

THE COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT
IN THE ARTS (WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE
TO COMMUNITY ARTS)
FOR DISCUSSION

A PAPER FOR DISCUSSION

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Prepared by: Kathie Muir

Artists as Workers

In discussing employment in the arts and relevance of job creation schemes one needs first to establish the case for the artist as worker.

It is a commonly held prejudice that because artists are engaged in an occupation which allows considerable scope for self expression, and thus self fulfillment, their claims to adequate conditions of employment and reasonable rates of remuneration are not as strong as other workers. It is implicit to this view that the non material rewards of arts occupations are the main purpose of pursuing them, and more than adequately compensate for irregular or inadequate remuneration and the lack of other employment benefits. Visual artists, crafts people, writers and composers, the initial creative artists, are highly susceptible to this type of argument, particularly when a large proportion of their work is done on a non commissioned basis.

The contrary view, that of the artist as a legitimate worker, has generally relied on the cultural value of the arts and the personal conviction of its proponents. The case for the artist as worker has been weakened by lack of information on Australian conditions and the difficulties of translating the findings of isolated surveys into other countries in the Australian experience.

These deficiencies are now being addressed. The Australia Council report, The Artist in Australia Today has produced a body of research which identifies the size of the arts labour market and documents information on aspects of arts employment.

The Artist in Australia Today identified some 25,000-30,000 professional artists practising in Australia at present with figures for 1980 indicating another 1,000 students enrolled at fine arts courses at Universities; 10,000 in art design and music courses at CAE's and almost 100,000 in similar courses at TAFES. It is reasonable to estimate that approximately one-quarter to one-third of these would hope to enter arts practice subsequent to their training. Many will be unable to do so because work opportunities will not be available.

There are as many artists practising in Australia as university lecturers and architects. The wages bill in 1975/76 in the arts was the equivalent of agriculture or mining (Myer Foundation Report May 1977).

The artist/artworker is a significant group within the labour market. When other related occupations are taken into account from administrators to technicians, from film makers to ticket sellers, arts related employment extends to a significant industry. The employment conditions and options for artists therefore have ramifications for a whole range of occupations. If artists employment is expanding then the employment of related occupations is likely to increase. The artist is undoubtedly a worker with a position which relates closely to employment in many other areas.

Artists Incomes and Employment

Other findings of the report include:

- The average arts income is less than half the average income of all occupations in the professional/technical category.
- Average arts incomes in most artists groups were approximately \$10,000 in 1981/82. This includes earning from related occupations such as teaching. (Average income across the work force in 1981/82 was: in professional and technical occupations \$20,099 and across all workers with post-school qualifications \$17,663).
- Gross returns from the actual practice of art were closer to an average of \$8,000. In 1981/82 26% of artists earned less than \$6,000 from all sources. (In the whole Australian workforce only 6% of income earners earned less than \$6,000)
- Of all the art forms in the survey community artists registered the lowest at just over \$5,000 from their principal artistic occupation (ie, not including related income from sources such as teaching).
- Artists have to rely on income sources other than their art to provide an average of 35% of their income.
- Only one third of artists receive a regular income from arts related work.
- 29% of all artists surveyed had been unemployed in the last 5 years with an average duration of 14 months (60% of community artists had been unemployed for an average period of 17 months).
- Only 40% of artists spend all their working time on arts related work
- A second 40% would like to spend more time but are unable to because the work is unavailable or offers poor returns.
- Artists derive their arts related income from a variety of sources, including salaries and wages paid on a regular or casual basis, receipts from sale of works of art and fees, commissions, royalties and so on.

ABOUT HALF THE PRINCIPAL ARTISTIC OCCUPATION INCOME OF ARTISTS, ON AVERAGE, COMES FROM WAGES AND SALARIES.

Artists therefore already fit into the existing system of employment as workers. This varies considerably between artforms.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDER-EMPLOYMENT ARE SERIOUS PROBLEMS IN ALL ARTFORMS. THIS IS A CRITICAL WASTE OF HIGHLY TRAINED SKILLS AND RESOURCES. THIS UNEMPLOYMENT HAS LARGELY BEEN CONCEALED BY THE INELIGIBILITY OF ARTISTS TO REGISTER WITH CES.

