

# BLAK FUTURES

COLLECTIVE STATEMENTS TO START A NATIONAL  
CONVERSATION ABOUT THE FUTURE OF BLAK ARTISTRY



Government of South Australia  
Arts South Australia



ADELAIDE  
FESTIVAL **AF**

BLAKDANCE

AUSTRALIAN  
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THEATRE



Our Boards, artists, creatives and staff uphold First Nations sovereignty.

We recognise the lands on whose Country on which we work as unceded lands and still without a treaty.

We honour and pay respects to Country on which we travel and share stories. We pay respects to our Elders, past and present. We acknowledge all First Peoples of this continent and celebrate the beauty and strength of our communities.  
Always was, always will be.

We acknowledge the ongoing significance of dance as cultural practice, as interconnected with story, song and country.

We pay respect and homage to all Elders across Australia.



# ABOUT BLAK FUTURES

**In a revolutionary moment for Australian dance, First Nations Artistic Directors of multi-year funded dance companies gathered on Kurna Yerta to plant the seeds of the future of blak dance.**

Blak Futures was an unprecedented gathering that saw some of the nation's foremost Blak artists come together for two days of conversation, provocation and ideation alongside policymakers, arts industry leaders and creatives from across the country.

Blak Futures featured **Gary Lang** (NT Dance Company), **Frances Rings** (Bangarra Dance Theatre), **Jacob Boehme** (Idja Dance Theatre), **Dalisa Pigram** (Marrugeku), **Daniel Riley** (Australian Dance Theatre), **Joel Bray** (Joel Bray Dance), **Katina Olsen** (Dance Makers Collective) and **Thomas E.S Kelly and Taree Sansbury** (Karul Projects).

The program was facilitated by **Wesley Enoch AM** and **Marilyn Miller**, two pioneers of blak artistry, innovation and creativity.

The program began with a day of consultation with South Australian First Nations artists and industry. Then, on the final day of the 2024 Adelaide Festival, Blak Futures closed with a

public talk for audiences and the completion of two statements that put the weekend's conversations into practice: one that speaks to national priorities and one focussed on the South Australian sector.

These statements are a galvanising call for change that seek to build a sustainable, diverse, and thriving sector that prioritises care, collaboration and creative risk taking. They have been developed with a view to develop audiences for new work and support the future of Blak artistry in this country.

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We would like to acknowledge the generous contributions of South Australian First Nations artists, industry and community members who provided invaluable insight into the local ecology. We would also like to thank Uncle Rex Angie (Narungga, Kurna, Bungala, Nauo, Wirangu, Ngadjuri), Aunty Deanna Newchurch (Narungga, Kurna, Adnyamathanha, Ngaduri, Ngarrindjeri) and Uncle Eddie Newchurch (Narungga, Kurna, Adnyamathanha, Ngaduri, Ngarrindjeri) from Idja Dance Theatre for their Eldership, care, and guidance throughout Blak Futures.

Blak Futures was co-presented by Australian Dance Theatre, BlakDance and Adelaide Festival as part of the Time to Talk Series. The program was generously supported by Arts South Australia. The gathering was held at The Odeon from 16 - 17 March 2024, coinciding with the final weekend of the 2024 Adelaide Festival and the world premiere season of Daniel Riley's *Marrow*.











# NATIONAL COLLECTIVE STATEMENT

**On 16 - 17 March 2024, in a partnership between Australian Dance Theatre and BlakDance, generously supported by Adelaide Festival, First Nations Artistic Directors from multi-year funded dance companies, South Australian-based dance practitioners and arts leaders gathered on Kurna Yerta for Blak Futures, an unprecedented two-day event.**

**Together we identified the most urgent matters facing our sectors.**

## **Shared Priorities for First Nations Contemporary Dance**

We collectively identified actions for the future for First Nations dance companies in Australia:

1. Blak Playing Australia funding and touring network, with innovative audience development strategies like a national touring blak performing arts festival
2. Fund a pathways (bridging) program for small-to-medium self-determined First Nations contemporary companies into federal four-year investment
3. Paltityangga First Nations dance festival based in Adelaide which includes strategic international and national market development
4. Major institutions and National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (NPAPF) companies to increase self-determined engagement, and all of organisation transformation such as increased First Nations employment (including decision making roles), programming, commissioning and

representation at all levels. We call on these institutions and organisations to publicly report on their performance in achieving their First Nations commitments

5. We call for an increase in engagement and investment in First Nations hubs locally and nationally (e.g., Tandanya), and funding for dance sector capacity building initiatives to take place in those hubs (e.g., Birrang)
6. Professional pathways for cultural dancers to tell our stories
7. Opportunities for sustained employment to create economic stability for trained professional dancers
8. Training and development on Country and a strong pipeline for First Nations talent, from youth to senior leadership

## **Shared Values and Principles**

Our discussions and recommendations are grounded in our shared values and underpinned by key principles:

1. Legacy and lineage; ours is the oldest living continuous culture on Earth and we have a responsibility to continue that lineage and ceremony with Country and community. Dance, art and ceremony are integral to this cultural maintenance, and we acknowledge that we are part of an evolving continuum
2. Kinship is an integral part of how we are in relation to one another as First Peoples, and to our shared art making. We are stronger when we elevate each other rather than be in competition.



3. Self-determination will ensure our cultural practices, community and sector are maintained, sustainable and thriving.
4. Ecology; we acknowledge we all play an integral role within the ecology of the First Nations dance sector and we each contribute in a diversity of ways.

Collectively, as First Nations Artistic Directors of organisations receiving multi-year federal and/or state funding, we acknowledge we are part of a continuum and we carry hopes and dreams passed on to us through the extensive lineage of First Nations dance leaders who have come before us.

