



Creative Production Synergies in Penrith and the Blue Mountains

Report June 2020

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Blue Mountains Cultural Centre Library.

Executive Summary

Regional leadership in arts and cultural production is evident in Penrith and the Blue Mountains through the different yet complementary approaches of the City Councils. This research project began in August 2019, the interview phase was completed in early December 2019, and this report was completed in June 2020. Therefore, the research spanned a very challenging period of drought and severe bushfires over the summer across New South Wales, followed almost immediately by the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses in arts and recreation services were among the first and most severely affected by the need to enforce Government social distancing restrictions, with 94 per cent of the sector reporting an adverse impact of the Government restrictions in the March Business COVID-19 survey (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020). Also, during this period

the Australia Council for the Arts announced a reduction in the number of organisations to receive four-year contracts. These environmental and health catastrophes, coupled with a reduced capacity in the arts and cultural sector, have significantly and negatively impacted on the region's arts and cultural life. The loss of Australia Council funding to the Australian Theatre for Young People, for example, reducing opportunities for young people in the region.

The realisation of the importance of the arts, cultural and creative practices to people's daily lives has come to the fore during the pandemic (Cantillon 2020), but also underlined its precarity and the extent to which artists and cultural practitioners largely exist outside the usual employment categories. This report has shown the need for investment in creative production capacity building –

a need which has now significantly increased. It is important that PCC and BMCC strengthen their alliance to support artists and creative producers and to advocate for equity in State and Federal arts and cultural development funding to increase cultural investment in Greater Western Sydney. PCC and BMCC need to encourage and establish key strategic partnerships to enable further investment and development for a sustainable arts and cultural sector in Penrith, Blue Mountains and Greater Western Sydney.

The survey established in conjunction with this research means that the Councils understand the region's creative practitioners current needs.

By taking bold actions that include the establishment of a Cultural Technology Centre, a Contemporary Art Centre, and creating dispersed creative

hubs with high level digital capacity, momentum will be maintained. Flexible, cutting-edge cultural infrastructure is now needed more than ever.

The emerging Aerotropolis, government attention under the Western Sydney City Deal and the investment in the

existing regional facilities provide opportunities for cultural and creative practitioners, with the aid of both local governments, to become involved in reshaping the region's cultural landscape. The Quarter health precinct could also be encouraged to develop an arts and cultural

program. Bold investment in cultural infrastructure would signal a creative and socially responsible agenda on the part of the both Councils for the benefit of the entire region.

Key Strategies and Recommendations

Five key strategies have been identified that will lead to greater creative production and development in the local area and broader region. Under these five strategies the following recommendations could be converted into actions over the coming decade.

Strategy 1:

Continue and strengthen the work that the two Councils have already begun, both independently and jointly, and advocate for new funding and partnerships to enhance and expand opportunities for creative practitioners in the region.

Recommendations

1.1 The PCC and BMCC strengthen partnerships with entities, such as those in the Penrith's The Quarter (Health and Education Precinct) and Aerotropolis precincts, and explore opportunities through the Western Sydney City Deal to foster regional creative industries growth.

1.2 The Councils review regulations to enable and support creative production spaces and consider broader utilisation of existing neighbourhood or community facilities for creative purposes, and in any upgrades or refurbishment programs engage with artists and creative practitioners about their needs.

1.3 PCC and BMCC continue their efforts to understand and address the needs of small-scale entrepreneurs and attract new audiences, particularly visitors from outside the area, to local cultural events and venues.

Strategy 2:

Expand and establish regional creative hubs, nodes and digital facilities that are coordinated by cultural staff to lead and support professional development programs and networking opportunities in the Penrith and Blue Mountains region.

Recommendations

2.1 Establish a major regional Creative Technology Centre in Penrith servicing the Nepean and Blue Mountains that is co-designed with creative producers in the region.

2.2 Explore options for accessible contemporary art galleries/cultural centre in the Penrith City Centre.

2.3 PCC and BMCC continue to advocate to TAFE NSW to develop and resource creative production facilities and to support start-up enterprises.

2.4 Establish a range of affordable makerspaces and adaptable studio spaces in collaboration with artists and creative practitioners.

2.5 PCC and BMCC collaborate to establish a unique training and performance centre, such as circus and physical theatre in the Penrith area.

Strategy 3:

Increase the education and training opportunities offered by institutions to deliver comprehensive creative courses which include employment/self-employment pathway programs across the Penrith and Blue Mountains region.

Recommendations

3.1 Encourage TAFE NSW and Western Sydney University to provide pathway programs with industry experts, business training and career development coach/mentors to assist in bridging the gap to employment, professional career opportunities and or business ownership within the creative industries.

3.2 Encourage Western Sydney University to reintroduce theatre, dance and visual arts education and introduce a public art and sculpture program for the Nepean region.

3.3 PCC and BMCC collaborate with Nepean Creative and Performing Arts High School to expand its creative reach and support young performers, musicians, designers and artists by working with local creative practitioners.

Strategy 4:

Expand professional development and collaboration opportunities that promote Penrith and Blue Mountains creative practitioners.

Recommendations

4.1. PCC and BMCC undertake discussions with a number of leading state and national creative institutions and cultural organisations to expand their professional development and collaboration opportunities, particularly aimed at increasing career pathways in the region.

4.2 PCC and BMCC work together with PP&VA, WSU, PSO and the Penrith Conservatorium to support and advance musicians' and composers' professional development and the growth of the region's music scene.

4.3 Establish a regional writing program that builds on existing Blue Mountains writing networks and supports an increased presence of writers in Penrith.

4.4 Provide an increased focus on the needs and participation of young people when programming Council-led events and creative initiatives.

4.5 PCC and BMCC establish intergenerational creative practitioner mentorship programs.

Strategy 5:

Continue to actively pursue cross-institutional partnerships that benefit the growth of the creative and cultural sector in the Western Parkland City.

Recommendations

5.1. PCC and BMCC continue to profile and celebrate home-grown creative practitioners.

5.2 Councils' respective transport planners consider accessibility, efficiency and frequency of public transport across the region with a view to better servicing creative practitioners and cultural facilities.

5.3 Advocate for reliable and affordable internet connectivity with service providers and government as an essential element of cultural infrastructure.

Summary

The research has uncovered unique creative production synergies between Penrith and the Blue Mountains City Councils. With continued collaboration, greater complementarity of creative production and presentation will deliver lasting benefits for communities across the two LGAs. The *raison d'être* of building cultural infrastructure and creative educational programs in decades past across the region is still relevant today - if not even more so. For example, the dual role of much of this infrastructure, in particular The Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre (aka The Joan), is to present quality artworks and to facilitate creative training and practices for this region. The next cycle of cultural development investment is now due, the benefits of which will be enhanced by regional collaboration to capture the value of the cultural and creative sectors in the coming decades.

The new needs are clearly identified through the case study interviews and the results of the survey undertaken by both Councils. These are to establish:

- 1) A facility for creative technologies.
- 2) A series or hubs of informal creative production and presentation spaces.
- 3) A contemporary multi-artform cultural centre in Penrith's CBD.
- 4) A review and modification of regulations to encourage creative expression.
- 5) Expanded training and professional development programs.
- 6) Continued discussions with TAFE and Western Sydney University, and commenced with state and national creative institutions, to expand the region's professional cultural and creative education.



Q Theatre with ATYP *Bathory Begins*

Introduction

Background

This report is designed to assist Penrith City Council, Blue Mountains City Council and the Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise to collaborate in developing regional strategies to nurture an active, productive arts, culture and creative sector. It follows previous research conducted between 2016 and 2018 for Sydney City Council and Inner West Council, which mapped and analysed creative infrastructure needs in these inner city LGAs (Ang et al. 2016, 2018; Pollio et al. 2018).

This earlier research documented the need to be proactive in providing cultural infrastructure, particularly in contexts where artists and creative producers are increasingly facing the loss of affordable, suitable spaces to work as a consequence of trends such as gentrification, the disappearance of industrial building stock, and inflexible land use regulation. Some of these trends are evident to different extents in the Penrith-Blue Mountains region. In the Blue Mountains, the issue is slightly less about unaffordable

spaces due to gentrification as about an absence of industrial building stock, although land use regulation remains a relevant matter. In Penrith, the key issue is the distance to production facilities, although a loss of affordable spaces for artists is becoming apparent.

In the Greater Sydney Commission's vision of a Metropolis of Three Cities, Penrith and the Blue Mountains are positioned within the Western Parkland City (Greater Sydney Commission 2018a).

The *Western City District Plan* forecasts that this part of the metropolis will see population growth of 43 per cent by 2036, and that new, high-quality jobs in the region will be created following the development of a new international airport at Badgerys Creek and its associated Aerotropolis. Penrith is designated to become one of the key urban nodes in the Western Parkland City (Greater Sydney Commission 2018b). Although the rate of population growth may slow somewhat as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Wade 2020), the region will nevertheless be a site of considerable economic development and social change over the next decade. This expansion must be matched by the provision of appropriate and innovative arts and cultural resources. Indeed, given the significant level of cultural activity already occurring in the region, this is a critical time to provide increased - but carefully calibrated - support for arts and cultural facilities. This investment will ensure the sector's survival and set it up

to be a source of income generation for the region and a key element in strategically enhancing its profile. The Greater Sydney Commission recognises the importance of arts, culture and the creative industries for successful urban development:

Great places are made when artistic, cultural and creative works are visible, valued, distinctive and accessible. ... Growing the arts sector will draw greater participation from both residents and visitors, boosting the economy and attracting investment. ... Creative industries have a growing role in the region's productivity, with creativity, entrepreneurship, technical ability and collaboration being essential skills for the future workforce (GSC 2018a: 57).

The New South Wales Government, through Infrastructure NSW, has focused on developing a cultural infrastructure strategy that is place-based and involves artists, cultural organisations and local councils. For both Penrith and the Blue Mountains, now is the

time to seize this policy moment to ensure that local cultural communities and creative industries are an integral part of the region's future. This report assists in this task by providing a better understanding of the social and economic contexts within which artists, creative producers and cultural organisations work in the two LGAs, focusing on a range of artforms and on the important facilitative role played by these two city Councils.

Although Penrith and the Blue Mountains are very different LGAs in terms of demography, environment and cultural landscape, synergies exist due to their geographical proximity. In relation to infrastructure provision for the arts, culture and the creative industries, these synergies can be strengthened and made more effective through locally and regionally sensitive policy, planning and investment to foster a more energetic and sustainable arts and cultural sector.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are to:

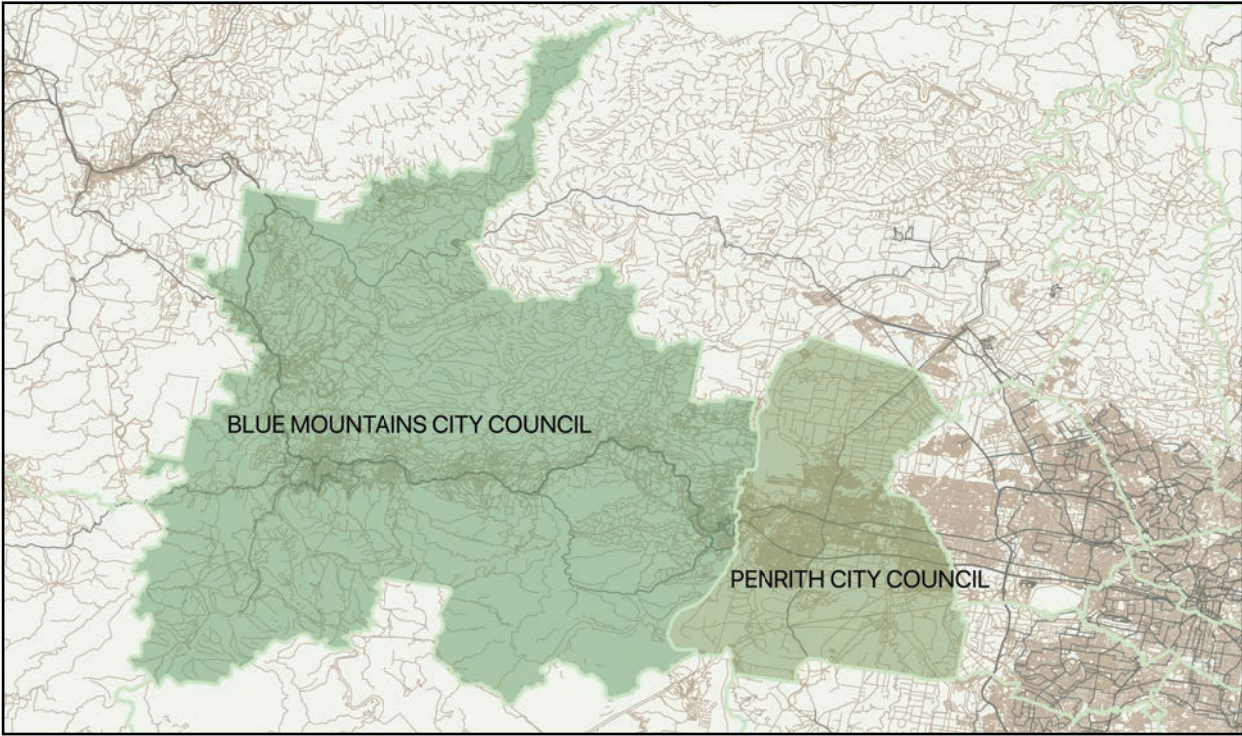
- provide detailed knowledge of the circumstances within which cultural and creative producers conduct their work in the Penrith and Blue Mountains LGAs;
- assess trends and needs related to the two Councils' arts and cultural initiatives, including the management of creative venues and cultural infrastructure; and
- indicate collaborative cultural production opportunities that are embedded in Penrith and the Blue Mountains.

Methods

The research consisted of three strands:

1. A literature review of the strategic and policy context of cultural infrastructure planning and investment in New South Wales and in Greater Western Sydney more specifically;
2. A survey, conducted by Penrith and Blue Mountains Councils and the Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise (BMEE), of current arts and cultural practitioners in the two LGAs designed to understand their infrastructure and support needs in facilitating their creative practice;
3. In-depth case studies of 31 cultural organisations, spread across Penrith and the Blue Mountains. These case studies covered seven artforms, and three creative enterprises. In total, 23 interviews were conducted with key players in most of the case-study organisations.

The case studies were selected from a range of options suggested by the Councils, BMEE and as they arose from WSU's own preliminary research, and are included as exemplars rather than constituting a comprehensive list.



MAP 1. Penrith and the Blue Mountains

Strategic and Policy Context

Cultural infrastructure in New South Wales

There has been growing attention to cultural infrastructure in New South Wales for more than a decade. The NSW Government’s *Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+*, published in 2019, was the first such plan in the history of the State. It is designed to guide the planning and delivery of cultural infrastructure in regions across the State to ‘support a thriving and dynamic cultural sector’. A key strategic priority of the Plan is to integrate cultural infrastructure planning with state and local government planning processes. In his Foreword to the Plan, the Minister for the Arts is emphatic about the importance

of cultural infrastructure for the State:

Supporting a culture of creativity is essential for New South Wales to succeed in a global innovation economy, but for culture to truly flourish it needs a home – places where it can be created, shared and enjoyed (2019: 2).

In the policy literature, ‘cultural infrastructure’ initially implied large presentation venues such as major concert halls, galleries or sports stadia, focusing primarily on cultural consumption. While these are still important spaces, policy makers have gradually come to see the importance of infrastructure that supports arts and cultural production and education. A focus on cultural production as well

consumption, complemented by supportive land-use planning, is considered of key importance to successful cultural precincts or hubs. The NSW Cultural Infrastructure Plan defines cultural infrastructure as the buildings and spaces that accommodate or support culture, ‘the places where the cultural sector and broader community come together to create, share, learn and store products or experiences’ (2019: 11).