Most artists register in teaching, clerical or unskilled categories. Other artists, such as crafts people or writers may be seriously under employed but ineligible for benefits because they are not considered to be seeking full time work. Although recent changes have enabled artists to register with the CES under some categories, considerable efforts will have to be made to encourage them to do so. If they remain ineligible for receipt of benefits there is little incentive to register.

Artists Training

ON THE AVERAGE ARTISTS SPEND FIVE YEARS IN FORMAL TRAINING TO OBTAIN THE BASIC QUALIFICATIONS FOR THEIR ARTISTIC OCCUPATION

Almost 30% of those who complete their original course go on to further training.

Given this degree of commitment to developing their skills, and the critically high level of unemployment, it would be appropriate for artists to receive special assistance under the CEP or other job creation schemes.

Despite this commitment by artists it is a major concern, particularly in regard to performing arts training in Australia, that some institutions do not adequately equip students for work in their chosen fields. This is despite their claims to offer professional courses. Actors Equity, for example, holds the view that drama graduates from CAE's are not prepared sufficiently for entry into professional theatre.

There are numerous arguments to change the nature of arts training. There are two major committees established to investigate this area. The Tertiary Arts Education Review is being established by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission and by the Australia Council. The National Arts Industry Training Committee is already established and is investigating the current training needs in most art forms.

The under utilisation of the skills of trained artists suggests three options for change to training:

- a) to change the training options available for artists and to make it more relevant to employment options, to include skills in management and budgeting to assist artists ability to manage projects and to include training in community arts processes and practice to equip artists to work in these areas.
- b) to cut the number of positions available for artists at training institutions.

c) to establish more work opportunities for artists.

In order to change the situation of artists it is imperative that society recognise artists as highly trained workers. This will require a fundamental change in attitude to the relevance and value of cultural pursuits. The momentum of such a change of attitude is likely to increase employment opportunities for artists.

Increased arts funding, and increased involvement in the arts by other authorities, legislative change, an end to discriminatory bureaucratic practices against artists (eg CES eligibility, sales tax provisions, tax averaging legislation) will all assist in effecting this change. However without committed and active work by the arts community itself it will not occur.

CEP Training Projects In The Arts

The CEP is funding projects with a high training component. There are many theatre, mural, film, video, youth arts and festival projects which are structured around a team of six to ten young unskilled trainees and one or two experienced trainers. (Applicants often apply for part time or casual specialist consultants but these positions are not always funded by the CEP as they may be outside the guidelines.)

Given the concerns about adequacy of tertiary training and unemployment levels of skilled artists - it seems unrealistic to expect that participation in a nine to twelve month CEP arts project will enable a previously unskilled person to compete successfully for employment. These workers may have gained considerable satisfaction from this participation and may be very keen to pursue this new found 'career', however many of them will be disappointed and disillusioned.

Participants in a Wage Pause film making project for women have stated that whilst the project was personally satisfying and they gained in confidence and assertiveness through their participation, when the project came close to conclusion and they had to look for other employment, this confidence was shattered by the realities of the market place and the probable return to the dole queue.

The Victorian Ministry For Arts EIP Artists In Community project in 1983 claims a 70% continuance rate. However the Ministry was able to advertise state wide for artists to participate in that project and they were carefully matched with host organisations. In addition all of the ten artists had several years previous experience in the arts and most had an understanding, or experience, of working in communities.

If the nature of CEP schemes were changed to allow for targeting of participants in terms of skills and those likely to benefit the objections in this paper would be partially met.

The notion that unskilled people can become wage earning community artists through participation in a six to twelve month CEP arts project is alarming. The status of the highly skilled artist, with the equivalent years of training to a doctor or lawyer, is not recognised at present. Nor do their income or employment statistics reflect their skills. It would seem more appropriate to foster employment opportunities for skilled artists and retraining schemes which could assist them in applying their skills to other situations (for example artist in community positions).

As well as aiming to create jobs for the most disadvantaged of the unemployed, and to provide training and new skills, CEP aims to provide worthwhile work experience for the participants. If this means involvement in something interesting and satisfying which motivates the participants to work, then arts projects seem highly likely to meet this criteria. However if it is taken to mean that the skills learned from participation are readily translatable to other areas of employment the result is not longer assured.

