

Affirmative Action for women in the visual arts

compiled by the Affirmative Action committee of the Union

Affirmative Action addresses the issue 'of women and employment in the visual arts. The following policy is to be directed to people in various positions, all visual artworkers, board members, and administrators of art institutions, colleges, galleries, funding bodies and legislators.

Historically, women's artwork has been undervalued. Art museums have acquired far less work by women for permanent public collection than work by men. Often work by women fits within conventional definitions of art. However, there are many aspects of women's work that do not. The social conditions under which women live and work can lead to the production of works that differ from mainstream art. Most of this work tends to be less valued, not as highly priced, not preserved, collected and exhibited in the same way that conventional art objects are.

Discrimination on many other grounds such as age, marital status, class, ethnic origin operate within the art industry. This policy is concerned specifically with gender discrimination which may also occur in any of the previously mentioned categories.

While the A.A.W.V.A. acknowledges the Australia Council's 'Strategy for Actions we insist that women be offered 50 per cent of employment, exhibition and funding, and this be extended to include every situation that counts as employment for women artists in the public and private sectors.

The task of childrearing is a part of the life of many women artworkers. Much time and energy that would otherwise be directed towards career advancement goes into this unrecognised form of work. Funding bodies and other employers must recognise the value of such forms of work by women. It is envisaged that all public exhibition and performance spaces will provide childcare facilities to allow those directly responsible for childcare, access to all forms of cultural production.

The art world has traditionally excluded women from many areas of employment. Within the arts there are three principle sources of income/employment for artists.

These areas are interrelated; income or employment in one area tends to be a prerequisite for employment or income in the other.

Women are the majority of under-graduate students and occupy the lower paid teaching positions in art institutions. Teaching positions subsidise and sponsor art production by giving teachers access to equipment and resources otherwise unavailable to individuals. In addition, teaching positions are generally designed to allow time for the individual artist's own work as an integral part of the job.

1: A minimum of 50 per cent of all teaching, administrative, support and technical staff positions in art institutions be filled by women. Women occupying these positions should be at least equal in numbers to men at all levels of seniority, and also among all categories of employment.

2. All selection committees for employment be comprised of a minimum of 50 per cent women.

3. Representatives on all college councils, boards, promotion, appeals, disciplinary and selection committees be comprised of at least 50 per cent women.

4. All assessment panels be comprised of a minimum of 50 per cent women.

5. All grants and scholarships given by an institution be allocated to a minimum of 50 per cent women.

6. A minimum of 50 per cent women students must be admitted to all levels of study in art educational institutions, including Postgraduate studies and Masters Degrees. Moreover all Departments within these institutions must ensure that women students are being encouraged to enter their Departments in equal numbers to men.

7 Institutions provide childcare facilities for the children of staff and students.

8. Resource centres maintained by educational institutions must give priority to collecting work by and about women and their artwork.

9. All courses must incorporate a minimum of 50 per cent theoretical, critical and practical work by women.

All publicity material produced by educational institutions be of a nonsexist nature. Where reference is made to students and teachers of educational institutions, equal representation must be given to women and their work. Images referring to the life of the institution should ensure that women's contributions should be recognised.

11. Staff use materials in classroom and studio in a non-sexist manner.

Money that artists receive in the form of grants is taxable and is therefore income. These funds are at present distributed mainly to men and include not only direct grants but living allowances, travel grants, residencies etc.

This section includes residencies, scholarships, exhibitions, living allowances, fellowships, traineeships, travel allowances, research and publications grants

1. Arts organisations allocate a minimum of 50 per cent of their funding to women and their work. Accordingly, public funding agencies only award grants to those organisations that adhere to such a policy. In exceptional circumstances, when funding must be given to a predominantly male organisation, equivalent funding of women and work must occur. For the purposes of this recommendation, a member of a collective counts as an applicant.

2. Non-sexist language appear in all advertisements for grants. Advertisements appear in media with a high percentage of women readers.
3. Selection panels for grants be comprised of a minimum of 50 per cent women.
4. Childrearing and household management be recognised as relevant work experience in grant applications.
5. Funding bodies devise a scale of financial assistance for child care for successful applicants where applicable.
6. Where artists are funded to attend specific art events, a minimum of 50 per cent of these artists be women.
7. All State and Federal Arts funding agencies develop and disseminate a documentation of women's art work which is appropriate to the needs of teachers, curators, artists and the public. Each state should hold such a resource and should develop its collection in line with the particular needs of its own community
8. All funding bodies and organisations in receipt of public funds demonstrate measures taken in encouraging women to apply for the full range of grants available, (eg in the form of Affirmative Action Management Plans). Women should also be encouraged to seek funding on a level equal to men for comparable projects.

In major Australian exhibitions from 1896-1982 an average of only 11 per cent of exhibitors were women. It should be noted that income from exhibition which usually means the payment of fees and sale of work rarely covers costs. Inclusion in exhibition, regardless of fees or sales, can lead indirectly to income through offers of employment.

1. A minimum of 50 per cent of artists selected for publicly funded local and overseas exhibitions of Australian contemporary art be women. A minimum of 50 per cent of work selected be that produced by women.
2. A minimum of 50 per cent representation of women's work appear throughout each exhibition. It is possible to envisage a transitional stage in which it will be necessary to curate exhibitions of work from permanent public collections deficient in the work of women. In this case, art museums must publicly state their intentions to redress such imbalances. When less than a minimum of 50 per cent women represented and work presented is reached the imbalance must be immediately rectified in other exhibitions. In any given period, it should be assumed that women's work is of equal value, irrespective of their choice of media and areas of practice.
3. Publicly funded exhibitions travelling overseas include a minimum of 50 per cent of women's work.
4. Exhibition spaces receiving public funds must ensure equitable conditions of exhibition for women exhibitors. Such considerations include duration of exhibition, prominence of work, materials and facilities and equipment for mounting exhibitions.

5. When Australian artists and work are nominated to overseas selectors for exhibition overseas, a minimum of 50 per cent of these nominations be women and work by women.

6. Positions on public selection boards, such as funding bodies, advisory bodies, art museum boards be allocated to a minimum of 50 per cent women. Women occupying these positions should be in equal numbers to men at all levels of seniority and also among all categories of employment.

7 All galleries employ a minimum of 50 per cent women as curators. Women occupying these positions should be in equal numbers to men at all levels of seniority and also among all categories of employment.

8. All publicity material for exhibitions, eg publications, postcards, posters etc, should reproduce a minimum of 50 per cent work by women in its illustrations, and refer to a minimum of 50 per cent work by women in its texts.

9. The language used in all publicity material be non-sexist.

10. Invitation to participate in exhibitions be advertised in news media with a high percentage of women readers.

11. Agencies and institutions demonstrate measures taken in seeking out women artists.

12. Publicly funded museums and art galleries allocate a minimum of 50 per cent of their funding to the acquisition of contemporary work by women.

13. Museums and art galleries acknowledge research which identifies the range of products and processes of the historical work of women and initiate a concerted effort to research, acquire and exhibit a representative historical collection.

14. Contemporary one person shows and retrospectives be allocated to a minimum of 50 per cent women.

Other booklets available from the Artworkers Union include: • Copyright for Visual Artists • Health & Safety for Visual Artists • Artworkers Union Members Handbook

Source: Published policy booklet: Affirmative Action for Women in the Visual Arts (Artworkers Union, 1985)