



Artstate Bathurst Rapporteurs' Report

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Introduction

The geographer Doreen Massey [wrote](#) that “if space is... a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space.” This is a point not lost in the gathering of stories, by way of artists, art workers, other cultural practitioners, and their work at Artstate 2018 in Bathurst.

Artstate was the (re)making of one place - Bathurst - through the intertwining of ancient and continuing stories of the Wiradjuri people with those presented by other delegates. In (re)making and (re)telling Bathurst, those gathered also were telling anew the stories of artwork, artworking, and culture across regional New South Wales and further still across the Australian continent and the multitudes of people and nations within it: a simultaneity whose pasts cannot be ignored even while the future is being told.

This report also re-tells some of the stories told at Artstate Bathurst, organised along five thematic pathways: (1) Deep Knowledge (2) Reciprocity (3) Co-creation (4) Diversity and (5) Uncertainty. Each theme is summarised with a recommendation for future ArtState gatherings.

Deep Knowledge

We acknowledge the Wiradjuri as the traditional custodians of the land in which Artstate Bathurst met - and pay our respects to Wiradjuri elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Indigenous Australians involved. We thank the Wiradjuri people for having been given the opportunity to walk lightly and share learning on Wiradjuri **Nguram-bang** (country) over the course of Artstate Bathurst. Artstate Bathurst through its cultural, arts and conference programming enabled a great depth of sharing in a diversity of first nations practices, which should set the new minimum standard for future events.

From the **Gawaymbanha** (welcome) to Wiradjuri **Nguram-bang** at the foot of **Wahluu** on Thursday evening, we shared in the traditional story of Law that gave this great mount its name. We heard of the **Dyujala** (Lyrebird) creation story that celebrates the diversity of the Bathurst community - among many other Wiradjuri stories and philosophies. We learned of the **Wiradjuri** (no taking), shared with us literally translated as the people who do no taking, as the giving people and the sharing people. Delegates and community members alike were invited to walk through smoke, welcomed and challenged equally to be critically present, to listen deeply, to be open, and to be ready to share in a great depth of knowledge. The way the elders, and other members of the Wiradjuri Community gifted a safe space for difficult conversation needs to be recognised for the immense challenge and responsibility that it was.

In conversation with other delegates it became evident that all who attended felt blessed to have been gifted an introduction to the language of the nation through the speakers and arts programs - and we must recognise this was absolutely no small gift - and that in actuality this itself is an inherent challenge towards knowing country. The elder-led approach to sharing knowledge, reinforced by emerging and established first nations artists was a highlight, and for many a necessary challenge. The morning after the welcome - this was put immediately in to critical focus in the keynote address **Nginha ngurambang marunbunmilgirridyu** (I love this country – but do you?) by Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi artist Jonathan Jones. Jones also provided clear provocations in return to the pressure placed upon elders by the expectation to represent their communities to others. Jones' keynote was paired with the opportunity to revisit **guwiinyguliya yirgabiya ngay yuwin.gu gulbalangidyal ngunnhi** (they made a solitude and called it peace) at Bathurst Regional Art Gallery.

The morning panel First Nations Artists: Responding to Place equally set a suite of unique challenges and provocations around Country, Language, ecological thinking, intergenerationality and aesthetics. In considering programming in this way, the challenge, and framing for all further aspects of the Artstate Bathurst had been set - which through Frith Walker and Kresanna Aigners' placed based knowledges became necessarily centralised on the local, and deep knowledge of the rich interplay of transcultural dialogues in place based understandings.

We stress that this approach to elevating local and indigenous knowledges must continue and be strengthened over future events - the health of our places and the health of our communities depend upon it. We heard many times over the Artstate Bathurst proceedings but it won't hurt to reinforce again and again - when country is sick, so are our communities, so are we. Colonisation has created a false separation - and as cultural practitioners and administrators we have a fundamental role to play in the process of intergenerational healing.

(1) Continue an elder-led approach that operates with clear recognition of the challenges and acknowledgement of deep local knowledges.

Reciprocity

From indigenous and non-indigenous practitioners alike, we have heard that place learning is necessarily embodied and local. Place is lived/living, it is shared - and in that sharing we necessarily engage in what Margaret Somerville [calls](#) "the contact zone of contested place stories" - it is incumbent upon us all to become more place literate; to understand the multitude stories that weave through the fabric of shared country. For non-indigenous practitioners this means to critically analyse the histories, stories and representations we privilege, to be active citizens in the deconstruction/dismantling of the colonial project - to find ways to meaningfully reinhabit our places - because as Jonathan Jones pointed out - colonisation continues to cripple and harm all Australians. If we are going to be serious about arts-citizenship then Artstate must maintain the priority to engage with First Nations peoples and Aboriginal arts practitioners and organizations and continue to provide platform to elevate first nation knowledge.

We echo last year's Rapporteurs - to see extended use of local, but perhaps more importantly indigenous foods - as a way in to further ecological understanding of place would be a fantastic stretch target for future events. In this way the spaces for creative, social and cultural entrepreneurship can be bridged - meeting both the recommendations here, and in recommendation 5.

(2) Continue to explore what are best practices to create ways to share place with reciprocity and respect.

Co-Creation

In becoming more place literate - we must draw together the speaker's program (the conference) and the arts program (the festival) to further build social cohesion for the communities we support. A great deal of our conversation was centered on a sense of place. To activate our broader and diverse communities alongside Artstate should remain a priority .We have condensed this to a sentence. Artstate has been, and should be, a vehicle to model best practice with our communities - to set up local and national ecosystems of support for all stages of artistic careers - the one sentence take home on that is: people support what they co-create.

