

FOI

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Attachments: Lindy Lee - Letter of Resignation Creative Australia Board.pdf

s22(1)(a)(ii)

From: Lindy Lee s47F
Sent: Thursday, 20 February 2025 9:17 AM
To: Burke, Tony (MP) <Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au>
Subject: Creative Australia Board resignation

Dear Minister Burke

Following the announcement that artist Khaled Sabsabi and curator Michael Dagostino will no longer represent Australia at the 2006 Venice Biennale, I must submit my resignation from the Creative Australia Board. Herewith is my letter of resignation.

While I was part of the decision, I cannot ignore the deep sense of loss I feel over silencing an artist of Khaled's stature. This decision contradicts my core belief in the importance of supporting artists.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity you gave me to serve on the Board. Although my time has been brief, I believe I have made a meaningful contribution. It has truly been an honour to serve, and it saddens me to resign.

I wish you all the best in the upcoming election. You have been the most sympathetic and progressive Minister for the Arts in my experience, and I am grateful for your genuine support of the arts.

Yours faithfully
Lindy Lee

OFFICIAL:Sensitive

Lindy Lee
Lindy Lee Artistic Productions Pty Ltd

s47F

Thursday 20 February 2025

Hon Tony Burke MP
PO Box 156
Punchbowl, NSW, 2196

Dear Minister Burke

Following the announcement that artist Khaled Sabsabi and curator Michael Dagostino will no longer represent Australia at the 2006 Venice Biennale, I must submit my resignation from the Creative Australia Board.

While I was part of the decision, I cannot ignore the deep sense of loss I feel over silencing an artist of Khaled's stature. This decision contradicts my core belief in the importance of supporting artists.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity you gave me to serve on the Board. Although my time has been brief, I believe I have made a meaningful contribution. It has truly been an honour to serve, and it saddens me to resign.

I wish you all the best in the upcoming election. You have been the most sympathetic and progressive Minister for the Arts in my experience, and I am grateful for your genuine support of the arts.

Yours faithfully,

s47F

Lindy Lee

FOI

From: TODD, Alison
Sent: Friday, 21 February 2025 11:48 AM
To: §22(1)(a)(ii)
Subject: FW: Background points [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Attachments: Venice Biennale 2026 background points.DOCX

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TPs are on the final page

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Venice Biennale 2026 Artistic team

Key issues

- The Board of Creative Australia recently announced its decision not to proceed with the artistic team for the Venice Biennale 2026.

Background

Venice Biennale 2026 Artistic team announcement

- On 7 February 2025 Creative Australia announced the 42nd artistic team to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale 2026, Khalid Sabsabi (artist) and Michael Dagostino (curator).
- Following the announcement articles appeared in the media relating to Mr Sabsabi's previous work including video installation titled *You* (2007), depicting Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, and video *Thank You Very Much* (2006), depicting planes hitting the Twin Towers in New York.
- On 13 February 2025 Liberal Senator Claire Chandler, Shadow Minister for Science and Arts and Shadow Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs raised in question time to the minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Wong, why the government is "allowing a person who highlights a terrorist leader in his artwork to represent Australia on the international stage at the Venice Biennale?"
- On 13 February 2025 the Board of Creative Australia released a statement announcing its decision not to proceed with the artistic team chosen for the Venice Biennale 2026 stating that:
 - "Creative Australia is an advocate for freedom of artistic expression and is not an adjudicator on the interpretation of art. However, the Board believes a prolonged and divisive debate about the 2026 selection outcome poses an unacceptable risk to public support for Australia's artistic community and could undermine our goal of bringing Australians together through art and creativity"
- On 14 February 2025 the shortlisted artists and curators for the 2026 Venice Biennale issued a statement to the Board of Creative Australia in support of the winning artistic team and asking for them to be reinstated.
- Media reported on 17 February a Creative Australia spokeswoman said "it had resolved to commission an immediate, independent, external review of the 2026 Venice artistic selection process to recommend any changes considered necessary".
- Media has reported resignations of Creative Australia staff including Mikala Tai, Head of Visual Arts and Tahmina Makinyar, Project Manager, Venice Biennale.
- On 16 February, Lindy Lee posted a statement on Instagram announcing her decision to step down from the board of Creative Australia. The department has not received any formal notification of the resignation and the department is advised the Minister has also not received any notification.

