([55:08](#)):

It's kind of only, only our Western culture. Do we allow self-realization culture to come at the end of well, let's get our economics sorted out. And I think somehow that story is become the story of what we are as a culture. And, and, you know, I mean, I, I get struck by as soon as you encounter indigenous indigenous people, which are beginning to in a very small way, it's the opposite. Culture's gotta be there right from the beginning before we watched telly before, you know, it's, it's there, it's there with, you know, with connections to country and things and understanding some of those things are it's part of the way we've got to go forward. Culture is the beginning, not the end.

Speaker 1 ([55:55](#)):

Absolutely. I would say in terms of stories at the art gallery, we, we, we do do that. That's how we curate exhibitions. That's how I talk about art. I don't talk about an artist is in terms of their economic contribution in dollars and cents. I talk about their artistic practice and how they work and their inspiration and what they're trying to say and how their work is art of the now, how it is an expression of now. So we, we do do that, but we don't quantify our work in that way, which is totally fascinating.

Julian Meyrick ([56:32](#)):

I don't know if I have any kind of answer to that one, Robert, cause it's quite a difficult question. One thing that I do having had this discussion with a few people about what culture is just got to be an endless and quite tedious dinner party conversation is, is, is to look at the things I encounter on a daily basis and try and fit them in it. So my 13 year old son is fascinated by graffiti and to tubing. And I went to the Robert Hannaford exhibition and you know, other other things, and you, if you take the things in front of you and you, you try and build a puzzle of what the cultural experience is actually like, then you end up, I think with a very different view of it than if you just go through policy reports. And it's messy and it is messy because we're messy, we're living at a messy time. And I, as you know, I can't think of any where better to start than the encounter itself, whether, whether that's with a film or with a painting or with a piece of music, because whatever happens there between us and individuals in an individual artwork, that is where the value ultimately, thank you.

Speaker 1 ([57:56](#)):

That's a terrific spot to end. Please join me in thanking our speakers. [inaudible].