Adapting a typology developed by the ICS Cultural Infrastructure research program team (Ang et al 2016), the Plan distinguishes the following types of cultural infrastructure according to their principal function:

- Presentation (e.g., live music venues, galleries,

- Aboriginal Keeping Places, cinemas)
- Community and participation (e.g., community venues and centres)
- Libraries and archives (e.g., local libraries)
- Practice, education and development (e.g., art schools, rehearsal spaces, studios)
- Commercial and enterprise (e.g., creative retail, co-working spaces)
- Festival, event and public (e.g., outdoor event spaces, public art)
- Collections (e.g., storage, digitisation)
- Digital (e.g., websites, online communities and databases, social media).

Policy for cultural infrastructure provision is now much more closely interlinked with larger urban planning agenda, particularly with the metropolis of three cities concept developed by the Greater Sydney Commission (GSC) and the Western Sydney Airport development. In this context, Western Sydney has, belatedly, become more than a peripheral zone in the eyes of central planners. It must now have its own infrastructure accessible within the GSC's concept of a '30-minute city'. In the process, traditional divisions between policy areas are diminishing with the increasingly explicit coordination of functions such as service provision, employment, economic growth and place-making. For instance, the NSW *Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+* provides this 'vision' for the Western Parklands City (which includes Penrith and the Blue

Mountains): 'Cultural infrastructure helps drive new locations for jobs and investments'. Integrating cultural infrastructure as part of the new Western Sydney airport and Badgerys Creek Aerotropolis is encompassed within its strategic focus, as is the co-location of culture within emerging centres of creative industries, technology and innovation.

But *how* these jobs can be created is not stated. This crucial question can be easily overlooked alongside issues of transport, logistical and industrial infrastructure. Viable new cultural infrastructure will need to complement what has already been developed, particularly the 'soft infrastructure' of organisations and networks of artists, creative workers and cultural industries. The *Western City District Plan* (2018) outlines target areas for development across the region. These include the Aerotropolis south of Penrith and supporting nodes like St Marys, where the rail link will connect to the Western Line, and Katoomba, which is slated for development in light of projected increased tourism flows as a consequence of the new airport in western Sydney. The Plan envisages 'a major tourist, cultural, recreational and entertainment hub' in Penrith, the kind of development that has been proposed in local planning documents such as *Penrith Progression* (2015). There are clear opportunities for developing cultural infrastructure that converge with such major urban planning projects. The question

will be how to develop productive cultural infrastructure and facilities that more broadly and sustainably support arts and cultural ecologies across LGAs and the region.

This view is supported by Infrastructure NSW's *Cultural Infrastructure Strategy: Advice to the NSW Government* (2016), which recognises the need for there to be a good fit between infrastructure provision and local social and cultural conditions and activities. The Strategy places considerable emphasis on the role of cultural infrastructure in urban regeneration and the activation of public spaces, particularly when clustered to form 'cultural precincts'. Cultural precincts need to be relevant to local communities:

Cultural precincts also help to distinguish a city or neighbourhood; but the art and culture inspired, created or engaged within that cultural precinct must be local to or informed by the area itself. This leads to the creation of distinctive, organic, civil spaces and cultural experiences. (Infrastructure NSW 2016: 29)

In the *Cultural Infrastructure Strategy*, productive infrastructure is given strong emphasis within a vision of planned precincts: 'Large flexible, dynamic spaces are created and maintained for cultural production and presentation such as "maker-spaces" for contemporary artists and musicians and venues for collaborative and satellite exhibitions and international travelling blockbuster exhibitions'. The

strategy also contains a framework for evaluating infrastructure. The cultural infrastructure investment framework proposed in the report (and eventually adopted by the NSW government) presents a set of objectives and criteria to assist in the consistent planning of cultural infrastructure in NSW. It sets up requirements for projects to demonstrate the benefits that they seek to deliver in achieving public value, such as job creation, international and interstate visitation, development of the cultural and creative sector, and cultural participation of local residents. The broad objectives and criteria are:

- global competitiveness (visitation and tourist growth, enhancing the state's attractiveness as a place to work or live or do business, filling particular market gaps)
- productivity (jobs, innovation, strengthening sector)
- sustainability (economic sustainability only considered) and equity (equitable opportunities and increased cultural participation)
- urban and regional development (urban renewal, precinct development) (Infrastructure NSW 2016: 11).

This framework creates a heightened emphasis on demonstrating extrinsic outcomes of cultural infrastructure planning and investment, rather than on intrinsic cultural values such as artistic merit. Responding to this highly 'integrated' policy

reality presents challenges for the limited resources of local councils and arts organisations, particularly if it is coupled with a commitment to work closely with artists, cultural practitioners and stakeholders in order to ensure that infrastructure is well-matched to regional realities.

The NSW Government's *Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+* (2019), which builds on the Strategy's recommendations, further details plans to develop cultural infrastructure in the Western Parkland City. The Plan envisages 'world class cultural infrastructure' and opportunities for 'new models for delivering cultural infrastructure', in recognition of the considerable innovation in arts and cultural provision in Western Sydney. It proposes that investment in cultural infrastructure be 'aligned with centres, transit hubs and planned transport upgrades, [which] will have a catalytic effect on the emerging Western Parklands City' (2019: 59). This Plan is ambitious and wide-ranging, with an emphasis on the integration of arts and cultural planning with urban planning. It recommends 'the integration of cultural infrastructure planning with land-use and precinct planning and the embedding of cultural infrastructure within other government portfolios' (Goal 1, 10). Increasing flexibility is a strong theme, for instance by easing planning regulations to facilitate cultural infrastructure by simplifying planning requirements and better utilising digital technologies. The Plan recommends 'increasing making space

through the adaptive re-use, expansion and maintenance of existing infrastructure' (Goal 7). All these measures will require more detailed planning and collaboration at local government level and imply whole-of-council commitments.

Arts and cultural policy is, therefore, increasingly understood as intertwined with larger planning and development agendas. There are increasing opportunities to develop cultural infrastructure, but these may be positioned within very different partnership and funding contexts. For example, in 2019 the federal government abolished the Department of Communications and the Arts and moved its responsibilities to a much larger Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, with uncertain implications for arts and cultural funding (including funding for cultural infrastructure) at the national level. Opportunities may not be clearly labelled as arts or cultural infrastructure — accessing them will require proactive engagement as they present themselves. In these emerging conditions, it will be important to ensure that top-down policy and planning does not override the importance of detailed local cultural planning based on a knowledge of what will work on the ground with existing cultural practitioners and communities.

Local government and local cultural organisations will be crucial to this policy and planning process.

Cultural infrastructure in Western Sydney

The 2015 report by Deloitte, *Building Western Sydney's Cultural Arts Economy: A Key to Sydney's Success*, found that, on a *per capita* basis, the Western Sydney cultural and arts sector has been grossly underfunded and supported in recent decades. While Western Sydney represents 10 per cent of Australians, it only attracted 1 per cent of Commonwealth arts funding and 5.5 per cent of the State's arts, heritage and events funding. The region has a significant shortage of cultural venues and events compared to Eastern Sydney. None of the major State-funded cultural institutions is located in Western Sydney, a situation which will only change with the scheduled move of the Powerhouse Museum (MAAS) to Parramatta. The Deloitte report found that local government had provided the bulk of support for the cultural arts sector in the region 'through the establishment, ownership and maintenance of performance venues, promotion of local and major events [and] facilitation of Cultural Arts activity including industry development'. It argues that there are favourable conditions to take advantage of opportunities to develop the cultural sector in Western Sydney, such as a growing economy, large-scale audiences, lower establishment costs, and fewer regulatory issues. Although some of these conditions may be under challenge as a result of



Be Right Back.

COVID-19, the region will remain the State's centre of growth for the foreseeable future.

The importance of local government to building production-focused cultural infrastructure in Western Sydney was highlighted in SGS Economics and Planning's 2018 report for Create NSW, *Mapping Arts and Culture in Western Sydney*, which noted that almost all significant purpose-built cultural infrastructure in the region had been provided by local government. This historical situation is a strength, as these facilities are generally attuned to local needs, but there are also many gaps in cultural infrastructure that local government has little capacity to support. For instance, the SGS report found that there was a lack of infrastructure for film production - there is only one publicly accessible place to edit film and a lack of opportunities to screen locally-made films (SGS 2018: 87). SGS also found a lack of maker spaces in Western Sydney and across artforms (SGS 2018: 100).

The SGS report provides the best overview of Western Sydney's cultural infrastructure to date, mapping the region by artform and LGA, and including both privately-run and publicly-funded venues. Differences between LGAs were very stark. Not counting general community spaces - which are not purpose-built cultural infrastructure - the Blue Mountains had 69 arts and cultural spaces, bolstered particularly by 45 visual arts spaces (primarily privately-run galleries and studios), more than all the other LGAs combined. By contrast, Penrith had only 14 dedicated arts and cultural spaces (SGS 2018: 53). Penrith's strength lay in its regional infrastructure assets, in particular the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, along with the Penrith Regional Gallery/Lewers Bequest. The Joan reported the highest attendance figures of 292,000 for a Council-operated arts facility (SGS 2018: 59).

Neither Penrith nor the Blue Mountains has dedicated infrastructure for digital art, and Penrith has no dedicated space for writing.

Multipurpose community infrastructure, such as community halls, was identified in the audit as important for cultural expression across Western Sydney. Outdoor spaces, such as showgrounds, gardens and parks, were also important for cultural activities such as festivals. However, it should be noted that spaces such as community centres are not always suitable for cultural activity, as they often lack specific facilities such as storage spaces or equipment. Overall, the SGS report confirms that there is limited purpose-built cultural infrastructure in Western Sydney.

Cultural Infrastructure: Penrith and Blue Mountains

The Penrith and the Blue Mountains Local Government Areas are very different in terms of cultural activities and networks, and the locally-generated infrastructure that has developed over time. Different kinds of environment, with different populations and urban structures, have led to different cultural facilities, artist clusters, organisations and cultural enterprises. Penrith CBD has a role as a significant regional centre in arts and education, with significant regional infrastructure such as the above-mentioned The Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre and the Penrith Regional Gallery and Lewers Bequest, as well as the Western Sydney Conservatorium and

two campuses of Western Sydney University. These institutions have well developed creative production and education programs (see PP&VA Strategy 2015) that support cultural value chains at various points extending across creative ideas, production, dissemination and audience participation (for the concept of the cultural value chain, see Ang et al 2016).

Penrith City Council has pursued the further development of arts and cultural infrastructure as part of an attempt to 'progress' Penrith, largely through the development of central Penrith. It has cultivated a strong place-based approach to cultural development, such as through the Magnetic Places program that encourages large-scale public participation in developing public art and local identities (PCC Magnetic Places Grants Program 2019). Place-based approaches have also been important in the Blue Mountains, partly due to its demography and geography — a string of small townships along a ridge line surrounded by a national park. This environment has encouraged artists and other creative producers to cluster in dispersed groupings; the Blue Mountains has long been recognised for its home-grown cultural networks, with a high proportion of jobs in the creative industry sector (7.4 per cent of jobs compared to the state level of 4.7 per cent; BMEE 2018).

Different policy emphases are apparent in Penrith and the Blue Mountains. Penrith has tended to link cultural development and

infrastructure with urban development and place-management goals, and to enhancement of its role as a regional hub. The Blue Mountains has developed, by contrast, an enterprise support model applied to a relatively well-developed arts community. The Blue Mountains Creative Industries Cluster and the brand identity MTNS MADE, for example, were developed within the Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, an independent body funded by Blue Mountains City Council.

The *Mayoral Arts and Culture Summit* organised by Penrith City Council in 2015 is an important reference point for this research, forming a kind of policy benchmark. It was a regional collaborative event, involving artists, creative entrepreneurs and other cultural stakeholders from Penrith, the Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury LGAs. Creative infrastructure was a major theme of the Summit. Detailed priorities and associated strategies were put forward that seem to have a strong resonance with policy documents such as the *Western City District Plan* and *Create NSW's Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+*. These strategies focus not only on *hard* infrastructure (such as spaces, buildings and venues), but also on *soft* infrastructure such as the institutions, policies and human resources to facilitate the development and delivery of cultural infrastructure and facilities. Relevant strategies articulated by the Summit include hard and soft infrastructure.

Hard infrastructure

- Establish and resource accessible creative hubs/ incubators that support artists to grow their practice and generate professional opportunities.
- Build an environment supportive of innovation and creativity including supporting artists and artist workspaces as anchors around which to build creative industry clusters.
- Identify local council spaces and shop fronts across the region and develop a program of pop-ups to increase the number of artists who have access to work spaces
- Cluster arts organisations and creative pop-up spaces as retail anchors and activity generators to attract and support other enterprises
- Establish and resource digital multimedia hubs/ incubators to enhance artist capacities, contemporary arts practices, audience and reach
- Research how the arts can be integrated into new commercial and residential development projects in the region.

Soft infrastructure

- Councils to work with the business sectors to broker partnerships and sponsorship
- Develop partnerships with schools, colleges and universities, including artist-in-residency

programs to engage and nurture children and young people's creativity

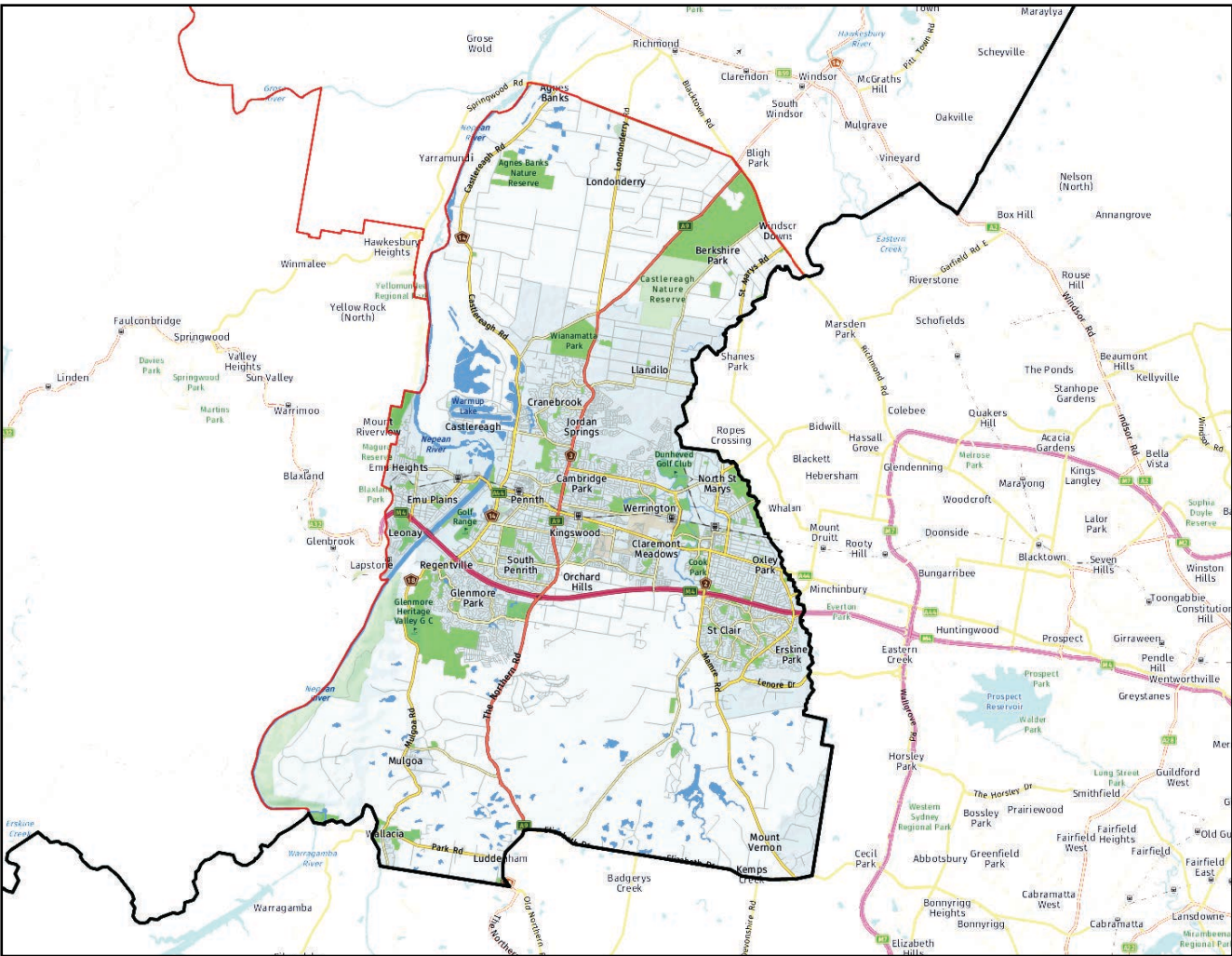
- Undertake a skills audit of the region's artists to identify professional development needs and employment pathways (Penrith City Council 2015).