The CEP system also frequently excludes people with professional training and experience from its benefits. Some CES officers dealing with CEP projects have refused to refer people on its records who have been unemployed for six to twelve months because they are too well qualified. These people obviously would have benefitted from a period of secure employment and added considerably to the success of the project.

Actors Equity and Artworkers Union

Actors Equity is particularly concerned at the huge unemployment rate amongst actors. It is already a heavily overloaded labour market. 60% percent of actors cite work not being available as the reason they do not work more. Many actors are not registered with the CES and those that are, are frequently excluded from CEP schemes due to occasional days work. This is a most unsatisfactory situation. An actor may have been unemployed for many months but may have had occasional days work as an extra or doing voice overs, which can exclude her/him from participating in a CEP project which could guarantee employment for six or nine months.

Equity argues that more of the CEP grants should be benefitting these people and emphasise their concern that job creation projects should lead on to longer term employment.

It also points out that the chances of successful projects continuing would be higher if professional actors were employed, particularly if projects are looking to funding bodies to ensure their continuation. Professional actors with community theatre experience would assist in developing proper consultation and interaction with the host community which would assist the project 's credibility as a viable on-going situation when other funding bodies scrutinise its achievements and chances of success after a mere 9 or 12 months in operation.

The CEP schemes which are taking untrained, unskilled, unemployed people and attempting to train them for continued work in a labour market, which is already overburdened, are impractical and only likely to raise people's expectations.

Equity is particularly concerned that CEP does nothing to further the aims of more secure jobs and more suitable training in the theatre industry.

Artworkers Union has also expressed concern in these areas. It sees the benefits of CEP being restricted to some arts occupations, eg community arts and theatre and believe it is of little benefit to visual artists, particularly those who work through exhibitions. It also believes that the situation of visual artists generally is more dire than is realised and are critical of the Individual Artists Enquiry findings. It believes the averages have been severely inflated by the situations of some performing artists and a few highly successful individuals in other areas and thus do not accurately represent the plight of their members.

Artists whose main work is studio based have little opportunity to gain income except through exhibitions and occasional commissions. Unless they can identify with the aims and practise of community arts, or are willing and able to find a teaching job, they have little opportunity to work for wages.

These are the most disadvantaged of Artworkers Union members but are unlikely to receive any benefit from the CEP scheme, and as they are unlikely to get employment in their area of work are also unlikely to be registered.

Artworkers Union would be interested in seeing a job creation scheme expanded and opportunities for commissioning and exhibiting work created.

The aims of specific arts groups and unions are obviously different to the aims of the Community Employment Program but highlight that the existing high levels of unemployment are not assisted in this significant industry.

Those advocates of wide ranging schemes employing one or two skilled artists and several trainees should also take note that 60% of community artists have been unemployed in the last five years and average seventeen months unemployment in that time. What are we training these people for - what can we offer them in job creation schemes?

ARE WE IN DANGER OF CREATING A SUBGROUP OF KEEN BUT INADEQUATELY EQUIPPED AMATEUR ARTS WORKERS WHO ARE GOING TO WANT TO CONTINUE WORK IN AREAS OF COMMUNITY ARTS PRACTICE WITH NON PROPER GROUNDING OR EXPERIENCE?

IF SO, WHAT EFFECTS WILL THIS HAVE ON THE WIDER COMMUNITY'S UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNITY ARTS AND COMMUNITY THEATRE? AND WHAT EFFECT WILL IT HAVE ON THE ESTABLISHED ARTS WORLD'S UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNITY ARTS WHICH IS STILL NOT PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD OR ACCEPTED?

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The longest single periods of unemployment occur amongst visual artists and composers. Actors, singers and community artists appear to be the most commonly affected by unemployment. About 44% of all artists regard the competition within their field as being extremely strong already. It seems immoral to raise people's hopes of permanent jobs in the arts industry after a mere nine months involvement through a job creation scheme. If regarded simply as an alternative source of arts funding, CEP is extremely convenient at this time, however the aims and intent of the CEP scheme also need to be examined in the light of the ways in which it is currently being used and administered and its possible applications in the future.

Implications of CEP on Community Arts Development

Looking at the aims of the Community Arts Board - which are arguably a good precis of most of the aims of the community arts field - one can find many that can be furthered by a carefully developed CEP project.