Selection process

- Creative Australia is the commissioner of the Australia Pavilion and the producer of the Australia at the Venice Biennale project, which incorporates the exhibition within the Pavilion, a suite of professional development programs for Australian creative and cultural workers, and a co-investment program that garners support and advocacy for the project.

- The 2026 artistic team was selected by Creative Australia, based on an open Expression of Interest process and the advice of a panel of five independent industry advisors including national and international visual arts experts.
- The industry advisors were Mariko Smith (Yuin and Japanese curator), Elaine Chia (arts professional), Wassan Al-Khudhairi (curator of Hawai'i Triennale), Dunja Rmandić (Director Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery) and Anthony Gardner (independent curator and academic).
- A total of six artistic teams were shortlisted in the two-stage open call process:
 - Dhopiya Yunupingu (1950 – 2024, artist) with Tony Albert and Sally Brand
 - Hayley Millar Baker (artist) with Erin Vink
 - James Nguyen (artist) with Anna Davis
 - Jenna Mayilema Lee (artist) with Tina Baum
 - Mel O'Callaghan (artist) with Tamsin Hong
 - Khaled Sabsabi (artist) with Michael Dagostino
- The department was notified by Creative Australia of the artistic team on 31 January 2025 and Creative Australia notified the Minister on 31 January 2025.

Creative Australia

- Creative Australia is a Corporate Commonwealth Entity established by the *Creative Australia Act 2023* (the Act). The Australia Council Board of Creative Australia is the accountable authority.
- Creative Australia is accountable to the Australian Parliament and to the Government through the Minister for the Arts.
- The Act prevents the Minister of the day from directing Creative Australia in relation to particular grants to artists and arts organisations.

Talking Points:

- Creative Australia's decisions are made at arm's length from Government, guided by peer and industry assessment.
- The *Creative Australia Act 2023* prevents the Minister of the day from directing Creative Australia in relation to particular grants to artists and arts organisations.
- Consistent with the requirements of the *Creative Australia Act 2023*, the Minister was not involved with the selection of the artist.
- The Board of Creative Australia, as the accountable authority, decided not to proceed with the artistic team chosen for the Venice Biennale 2026.
- This is a matter for Creative Australia.

FOI

From: s22(1)(a)(ii)
Sent: Thursday, 27 February 2025 12:17 PM
To: Arts - DLO Burke; s22(1)(a)(ii)
Subject: RE: For visibility - open letter from previous curators of Venice Biennale [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Thanks can you pls draft a min reply for this one.

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From: Arts - DLO Burke <dlo.burke@MO.arts.gov.au>
Sent: Thursday, 27 February 2025 11:55 AM
To: s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@mo.arts.gov.au>; s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@arts.gov.au>
Cc: Arts - DLO Burke <dlo.burke@MO.arts.gov.au>
Subject: For visibility - open letter from previous curators of Venice Biennale [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Good morning s22(1)(a)(ii)

For your visibility, Please see below open letter received from curators of previous Venice Biennales.

I have included @s22(1)(a)(ii) for departmental visibility as well.

Thank you

s22(1)(a)(ii)
 Departmental Liaison Officer • Office of the Hon Tony Burke MP
 Minister for Home Affairs
 Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
 Minister for Cyber Security
 Minister for the Arts
dlo.burke@mo.arts.gov.au
 M s22(1)(a)(ii)
 Suite MG 43, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

From: APH Website contact form <contactform@aph.gov.au> On Behalf Of s47F @gmail.com
Sent: Tuesday, 25 February 2025 11:40 AM

To: Burke, Tony (MP) <Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au>

Subject: APH Website contact form - new enquiry - s47F (s47F @gmail.com)

Parliamentarian Hon Tony Burke MP
 Name s47F
 Telephone (work) s47F
 Telephone (mobile) s47F
 Email s47F @gmail.com
 Address s47F

Question

OPEN LETTER TO THE CREATIVE AUSTRALIA BOARD AND CEO
 FROM THE CURATORS OF AUSTRALIA'S PARTICIPATION IN PREVIOUS VENICE BIENNALES

Creative Australia is for the artist. Creative Australia is for us all.
 —creative.gov.au/about-us

Creative Australia was established to 'uphold and promote freedom of expression in the arts' and 'to support Australian arts practice that reflects the diversity of Australia'. Today these defining words have a hollow ring, at odds with our prior understanding of the role of Australia's peak arts body.