Reconsidering these strategies in the present context can form a sound basis for a collaborative cultural infrastructure plan and strategies across the region. The Mayoral Summit's proposed directions have affinities with local government policy activity and activities in both Penrith and the Blue Mountains.

The *Penrith and Blue Mountains Creative Production Enablers and Support Survey* (Penrith City Council 2020) was initiated by Penrith City Council, Blue Mountains City Council and Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise to understand better the infrastructure and support needs of people currently working in the arts, culture and creative industries in the two LGAs. Of the 167 respondents, 68 per cent resided within the Blue Mountains LGA, while 23 per cent came from the Penrith LGA. This response rate reflects the comparatively greater size of the creative community in the Blue Mountains. Participants in the survey identified a variety of key physical facilities (cultural infrastructure) that they believe is needed to support their creative practice. These facilities include small creation spaces, performance space,

rehearsal space and collaborative spaces. Affordability is a key requirement mentioned by respondents. More affordable spaces, along with multipurpose creative hubs, are at the core of what participants say could be improved to expand creative production in Penrith and the Blue Mountains.

In Penrith, the largest proportion (38 per cent) of respondents was willing to travel throughout the Penrith and Blue Mountains region for their work, with 30 per cent of Penrith respondents willing to travel within Western Sydney. In the Blue Mountains, respondents were less inclined to travel outside their LGA, with 43 per cent stating that they would be willing to travel within the Blue Mountains only. Despite this reluctance, 29 per cent of respondents were happy to travel to Penrith. Thus, at least two thirds of Penrith and more than half of Blue Mountains respondents were willing to travel within the region. These survey findings suggest that creative production synergies between the two LGAs can be enhanced with the provision of affordable and suitable cultural infrastructure, both local and region-wide. More detailed information and analysis relating to the survey is provided in Appendix 1. The next two sections provide additional information concerning the LGAs that are the subject of this report.



MAP 2. Penrith Topography

Penrith City Council: Cultivating Creativity in a Growing Region.

Located on the banks of the Nepean River at the foot of the Blue Mountains, Penrith City lies on the western fringe of the Sydney metropolitan area. Established as one of Sydney’s earliest colonial towns, Penrith is now home to a growing population of 213,000 people and services a catchment of over 1.5 million people. It also has a proud Aboriginal heritage, having Sydney’s second largest Indigenous population (after Blacktown LGA), as well as being a

culturally diverse community with speakers of 79 different languages.

Greater Penrith is strategically located as the closest urban centre to a new international Western Sydney Airport and its associated Aerotropolis. To ensure that the City continues to play its role as a vital hub for communities in the region, as well as for Central and Western New South Wales, it is receiving significant government attention and

investment through the Western Sydney City Deal, particularly with regard to transport infrastructure.

Penrith is self-described as ‘a city of pride and progress’ ideally positioned in ‘a region of opportunity’ (Penrith City Council 2018). It is set to experience considerable change in the coming decades with significant investment in residential, commercial and industrial property, and in transport infrastructure.

Penrith's population is one of the fastest growing in Australia and, according to some estimates, is projected to grow by another 100,000 or more people by 2041, in a Western City region of 1.9 million people (NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment 2020). As already noted above, however, the COVID-19 crisis has suggested that this population growth may slow for several years. With around a third of its population aged 24 or under, Penrith will be home to many talented creatives.

Cultural landscape

A sense of pride and ambition is reflected in many of Penrith City Council's recent strategic documents in which artistic, cultural and creative production are identified as important contributors to community wellbeing. Both the *Mayoral Arts and Culture Summit* and internal work on cultural infrastructure needs identified the development of a creative industries hub as a priority for the City. *Penrith Progression: A Plan for Action* (2015), an initiative of Penrith City Council, proposed the further development of the creative economy in the CBD by supporting new businesses and providing new prospects for knowledge and creative workers. An important goal is attracting and keeping the so-called 'dream demographic' of 15-35 year old, tertiary-educated professionals to improve the city's economic and cultural vitality. These proposed strategies include a 'talent attraction' program, an

increase in the level of funding for cultural arts venues and programs, and the investigation of new cultural arts venues in Penrith.

Following from the *Penrith Progression* action plan, Penrith's *Economic Development Strategy* (2017) nominated 'arts and culture' as one of the six target sectors for growth. The Strategy set a highly ambitious target to generate more than 5,000 new jobs in arts and culture by 2031. It notes that one of the actions required to achieve this growth will be to focus on 'Improving urban amenity to attract new investment, particularly in arts and culture, recreation and bespoke services and manufacturing' (2017: 6).

Despite the relatively high numbers of people who participate in creative arts and cultural activities in the Penrith and Blue Mountains region (Australia Council of the Arts 2017), the creative industries sector in the Penrith local government area could be said to be embryonic, with just 76 businesses engaging in creative and performing arts activities. The majority of these businesses fall within the subcategory of Creative Artists, Musicians, Writers and Performers. There are 1,117 people employed in the Arts and Recreation industry sector in Penrith in 2019, of which only a fifth (200 people) were employed in the Creative and Performing Arts sub-sector (id 2019). Penrith has a long way to go to reach its ambitious target of 5,000 new jobs in Arts and Cultural activities by 2031. In the wake of the 2020 COVID-19 health and economic crisis, this task will

be an even greater challenge and requires urgent and dedicated action.

Yet, in the context of its future growth Penrith's ambitions are not unrealistic. There is a burgeoning pool of creative talent in the Penrith community and region. With around 70,000 people aged under 25 years in 2016 (ABS 2016), there are almost as many young people in the Penrith LGA as the entire population of the Blue Mountains LGA (75,000). These young people represent 35 per cent of Penrith's resident population, a larger proportion of young people than that of Greater Sydney as a whole, where 32 per cent of people are in that younger age group. The number of people aged 15 to 34 years who are most likely to attend and participate in arts, culture and creative industries is projected to grow by 58 per cent in Penrith in the next two decades. This cohort will be a primary source of creators and consumers of arts and culture, and it is for these young people that the value of investment in creative production will be of most benefit.

Educational landscape

Penrith has an advantage of having Western Sydney University located relatively close to its city centre. In 2017 there were 7,850 students attending its Penrith campuses, and 1,738 students enrolled in the University's Creative Arts courses (WSU 2017: 59). There were 2,925 Western Sydney University

students living in Penrith. The nearby Nepean campus of Western Sydney Institute of TAFE is also a Centre of Excellence in Arts and Design and offers screen media courses.

In 2016, the Penrith LGA had 66,059 students from pre-school to Year 12, representing an 8 per cent growth in student numbers since 2011; in 2019 there were 54 government schools in the Penrith LGA. Established in 1963, Nepean High School in Emu Plains draws students from Penrith and the lower Blue Mountains and has a longstanding reputation for cultivating the creative and performing arts. In 2010, Nepean High School began a specialist stream for the Creative and Performing Arts, by audition, and changed its name to Nepean Creative and Performing Arts High School. It had an enrolment of 1,120 in 2018. In 2012, the Nepean Arts Centre (NAC), a purpose-built facility that hosts school and regional arts performances, was constructed on the school site. The school offers a range of developmental opportunities, such as (in 2016) working with an artist-in-residence, and participating in NSW School Spectacular performances. It also offers participation in 'Art Dreaming', a platform for young Indigenous artistic learners.

Penrith's role as a regional centre for school age students of creative and performing arts is exemplified by the use of the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre. On average, there are approximately 13,000 school student attendances at The Joan annually; a number

that climbs every year. There has also been an increase in the number of students attending group vocal ensembles outside of private tuition over the last five years. This was a response to the demands of the Penrith community for educational music programs that develop confidence and build performance skills in students within a group environment, rather than just focusing on the technical skills of learning an instrument.

The greatest potential for nurturing 'locally grown' creative production in Penrith is to develop opportunities and pathways to support the participation, learning and future employment in the creative sector of the young people of the region. Investment in regionally significant creative production infrastructure will help retain and attract emerging artists and creatives. Facilitating the engagement of established creative practitioners with young people and emerging creatives will, in turn, help expand their opportunities. These directions are evident in the approach to creative production adopted by Penrith City Council and its creative organisation, Penrith Performing and Visual Arts (PP&VA).

Governance and support structure

Penrith City Council supports creative production through direct delivery of creative initiatives and to the PP&VA. The PP&VA is a controlled entity of Council, with its

objectives and operation managed by a Board of Directors in accordance with the constitution of the PP&VA, and is a company limited by guarantee.

Council-led cultural development and city activation

Penrith City Council employs professional cultural staff whose focus is on community and cultural development, supporting creative industries and professional development programs, projects, events and place activation. The collective experience of the staff provides the necessary expertise in the delivery of high-quality outcomes for the City and community. Several staff maintain their creative activities as curators and/or arts practitioners. These staff include a Senior Cultural Development Officer and Cultural Project Officer (Community and Cultural Development Department), City Projects Officer (City Renewal Team); Cultural Engagement Officer (Neighbourhood Renewal), and Neighbourhood Renewal Coordinator (Place Management). Both the City and the Neighbourhood Renewal Teams are located within the Place Management Department. Their activities encompass the diverse neighbourhoods and environments that comprise the Penrith LGA.

The City Activation, Community and Place Department of PCC is a dedicated team (in all senses of

the word) engaged with 'activating' twelve identified underprivileged neighbourhoods across the Penrith LGA. Activation has become a buzzword that runs the risk of under-delivering given the challenging circumstances within which local governments often have to work. The staff distinguish between the needs of the Penrith Central Business District (CBD) and the surrounding neighbourhoods. The roles, according to the City Projects Officer in the City Renewal Team, Dimity Mullane, involve looking at the 'entire community and having a different approach to what that activation is' (interview 21

October 2019). In her view, activation is generally seen as 'enlivening the city centres', which includes 'having strong relationships with the business and resident communities' (interview 21 October 2019). Locally empowering programs nurture and support the development of local talent, investment and enterprises. Manager, Jeni Pollard, elucidates the 'particular approach of PCC', which aims to:

break through on important issues for people in particular places. In disadvantaged communities it's pretty much about trying to increase decision-making for those

residents into Council decision-making processes. In the city centre, it's about revitalising and trying to support small businesses in those communities. (interview 21 October 2019)

Penrith Performing and Visual Arts (PP&VA)

Apart from the direct delivery of arts and cultural activities, Penrith City Council supports its regional organisation, the Penrith Performing & Visual Arts (PP&VA), which 'offers more than just the performing and visual arts – it offers a vision of a creative Penrith for the whole community' (Penrith



Audience Engagement with Victoria Garcia's work in *Landing Points*.

Performing and Visual Arts n.d.). The PP&VA is an umbrella organisation for the major Penrith-based cultural institutions and oversees the management of the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, Penrith Conservatorium, Q Theatre and Penrith Regional Gallery & Lewers Bequest art collection. In addition to Council's ongoing funding, the PP&VA is supported by the public sector as well as by private funding. Hania Radvan has been the CEO of PP&VA since 2013. Prior to this position, she was in Darwin for 22 years as the Marketing Manager of the Darwin Performing Arts Centre and then Director of Arts NT.

Her main priority has been to create 'a really strong leadership team and enabling them to lead' (interview 21 October 2019).

Both of Penrith's two regionally significant arts venues are managed by the PP&VA. They are:

- Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre - concert hall (capacity 660), drama theatre (capacity 380), studio space (capacity 100), 23 music studios, two orchestral and two ensemble rooms. It is operated by Penrith City Council through Penrith Performing and Visual Arts Ltd.
- Penrith Regional Gallery & the Lewers Bequest – four gallery spaces, artist garden, collection storage, and Modernist research. It is operated by Penrith City Council through Penrith

Performing and Visual Arts Ltd.

More detailed description of these two institutions, as well as the Penrith Conservatorium, is provided in the section on regionally significant cultural institutions. Penrith Performing and Visual Arts hosts a detailed program of activities to maximise resources for creative production and creative development alongside its programming and presentation functions (PPVA Strategic Plan 2017). Notable elements of the strategy include:

- promoting inter-arts links by dedicating 'space and opportunity to explore those creative possibilities offered by our joining of theatre, music and the visual arts' (p. 10);
- encouraging new, independent work in the performing arts that support new partnerships and resonate well with audiences, especially young people (p. 11);
- forging partnerships with arts and cultural entities such as the Australian Chamber Orchestra (ACO), Museum of Applied Arts and Science (MAAS), Western Sydney University (WSU), Classic FM (p. 18);
- working with new and emerging technologies to build technical capacities; drawing on a diversity of local and visiting artists to 'develop pathways through initial engagements and residencies through to production and presentation' (p. 19);
- extending opportunities for regional practitioners through residencies, master

classes and seminars, presentation opportunities etc. (p. 19);

- extending opportunities for students and educators in the region through partnerships with schools, TAFE, WSU.

Direct delivery of cultural and creative projects

Many of the creative and cultural projects developed, delivered or facilitated by PCC, as illustrated in the case studies provided in this report, focus on mentorship and professional development to assist with careers goals and possible employment for creative practitioners, sector development, networking opportunities and social engagement. These areas could form the framework for a future PCC arts and cultural policy agenda. Such activities include the DiG Space Program for early career digital media producers, Queen Street Riches and Textures Annual Projects, community engagement, mentorship and partnerships, the Music Pathways Program for senior high school students, *Magnetic Places* to provide opportunities for local artists and communities, *Open Mic* nights to support local musicians, and *Barefoot Beats* to engage local school students in music (see the case studies for more detailed description of these programs). The major arts event delivered by PCC is the *Real Festival*. It aims to 'transform' Penrith into a space characterised by the inclusive celebration of art, culture and creativity.

Real (River Environment Arts Lifestyle) Festival

The *Real Festival* is an annual, two-day, free access, multi-arts festival held on the first weekend of November at the Tench Reserve on the Nepean River. By presenting a bold contemporary program that evokes curiosity and celebrates the unpredictable, Real hopes to attract tourists, entertain and create new experiences for audiences to connect, engage and enjoy. Council's vision is to develop and deliver an internationally recognised arts and cultural festival that:

- positions Penrith as a leader in major events and an attractive visitor destination
- attracts local and overnight visitors to the region
- stimulates the growth of local creative industries and creation of new jobs
- creates a sense of local pride.

According to PCC Events Officer Christine Glasson, who has been the festival programmer since its inception in 2016, the *Real Festival* also aims to foster and develop local creative and cultural expression. Glasson uses an expression-of-interest process to encourage participation in the festival program, and receives around a quarter of total responses from artists in the Penrith or Blue Mountains areas. This family-friendly program includes scheduled and roaming performances, alongside workshops:

You're in for a real treat when acclaimed entertainers, live music, fun activities and active

adventures come together in a spectacular fusion of fun. There's something new and exciting around every corner of the Real Festival (Penrith City Council 2019b).

