

By Rachael S Morgan

Nation *noun*.

1. A people who share common customs, origins, history and frequently language; a nationality or nationalism.

Culture *noun*.

1. The set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterises a society, institution, organization or group.

The Federal Government has recently announced a \$42 billion Nation Building plan. Ask a person on the street to name one thing they think represents Australia as a nation and you will get a multitude of different answers. One person might say Shane Warne or Sir Donald Bradman; another might say Arthur Boyd, Brett Whitely or Dame Nellie Melba. Dependant on the age of the person you ask you might get Kylie Minogue as an answer or something more random like Sunday bbq's at the beach, cane-toad races, surfing or koala bears. Others will give you Uluru, Captain Cook or our national song – yes, I mean *Waltzing Matilda*.

Not once (besides the obvious examples of the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge) will you hear a person espouse with nationalistic pride the delights of Australia's man-made structures, roads or municipal buildings. Nor will anyone boast about our taxation, education and healthcare systems or our economy (struggling or otherwise).

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is known to have written '*a nation is the unity of its people.*' While constant investment in new infrastructure, improving healthcare and education, jobs and the environment etc is necessary for a nation to function (and in most cases sorely needed), these are not the things that bring people together. They do not create communities or a sense of national identity, pride or indeed belonging. Whilst risking sounding too simplistic, Arthur Boyd, *Waltzing Matilda* and Donald Bradman; more specifically the art we create, the songs we sing, sports we play and the things we do – our *culture* - has done more to achieve these things.

The dictionary definitions above, when placed side by side, seem to imply that a nation and its culture are intertwined. Would it not then stand to reason that a nation-building plan would include some building of its culture? Apparently not. Can we really build our nation without also supporting and investing in our culture as well as our nation's basic functionality? A nation cannot be built on bricks and mortar alone however there is no mention in the Federal Government's Nation Building plan of intention to do otherwise.

The arts, whether it is contemporary dance, theatre, any kind of music, painting or literature, give us a reason to connect with each other, opportunities to create, or simply a chance to come together, engage and discuss. Sport, whether we are young or old, a participant or spectator, provides not only health benefits but a sense of inclusion and even identification. In short these things create a sense of community wellbeing; creating conditions that enhance the potential for people to flourish and achieve their potential. And let's not

forget, these things can also create revenue, hence contributing to our economy.

It is well known that the arts, sport and culture all make a contribution to health, education, crime reduction, to creating strong, culturally rich and vibrant communities, promoting diversity and to a nation's wellbeing. The problem is however, that its contribution is difficult to quantify. But, if we look to Albert Einstein, he once said, "Not everything that can be counted *counts* and not everything that *counts* can be counted." This couldn't be truer in this case.

Another truism is that bricks and mortar – buildings – rarely last forever. What are they really but places for people and communities to gather - to discuss, educate, learn, engage, work and create. What are roads and railways but simply a means for people to reach each other?

One much-loved local icon, Brisbane Powerhouse, is a perfect example of this. Once an essential part of Brisbane's infrastructure, providing power to our transport system and homes, the former power station soon became obsolete, abandoned and all but forgotten. It is ironic that its current incarnation is that of a world class arts centre providing space and opportunity for people to meet, see groundbreaking Australian theatre and dance, view and talk about visual art, introduce their children to the arts and sport during school holidays, spend time with friends listening to Australian music and giving local artists the support they need to create truly wonderful art.

We should not be naïve enough to think this building will always be here. We may see a day when Brisbane Powerhouse is reincarnated again as something different or is not here at all. One thing we can be sure of though is that, long after the bricks and mortar are gone; the art seen here, the music danced to, the work created and the conversations had; the connections made and the communities brought together will live on - perhaps even to be talked about by future Australians as representative of our nation.