

Key themes from artists' comments

Following the publication of the draft report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts study, the Productivity Commission invited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to comment on the study via social media.

The Commission acknowledges the generosity of artists who took the time to provide their views. A high-level summary of the diverse perspectives we heard is provided below.

Not just dots

Many artists, particularly those in south-east Australia, stressed the need to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts incorporate a broad range of styles, techniques and art media, with dot painting just one style. Some noted the pressure in the market to paint in a particular way, and highlighted the need to resist a stereotyped view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art styles

Others raised examples of artists borrowing styles from other regions, without permission or full appreciation of what the styles represent. Some artists choose not to use traditional motifs to avoid the need to seek cultural permissions.

Difficulty of operating an arts business

Many artists highlighted challenges with converting their arts practice into a commercial business. Difficulties included: the high cost of materials, a lack of affordable and culturally safe places to work (especially in cities or regions without art centres), the need to balance an emerging arts practice with other obligations (including caring responsibilities and full-time work), access to markets, and specific business skills (such as digital and e-commerce, tax and bookkeeping, and guidance on quoting for works).

Some artists called for greater access to ongoing arts employment opportunities, as well as a basic wage for Aboriginal artists.

Concerns over 'fake art'

Artists expressed concern with inauthentic or fake products, made without the involvement of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. These products are considered to misappropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and mean that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have to compete against low-cost inauthentic products.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control over the industry

Some artists were also concerned over the amount of control non-Indigenous people hold over the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and crafts market and expressed aspirations of greater control for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the industry. Some argued that greater cultural awareness is needed in major cultural institutions.

Community and consumer education

Artists highlighted the need to educate consumers and improve their understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and cultures. This includes the role of public art installations and school education programs.

Grants and funding

Many artists called for more funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual artists, and access to development options, including mentoring opportunities for early career artists.

Some artists expressed concerns with how grants for specific arts projects are allocated, noting that the same artists seem to be favoured by selection panels for some public artworks.