However, there is very valid case for concern that:

1. The CEP assessment committees who choose projects have a totally different set of objectives.
2. The people who put up CEP grant applications may have totally different aims again in the arts/community arts area or may be totally ignorant of the rationale behind the aims which have been developed.,
3. Many of the community arts projects suggested can only be successful in such a limited time if they have skilled artists with community practice employed to facilitate them. Unfortunately, these artists are not always eligible.

The Community Arts field has come a long way in ten years. In the last couple of years there has been significant consolidation of its practice and theoretical analysis. It is appropriate that there is continuing debate and refinement. It would be disastrous if the many years of hard work which has enhanced the status of Community Arts were now jeopardised by the proliferation of inadequately planned or poorly executed short term CEP arts projects. Many CEP projects receive a high level of funding yet may not have clear objectives or methods of implementation, may be inappropriate to the needs and goals of a particular community, may not be able to secure the services of the highly skilled artworkers required to achieve their aims and most have no clear plan of action for follow up activities after the expiry of the CEP grant.

The CEP assessment committees and project officers based within the CES are not able to consider these questions even if their aims were compatible with those of community arts. They have insufficient time to thoroughly research each application and there is totally inadequate provision for assessment and evaluation of projects.

Not only are there valid concerns about the criteria employed in assessing the value and feasibility of arts projects assisted under CEP, the techniques employed in implementation and the skills of those involved but there are concerns also about the appropriateness of perpetuating short term funding.

Realities of Short Term Funding

CEP funding for arts projects does not create significant on-going employment. There is no implicit commitment in the scheme even to provide extended employment for people engaged as trainees. Under the new guidelines renewed employment for persons engaged for more than thirteen weeks is expressly refused.

Within the CEP, projects are favoured which are labour intensive and able to be implemented quickly. This supports the contention that large projects are being approved without the necessary support, community consultation or developmental work occurring which would ensure both their relevance and success.

Although additional funding for the arts through CEP is welcome, it compounds the bad effects of existing short term funding patterns. Many art workers and organisations are arguing against the limited life funding currently provided by the Australia Council and State Arts Funding Authorities.

Considerable time is required to allow proper research into an area's needs, for the time necessary to win local support and engage with the community. Projects require time to evolve and, for the interest and advances to consolidate, follow-up work or second stage projects are required. Time should be allowed in all arts projects to assess future needs and appropriate continued action. Short term funding makes proper evaluation and documentation very difficult. CEP is compounding these problems and perpetuating the attitude that short term funding is the appropriate pattern of arts support.

If these issues are not considered, particularly if the project has a dramatic impact on an area, the risk is that the community, the local council, businesses and organisations will be left confused as to what was achieved and resentful either of the artists or of being used as the subject of social experimentation by the government through CEP. The real benefits to well planned community arts projects are unlikely to be matched under the CEP scheme.

The exception to this is where Community Arts Officers and organisations use CEP funding as an alternative means of implementing a project they have been intending for some time, or as funding one stage of a larger project.

A further concern in this regard is that CEP funding is encouraging employers to appoint CEP workers and to reapply for further funding thus creating consecutive temporary positions rather than permanent positions in the arts.

THE NATURE OF THE COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

"The fundamental purpose of the CEP is to assist the most disadvantaged groups of unemployed in obtaining permanent employment in the general labour market...

"Similarly, the CEP is not designed to provide on-going funding for community services or other activities, or to enable sponsors to develop services or facilities using the best labour available. While the provisions of worthwhile community services and facilities is an important element of the program, the primary objective is to provide employment opportunities for those most disadvantaged in the labour market."

(The Hon Ralph Willis, Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Parliamentary Statement June 1984).

The CEP is being used as an alternative grant/funding source by many arts, community, welfare and social service groups.

These groups are usually seeking people with some specific skills and frequently are able to find them as many skilled people are unemployed. These people have an advantage also in obtaining such jobs in that their higher educational qualifications and personal assertiveness make them better equipped to deal with the CES and better able to seek out these jobs. Also in the arts and community service areas the word of mouth network is strong and many organisations have suitable people in mind or actively seek them through affiliated groups.