We join our artist colleagues and supporters from the arts sector to express our dismay and disillusionment at Creative Australia's abrupt, unexplained and unprecedented reversal of its decision to award artist Khaled Sabsabi and curator Michael Dagostino the opportunity and honour to present their project at the 2026 Venice Biennale in the Australia Pavilion.

As previous curators of the Australia Pavilion we stand in wholehearted support of our colleagues Khaled and Michael. The decision by the Creative Australia Board and CEO undermines the reputation of both artist and curator, and by extension casts a shadow over the selection process and those who have participated in it.

We are stunned that in these fraught times, the Creative Australia Board and CEO took no time to defend their decision against uninformed comments on Sabsabi's early works by those who had not even seen them. Rather than fostering civil discussion of complex subjects, their reactive move has inflamed a polarised debate.

We call for the reinstatement of Khaled and Michael's invitation so that they may fulfil their proposal in Venice. We further request a transparent account of the processes of selection, invitation and withdrawal.

All of us are deeply concerned about the impact of this decision on the Australian arts community and its government partner Creative Australia. It puts the future of the Australian presentation at the Venice Biennale into question, erodes the respect and international recognition of Australian art accrued by mutual efforts over decades, and threatens the principle of artistic independence.

Curators
 s47F

s47F



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FOI

From: s22(1)(a)(ii)
Sent: Friday, 7 March 2025 10:11 AM
To: TODD, Alison
Subject: FW: Urgent Reinstatement of Khaled Sabsabi and Michael Dagostino – Venice Biennale 2026 [SEC=OFFICIAL]

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From: s47F <s47F@wsaa.com.au>
Sent: Friday, 28 February 2025 4:31 PM
To: s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@mo.arts.gov.au>
Subject: Re: Urgent Reinstatement of Khaled Sabsabi and Michael Dagostino – Venice Biennale 2026 [SEC=OFFICIAL]

Hi s22(1)(a)(ii)

Thanks for replying on behalf of the Minister. WSAA Working Group and I would be pleased to meet with you at 11am on Friday the 7 March.

The working group comprises:

s47F, Western Sydney Creative, Western Sydney University
 s47F Campbelltown Arts Centre
 s47F Penrith Performing & Visual Arts
 s47F Arts & Cultural Exchange
 s47F The Leo Kelly Blacktown Arts Centre

Would you like me to send a meeting invitation, or is it protocol for you to? If so, I will send though contact details early next week.

Kind regards,

s47F
 s47F @wsaa.com.au

From: s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@mo.arts.gov.au>
Sent: 28 February 2025 15:06
To: s47F <s47F@wsaa.com.au>
Subject: FW: Urgent Reinstatement of Khaled Sabsabi and Michael Dagostino – Venice Biennale 2026 [SEC=OFFICIAL]

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Hi s47F

Thank you for your request to meet with Arts Minister Tony Burke. The Minister is unable to meet. However I can meet with you on his behalf.

Are you available for an online meeting at 11am Friday 7 March?

Thanks

s2
2f

s22(1)(a)(ii)

Senior Adviser

s22(1)(a)(ii) | s22(1)(a)(ii) mo.arts.gov.au

Office of Tony Burke MP

Member for Watson | Minister for Home Affairs | Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
Minister for Cyber Security | Minister for the Arts | Leader of the House of Representatives

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters where I live and work.

I pay my respects to their culture, and their Elders past and present.

