

Executive Summary

Background

Founded in 1895, La Biennale di Venezia is considered one of the most important and prestigious events on the international contemporary visual arts calendar. Over 90 countries have taken part in recent years, and the event attracts thousands of key influencers from the international visual arts community.

New Zealand has exhibited at la Biennale di Venezia since 2001, leading to greater national and international profile and opportunities for all participating artists. An official presence brings New Zealand contemporary art to the attention of global media, art institutions, experts and gallerists and offers professional development opportunities for the curators, exhibition attendants and team members, including the technical, design and artistic contributors to the project.

Creative New Zealand funds and manages New Zealand's presence at la Biennale di Venezia for its almost seven-month duration. Additional supporters include public galleries and museums, sponsors, artists' gallerists, and the broader arts community. New Zealand at Venice patrons contribute around a third of New Zealand's pavilion budget. A new venue is chosen for each exhibition as New Zealand does not maintain a permanent national pavilion.

The Venice Biennale is the only major and credible international visual arts event in which New Zealand can guarantee a sustained presence and can select and present its own artists. Its inclusion is the result of a Government-to-Government invitation.

This is a timely Review. The contemporary visual arts market, both in New Zealand and internationally, has evolved significantly since 2001. Developments include the greater internationalisation of practice from Aotearoa, with a larger number of artists undertaking studies offshore; the attendance at major international art fairs by gallerists and dealers; and the significant strengthening of visual arts leaders amongst Māori, Pacific and migrant diaspora communities.

Past reviews in context

Creative New Zealand commissioned reviews of the country's participation in the Venice Biennale in 2006 and 2013. The reviews found overwhelming support for New Zealand's continued presence at the biennial event, with the opportunity to position this presence as a cornerstone in the long-term development of the country's contemporary arts scene. Project management – including the artist selection process, promotion and presentation of the pavilion was praised – with only modest suggestions for change offered. The 2013 review recognised the significant demands delivery placed on the agency's staff.

While there remains overwhelming support for New Zealand's continued presence at the Venice Biennale, there is now widespread recognition that key aspects of the selection and delivery of the country's representation are no longer sustainable.

Principal observations included:

- The resources available for this significant undertaking are inadequate.

(Noted by those closely associated with the project management and delivery.)

- A clearer statement of expectations and outcomes is required. There is an opportunity for the Aotearoa New Zealand pavilion to represent what is distinctive in the country's cultural 'voice' and invite dialogue with the international community.

(Noted by those closely associated with artist selection and assessing the overall contribution that participation makes to the country's cultural profile.)

The 2022 Review

Selection to exhibit at Venice provides an opportunity for the artist to rethink their practice in an international context. There is ample evidence that the recognition the Biennale provides has, for most exhibiting artists, led to further international engagements.

Representation at Venice is an important dimension of Creative New Zealand's International Strategy. There is opportunity to align this representation to a wider international cultural profile for Aotearoa through enhanced recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a Government-to-Government initiative and improved linkages to other cultural exports and relationships with other parts of Government, including the Ministry for Trade and Enterprise.

Consultations indicated that while Māori artists have represented Aotearoa New Zealand at Venice, Western knowledge, artforms and institutions have historically been promoted and valued more than Māori artforms, mātauranga and approaches in the way New Zealand plans, develops and presents artists and their work at Venice.

The inclusion of tikanga and mātauranga Māori in the planning, development and presentation of Aotearoa artist's work at Venice provides a number of opportunities for New Zealand to be more innovative in the way it engages with other cultures and nations internationally.

New Zealand's participation in Venice is currently designed to serve the individual artist. There is opportunity to move the conversation from personal and singular to how representation provides public and collective value for New Zealanders. Personal and public value should be intimately connected.

There is limited recognition of the benefits – both to artists and the county's cultural profile – that result from representation in the event. Noting the significant resource allocation required of Creative New Zealand, a number of consultations suggested greater international benefit could be achieved through wider representation at visual arts events in the Asia Pacific region.

The 2006 Review identified four options for continued representation at Venice. An internal evaluation of the 2013 representation identified a similar four options for future programme delivery. A number of the options proposed 16 years ago remain relevant today, but the context for their consideration has evolved. The current model is now widely regarded as unsustainable, and change is required.

There is general acceptance of Creative New Zealand's role in managing artist and curator selection. However, the capacity of an arts development agency to project manage the delivery of a complex international exhibition, requiring differing methodologies and practices every two years, attracted a diversity of opinion.