There is currently an argument relating to the targeting of CEP participants. It concerns whether CEP vacancies should be listed on the CES boards or otherwise publicly available. There is concern that if this occurs it will make it more difficult for the severely disadvantaged unemployed to attain work through the CEP scheme and therefore the problem will be perpetuated. This argument is similar to that which exists in regard to continued employment funding for CEP workers who wish to consolidate their experience in a particular project after the initial funding has expired. The arguments put forward are perfectly valid for the needs of the groups involved and many of the CEP employed, however, they do not take into account all the specific aims and limitations of the CEP itself. The argument could be directed, instead, at developing a rationale for a change in the nature of the scheme, or the running of a multi-stranded scheme.

The dissension which exists currently will become far more acute if the CEP funding for 1984-85 is already mainly committed and the project assessment committees choose projects which are more strictly in line with the aims of the scheme ie to employ those people far less able to compete in the open job market through fewer skills in education, presentation and employment history.

Any ensuing outcry or complaints from the arts community or community groups in general can be rebutted by a reassertion of the original aims of the scheme.

Therefore although CEP currently can be used to fill these groups needs it is not designed for this purpose and a continuation of its relevance cannot be relied upon.

Arts, welfare and community groups are using CEP as alternative funding source for 1) extension of existing projects 2) short term and training projects they have been wanting to do for some time 3) experimental projects 4) pilot projects as test cases to create an argument for more, and on-going, funding.

They are not in the business of altruistically creating jobs for disadvantaged people, to give them a break from the trap of unemployment. Who can blame them? CEP is the goose that lays plenty of golden eggs - it provides for more money than any other funding option, covers far more of the costs - equipment, phone, electricity, materials etc more comprehensively, it is often quicker to get processed and certainly initially easier to get. There is FAR less checking of the feasibility of the project and ALMOST NO EVALUATION or accountability.

Of course arts groups and others jump at this opportunity.

However CEP is not designed to cater for these sorts of needs. Its purpose is not to fill the arts and social services budget deficiencies. It is convenient for Federal/State and local government that it is being used for this, as it enables all sectors to avoid their responsibility for properly supporting development in these areas, it dilutes any attempts at pressure in these areas from community groups - and more projects, albeit of a very temporary nature, are occurring in all these areas than at any other time. Hence such criticism can be easily countered, CEP is actually being used as an argument by some State Arts Authorities against increasing, directly, community arts funding and there have even been suggestions that it may be used against the Australia Council's bid to have its funding restored to 75/76 levels in real terms.

It therefore has serious ramifications in these areas.

If the government were to change, or policies change, it can be withdrawn or scaled down easily because it was always intended to run for a limited duration. Should its priorities in implementation change, arts groups have no argument because its intention was always somewhat different to the way most groups have used it.

Federal and State arts authorities are frequently being asked to contribute the 30% component as part thereof. In some instances they are pleased to do so - 30% is much easier than being faced with demand of 100%. The Australia Council and its Boards are particularly concerned at what happens at the end of limited life CEP projects. Both the Theatre Board and the Community Arts Board are likely to face a deluge of applications from groups funded temporarily through CEP. The numbers of these applications and the large amounts they are likely to be applying for will mean the Boards will be able to assist only a very small percentage of them.

The Australia Council has had no commensurate funding increase to enable it to pick up the tab. Around Australia there are dozens of new theatre projects being funded primarily by CEP for amounts as high as \$150,000 - \$200,000, what hope have they of finding funding to continue their activities at the end of 12 months? Even if the Theatre Board had double its current allocation its support for community based theatre would still be inadequate, and 12 months 'amateur' CEP existence would not be likely to convince the Board of long term viability.

State arts authorities differ greatly in their attitudes to CEP funding and their support for these projects gaining some funding through CEP sources.

They range from the Victorian Ministry for Arts response which involved initiating a \$1 million scheme of 24 artists in community and a large training program, funded by CEP money, to the Queensland Government's Cabinet decision that NO PROJECT IN RECEIPT OF CEP FUNDING WILL BE ELIGIBLE FOR OTHER FUNDING FROM GOVERNMENT SOURCES! No hope of 30% support there or even shortfall funding.

CEP then has added limitations because it is so inequitable from one State to another.