The involvement of numerous students from Charles Sturt University as production assistants throughout the event provided them with immeasurable experience. Further involving students from universities, schools, TAFE, private and informal education systems will help extend the reach of Artstate both laterally out into the communities it visits and involves and longitudinally so that they become future arts and cultural sector workers already imbued with wider views of what the sector is and can do.

(3) Find ways to continue to draw the Arts and Speaker programs together, to model best practice, and build community resilience.

Diversity

In working with our communities - It is imperative that we continue to explore opportunities to broaden the types of voices we choose to elevate. It has been wonderful to hear, listen and share practices with artists/arts-workers with disabilities, the neurologically diverse, the culturally and linguistically diverse, and arts and cultural workers from across all levels of the sector including those in regional, rural and remote communities. We would seek to further and more strongly amplify voices at future events from marginalised peoples to ensure we do not deny involvement in the critical conversations on arts economic, political, cultural and social activities. Doing so will enable us to truly celebrate the richness and diversity that makes up the fabric of the regions - and to appreciate the breadth and depth of practices taking place in regional Australia.

We need to ensure that when we call for speakers, and when we generate our artistic programs we guarantee accessibility and hold ourselves accountable to the choices we make and opportunities we provide. Our sector should be the model for best practice of inclusivity and transparency - exploring means of organising ourselves to ensure diversity of views, and calling out bad practices. Artstate should continue to explore ways to increase 'diversity' without simply exploring 'political inclusivity'. This means finding mechanisms under which diversity flourishes, rather than is forced.

(4) Ensure we continue to champion and support diversity of views - exploring ways to ensure diversity is built from the ground up.

Uncertainty

In building robust regions, the incredible and diverse contribution from emerging and young regional artists cannot be understated. The examples of emergent professionals who are forging careers in Regional Australia was a very definition of the kind of entrepreneurial and innovative activity championed by other (non arts) government portfolios. The passion and dedication to regional practice was paramount - and the challenges raised by all young regional artists were politically and economically astute. Emerging artist James Farley made several impassioned calls for universities, local councils, state and federal governments alike to recognise the need for a resilient arts ecosystem that supports and advocates transdisciplinary engagement across all stages of career development. Not to see funding as 'support' but as 'investment' - and not to think in terms of handouts, but as seeding our sectors capability - a sector for which the return on investment is evident not just in economic terms. All emergent artists displayed a clear knowledge of how to articulate the obvious economic and cultural value made in their practices, and in so doing exemplified the maturity of Australia's regional artist networks.

Whilst not explicit, there was a noticeable undercurrent through sessions espousing the value of the creative industries and the multitudinous value in place making - that social, artistic and cultural entrepreneurship as modes of understanding the broader value of creative and cultural product is an emerging phenomenon. Jack Archer of the Regional Australia Institute investigated this to some degree, as did numerous concurrent panel sessions. Exploring the role of artist as entrepreneur, cultural worker as 'intrapreneur' and the role innovation plays in the arts sector would be an interesting exploratory realm for future Artstate events to tackle with greater vigor. Looking at how the converging languages of arts/business can generate new opportunities will be of critical importance to the sustainability and ultimate growth of regionally based creative practice - which as Archer pointed out, contributes significantly to the liveability of the regions.

As part of the dinner address, we stated that artists by definition should make the best entrepreneurs - and borrowed the definition from Eric Reis of the [Lean Startup](#) - an entrepreneur is "someone who creates new products and services under conditions of extreme uncertainty." Uncertainty is core business for cultural workers and organisations, we should celebrate it. When speakers asked for funding that gives permission to fail, the political cringe was palpable,

but what we really mean is funding that allows us to prototype, test and evaluate (of which failure is always a possible and measurable outcome, but one that cannot be known beforehand). As cultural sector workers our primary output is creating the future - our business is generating products and services that haven't existed before. In generating the future anytime spent trying to pre-measure the immeasurable might provide temporary comfort for policy makers, but the need to understand that it doesn't actually lower risk. We need to develop a greater appetite for risk, and to have that conversation openly. Funding known and safe organisations or projects will inevitably result overtime in low-risk and low-reward (and a stagnation of the sector). Are we a sector of fixed or growth mindsets? Our young regional artists remind us of just how much value the regions get when we focus our skills on meeting real human needs coupled with placing small bets fast.

We should continue to embrace uncertainty head on - and champion investment in our young regional artists - and continue to explore what this means as a sector at future Artstate events. To continue to focus on the broader contribution of the arts in thematic domains, rather than disciplinary domains will be critical to ensuring that Artstate meets the interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, intercultural and transcultural futures artists are working to create. Beyond our narrow partners in tourism, we should pay particular attention to how we activate and innovate across broader discipline boundaries - making the case that we create value everywhere we go. We should also continue to explore the pressure points at all levels of the arts and cultural sector ecosystem - especially where it provides platform to not only discuss the role of emergent regional practitioners, but to showcase their exemplary works of practice in the arts program.

(5) Challenge traditional models and assumptions, build robust regions through increasing our appetite for risk, and find ways to reward experimentation and uncertainty.

Conclusion

Ultimately, we have come together and celebrated Regional Arts practice, a practice that creates value across borders - and whose value resonates with time. The conversations started here, must continue. We ask that we continue to move forward exploring (1) Deep Knowledge (2) Reciprocity (3) Co-creation (4) Diversity and (5) Uncertainty.

....."and next time you visit Wiradjuri Ngurambang remember: "Yindyamarra" (respect, go slow, show patience, act with honour, and be courteous)." - Uncle Dhinawan.