Participation at Venice is expensive. Approximately \$1.2 million is required over a two-year cycle to deliver the pavilion. Of this, Creative New Zealand contributes \$800,000, with the remainder provided by patrons, associates of the artist, and other visual arts organisations. In addition to these 'above-the-line' costs, staff costs are absorbed within the International Services and Initiatives team and other teams within Creative New Zealand such as Communications, HR, IT, Finance and the governance framework. International team. Creative New Zealand's financial contribution represents 1% of its overall annual budget.

The Review identified the International team's capacity to sustain the exhibition delivery as a critical issue. Managing complex creative projects – spanning exhibition development, logistics, communications, marketing and a creative team's interpersonal dynamics – is onerous. The workload, on top of other international projects, and combined with a range of health and safety in the workplace issues experienced in recent years, is deemed unacceptable. The management submission of May 2022 to the Arts Council to undertake this Review noted: *Management's view is that the current resourcing and delivery model is **unsustainable**.*

There is no simple solution to address the situation's complexity.

A phased approach to decision making

The Review recommends that a phased approach, providing for several decision points, is required to determine the future governance and management model for the project's delivery.

The critical first decision requires ***an in-principle commitment that New Zealand should sustain a presence at Venice***. The 'Value Proposition' included in our Report provides powerful justification to support such a decision. This would enable New Zealand's continued representation at the Biennale for a further three events.

Respecting the government-to-government agreement that underpins the Biennale governance structure, it is recommended that the current **Commissioner and related artist selection arrangements are retained within Creative New Zealand**.

The second critical decision requires a further disciplined and transparent **investigation of other exhibition delivery models available within New Zealand**. A sector briefing leading to a select tender process is recommended, allowing individual agencies to align existing capability with an assessment of additional requirements necessary to deliver the project over a three-exhibition cycle.

In turn, Creative New Zealand will assess the viability of submissions received from both an artistic and operational perspective, along with a consideration of the budget required, to determine if external delivery of the Biennale representation can be achieved. It is recommended that this assessment be completed by the third quarter of 2023 to enable a level of engagement by the selected agency with the 2024 event.

In the event that external delivery of the project is not deemed financially or operationally viable, a re-structured, dedicated and suitably resourced team will be required to be recruited within Creative New Zealand to deliver exhibitions in 2026, 2028 and 2030.

Key to adopting this phased approach to determine future representation at Venice will be a clear commitment that – regardless of the delivery arrangements chosen – **there remains a long-term commitment to New Zealand at Venice**.

The phased approach to determining representation is evaluated in detail in Section Two of the Report: *Resourcing and Delivery Models*.

Of secondary importance, the Review identified a range of opportunities to enhance return on investment and demonstrate the wider benefit of New Zealand's continued representation at the Venice Biennale.

Noting the requirement for the Commissioner role to be a representative of a government agency, consultations revealed overall support for Creative New Zealand's responsibilities as Commissioner, with ongoing management of the artist and curator selection process.

A number of process enhancements are proposed, including:

- written criteria for artist selection and terms and conditions for artist involvement in Venice including consideration of Mana Tangata, Mana Ake, Mana Whenua and Mana Toi¹
- the requirement for selection panellists to have knowledge or experience of the Biennale
- greater transparency in how the selection process is communicated to applicants and the wider arts community.
- The inclusion of leadership who understand the institutional dynamics and will create a healthy culture/ set of behaviour expectations for the project

While New Zealand at Venice has established five broad project objectives, consultations revealed these are not widely understood. There is an opportunity to enhance the statement of objectives to provide greater clarity of outcomes and benefits. The statement may also reference the opportunity for representation to contribute to the country's international profile. In turn, it will support advocacy to government and private supporters, offering clearer and stronger reasons for continuing to be present at Venice.

The future for New Zealand at Venice will be contingent on the effectiveness of advocacy to argue its value to secure a sustainable funding base to enable its delivery in a professional manner and provide for a healthy creative workplace culture.

Communication of the outcomes of the Review calls for a clear commitment to future representation, supported by a summary of opportunities and benefits the 'phased' approach to the management and delivery of the pavilion for future years.

¹ Mana Tangata – how mana is shown in the artist and their team's leadership and character; Mana Ake – how the mana of others is uplifted in the way people are treated and respected as part of the project; Mana Whenua – how the mana of the local people is respected, acknowledging the presence and authority of the Venetians over their territory; Mana Toi – how connection and representation is created through the arts, including the engagement, curation and/or participation of artists and creatives.