PCC invests the major part of the \$600,000 that the festival costs to stage, with contributions from sponsors, grants (for example, from Destination NSW in 2019) and local businesses. The audiences are predominantly (67 per cent) from the local government area of Penrith, with 32 per cent coming from other parts of Greater Metropolitan Sydney and other areas of NSW. Attendance is rather weather dependent because the festival is in an outdoor venue, but is steadily growing: from 18,000 in 2016, 20,000 in 2017, 25,000 in 2018 and reaching 27,500 in 2019. According to Glasson, Real audiences are predominantly aged between 25 and 44 years (62 per cent), with the 18-25 age group increasing slowly, and 'it is an audience we are looking to grow in the future' (interview 3 December 2019). She also notes that adults without children in their early 30s are attending, particularly for the evening programs. The 2019 program presented a range of workshop activities, exhibitions and performances that were 'family- friendly' and might also be described as 'middle of the road', reflecting the ambitions of the festival to be inclusive and accessible. The themes embedded in the REAL acronym (river, environment, arts and lifestyle) are reflected in the programming. The popular giant light bilby puppet by Evelyn Roth and

illuminart is one example of bringing attention to endangered animals and the Australian environment, and is a successful instance of accessible, crowd-pleasing programming at REAL Festival. It also represents good regional cultural production synergies, having been created by artists in South Australia and the Blue Mountains for the Penrith festival.

An open-air public park offers flexibility for this type of arts festival, despite its associated weather dependence. Each year, the festival designs a new experience (to attract repeat visitation), hires temporary hard infrastructure (such as marquees, stages and mobile sound systems) and also involves many PCC staff in its delivery. The festival is an example of how different Council-organised cultural projects are leveraged by 'showcasing' them together. Some of the projects from other creative initiatives, like the *DiG* program, were screened in the 2018 festival. Real Festival also aims to develop and produce new works allowing for international and Australian collaborations and artistic mentorship opportunities.

These include the 2019 Headline Performance *All That We Are*, an aerial spectacular created exclusively for Real Festival through an international collaboration produced by Penrith Council, and directed by renowned Spanish director Younes Bachir and Australian choreographers Strings Attached.



Real Festival *All That We Are (Todo lo que Somos)*.

The 2018 Headline Performance of *Mountain* by Stalker Theatre, an innovative, physical and visual performance commissioned by Real Festival, has since toured nationally and internationally.

Resourcing challenges

Creative production in Penrith relies largely on the financial contribution of Council and the private sector. Apart from the DiG Space Program, which

was notably successful in receiving a grant from Create NSW in 2017, grant applications to either state or federal arts bodies for Council's activities have had limited success. However, the activities of the PP&VA have received a number of grants, although many require matching funding from Council, which can be cost-prohibitive. In some cases,

sponsorships and partnerships can be more valuable and flexible. Under the Create NSW Arts and Cultural Funding Program – Round 1 2020 grant programs, Penrith Symphony Orchestra Inc. received a \$38,332 grant to present its regular season of four symphony concerts, an opera gala, a children's concert and a Family Christmas concert, and to continue to support young and emerging artists and to promote a love of fine music to Western Sydney and the Lower Blue Mountains.

PP&VA received \$19,580 for *Street Notes*, a series of site-specific classical music interventions in the streetscapes of Penrith. Produced by PP&VA through Penrith Conservatorium, *Street Notes* delivers eight mentoring opportunities for musicians aged 18-26 years old, and

supports established musicians to diversify and develop their practice.

The financial contributions of private individuals and companies are important for the arts and cultural sector, especially in Penrith, where its regional gallery was established through a generous bequest. As the Mayor, Councillor Ross Fowler OAM, noted in his weekly column in the *Western Weekender* (13 September 2019):

In Penrith, we are in debt to the Lewers family, who in 1981 not only gifted a wonderful collection of works by Gerald and Margot Lewers and their contemporaries to our community, but also their property, house and gardens. The Penrith Regional Gallery and Lewers Bequest, its garden and the artworks it contains, are such a rich treasure for our City

... This is because art matters, and gifts to art galleries can make a very real difference to generations of a community.

While private funding does make a valuable contribution, for Penrith to become a regional hub for creative production it cannot rely on serendipitous private generosity. The reliance on external grants or philanthropic funds to support creative production projects, such as *DiG* and *Music Pathways* (see the case studies below), leaves PCC vulnerable regarding its capacity to increase professional development and creative employment opportunities. The perception of several PCC creative and cultural staff consulted for this report is that the ambitions articulated in the 2015 Mayoral Report could be rejuvenated. PCC employs, as noted, a number of staff who engage in cultural 'activation', and its approach to employing artists through particular programs is to be commended. There is also a strong culture of partnership development. But, there is just one staff member whose central role is to deliver educational and professional development opportunities across all artform areas.

Fundamentally, then, the challenges faced by Penrith are related to *inadequate resourcing*. Council expenditure on internal initiatives and external programs has made an important contribution to Penrith's cultural life, but it is not sufficient to meet the many identified needs. Employment of creative practitioners is one of the areas that the City has strategically identified to be significantly upscaled. While

PCC delivers to a high standard on its allocation of funds, its intention to increase the number of employed artists and cultural practitioners from the current estimated 1,285 (profile.id, 2019) by 5,000, as targeted by Council's Economic Development Strategy (2017), will require substantial investment from all three tiers of government as well as industry.

Cultural infrastructure provision

As noted, Penrith is forecast to grow (COVID-19 notwithstanding) significantly in the coming decades as a key node of the Western Parkland City, one part of the 'metropolis of three cities' envisaged for the Greater Sydney Region (Greater Sydney Commission 2018). For PCC to keep pace with, and take advantage of, predicted demographic, population and high-tech industry changes will require a broadening and deepening of its cultural and creative opportunities, including the provision of adequate cultural infrastructure and venues.

Lack of meeting spaces

Across all the stakeholder interviews conducted for this research, the need for Penrith City Council to identify and maintain places for artists to meet and collaborate was consistently and strongly expressed. There are remarkably few, if any, physical structures and spaces

that are available to artists, producers and designers to access as maker spaces / studios, rehearsal spaces, storage areas for equipment / props, exhibitions, and to enable general networking, mentoring and to bring creative partners together for projects or programs.

Lack of creative production facilities

While The Joan does have professional standard rehearsal spaces, access to this facility is limited by its already tight schedule and the need for creatives to have sufficient funds to pay the hire fee. Many of Penrith's creative projects require intensive professional development and creative labour inputs, and frequently operate in non-traditional spaces such as parks, schools, footpaths, community halls and the like. Some cultural activities depend less on hard infrastructure but require places that connect and provide professional facilities. These issues are similar across artforms and cultural activities. For the Place Management team, the example of Blacktown Arts Centre (BAC) is an ideal centre, as it is open enough to be able 'walk in there without a reason'. BAC does not, according to the team, feel like a facility, and its ease of access, including proximity to trains and shopping centres, is a real advantage.

Cultural Engagement Officer Donita Hulme says that the Centre has 'interesting curatorial stuff, that doesn't

feel curatorial. It doesn't feel affected' (interview 21 November 2019).

Another effective model mentioned by staff is The Studio, a media and creative technology hub in central Sydney, which was established in 2018 with private funding and co-investment from the federal government through its Incubator Support Fund+. It houses 140 resident startups and provides access to recording and green screen studios, a private edit suite, meeting rooms, and networking and development opportunities.

Penrith needs an equivalent central hub and creative incubator (both physically and socially) where local creative and cultural practitioners can meet and work regularly, and where Council-initiated professional and cultural development projects can be scaled up and made more sustainable. Within the Penrith LGA, there are several venues that could be considered for adaptive use or re-use for such purposes, such as:

- TAFE campus in Henry Street, Penrith (no longer used for large-scale teaching)
- St Marys Corner, Queen Street end (close to the railway station).

Making these or similar spaces available requires the will of Council to negotiate the terms on behalf of creative producers, while activating them requires consultation across Council teams in conjunction with creative producers working in the region. This report consistently

points to the need for greater scale and scope of cultural infrastructure in the region. PCC has demonstrated a capacity to invest in emerging artists through its various initiatives, and so is in a good position to capitalise on and extend this investment to advance creative production and cultural activity in the region. Penrith Council is also in the early stages of creating a 'City Park' in the heart of the City Centre. It would be ideal for Council to consider opportunities to bring a creative aspect to this development, as well as to any future redevelopment adjacent to this site.

Future policies and plans

There is gathering evidence regarding the returns on investment in arts and cultural programs, such as those provided through PCC. Recent studies into the connection between art and social cohesion have found, according to a recent survey of the field, that:

the arts and culture are particularly effective in creating social networks among different sorts of people who would not otherwise have come together, therefore providing cohesion across otherwise divergent demographic groups. The process of 'creative place-making' that occurs through creative enterprise and community-based arts and culture, such as festivals or installations of public art, has been found to connect disparate members of a community. These kinds of celebrations can bridge social barriers, fostering a sense of

communal pride. (A New Approach 2019: 20)

There is also evidence linking increased employment prospects to arts education and programs. Through the *DiG Space Program*, for example, the creative mentees were able to advance their careers, with employment in new commission works, development of professional networks and/or full-time employment (see the digital arts and culture case study below). Arts and culture-based education has been found to be beneficial in developing intellectual skills and enhancing educational impacts. Not only does this help to 'future-proof' Australia's workforce, it also contributes to mitigating the impact of disadvantage (*A New Approach* 2019: 16). Both types of value are demonstrated in Penrith's arts and cultural initiatives.

In the absence of an arts and culture strategy *per se*, Penrith City Council has endorsed a number of strategies that guide its approach to arts and cultural activity. These include the *Penrith Night Time Economy Strategy* (Urbis Pty Ltd 2017) and the *Draft Penrith City Library Strategy 2017* (Penrith City Council n.d.). *Penrith Progression* identified the creation of an evening economy as an important element in the revitalisation of the Penrith City Centre. A night-time (or evening) economy is fostered by businesses that offer dining or entertainment activities after sunset. The vision for Penrith City's night-time economy is for it to be safe, diverse and busy. It includes identifying

linked precincts, creating large and small spaces for indoor and outdoor fun, and a range of activities suitable for the whole community at different times of the evening and night. Penrith has many strengths, such as diverse businesses, leisure and recreation assets and a diverse urban landscape, which lend themselves to building a strong night-time economy. The *Penrith Night Time Economy Strategy* (Urbis Pty Ltd 2017) aims to build on these strengths, as well as create an environment to support a diverse range of activities and attractions to show that Penrith is an active, bustling City with flexible daily rhythms.

Libraries are significant providers of technology, digital access and support, and the library strategy proposes to 'encourage digital creativity e.g. learning opportunities and maker spaces', and to 'showcase new developments and innovations (leading edge technologies) for community creative and learning opportunities'. The strategy also proposes investigating a library publication option to support significant local content.

Council's recently endorsed Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS), *Planning for a Brighter Future* (PCC March 2020), confirms the idea that libraries are 'evolving into facilities for community and cultural gatherings and events, display spaces, bases for outreach programs, and hubs for our digital future' (2020: 41).

The LSPS acknowledges the value of cultural infrastructure and incorporates it into its planning priorities. Planning Priority 1: 'Align development, growth and infrastructure', while not making specific mention of the need for new cultural infrastructure, refers to community facilities such as parks and libraries and remarks that '[o]ur need for infrastructure to meet our growing demand is one of our community's strongest priorities' (2020: 27). In this context, advocacy for cultural infrastructure would need to be advanced through Action Item 1.1, 'Determine the local infrastructure needs for our communities'. Planning Priority 14 proposes to '[g]row our Tourism, Arts and Cultural Industries', noting 'the potential to further expand our arts and cultural industries, particularly the opportunity for new cultural institutions' (2020: 71). Council proposes to work with the NSW Government to explore the potential for new facilities, particularly within the Western Sydney Aerotropolis and in capitalising on the tourism economy. Recommendations relevant to cultural infrastructure include: reviewing planning controls to ensure that there are opportunities for tourism, arts and culture; and preparing a joint-study with Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury City Councils to determine needs and key linkages to support the growth of arts and cultural industries. The former activity could provide an opportunity to make planning regulations more amenable to

cultural activity and creative production.

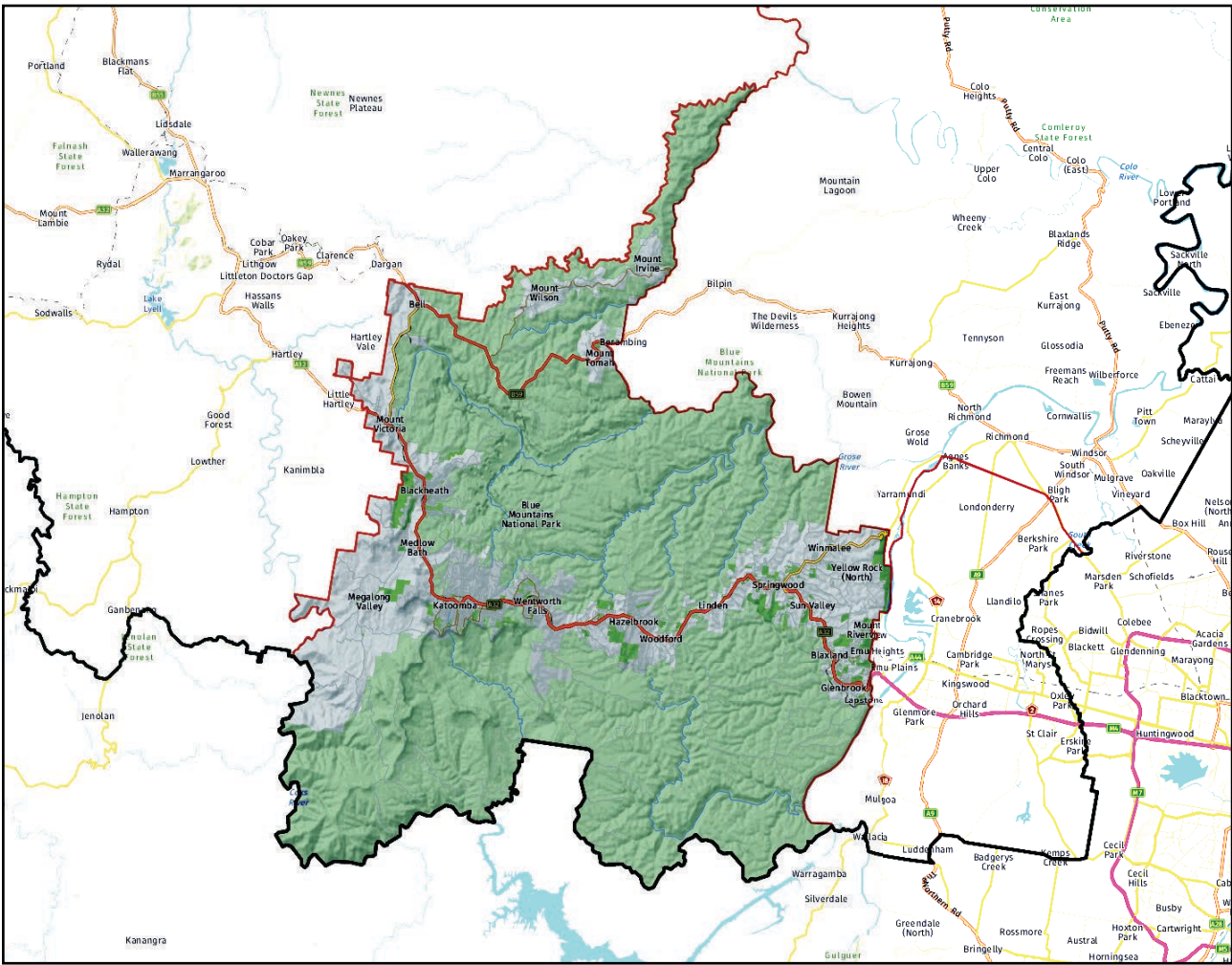
Conclusion

The Penrith case studies throughout this report illustrate some of the many and diverse creative and cultural initiatives managed by PCC staff that are helping to nurture creative production in Penrith. While not comprehensive, the selection provides an indication of the depth of attention brought to developing and delivering these projects, and of PCC's contribution to stimulating creative employment and cultural engagement with limited (even inadequate) resources.