We are dancing a new cycle of a woven mat, bringing together connections from all of our sectors and communities. Each layer and each string represents a generation. At the centre, our connection to our lore/law. We understand the fibres of each layer of our mat create strength, and a place to sit and meet on Country.

As First Nations artists connected through our cultural responsibilities we ask those who are not bound to these obligations to share responsibility in acknowledging their own positions with regard to our principles and the place in which they exist on Country, so we can maintain and sustain the fibres to be woven in the layers to come.

### **Calling for Change**

We collectively call for a consolidated, targeted investment in First Nations leadership of small-to-medium dance companies, NPAPF organisations and a self-determined dance sector. We have a broad and diverse First Nations dance ecology with a lack of multi-year government funding for First Nations companies.

This is a problem for our entire industry.

Self-determined First Nations dance companies play an integral role in workforce development, pathways for employment, retention of trained dancers and education of breadth and depth of form. To realise this, we need equity across our sector.

Building a healthy ecology through sustained investment into self-determined small-to-medium companies, majors and First Nations leadership calls for immediate increases in our capacity to establish governance and operational administration.





# SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COLLECTIVE STATEMENT

On 16 - 17 March 2024, in a tri-organisation partnership between Australian Dance Theatre, BlakDance and Adelaide Festival, First Nations Artistic Directors from multi-year funded dance companies, South Australian-based dance practitioners and arts leaders gathered on Kurna Yerta for Blak Futures, an unprecedented two-day event.

Our discussions and the following recommendations are grounded in our shared values and underpinned by three key principles:

**Legacy and Lineage** - ours is the oldest living continuous culture on Earth and we have a responsibility to continue that lineage and ceremony with Country and community. Dance, art and ceremony are integral to this cultural maintenance.

**Self-determination** will ensure that our cultural practices, community and sector are maintained, sustainable and thriving. This principle emphasises that First Nations artists and arts leaders should be trusted to know where investment and resources will have the most impact for our sector.

**South Australian artists are valued** through meaningful development pathways that provide local opportunities for our artists. Investment in SA artists and regions ensures our artists can lead rather than leave.

## Recommendations and Outcomes

### Reinvigorate Tandanya and Invest in its Future:

Tandanya is the oldest First Nations run cultural institution in Australia and an unparalleled legacy for South Australia and our community. Investing in the re-opening and future of Tandanya will provide a dedicated space and cultural hub for artistic and cultural practices, ceremony and cultural leadership. Programs such as the First Nations Dance Program initiated and currently run by The Mill can be rehomed at Tandanya within a culturally appropriate First Nations-led precinct.

### Community-led Action

Establish a community action group including representatives from land councils, arts and culture sector and other advocacy groups. The group will consult with and advocate for the Community in identifying key sector-specific concerns to take to government.

Included in this group is a task force focused on education, training, youth and industry pathways with self-governed institutions and allied arts and cultural organisations.

### Sector Growth

Dedicated support for sector growth in South Australian small-to-medium companies toward long term state and federal funding and producing support for contemporary dance, cultural dance and festivals.

There is an urgent need for investment in the First Nations Dance Program developed by The Mill Adelaide, through consultation with the First Nations Dance Community in 2022. This program began in 2023 supported by BlakDance and



Australian Dance Theatre, coordinated and further developed by The Mill's First Nations Program Coordinator (Narrunga, Ngarrindjeri & Kurna) Caleena Sansbury. We recommend supporting the expansion of this program to be run and led by First Nations artists and arts workers. Participants of Blak Futures emphasise that the already existing national cultural institution, Tandanya, is a culturally safe space to run a variety of First Nations programs with Performing Arts as a leading program.

#### **Develop a Strong Pipeline for Talent**

First Nations performing arts organisations play a critical role of incubating early-career talent and future leaders. To deepen the pipeline and nurture cultural leaders of the future, we must:

- invest in more youth and training initiatives and fund infrastructure that give creative and cultural spaces for youth and independent artists
- create customised and culturally affirming training programs embedded in major performing arts organisations
- expand tertiary placement opportunities and job-based learning for emerging and mid-career creatives across all performance and creative production roles

#### **Shared Accountability for First Nations Outcomes**

Implement KPIs for all multi-year funded arts companies of South Australia, ensuring quotas for First Nations employment and representation at all levels of governance and management, embedded cultural education and leadership pathways to enable a thriving

First Nations arts ecology with meaningful outcomes for our communities.

#### **Celebrate South Australian Excellence**

Limited models of creating and touring dance and performance works inhibit the capacity, integrity and longevity of First Nations works. We recommend establishing a First Nations performing arts market aligned with new First Nations dance festival, Paltityangga, from 2026, that is structurally underpinned by cultural values of relationality and reciprocity. This would be a first of its kind and opportunity to create a legacy in South Australia.

# PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS

## PRODUCERS

AUSTRALIAN  
DANCE  
THEATRE

~~BLAK~~DANCE

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## GOVERNMENT PARTNERS



Government of South Australia  
Arts South Australia

## PARTNER COMPANIES



NT DANCE COMPANY

bangarra  
DANCE THEATRE

IDJA DANCE  
THEATRE

marrugeku

JOEL BRAY  
DANCE



Dance Makers Collective

KARUL  
PROJECTS



We would like to thank representatives from Arts South Australia, Creative Australia and performing arts companies from all over Australia for attending and supporting Blak Futures.

We acknowledge that dance, particularly Blak dance, involves a rich tapestry of artists, creatives, makers, Elders and community members. It is a diverse and thrilling area of arts practice. These statements are a starting point, a kernel of provocation and advocacy that seek to start a conversation with a broad range of creators across the nation through continued consultation.

We thank all working in the sector for their artistry, passion and perseverance in creating work that sparks inspiration and connects audiences to culture and country.

For more information please contact:  
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