

ICOM Australia statement on Creative Australia's decision to rescind Khaled Sabsabi and Michael Dagostino's 2026 Venice Biennale Commission

ICOM Australia upholds the International Code of Ethics that sets the standard for museums and cultural bodies throughout the world. ICOM Australia expresses shock and disappointment in the recent actions of Creative Australia over their decision to revoke the 2026 Venice Biennale Commission of artist Khaled Sabsabi and curator Michael Dagostino.

ICOM Australia does not believe that, once the commission was called into question, due diligence was undertaken to

- investigate the history, context, and artistic intent of the artist's body of work
- act in the best interests of the public and Australia's international standing by upholding the transparency and accountability of the commissioning process.

ICOM Australia upholds artists' and individuals' freedom of artistic expression under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Act. This right should remain free from political influence or interference.

Australia had established itself as a best practice cultural industry in the eyes of the international community. This recent decision has brought negative global attention to Australia and brought into question our position as an inclusive safe place for artistic expression.

Australia's contribution to the Venice Biennale - the most prestigious global contemporary visual arts event – will forever be marred by uncertainty unless action is taken to remediate recent events.

ICOM Australia urges Creative Australia to revisit its decision, exercise ethical due diligence and reinstate Khaled Sabsabi and Michael Dagostino for the 2026 Venice Biennale.

Alex Marsden
Vice-Chair

Background

ICOM is the largest international network of museum and heritage professionals, with more than 57,000 members around the world. ICOM Australia provides the international voice of Australian museum and gallery professionals and upholds international standards, benchmarks, and ethics.

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