The artist- and cultural practitioner-centred projects all create opportunities that aim to generate professional development and possible employment for artists and creative practitioners from across the region. Emerging artists and other creatives are assisted to find a peer network and career pathways, and professional artists and cultural practitioners are employed to improve social and cultural engagement in lower socio-economic areas, as well as in public events such as the Real Festival. The programs aim to integrate arts and cultural activities into the local and regional social context. With its dedicated and ongoing resourcing for arts and cultural production, Penrith has a strong foundation for becoming a centre that supports creative production across the Greater Western Sydney region.



Sevket Uruk Guden *Queen Street Riches and Textures*



MAP 3. Blue Mountains.

Blue Mountains City Council: Maximising the Potential of a City of the Arts

The City of Blue Mountains is located on the western fringe of the Greater Sydney Region, and is one of only two cities in the world surrounded by a UNESCO-declared World Heritage Site. It is also the only council in NSW designated under the Australian Classification of Local Governments as a 'Category 12 Council - Urban Fringe Large' as a result of its location and

population of between 70,000 and 120,000. According to the 2016 Census, the Blue Mountains had a population of 76,902.

The City of Blue Mountains is in a rugged and beautiful area that is largely a national park. The Blue Mountains is, nevertheless, a peri-urban region on the edge of metropolitan Sydney, distant

from but still accessible to metropolitan art resources and venues. The area is relatively sparsely populated, with settlement largely located in a string of small townships along a narrow east-west ridge line. Artists have long been attracted to the area because of its attractive landscapes, 'village' lifestyle, affordable property and strong sense of community. Being a tourism

destination provides enhanced cultural opportunities in the area. Activity levels in the arts, arts festivals, artisan markets and community-based art activities in the Blue Mountains far exceed overall levels in NSW (Blue Mountains City Council 2017: 153).

Cultural landscape

The NSW Government's Creative Industries Taskforce (2013: 32) described the Blue Mountains as a place where 'natural creative industries precincts, clusters and hubs' had developed: 7.4 per cent of the working residential population is employed in the creative industries, around 60 per cent higher than the State average of 4.7 per cent. Compared to NSW, 18 per cent of Blue Mountains residents are employed in the creative industries (2,696 in the Blue Mountains compared to 148,000 in NSW) which is the fifth largest source of employment in the Blue Mountains (BMEE 2014: 4). The standing of Blue Mountains-based professional artists and companies is indicated by the receipt of 23 successful Australia Council for the Arts grants in 2018-2019.

Consulting group SGS Economics and Planning's 2018 study of cultural infrastructure in Western Sydney identified 69 cultural infrastructure items in the Blue Mountains - by far the largest number for any LGA examined (SGS 2018: 53). Almost two thirds of them are privately-run commercial art galleries catering to tourists. In

1995, the Blue Mountains was announced as the pilot City for NSW's City of the Arts program. Funding was provided for 1996-98. This concept originated in the Blue Mountains, and the Council and community have continued to use it, although the State government program no longer exists. The City of the Arts concept has become an enduring part of Blue Mountains City's identity and is reflected in Council's policies. The City of the Arts Trust administers Blue Mountains City Council's annual arts grants programs.

Blue Mountains City Council has developed a distinctive approach to supporting the creative industries. Realising that the Blue Mountains had limited access to land and that the area had little additional capacity for industrial or real estate development, Council was an early adopter of a sustainable planning approach. This adoption involved recognising that the Blue Mountains' environment, heritage and cultural activities were key assets for the region. The development of the Blue Mountains as a centre for the arts and creative industries is a key priority for the BMCC. This emphasis on the central importance of the arts and supporting creative industries is strongly reflected in the *Blue Mountains Local Strategic Planning Statement Blue Mountains 2040: Living Sustainably* (BMCC 2020), which was endorsed by Council in March 2020. These cultural policy emphases have been established through wide consultation guiding policy directions and reflect the

outcomes and directions set by the *Blue Mountains Cultural Strategy 2006-2016*, which involved extensive consultation through 24 sector workshops (various artforms plus cultural heritage and religious and spiritual practices) held across the city and involving over 500 people. This initiative set the framework for ongoing policy development over the subsequent four years. A new *Creative Strategy* is currently in development.

The 2006-2016 *Cultural Strategy* had a strong focus on the provision of much needed cultural infrastructure such as the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre in Katoomba as well as the provision of affordable and accessible facilities and venues for performance, exhibition, training, studio space, and heritage collection storage and treatment. It also focused on improved presentation and marketing of Blue Mountains' cultural attractions and products, and on the potential of the creative industries to reach a self-sustaining critical mass.

The Strategy reflected a concern with the low level of paid employment in cultural occupations. Blue Mountains' creative producers and the 'soft infrastructure' that they generate are regarded as necessary to 'sustain a vibrant and self-replenishing creative industry'. A key priority was that 'artists [would be] able to live and practice in the Blue Mountains, supported by affordable studios and reliable work opportunities'. Actions to support this goal included advocacy for employment

assistance to develop artists' business skills, investigation of a cultural business incubator, and promoting the concept of artists' studios and co-location of cultural enterprises. These actions point to the direction that the Council has taken in developing an enterprise approach to supporting the arts, as is exemplified by the founding of the Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise (BMEE) in 2013, and the subsequent development of the Blue Mountains Creative Industries Cluster and the brand MTNS MADE (see discussion below).

Blue Mountains City Council operates two regional level cultural institutions, the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre in Katoomba and the Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub in Springwood. The Cultural Centre comprises the City Art Gallery and the World Heritage Interpretive Centre, as well as workshop and seminar spaces, a gallery shop and café and a viewing platform. It is co-located with the Katoomba Library, employing five full-time, seven part-time, and also casual staff. The Theatre and Community Hub is co-located with the Springwood Library and the Braemar Gallery. It has five full-time and four part-time staff, plus casuals.

Governance structure

In 2019 Blue Mountains City Council created several new Directorates: Office of the CEO; Strategy and Corporate Services; Culture and Community Services

Directorates; Economy Place and Infrastructure and Environment and Planning Services. The newly created Arts and Cultural Services branch sits within the Cultural and Community Services Directorate. Council has a number of staff involved in arts and cultural program delivery and activities, including cultural development staff, arts staff (performing and visual arts) within Council's major cultural facilities, library staff who also carry out arts activities, events and marketing staff, and staff employed in heritage, recreation and planning. Paul Brinkman is the Manager of Arts and Cultural Services, which includes cultural development and the management of Council's major cultural facilities, the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub, and Braemar Community Gallery. The Branch delivers cultural programs, arts grants, public art provision and manages the Council's cultural collections. It promotes the artists and arts activities of the Blue Mountains. The Branch's role is to strengthen the unique identity of the Blue Mountains as a City of the Arts and a centre of culture and creativity. The intention is that cultural activity is seen as a whole-of-Council activity, as Paul Brinkman states:

Ideally, given Council's renewed push to have all parts of Council working together to increase the level of public art activity, we are determined to see much more visible quality art in the public domain. This is the

direction of the Arts and Cultural Services branch that I now lead. I think this can be done with our increased resources and by better integrating with other parts of Council to get results. Given the Council's very limited rate base, I'm also wanting to see if we can get government support for a really dynamic transformation of our public domain. (interview 17 October 2019)

The Branch's Cultural Development Unit has one full-time Cultural Development Coordinator position, whose responsibilities include strategic cultural planning, cultural initiatives, the BMCC's City of the Arts grants program, and the promotion of the arts in the Blue Mountains through the City of the Arts social media platforms. A Cultural Development Projects Officer (part-time) was engaged in 2020 in a temporary capacity to further the provision of art in the public domain.

In addition, other Council departments support arts and cultural activities. The Tourism and Events section facilitates community and commercial cultural events throughout the City (such as *Winter Magic*, which attracts 40,000 visitors per annum), as well as providing events information for regional and state-wide promotion. Library staff are involved in a range of arts activities programming such as *Poetry under the Stars*, author talks and story-telling. Recreation, town planning and environmental staff are also involved in public art



Blue Mountains Cultural Centre *Cinema Under the Stars*

provision and integration of artistic design elements into the urban fabric. Planning staff are involved in providing advice and assessment regarding particular cultural infrastructure needs, including those related to heritage.

Resourcing cultural infrastructure and programs

The Blue Mountains has a particularly well-developed arts community, with a mature arts ecology. This cultural ecosystem includes the presence of many professional artists and companies, commercial arts venues, and strong community-based arts organisations. Arts activity is broadly spread across the spectrum of artforms, with particular strengths in music,

fine arts, writing, design, artisans (who have their own network and brand, Blue Mountains Makers), and a small but active film production sector. The Blue Mountains also has a strong creative producers network.

Council supports arts and cultural practice (at both community and professional levels) through direct Council programs. It also supports creative industries professionals 'at arm's length' through its funding of the Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, which manages the industry-focused activities of the Blue Mountains Creative Cluster /MTNS MADE program (see the section below on regional cultural institutions). Both funding strategies are necessary and, to a large extent, complementary. The goal is to maximise the capacity to work together to extend both hard and soft

creative infrastructure. The main ways in which Council currently supports cultural infrastructure and programs are through:

- Operating two flagship regional cultural institutions: the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre (Katoomba) and the Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub (Springwood)
- Funding the Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise (BMEE) and its Creative Industries Cluster, including the MTNS MADE campaign
- Operating the Braemar Community Gallery (Springwood)
- Partnering with a range of arts providers, such as Sculpture at Scenic World
- Facilitating many local and major arts and cultural events and festivals

- Providing a range of arts and cultural programs
- Providing information and promoting local arts-based cultural events
- Providing and facilitating educational and skill-based public programs
- Funding arts projects through the Blue Mountains City of the Arts Grant program (\$50,000 annually) to support local artists, arts organisations and their projects across artforms (including film)
- Providing small grants to non-profit arts organisations through the Community Assistance Grants program;
- Supporting artist residencies in locations such as Big Ci in Bilpin and at the Old School, Mt Wilson (up to 2019).

Major cultural facilities

During the past decade, Council has established two regional arts and cultural institutions, the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre and the Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub. Blue Mountains residents had long sought a publicly-funded regional art gallery and in 1997 Council initiated research into the feasibility of a regional City Art Gallery within a Cultural Centre concept. In 1998, Council also commissioned a Charrette - an intensive community urban design process exploring urban redevelopment in Katoomba. The community strongly supported the regional gallery, along with other cultural infrastructure, being located in Katoomba (Kaufman and

Morris 1999). The Blue Mountains Cultural Centre was conceived as incorporating a City Art Gallery and World Heritage Interpretive Centre reflecting the community's strong attachment to the arts and culture, and its identity as a City within a World Heritage National Park environment. Funding took many years to be acquired. The building involved a partnership between Council, the State government, and the developer and also included significant contribution from the federal government in recognition of the City's World Heritage site status. After a long development period, the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre opened in 2012.

The Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub opened in Springwood in 2015. The facility was entirely developed and built by Council. This cultural precinct has a substantial theatre and performing space, as well as spaces for community organisations and services, connected to a library and the adjoining Braemar Gallery. The two flagship cultural institutions, Blue Mountains Cultural Centre and Blue Mountains Theatre Hub, are business units of the Council. This means that a considerable proportion of the Council's limited cultural budget goes into running these larger entities, leaving relatively limited resources available for other creative production infrastructure (hard / soft or built and social). There are opportunities to extend the production element of the large venues (see the case

study on regional institutions below), including by increasing outreach activity (a good example is the Street Art Walk in which the Cultural Centre was a partner). There is an identified need to increase cultural services activities by extending infrastructure for cultural and creative production across the LGA.

Direct Council support for arts and culture

BMCC is concerned to support the creative sector and professional artists, as well as community participation in arts and culture. Interaction between professional and community-based arts and cultural activities are important as a strong cultural ecology involves intersections of professional and amateur activity. Local arts organisations across the Blue Mountains, such as the Blue Mountains Creative Arts Network (BMCAN), Blue Mountains Creative Arts Centre (Glenbrook), Springwood Arts Centre, Modern Art Projects Blue Mountains (MAPBM) and the Blackheath Arts Society, as well as many other performing arts groups and choirs, reflect this broad arts participation. Continued support is also needed for amateur and professional arts activities, such as open studios, arts trails, annual awards, assistance with grants and other career development activities.



Street Art Walk.

Blue Mountains City of the Arts grants program

The City of the Arts grant program is focused on supporting the arts sector and community involvement in the arts. The total investment is around \$50,000 annually, and between 6 to 10 projects are usually funded. The maximum grant is \$10,000, with most projects receiving between \$5,000 and \$7,500. A quick glance at the six grants awarded in 2019 shows a high standard of artistic projects. Of these, three could be described as contemporary arts projects investigating aspects of the social and environmental world. Miriam Williamson's *Birdland* explores ornithological images found in the Mount Victoria Museum and the National Parks collection (see the visual arts

case study below). David Brazil's photographic project involves rephotographing and reimagining early 20th century postcard images of the Blue Mountains and the sites of places in the present. *Sewnup* by Modern Arts Projects Blue Mountains (also discussed in the visual arts case study) investigates 'the tension between beautiful textiles and clothes and the often questionable aspects of their product cycle'. The remaining three grants were for programs to support arts and artists in the Blue Mountains community. *FunKtion @ The Junction* is a youth mentorship initiative for musicians culminating in a performance at the Junction 142 venue in Katoomba. The *Blue Mountains Pluriversity Project* is an arts and culture education pilot program for young people provided by 'The Big Fix', a

not-for-profit cultural organisation which describes the project as 'not-for-profit learning-by-doing platform to fill in the gaps not being filled by mainstream tertiary education'. Finally, the grant supported Varuna, the National Writers' House in Katoomba, in holding the inaugural Blue Mountains Writers Festival in 2019 (see the writing and literature case study below).

The grant program supports ephemeral projects that involve professional artists and cultural practitioners delivering projects that benefit both the arts sector and local communities. Its predecessor, the Cultural Partnerships Program, had an annual budget of \$100,000 that was co-funded by the NSW government (the-then Arts NSW, now Create NSW) until

2009. Council then solely funded the Partnerships Program, investing \$50,000 per annum until 2013, when it was replaced by the City of the Arts Program with the same amount of funding.

Direct delivery of arts project initiatives

Katoomba Live and Local is an example of an arts initiative directly delivered by BMCC. It involved local musicians activating the town of Katoomba on April 7, 2018.

Live and Local is a 'flexible, best practice model' initially developed by the City of Sydney to activate a place through the work of local musicians. Council and a local committee successfully applied for funding from the Live Music Office and Create NSW. Music promoter and music industry activist Meg Benson (Music Hunter) acted as curator for the project. Further value was added by a two-day workshop for young musicians held at the Mountains Youth Services Team (MYST) to build the capacity to promote themselves and their work by preparing submissions, obtaining an Australian Business Number (ABN), producing quality photos and music videos, and compiling written music descriptions. *Katoomba Live and Local* was promoted as 'a free family friendly festival with the objectives of stimulating local business, employing local musicians & gathering a diverse crowd'. It involved 180 musicians, a quarter aged under 25 and 10 per cent of whom were Indigenous musicians. Participating

musicians were paid a fee, as were community organisations such as school groups.