From: s47F <s47F@wsaa.com.au>

Sent: Wednesday, 19 February 2025 8:15 AM

To: Burke, Tony (MP) <Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au>

Subject: Fw: Urgent Reinstatement of Khaled Sabsabi and Michael Dagostino – Venice Biennale 2026

Dear Minister

Please find attached a letter from the members of the Western Sydney Arts Alliance regarding the withdrawal of Khaled Sabsabi and Michael Dagostino as the artistic team for the 2026 Venice Biennale.

The members look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

s47F

s47F

Western Sydney Arts Alliance (WSAA)

E: s47F@wsaa.com.au

WSAA acknowledges the people of the Dharug, Gundungurra and Dharawal Nations who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we tell stories and whose cultures and customs have nurtured, and continue to nurture, this land.

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FOI

From: TODD, Alison
Sent: Friday, 7 March 2025 3:38 PM
To: s22(1)(a)(ii)
Subject: Notes from meeting with WSAA Working Group 11am on Friday the 7 March [SEC=OFFICIAL]

OFFICIAL

Hi s22(1)(a)(ii)

Notes from meeting with representatives from the WSAA Working Group 11am on Friday the 7 March

Attendees

- s47F, WSAA - Advocacy for the Arts in Western Sydney
- s47F, Western Sydney Creative, Western Sydney University
- s47F, Arts & Cultural Exchange (Parramatta)
- s47F, The Leo Kelly Blacktown Arts Centre (Arts Centre and Culture Precinct and First Nations Arts hub in Penrith)
- s22(1)(a)(ii), Arts Adviser
- Ali Todd, Office for the Arts

WSAA – represents 42 orgs in western Sydney

- Wanted to reinforce concerns outlined in their letter to the Minister, and restate concerns, about Creative Australia's decision to rescind offer to Venice Biennale artists and the impact on Western Sydney arts and the community.
- Raised concern with the lack of communication from CA, lack of a fair & equitable process for the artists and the lack of confidence from the sector now with Creative Australia.
- Arts and culture are vital to western Sydney. The impact of the artists being chosen was very significant and had a very positive impact on the community. Toll of decision has impacted the western Sydney arts, safety in western Sydney is now also impacted including on creative learning, social cohesion and education.

s22(1)(a)(ii)

s22(1)(a)(ii) – thanked attendees for their honesty and feedback. Acknowledged that it was a very difficult time and that the Minister is aware of the issues raised.

Ali agreed to convey their request for a meeting with CA.

Alison Todd (*she/her*)

Assistant Secretary • Arts Development & Investment • Office for the Arts

Alison.Todd@arts.gov.au

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GPO Box 594 Canberra, ACT 2601

Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

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arts.gov.au



*I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land on which we meet, work and live.
I recognise and respect their continuing connection to the land, waters and communities.
I pay my respects to Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.*

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FOI

From: s22(1)(a)(ii) <s22(1)(a)(ii)@creative.gov.au>
Sent: Friday, 14 March 2025 3:25 PM
To: s22(1)(a)(ii) - MO staff; s22(1)(a)(ii) - MO staff
Cc: TODD, Alison; Adrian Collette
Subject: Statement announcing the Venice Biennale 2026 review terms of reference

Hi s22(1)(a)(ii) and s22(1)(a)(ii)

For your information, please find [here](#) the statement we have released on our website and to media contacts.

The following received advance notice:

- Our staff
- The artistic team
- The industry advisers
- The shortlistees
- The Venice Ambassadors

Best,
s22(1)(a)(ii)

s22(1)(a)(ii)
Head of Public Affairs
Office of the CEO
T: +61 02 s22(1)(a)(ii) **M:** +61 s22(1)(a)(ii)
nicola.grayson@creative.gov.au

Creative Australia

Level 5, 60 Union Street, Pyrmont, NSW 2009
[contact us](#) | [follow us](#)
creativepartnerships.gov.au
creative.gov.au

We acknowledge the many Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and honour their Elders past and present. We respect their deep enduring connection to their lands, waterways, and surrounding clan groups since time immemorial. We cherish the richness of First Nations Peoples' artistic and cultural expressions