

18 February 2025

Statement in support of artist Khaled Sabsabi and Michael Dagastino

AAANZ is deeply concerned at the decision to withdraw support for artist Khaled Sabsabi and curator Michael Dagastino who had been selected to represent Australia at the 2026 Venice Biennale. [link <https://creative.gov.au/news/media-releases/venice-biennale-2026/>]

AAANZ is deeply concerned about the message this sends to artists and the broader cultural sector about artistic independence and arms-length decisions about funding. This decision amounts to censorship and is not aligned with democratic values of creative freedom and diversity of perspectives.

As noted in the original media release from Creative Australia on 4 Feb 2025 endorsing the team, Sabsabi is an artist whose work 'explores human collectiveness; and questions identity politics and ideology, inviting audiences to do the same', curator Michael Dagostino is recognised as someone who has 'embedded an intentional artist-driven approach to all of his curatorial and director roles, facilitating access, equity and authorship'. These qualities were recognised by the independent selection panel who selected the artists and endorsed by Creative Australia CEO Adrian Colette and Creative Australia Chair Robert Morgan.

Art plays an important role in a mature democracy encouraging reflection upon our shared humanity and creating opportunities for critical discussion about issues that affect societies past and present.

In their statement of 13 Feb 2025 Creative Australia cited concerns that '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.' This followed only one day of statements in the media and at Parliament Question Time.

AAANZ calls on the board of Creative Australia to reconsider their decision and the Arts Minister Tony Burke to reaffirm his commitment to arms-length decisions about arts funding that respect the judgement of independent teams of experts and upholds creative freedom of expression.



Dr Katrina Grant
President, Art Association of Australia and New Zealand