Street Art Walk at Beverly Place, Katoomba is another example of Council working with a wide range of partners and stakeholders. Partners in the project included Street Art Murals Australia (SAMA), Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, , and landowners in the precinct. In 2013, SAMA came up with a proposal to produce aerosol murals on the alleyway site. It took around 18 months to sort out legal, heritage, planning and stakeholder requirements, and crowd-funding for the project before the precinct was launched in June 2015, when some 30 wall sites were painted in a single weekend by international, national and local aerosol artists to create an outdoor gallery. The *Street Art Walk* has been credited with facilitating urban renewal for an underutilised part of the city, generating a new tourism attraction, and contributing to the creative economy, particularly for young people. For street art, streets and accessible wall space provide both a studio and living exhibition space; soft infrastructure was developed by extending networks through SAMA to local communities and by giving legitimacy to what is often seen as an 'outlaw' art form. According to independent evaluation, digital technologies played an innovative role which improved community engagement with young street artists by challenging perceptions of street art and young street artists as 'illegal' graffiti' or 'faceless

vandals' (Hall and Harris 2006). The *Street Art Walk* is an ongoing and dynamic art space, being periodically repainted as befits an inherently transitional/ephemeral art form. Other public art initiatives were also mounted through partnerships between Council and State government entities such as Sydney Water and State Rail, producing a number of artworks on water reservoirs (from the lower to the upper Blue Mountains) and on State Rail property throughout the LGA.

Creative sector development

The Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise (BMEE) was founded in 2013 as a not-for-profit company. It is funded by Blue Mountains City Council but operates as an independent entity. In response to local demands, BMEE launched the Blue Mountains Creative Industries Cluster, which developed the MTNS MADE brand for locally-made creative products. The Creative Industries Cluster manager works with creative producers to support development in the creative industries. Its activities range from supporting the MTNS MADE brand through website listings and promotions, advocacy for resources and opportunities, networking including forums and events, and by supporting business skills workshops. Paul Brinkman commented on the success of this initiative:

The MTNS MADE campaign was fantastic. I actually know artists who have engaged with

that program and moved here because of it. That clustering mentality of MTNS MADE is setting an identity for the Blue Mountains as a place for creative producers. We're promoting that brand through what already exists up here. And that's good for both attracting new residents and artists to the region. But it's also about establishing our identity as a place of quality arts. Arts with integrity. (interview 17 October 2019)

A more detailed description of MTNS MADE and the Creative Industries Cluster is provided in the section on regional cultural institutions.

Cultural infrastructure provision

Space for cultural and creative production remains in short supply in the Blue Mountains. With limited resources across a geographically spread-out LGA, planning needs to address how additional creative infrastructure can best be distributed to match diverse cultural needs. Council needs to consider how it can best support and facilitate both professional artists and cultural practitioners seeking to earn a living, and the many community-based arts and cultural activities and organisations. The possible use of Council-owned spaces for creative purposes will be further clarified by a building audit currently being undertaken by Council. The new Creative Strategy will address these issues and integrate them into an ongoing, long-term approach that can bring together

interrelated needs and requirements.

Facilitation of infrastructure for cultural production and arts education can include providing access to underutilised spaces. Temporary support was given for two such projects by the Council provision of reduced or free rents for a fixed period (see the Toolo and Digital Ecology Lab case studies below). They were:

- an artist in residency initiative at a temporarily vacant Council commercial property, The Kiosk, an initiative of Modern Art Projects Blue Mountains in partnership with Toolo, and
- Toolo's Digital Ecology Lab located in the former Katoomba Library.

Council also supported the *Mind the Gap* artist initiative that sought to utilise vacant shops in Katoomba. In addition, Council provides built spaces for community-based arts organisations including the Braemar Community Gallery, Springwood Art Centre and Blackheath Arts Society Centre.

In 2015, BMEE submitted a proposal to develop a maker and co-working space in a site in Katoomba - *Maker and Innovation Space* (2015). Although the proposal was not successful, it is useful to consult it for its consideration of the needs of artists and other creative producers. A survey of nearly 300 respondents established that 82.5 per cent would use a maker or co-working space.

The proposal, informed by survey feedback, had the following elements:

Maker space: 1) training workroom 2) an artisan hub with working equipment 3) meeting area to meet clients 4) digital hub with high data capacity and design, audio and visual editing software 5) a photography studio and editing suite.

Co-working space: 1) desks to bring your own device 2) lounge area and casual work space 3) workshop room for training 4) room to meet with clients 5) high capacity data upload facility. (2015: 17)

While the Blue Mountains has recently seen the development of some commercial co-working spaces relevant to creative production such as Nauti Studios in Hazelbrook, there is still a significant shortage of workspaces for a range of creative purposes. While short-term artist spaces have been beneficial (e.g., The Kiosk), longer-term facilities are also needed.

Future policy and plans

Blue Mountains City Council is committed to expanding resources and infrastructure for creative and cultural activity. Some relevant actions from the recently endorsed Local Strategic Planning Statement, *Blue Mountains 2040 Living Sustainably* (BMCC 2020), include:

Short term

- Working with the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment to amend the *Standard Local Environmental Plan* to provide greater flexibility for events and temporary uses, and opportunities for certain events to be considered compliant developments (action 4.5)
- Working with the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment to investigate options for amending the *Standard Local Environmental Plan* to provide opportunities for studios or maker spaces within town centre areas (action 4.6)
- Investigating ways of facilitating the integration of sustainability measures (water sensitive urban design), creativity / art and heritage where appropriate, within all new works on public land (s4.8)
- Seeking to elevate the importance of culture and creativity through an update to the objectives of the *Blue Mountains Local Environmental Plan 2015*, to recognise cultural events (action 4.9).

Medium term

- Investigating opportunities to establish an Artist in Residence program, with a potential site being at

Braemar Gallery in Springwood, among other locations (action 4.10)

- Updating and beginning to implement the *Blue Mountains Cultural Strategic Plan*, incorporating the *NSW Cultural Infrastructure Plan*, and a *Blue Mountains Public Art Policy* to transform the public domain of the City over time (action 4.11)
- Investigating opportunities and seeking funding sources to incorporate smaller, multi-purpose performance and teaching spaces within Springwood Theatre and Community Hub and other locations (action 4.12).

The plan also recommends that home-based industry is supported through opportunities in town centres for co-working spaces, flexible work arrangements and improved digital technology (see actions 7.8 & 7.13).

Conclusion

Despite the achievement of creating two major regional cultural facilities in the past decade, significant challenges remain for the Blue Mountains City Council in furthering and sustainably supporting creative production in the region. This aim has long been

recognised in Council policy documents; however, progress in developing infrastructure relevant to cultural production has been fairly slow. In part, this slowness is due to limited resources, including a lack of suitable infrastructure such as industrial warehouses, which are more readily available in metropolitan areas, and to the overall challenge of providing facilities stretching across the LGA's ridgeline. Moreover, the Blue Mountains has a limited ratepayer base, with resource needs spread across 27 towns and villages over 100 kilometres of mountainous terrain.

The well-developed Blue Mountains arts and cultural ecology in a sense presents its own challenges, with the need to consider the requirements of many different creative individuals, groups and organisations across artforms. Research into the specific requirements of creative production practices as different as sculpture and music performance is needed. Partnership opportunities have emerged with the recent urban plans for Greater Sydney and the new Western Sydney Airport, which have recognised the need for developing cultural infrastructure in Western Sydney. These opportunities need to be quickly grasped.

Significant Regional Cultural Institutions

Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre

597 High St, Penrith NSW 2750

Penrith Conservatorium

597 High St, Penrith NSW 2750

Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest

86 River Road, Emu Plains NSW 2750

Blue Mountains Cultural Centre

30 Parke Street, Katoomba NSW 2780

Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub and Braemar Gallery

106-108 Macquarie Rd, Springwood NSW 2777

Blue Mountains Creative Industries Cluster and MTNS MADE

2 Civic Place, Katoomba NSW 2780

Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre (aka The Joan)

Opening in 1990, the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre initially housed the Penrith Conservatorium of Music, Allan Mullins Studio and the Richard Bonyngé Concert Hall. The organisation which managed it was originally called the Penrith Bicentennial Performing Arts Centre, and is now named PP&VA Ltd. An upgrade in 2005 added the Q Theatre, extended Conservatorium facilities and the foyer. Colloquially known as 'The Joan' and another 15 years on, it is due again for update and expansion. As well as the need

for \$5.5 million of technology upgrades to bring it up to current professional standards, the expansion is particularly needed in light of the extensive outreach programs being undertaken. Hania Radvan, CEO of PP&VA (discussed above), the umbrella organisation which manages Penrith's three significant cultural institutions, explains that the organisation consists of three distinct 'proud and long' histories:

The history is that this Centre and the Conservatorium grew up together. And then when they

managed to get a bid for additional teaching rooms, at that point Railway Street Theatre company moved in, renamed back as the Q Theatre Company as an independent operating out of these premises. So there was this organisation that managed the gallery, the Conservatorium and The Joan, with the Q Theatre sitting as an independent. (interview 21 October 2019)

Radvan envisages The Joan as part of a regional arts hub producing artworks that will generate long-lasting impact. To achieve this aim, annual



Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre

programming with attention to budget, subscription base and audience development has gone hand-in-hand with providing development opportunities for young and emerging artists from the area. In terms of funding, Penrith City Council provides \$2 million *per annum* and federal funding is limited, according to Radvan, to 'tiny bits of capital funding through minor grant programs, that have to be matched'. Create NSW supports PP&VA with funding of \$375,000 per year, the majority of which underwrites the creative program of Q Theatre and a portion supporting the Penrith Regional Gallery.

Despite being named in the Create NSW Cultural Infrastructure Plan 2025+ as one

of the existing assets of the future Western Parklands City, there is little sign of State or federal funds flowing to assist with the upgrade of The Joan. Radvan feels that this makes the PP&VA 'quite vulnerable' and sees increasing levels of competition for State funds in the absence of a dedicated Western Sydney arts strategy. Project applications to the Australia Council for the Arts (ACA) have not been successful in a long time and Radvan is concerned that the ACA:

has never really grappled with this part of the ecosystem. It has very little interest or idea in terms of regional venues, because they just aren't where their majors [performing arts companies] and their small to

mediums tour to. (interview 21 October 2019)

The burden of being the most prominent arts institution in the city comes with an expectation that The Joan must provide for everyone. But, as Radvan points out:

We can't be everything to everybody. We actually have to be specialists. When we're the only organisation there's a tendency to try and make us everything for everybody. We have 30 staff basically, across both sites [The Joan and the Penrith Art Gallery], plus casuals. And within that you can't do everything at the same level. You have to work out what's the most important because otherwise you go backwards. I've got some staff working at home because we

can't actually fit them on site!
(interview 21 October 2019)

The reach of The Joan's audience extends to the Blue Mountains, but postcode 2750 - the suburb of Penrith - always 'comes top' as the source of audiences across its programs. Radvan notes that, in the last five years, there has been a 10 per cent increase in audiences overall. The Mountains' audiences come mainly from Springwood and further down. The Springwood Theatre Hub opened within the last 10 years, which may have increased an interest in attendance, possibly due to increased awareness and appreciation of the performing arts. Radvan also notes that the demographics of Penrith are changing and that the area is becoming 'far more middle class in terms of the new residential developments'. She points to an increase in professionals attracted to the area due to the establishment of Penrith as a health hub, including the new and upgraded hospitals at The Quarter.

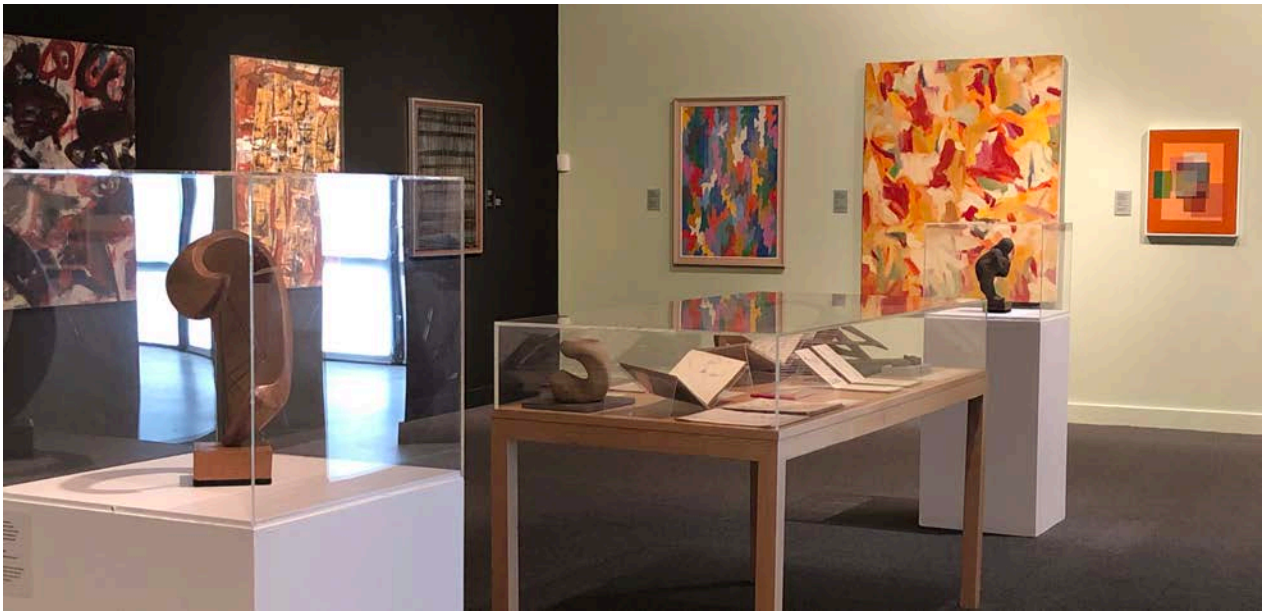
Alongside the changing demographic, The Joan has re-energised and professionalised its programming whilst maintaining PP&VA's constitutional core focus on education. To address Radvan's concern with 'what happens once the kids leave school?', The Joan began to establish pathways to advance the creative careers of young artists. A range of formal residencies was advertised. *Originate*, Q Theatre's annual skills development project for early-career theatre artists that results in a public performance

at The Joan, was expanded some years ago to include young musicians. There is a well established and evolving annual Youth Theatre Festival which gives high school drama students the opportunity to work with industry professionals to create an original performance. A further initiative was to enable and support artists to 'make work that you weren't controlling necessarily'; for example, by establishing a Director of New Work position in the Q Theatre, who in turn is encouraged for their 'individual artistic exploration'.