At the local government level also, response is enormously varied. There are stories of local government authorities which replaced permanent staff who had left with CEP personnel. One local government authority has employed a community arts officer for 6 months of 1983 and now 9 months of 1984 - the same woman on first wage pause and now CEP funding which totally fails to allow any consolidated arts development in the area and is a situation in which the State arts authority, the Community Arts Board, and the network can have no influence as their financial support is not involved.

Other areas of local government are extremely supportive of projects in their area. Either under the guidance of a CAO or other Community Services Officer they have developed innovative well thought out schemes in the arts with a high degree of support and considerable training component. Local government attitudes show similar disparity to community initiated projects. Some Councils have assisted local groups in many ways to reach their 30% component or near to it - financially, with administrative and clerical support, accommodation, telephone etc. Others have withdrawn existing support for some groups in their areas and told them to look to CEP for their funding needs.

CEP therefore is of variable use as a source of arts funding as its methods of application vary so much from one region to another, from one application round to another and its administrators and assessors are still defining its application. These factors are compounded by the varying reactions of other agencies to its use.

There is no doubt that for many community arts officers, artists, arts groups and co-operatives, the Community Employment Program is a useful stop gap measure to enable some projects to happen which could not otherwise have happened and to develop some local arts initiatives. It can offer the opportunity for groups to experiment with new models using the experience as evidence to argue for support for funding from other sources. In many instances it is raising the awareness in the community of the possible applications of community arts and it is certainly providing opportunities for short term employment of artists and administrators. It also offers interesting, stimulating and exciting involvement for young, unskilled, unemployed people who may never have had that opportunity before. Some of them may find ways to continue working in these areas. It offers hope to students coming out of arts training institutions that (after the obligatory 3 months registered unemployment) they will be able to obtain temporary employment in their field of arts practice.

For these reasons community groups and artists will and should continue to use the scheme for as long as it remains a possibility.

However the real issues in regard to employment in the arts and support for the arts in general remain to be addressed. CEP is only obscuring these issues and diluting the force to lobby for change. After CEP these issues will remain, but more acutely because more people will have participated, been partly trained, been employed for a short term - and their expectations will be higher and their disillusionment greater.

If the skills and enthusiasm of these people are to be used and not wasted, strategies for change in patterns of arts support and use of CEP need to be developed now.

In recent years some initiatives have been taken to expand the range of employment possibilities for artists. Examples include the Victorian Ministry for Arts liaison with the State Planning Department and the subsequent employment of artists in some Housing Commission estates and on some planning committees; some existing per cent for art regulations, though these could be made more directly beneficial, and major commissionings for Parliament House.

These initiatives have hardly scratched the surface of what is possible. More work opportunities for artists need to be increased across the board - through direct - long term job creation; through increases in funding to the Australia Council and other arts funding bodies; through more commissions; more artists being employed in the planning process; more artists being employed to work in schools; other government departments developing ways or being receptive to suggestions, for involving artists in their work - more jobs from government departments going to artists co-operatives, eg, using screen printing co-operatives for publicity material and paying them properly; increasing Australian content on radio and television; more encouragement and funding of community initiatives such as health centres, tenants' councils, legal aid centres to use artists to further their aims; for the introduction of per cent for art funding in public buildings; and above all by government committing itself to the objective of national cultural development and regarding this as equally important as its nation's health, education and physical well being.

SUMMARY

The following issues, and others, remain to be addressed by the field:

- The suitability of CEP to arts projects.
- The effects it has on employment possibilities for artists.
- The implications of CEP on the development of community arts.
- The training of unskilled workers in the arts through CEP.
- The concern over future funding of CEP projects.
- The possibilities of restructuring the CEP or creating another level of job creation support appropriate to arts projects.
- The need for increasing other sources of support for the arts.
- The attempt to increase work possibilities for artists.
- The recognition of artists as skilled professional workers.
- The recognition of artists as a disadvantaged group within the labour market.

I am aware that Community Arts Networks in most States are giving consideration to these and intend putting submissions to the Arts Employment Inquiry Committee of the Australia Council and other appropriate bodies.

They are matters of considerable importance and some urgency and would be best served by consideration by a broad cross section of practising artists and arts organisations.

Kathy Muir
CEP Co-ordinator
Australia Council

August 1984.