

St Kilda Town Hall, 99a Carlisle Street, St Kilda, Victoria 3182
ASSIST Customer Service 03 9209 6777

[proudly portphillip.vic.gov.au](http://proudly.portphillip.vic.gov.au)



20 April 2026

Dear Issac,

**Re: Response to your correspondence regarding the exhibition
Picturing Democracy**

Thank you for taking the time to write to Council about Picturing Democracy. We acknowledge that the matters you raised are important and that questions of visibility, representation and belonging can carry deep personal and community significance. We appreciate your engagement and the opportunity to reflect on the exhibition and our broader cultural practice.

Following your correspondence, Council undertook a review of the exhibition's development, governance and alignment with the Exhibition Commission Brief. As part of this process, we also reflected on how future exhibitions can be strengthened to better support community understanding, transparency and trust.

Opportunities for improvement identified

While the review did not identify non compliance or discriminatory intent in relation to Picturing Democracy, it did highlight several opportunities for Council to improve how cultural programs are commissioned and communicated.

These include:

- clearer articulation, at the commissioning stage, of an exhibition's purpose, scope and limitations.
- enhanced risk assessment for exhibitions that may raise community sensitivities.
- clearer guidance around source materials and collection scope; and
- more transparent communication about how curatorial independence sits alongside Council's broader commitments to equity, diversity and inclusion.
- Embedding these principles through the actions of Council's new Creative and Prosperous Cities Strategy, currently in development, with the role of the arts in social cohesion identified as a core deliverable.

Council is committed to implementing these improvements as part of continuous improvement across our cultural services portfolio. We recognise that greater clarity up front can help set appropriate expectations and support more constructive public dialogue.

Assessment of the matters you raised

The review considered the concerns you raised against the Exhibition Commission Brief, curatorial documentation, exhibition material and relevant policy contexts. The findings are summarised below.

Curatorial intent and representation

Picturing Democracy was developed as a selective artistic interpretation of material drawn primarily from the Port Phillip City Collection. It was not intended to be a comprehensive or representative survey of all communities, faiths, minority groups or geographic areas within



the municipality. Representational parity was not required by the Brief, and no evidence of intentional exclusion was identified. Image selection was guided by curatorial and artistic considerations consistent with the approved concept.

Multicultural and religious representation

The Exhibition Commission Brief does not specify requirements for multicultural or religious representation within exhibition content. While it refers to engaging "diverse audiences," this relates to accessibility and audience engagement rather than demographic representation of content. The exhibition was framed as a creative response to the PHOTO 2026 theme Show Me Love, drawing on photographic material from the City Collection and responding to the gallery's civic context.

Fulfilment of the Exhibition Commission Brief

Council officers assessed the exhibition against the Brief's requirements, including its response to the theme, site responsiveness, use of photographic material, reliance on the City Collection, and development of interpretation and programs. These requirements were considered to have been met. Following the cessation of PHOTO 2026 during development, Council proceeded with the exhibition as a standalone project.

Religious sites, social inclusion and community visibility

The Brief does not position the exhibition as a mechanism for achieving social inclusion through proportional representation of religious or cultural groups. Accordingly, the presence or absence of particular sites or imagery should not be interpreted as endorsement, exclusion, or commentary on any community, nor as a reflection of Council's recognition of, or commitment to, particular communities.

Source material and new content

The Brief permits, but does not require, the creation of original material. Image selection drew from a catalogue of more than 4,000 works in the City Collection. One image depicting a Jewish space was newly created by the artist specifically for this exhibition. Uncatalogued ephemera were outside scope. For future exhibitions, Council will clarify these distinctions more explicitly.

Discrimination and political framing

The review found no references to political correctness or ideological direction in the Brief or curatorial documentation, and no material that discriminates on the basis of race, descent, or national or ethnic origin.



Additional actions taken

In response to feedback received:

- exhibition wall text has been amended to invite broader community participation and engagement with the City Collection online; and
- revised text will include appropriate cultural guidance regarding images of deceased Aboriginal persons, acknowledging this omission as an oversight.

Council values feedback that prompts reflection and improvement. While the review confirmed that Picturing Democracy was developed within its approved scope, we recognise the importance of ongoing dialogue about how cultural programming is framed, governed and communicated. We remain committed to delivering cultural programs that respect our diverse community while supporting artistic and curatorial independence.

Again, we welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with you to curate the community cabinets, drawing on your expertise in Heritage Collections.

Thank you again for raising your concerns. We appreciate your engagement and the care with which these matters have been expressed.