The Joan operates with a limited budget, so local productions tend to involve predominantly early-career artists focused on establishing pathways. This approach was reinforced when, in 2015, the Australia Council decided to end its *Artstart* program for emerging artists because of a reduction in its funds. As a response, The Joan carried on with its paid industry mentor programs and established a fellowship award, *Breakthrough*, which consisted of a \$5,000 stipend and a final open studio for a theatre artist, visual artist or musician to present their work to a general audience. This initiative was supported by philanthropic funding, which has unfortunately been discontinued. The Joan's activities are extensive, and its inventiveness could inspire major CBD cultural institutions. The Joan is never 'dark' (closed) because, when there are no performances there are rehearsals involving Penrith Symphony Orchestra,

Penrith City Choir, Inspire Choir, Penrith Musical Comedy Company, and various theatre groups. The Conservatorium is open until nine every night, and group classes also have regular times. This level of community engagement is enabled through dedicated resourcing and the availability of venues. The Joan supports many non-professional community activities by charging lower venue hire rates. As CEO, Radvan directs her attention to enabling such activities. She is sceptical about the tendency of the arts sector to marginalise community efforts in the arts, deeming them 'unimportant and amateur, instead of seeing them as - how fabulous that the entire community wants to dance?' (interview 21 October 2019)

Radvan sees several challenges in her work. In particular, there is an absence of a network of independent professional artists working in the region with which The Joan can partner. She understands the importance of working with professional artists, strong directors, and having good processes that support the artists. The need for professional creative networks in the region is a common thread identified throughout this research. There are also two main audience challenges. One is the difficulty of attracting enough interest for weekday programs because many audiences may work, but tend not to live, in Penrith. Secondly, although a recent survey indicated audiences' wish to be challenged by new works (Carter n.d.: 19), Radvan has found that several works



Penrith Regional Gallery Spring Exhibition *Gifting*.

which were presented for different types of audience did not meet box office predictions:

The Ugliest Duckling, we were hoping that because it was a fairytale everyone knew it. We moved it into the Q Theatre quite deliberately because it had an ambitious set. Still, because it wasn't on the back of a book, it still didn't translate into the big sales of audiences that you would hope. (interview 21 October 2019)

Despite this cautious response from audiences across 2017-2018, The Joan saw a 10 per cent growth in Box Office over the year before and a 21 per cent growth in the number of performances, with almost 8 per cent growth in attendances

(Carter n.d.: 8). Create NSW sees the redevelopment of existing cultural assets that include the Penrith Regional Gallery and the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre as:

a key ingredient in the paradigm shift for cultural infrastructure across Greater Sydney. It will be home to new models for delivering cultural infrastructure, unique and experiential cultural opportunities linked to tourism and global talent attraction. (Create NSW 2018: 59)

Radvan also recalls this constant refrain at the 2015 Mayoral Arts and Culture Summit: 'We need those other places. As artforms merge, as

practice changes, there is no space to show that kind of work in Western Sydney' (interview 21 October 2019). In operating within one of those 'other places', Radvan sees the need for a city gallery as uppermost. While the Penrith Regional Gallery is very special, Radvan observes that, for a city the size of Penrith, and the city that it will become, Penrith will need a contemporary art gallery in the CBD. She identifies the need for a purpose-built gallery with contemporary performance and exhibition spaces, more akin to the Redfern based multi-artform complex of Carriageworks than the Sydney Opera House.

Penrith Conservatorium

The Joan was originally built to house the Penrith Conservatorium and was established with a Director, and now has a part-time Manager, specialist leadership

and oversight from a Conservatorium Director. Staff also devise group programs and hire tutors to lead them. The Con works on an agency model whereby independent tutors are supported by PP&VA, which collects the fees, enrolls the students, and

disburses those fees to the tutors. In 2019, there were 330 individual tuition students a week enrolled, which Radvan says is 'massive'. This impressive number of students confirms the level of committed interest in music in the Penrith region. It also

demonstrates the demand for music tuition in the context of low investment in it in the public education system in NSW. As a result, only a small proportion of students actually learns to play a musical instrument. Radvan is expanding the Con's mission beyond that of an educational facility to one which has an 'artistic ambition', such as through the establishment of ensemble groups and creative projects that bring theatre practitioners and musicians together to create new work and performances:

A Con should do more than teach technique. It needs to be a place where people actually feel like they belong and they're part of something. It needs to teach performance as well as technique. But it also needs to have students that consider themselves artists. (interview 21 October 2019)

Penrith Conservatorium and The Joan are building closer connections to the Western Sydney University music precinct at Kingswood, for example by co-organising the first Penrith Music Network Forum in 2019. The Forum aimed to demystify the music industry and identify career paths and options, employing WSU students as Conservatorium tutors. Radvan is interested in developing this relationship while the students are still studying, so that they are aware of the resources and opportunities at the Con after graduation: 'It's that early career space where I think we can make a difference'.

Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest

Penrith Regional Gallery (PRG) is the 'anchor' visual arts gallery for Penrith. It is the home of the Lewers Bequest, which was gifted to the people of Penrith in 1980 by the family of artists Margo and Gerald Lewers. PRG is built as an extension to the Lewers home with four exhibition spaces, one of which is a large space alongside three much smaller spaces, and two studio spaces. Lewers House was refurbished to display the collection including works by Margo Lewers alongside curated exhibitions in the purpose-built Main Gallery, which is located about 3 kilometres west of central Penrith in the suburb of Emu Plains looking onto the Nepean River. The Nepean Creative and Performing Arts High School is close by. It can get very hot in Emu Plains and in the summers of 2019 and 2020 the temperatures on several consecutive days reached 45 degrees Celsius. A small sign encourages visitation to the Gallery because it is 'air-conditioned inside'. The co-located cafe regularly attracts more patrons than the Gallery on a weekday, yet provides a sense of energy and activity to the space. The Gallery seeks to embrace painters Margo and Gerald Lewers' sense of modernism as a lifestyle. As Sheona White, the Director of the Gallery since January 2019 comments:

Modernism isn't just a painting, it's the way you cook

your food, it's the way you make your kitchens, it's the mosaics you put on the floor, it's the dresses you make. All of that stuff is wonderful in the history here. It speaks to that story very well. (interview 21 October 2019)

White, whose experience extends from the Wollongong Art Gallery to the Art Gallery of NSW and Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art, sees the Gallery's exhibition program as directed to the local population, but one which still has the capacity to draw international interest. In 2019, guest curator Julie Ewington, previously of Queensland Art Gallery, produced an exhibition that attracted critical attention from a New York art magazine, as well as from inner-Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane audiences. But, fewer local people were interested in it. White quips that, unusually, the reach spread across 'London, New York, Emu Plains' (interview 21 October 2019). On such occasions the Gallery attracts, as noted, inner-Sydney audiences, but there is generally a high level of awareness and visitation from local and Blue Mountains residents:

Because there's not much else in the way of cultural facilities in the Greater West and Blue Mountains. Yes, there's Blue Mountains Cultural Centre. It's terrific. But we're very different to the Cultural Centre in Katoomba because we're an art museum with an established collection. (interview 21 October 2019).

A study undertaken in 2019 found that audiences to PRG



Penrith Regional Gallery Workshop.

are more likely to attend cultural events locally, in the Mountains and in Sydney, but not in Parramatta (Carter n.d.: 37). This finding underlines the strong regional support from audiences in Penrith and the Blue Mountains, as well as the choice of many to travel to central Sydney to find specific cultural offerings (this finding may have relevance to the future of MAAS in Parramatta). Despite the attractive location and the clearly professional curatorial approach to the collection and exhibitions, the Gallery faces significant constraints in developing its presence, creative engagement and visitation numbers. Space, human and financial resourcing, signage, transport and parking are key issues. As White observes:

You need a car. The buses don't come past here. You can't catch a bus here. You can walk from Emu Plains train station. It's about 25 minutes. Most people don't walk that distance and they can get lost. (interview 21 October 2019)

White's view is that an arts precinct, which has a range of arts presenters and producers, is essential to the development of a greater presence that attracts 'foot fall' attendance, not just those who come by car. The sense of discovery is encouraged via programming, but a location within a precinct would also be beneficial, as it would enable a wider audience to discover it through an overall experience.

The PRG also has a role to play in local cultural production, but has yet to realise what that role is and how it can best play out. The Gallery runs workshop programs employing local artists alongside local artist exhibitions. As with most galleries there are artist educators for workshops for children, but it is more challenging for the PRG to build a clientele for adult workshops. Nevertheless, the Gallery will continue to offer workshops with, and talks by, artists. Limited space is a critical issue. The studios on site are suited to providing school-age and adult education, and workshops during busier holiday periods. White sees that studio spaces for individual artists similar to the Parramatta Artists Studios

would work well in the area, and would free up the Gallery spaces for engagement and broad arts education services to the local population. The decision over 20 years ago by Western Sydney University to dismantle its art school continues to be felt as a great loss, as White notes it was a 'wonderful art school which had been brilliant'.

One result is that a patchwork or 'make-do' approach has developed to fostering a creative *milieu*. At exhibition openings the Gallery becomes an informal hub where artists find each other and 'hang out' well past Gallery closing times. It is seen as somewhere that artists feel a sense of ownership. As White observes, 'they will sit out there, take over the chairs, long after all the catering's finished and cook up projects'. In this way the Gallery becomes a networking space for practitioners to collaborate and expand their horizons and form part of a cultural ecology. A cultural ecology implies a thriving ecosystem that enables cultural practitioners, artists and creative producers to make culture within an interactive system of mutually beneficial and generative relationships with other cultural producers, presenters and users (Holden 2015). White, who used to teach at the WSU art school, is aware of the necessary elements to create a sustainable cultural ecology:

If you've got people who go to art school, it's a way of building those artistic communities and in building them it also filters out into the broader community.

Without that, then there is the idea of artist studios. Though you need a whole program around those residencies in order to make them porous enough so the broader community gets to engage with them. There's a lot of professionalism that needs to go into that as well. It's not just the real estate. (interview 21 October 2019)

Such a program includes critical writing about the work, facilitating connections among artists and between artists and local groups. For White, cultural vitality is about much more local engagement and local awareness, and about what's available and support for the people who can make that viable. White identifies the need for expansion, potentially when neighbouring sites come up for sale. Ideally, a purpose-built exhibition presence in Penrith CBD would really create an arts precinct. As part of monthly public programming, alternating music and art history lectures are currently held at the Joan and the Gallery. Persistence is important, according to White: she draws on her experience starting up Art After Hours at the Art Gallery of NSW, which now attracts many hundreds of people, but where in the beginning 'there'd be three people sitting in the front row, and they were probably staff'. Another, very successful 'after dark' initiative engages with school children, their teachers and parents, in which the children bring their art and craftwork and make their own exhibitions. This is another example of catering to the specific interest of the local community.

The 2015 PP&VA strategic plan describes an important regional education role for both The Joan and the PRG. This emphasis continues to inform the programming and approach of the PRG, including by expanding its creative remit to applied arts practices. For example, there are plans for a fashion exhibition profiling two well-known designers, and PRG is keen to offer exhibition and workshop opportunities to some of the local TAFE and high school design students. The ambition of this small gallery in a Western Sydney suburb is indicated by its extensive outreach programs. Those delivered in 2019 include: Summer Studio Residencies; Modernist Research Centre; Teacher Professional Development; Emerging Teachers Professional Development; Early Childhood Educator Mentorship (Penrith City Council); Internships and Work Experience Placements; Art Workshops for Children & Families; Art Club Workshops; Classrooms without Borders Home School Workshop Program; Night Garden Creative Arts Pop-Up Festival; MAAS – Virtual Classroom Project and AGNSW Partnership Project.

The hard-won trust and appreciation built up by the Gallery, however, can at times be ignored or exploited. For example, it is a missed opportunity not to include the PRG as a site for the annual Council-supported Real Festival (see the above case study of Penrith City Council). There are also unfortunate examples of major Sydney-

based institutions, receiving special funding to engage with Western Sydney, who then expect underfunded local entities such as the PRG to 'partner' with them to deliver the projects, essentially as an in-kind contribution. What is then delivered in such scenarios is usually a one-off, piece-meal project, rather than co-funding regional partners who engage equally in project development and delivery. For White, this practice flies in the face of the Gallery's commitment to building long-term relationships with practitioners and audiences:

I think there's a great capacity for re-engagement here which is not really based in physical capacity so much. It's to do with the programs, it's to do with the reputation, it's to do with the sense of history of this place being a hub for artistic social

engagement. (interview 21 October 2019)

Challenges

There are many Blue Mountains artists who exhibit and participate at the PRG, which confirms the creative synergies that exist between the two LGAs. However, expanded studio spaces and a contemporary arts precinct in the Penrith CBD would enable far wider regional engagement, specifically with a view to the high-end health and engineering facilities that are planned, and which will require equally high-end arts and cultural facilities and the artists to produce them. The PRG is now connected via the riverwalk with the Yandhai Bridge, yet visitation to the Gallery is still mainly by car and it will take some time to increase awareness of the benefits of the river bridge.

Conclusion

This case study provides an insight into the high-quality arts initiatives, production and presentations that occur in Penrith, and into the continuing complementary relationships within the region encompassed by Penrith and the Blue Mountains. The case study also reveals a tension in The Joan's capacity to maintain its role as the home of the Conservatorium while building the professional status of the PSO and the PYO. This tension, combined with the similar needs for a contemporary visual art gallery in the Penrith CBD, highlights the need for a cultural centre that expands the capacities of creative production and presentation as Penrith grows.

Blue Mountains Regional Institutions

The Blue Mountains has two cultural institutions at a regional scale: the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre in Katoomba and the Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub in Springwood. Between them, they comprise a considerable cultural resource. In Greater Western Sydney, Penrith is the only other LGA with two cultural venues that can be classified as regional institutions (SGS 2018). From

the perspective of audience and participation numbers in major Council-run institutions, the Blue Mountains, with combined attendance figures in 2019 for both institutions of nearly 162,000, has higher cultural attendances than all LGAs apart from Penrith and Parramatta. Both cultural facilities are supported by the Blue Mountains City Council's cultural services section, with Paul Brinkman as Director of both. This arrangement marks

a difference to the situation in Penrith, where a similar suite of regional facilities is administered at arm's length from Council through Penrith Performing and Visual Arts (PP&VA). Brinkman was Director and CEO of Cairns Regional Gallery before taking up the position in the Blue Mountains in 2011.

Blue Mountains Cultural Centre

BMCC used its UNESCO World Heritage status to secure federal funding towards the development of the Cultural Centre, which as noted above opened in 2012. The TAFE East site in Katoomba was identified as the location for the Centre and development went ahead as the abovementioned collaborative enterprise between BMCC, the NSW government and Coles Group. Federal funding included funds from the Better Regions and Green Precincts Fund. The Blue Mountains Cultural Centre consists of the following facilities:

- Blue Mountains City Art Gallery
- Blue Mountains World Heritage Interpretive Centre, with permanent interactive exhibition about the World Heritage Site, its environment and heritage
- Katoomba Public Library
- Blue Mountains Cultural Centre Shop (which supports local and Australian designers)
- Meeting spaces including a Seminar Room/Theatrette (accommodating up to 70 people), the Workshop Multipurpose Room (accommodating up to 70 people), which can be used as a 'wet area' for art workshops, and other smaller meeting rooms
- An extensive foyer area that can accommodate up to 150 and can be used for functions such as launches
- An outdoor courtyard and viewing platform with

views of the Jamison Valley, which can accommodate up to 200 people and is used for events such as outdoor film screenings

- Coffee shop (which can supply catering).

In 2018-19 the number of visitors and participants to the Cultural Centre was 118,238, a 3.75 per cent increase from the 2016-17 baseline of 113,962 (Carter n.p.). In line with our focus on cultural production infrastructure, we are primarily concerned with the role of the *Blue Mountains City Art Gallery* in this case study. The Gallery has a large exhibition space of 600 m² with seven-metre-high ceilings and 250m of movable exhibition walls that allow the space to be divided into three areas. It has sophisticated LED lighting systems complying with the National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries. The Cultural Centre staff connected to the City Art Gallery play an important role in supporting artists. These include an Exhibitions Manager, Public Programs Coordinator, Marketing Coordinator, Curatorial Officer and Gallery Technician.

Programming

There are three strands to Blue Mountains City Art Gallery's annual exhibition program: the *Exposé* Program, locally curated exhibitions, and externally-sourced touring exhibitions. The *Exposé* Program is for Blue Mountains artists; around six artists per year are selected for exhibition. These exhibitions are an opportunity for emerging

artists to gain significant public exposure in a professional public gallery. The *Exposé* process also promises artists, 'a chance to extend your artistic practice by exploring exhibition concepts and utilising professional museum display techniques', according to the program guidelines. A recent *Exposé* exhibition was Wendy Tsai's *Drawing Kedumba*, which traces her mapping through drawings, photographs, video and embroidery of 'The Gully', a significant place for Gundungurra and Dharug settlement before its development as the Catalina racetrack in the 1940s. Tsai's detailed expressive engagement through visual means raised issues including biodiversity, Aboriginal displacement, colonisation and current land management practices. Accompanying the exhibition were artist workshops for families and adults in 'framing the landscape' using drawing, black-and-white photography and lightboxes. These workshops were conducted *in situ* at Katoomba Falls Reserve and back at the Cultural Centre. The exhibition demonstrates the capacity of public programs to share artists' visions and practices with the public, and to connect with local cultures, histories and environments.

The Cultural Centre team has considerable curatorial skills and curates a large proportion of its exhibitions. An example of a high-quality exhibition generated at the Cultural Centre is *As far as the eye can see*, curated by Rilka Oakley in 2016. This exhibition features



Blue Mountains Cultural Centre Interpretative Centre *Into the Blue*.

prominent Australian printmakers exploring local landscapes, including six Blue Mountains artists: Locust Jones, Judith Martinez, Janet Parker-Smith, Julie Paterson, Gary Shinfield, Chris Tobin and Freedom Wilson. While the exhibition included work using traditional techniques such as woodcuts and etching, it also included works using installations, 3D sculptural forms, collages, monotypes and digital technologies. Associated public events included a panel discussion with printmaking professionals and a symposium involving exhibiting artists as a way of conveying the wide range of available print-making practices. *As far as the eye can*

see toured regional galleries across Australia for two years.

One of the Cultural Centre's most successful exhibition programs, 2018's *Blue Mountains Botanica*, was built on strong partnerships with the NSW Botanical Gardens and Domain Trust and the Mount Tomah Botanical Gardens. The exhibition was curated by Sabrina Roesner and focused on 200 years of botanical exploration in the Blue Mountains. It presented historical botanical illustrations, plant specimens and archival material drawn from the National Herbarium of NSW, the Daniel Solander Library and the Mount Tomah Botanic Gardens. Alongside this historical material was contemporary work with

botanical subjects by Blue Mountains artists, James Blackwell, Ona Janzen, Angela Lobar, Edith Rewa, Jacqueline Spedding and Jennifer Leahy. What might be considered a somewhat specialised area struck a chord with a public attuned to plants; an estimated 20,000 people engaged with various public programs and events at the Cultural Centre, Mt Tomah Botanical Gardens and the Leura Gardens Festival. Public programs included workshops on botanical art and discussions of botanical collections by Miguel Garcia, a librarian with the Daniel Solander Library at Sydney's Royal Botanical Gardens. A related exhibition program was Freedom Wilson's exhibition *Mycorrhizal Futurae Ferox – Inferius*,

examining the mysterious synergy between the Mycorrhizal fungus and the Buttercup Doubletail Orchid. This interest in Botanical art in the Blue Mountains is also evident in a more recent show at the Braemar Gallery in Springwood by a group of amateur artists under the direction of scientific illustrator, Barbara Duckworth. A further example of the fertile meshing of art, science and culture was a six-week series of programs organised by the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre to celebrate NAIDOC week, which was built around John South's exhibition *Skyworld's* exploration of Aboriginal astronomy through film and installation. The public programs included workshops, talks, film screenings, education programs, stargazing, and family-friendly events, all aiming to draw connections between Aboriginal art, culture and astronomy. Collaborators included dancers from Blue Mountains-based Wagana Aboriginal Dancers and Raven Spirit Dance Company (Canada), scientists from the Linden and Penrith observatories, experts in Aboriginal astronomy Kirsten Banks (Wiradjuri), Senior Euahlayi Law Man and Elder Ghillar Michael Anderson, and Aboriginal cosmology expert Duane Hamacher. The ambitious program was recently highly commended at the 2019 IMAGinE Awards presented by Museums and Galleries NSW.

While most public and educational programs are organised around exhibitions, the Cultural Centre also runs

some stand-alone workshops in artistic techniques, such as portrait photography, textile art and calligraphy. Exhibiting artists offer art-making workshops, including for school groups. While artist-run workshops generally focus on visual arts practices and techniques, they can sometimes be based more in performance practice, such as Weizen Ho's 2019 workshop, *Memoria: Voice, Body, Memory* based on the bodywork practices used in her performance art. The Cultural Centre provides support for artists in other ways. Within the Centre there is little direct interaction between the City Art Gallery and the World Heritage Interpretive Centre, which is an unchanging interactive display about the Blue Mountains environment and heritage adjacent to the City Art Gallery. However, the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre has hosted a World Heritage Artists in Residence Program in 2016. A six-week residency at the Bilpin international ground for Creative initiatives (bigci.org) allowed Polish artist Magda Wegrzyn to develop her work *Error Strategy* around the concept of errors in exploration, based on the 1813 crossing of the Blue Mountains by Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson. Canadian artist Karen Miranda Abel developed her sculptural work *Gardens of Stone* through the World Heritage Artists in Residence Program, based on sandstone caves in the Gardens of Stone National Park. These residencies were followed by an exhibition at the City Art Gallery. The Blue Mountains Cultural Centre is now

supporting a new residency program at the state heritage-listed schoolhouse in Mount Wilson.

It is apparent that environmental themes and materials are a strong feature of work at the City Gallery, whether it is more traditional visual artwork or more contemporary and 'relational' art forms that engage across disciplines with partners such as the Botanical Gardens. This focus is probably because it is part of the aesthetic background of Blue Mountains artists; Brinkman considers that most of the *Expose* artists are 'inspired by environmental themes' in some way, which gives the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre's program a strong identity and sense of place. The success of programs such as *Botanica* and *Skyworld* also suggests other possibilities for developing cross-disciplinary collaborations with other institutions. A notable project supported by the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre is the aforementioned *Street Art Walk*, which gave some recognition to an under-acknowledged visual art practice (see the Blue Mountains City Council case study above). This project suggests potential for more outreach programs to capture cultural practices beyond the fairly circumscribed visual arts and fine arts focus on which the BM Cultural Centre has tended to concentrate. An example is the Wollemi Artisan Market, which has been held periodically at the Cultural Centre since 2015, providing an outlet for local makers of art and design products. The Blue Mountains Cultural Centre has



Blue Mountains City Art Gallery Weizen Ho “Cultural Mobility” in *MAPSPACE*.

developed into an important showcase for artists and creative producers in the Blue Mountains, particularly in the visual arts. The City Art Gallery has created sophisticated programming that successfully balances the exhibition of emergent local artists with the development of strong programs curated in-house, as well as hosting significant touring programs.

While the Gallery program primarily focuses on exhibitions, its activities incorporate many elements which contribute to the productive side of arts and culture in the Blue Mountains. These include creative and educational programs linked to public programs that accompany exhibitions such as workshops, artist talks, outreach programs, activities with partner organisations and residencies. They are means for

artists to share aspects of creative practice, support creative education and extend creative networks.

Challenges

The Blue Mountains Cultural Centre was built with the expectation that it would be a major tourist attraction. It no doubt does attract visitors through the quality of its exhibitions and its World Heritage display, but for Brinkman it is primarily a ‘community space’ for people in the Blue Mountains. Part of the reason for this situation is that the Cultural Centre does not have an obvious entrance (it is located above the Coles supermarket) and is not visible from the main thoroughfare, Katoomba Street. This point raises the challenge of finding ways of making the BMCC more visible through signage, entrance ways and improving

tourist information. But, it also suggests that the Cultural Centre might further develop its role as a community space by providing greater support to the Blue Mountains’ artistic community and creative industries. Notwithstanding the significant achievements of the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre in developing a distinctive cultural institution built around a strong visual arts community and expertise in the Blue Mountains, from the perspective of our research there are challenges and opportunities to build on these achievements. These include to:

- Extend the repertoire of art forms beyond the visual arts and fine arts that has been the main focus of the City Art Gallery
- Further develop synergies between the component players of the Cultural Centre, including the World Heritage

- Interpretive Centre and the City library, and
- Investigate the potential for making greater use of spaces within the Cultural Centre as arts infrastructure when not required for other purposes.

Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub and Braemar Gallery

The Blue Mountains City Council developed the Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub (BMTCH) in Springwood in recognition of the city's need for a major performing arts venue. The complex has a substantial theatre and performing space, as well as spaces for community services. The building, which was opened in March 2015, was built entirely by Council, drawing on a federal government grant of \$9.5m allocated for a Springwood Cultural Facilities Upgrade. The complex, self-described as a 'vibrant, dynamic new cultural precinct', was also linked to the Springwood public library and the Braemar Gallery (see discussion below). The Theatre space seats 418 and has a theatre stage and full lighting and sound systems.

The hub also includes some spaces available to hire for meetings, functions and events, as well as premises tenanted by community services that include the Springwood Neighbourhood Centre, the Blue Mountains Vietnam Veterans and

Associated Forces Inc., Blue Mountains Recreation and Respite Service, and Blue Mountains Food Services (Meals on Wheels). In 2018-19, the number of visitors to the Theatre and Community Hub was 54,419, a 25 per cent increase from the 2016-17 baseline of 43,658. These figures are based on ticket sales and attendees to theatre events and do not include library visitors. BMTCH staffing includes a Facility Manager, Programs Coordinator, Venue & Theatre Services Officer, Venue & Theatre Services Assistant, Marketing Officer, Administration Officer, Acting Theatre and Building Technician and Theatre Technician. Our focus in this case study is on the Blue Mountains Theatre rather than other community activities in the BMTCH.

Programming

The theatre's program at present largely draws on touring programs, generally popular music acts, including classical music concerts and children's programs. The programs cater to a range of tastes, the 2019 program featuring diverse offerings from artists such as Bill Frisell, Kaki King and Xylouris White — all musical acts. Parts of the program are organised in collaboration with local promoters. The classical program is largely organised with the Blue Mountains Concert Society, a local non-profit organisation that has been dedicated to presenting classical music in the area since 1996. An upcoming act booked for 2020, Bandaluzia Flamenco, is co-presented with live music

promoter Music Hunter (see the case study below on Music Hunter and music promotion in the Blue Mountains). The Blue Mountains Theatre is primarily a 'presentation space' to provide entertainment, but is also able to provide experience for local talent. As Brinkman puts it:

Approximately one third of the theatre program each year is dedicated to major local groups, including the Blue Mountains Music Society and Blue Mountains Concert Society. The Blue Mountains Music Society supports the development of many emerging actors, stage workers, lighting and sound specialists and set designers. Many of these participants have gone on to develop professional careers in the arts. (interview 17 October 2019)

The program occasionally features workshops, for instance in circus skills that was meant to be presented in April 2020, associated with a show called *Varietyville: Acts of Absurdity*. Unfortunately, this and many other activities and performances were cancelled due to COVID-19. But workshops and educational programs are not consistent features of the Blue Mountains Theatre. Unlike the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, the Blue Mountains Theatre does not have a Public Programs Officer, yet as Brinkman comments:

I've got a Public Programs Manager up here [at the Cultural Centre] who takes care of all of our workshops, our artist education programs and bits and pieces like that. But I don't have anybody down there



Blue Mountains Theatre *Dorian Mode Trio*.

[at the Blue Mountains Theatre]. That's a resource that hopefully I'm working towards securing over the next couple of years, so we can actually use the space to its full capacity.
(interview 17 October 2019)

The majority of shows are one-night acts that run on Friday, Saturday or Sunday. With this pattern of programming, the theatre is generally empty through the week, leaving considerable capacity for the theatre to be used more. For Brinkman, there is capacity to do more theatre and performing arts work with young people, as well as more mature professional work. The theatre has the necessary production facilities such as a theatre stage, lighting and sound, green room space and a tiered stage. There is capacity for theatre training, and both demand for engagement in theatre, and skilled professionals living in the LGA to teach and direct it. Brinkman notes that the theatre is a very young facility and that 'great strides have been made in developing its

highly successful program. There is a plan for iterative and staged growth that takes time to do well'.

A notable exception to the overall lack of local theatrical production is the Blue Mountains Musical Society, which usually presents two musicals per year at the Blue Mountains Theatre. The Musical Society trains performers and stage managers and rehearses and produces its whole program, including music and choreography. For nearly 40 years the amateur Blue Mountains Musical Society has been presenting operetta, musicals and youth concerts at church halls, school auditoria and other venues (including in Penrith – at Panthers and The Joan), until finding a home at the Blue Mountains Theatre from 2015. The example of the Blue Mountains Musical Society shows that locally-based theatre can be done on this scale with the organisational resources of a well-established and experienced company.

The Braemar Gallery is a community gallery that supports a program of monthly exhibitions featuring the work of local and regional artists. The Gallery is located at

Braemar House, an historical building dating from 1882; it was acquired by Blue Mountains City Council in 1974 and, from 1974-1976, housed the library. From 1988 a community art gallery opened in the building, which also houses the Blue Mountains Library's local studies collection. The Gallery came under the control of the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre in 2015, although it still seems to function as a community-based organisation with local volunteers. Braemar House adjoins the Blue Mountains Theatre and the Blue Mountains library, and is not technically a part of the Blue Mountains Theatre and Community hub. It is included here, though, because in practical terms it forms part of the cultural hub in Springwood. Also, there are plans to redevelop the

building; Brinkman spoke of the possibility of the Braemar Gallery being extended or being ‘turned into an artist residency space or to be turned into a workshop space’. The Draft Local Strategic Planning Statement, *Blue Mountains Living Sustainably 2040*, mentions that Council would investigate the establishment of an artist-in-residence program, with an initial site at Braemar House (BMCC 2019).

Challenges and opportunities

There are clear challenges to developing the BMTCH and its potential to provide more local creative production infrastructure, particularly for the performing arts. The appointment of a Public Programs Manager able to develop a program of public events such as workshops and educational programs would enhance its capacity to develop stronger creative programs and outreach. Greater utilisation of the Blue Mountains Theatre in down times would open up spaces for rehearsal, creative development and education programs, as well as extend the range of performance opportunities for local artists, both professional and amateur. Council has also recognised that there are opportunities for developing creative infrastructure by addressing design issues within BMTCH to provide multi-use spaces. One of the actions in the draft LSPS, *Blue Mountains Living Sustainably 2040*, is that:

Council will investigate opportunities and seek funding sources to incorporate smaller,



MTNS MADE Reveal.

multi-purpose performance and teaching spaces within Springwood Theatre and Community Hub and other locations. (BMCC 2019)

While the Blue Mountains Theatre is a valuable entertainment venue for the region, it is still in its development stage and so it will be some time before it realises its potential to support performing arts capacity building in the area and the creation of new work. Creative production will be assisted by accessing and deploying the capacities of artists, organisations and educational institutions. The Blue Mountains Musical Society provides an example of an experienced and capable local arts organisation that can mount large-scale performances. However, other kinds of theatrical, musical, dance and performance work could be developed needing considerably less resourcing. The development of an artist’s residency program at the

Braemar Gallery, for example, would also enhance creative possibilities for the Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub as a whole.

MTNS MADE Creative Industries Cluster.

The Creative Industries Cluster is a project of Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise (BMEE), the peak regional economic development organisation for the Blue Mountains. It aims to stimulate economic development through advocacy, investment and industry development. While BMEE is largely funded by Blue Mountains City Council, it was established as a public company limited by guarantee, with an independent Board and constitution (BMEE n.d.). Hence, BMEE operates at arms-length from the Council. The Blue Mountains Creative Industries Cluster was developed by BMEE in 2013 in response to local demand for a

collaborative approach to economic development in the creative sector. An earlier cultural industries initiative by a group of local publishing and design practitioners, *Publish! Blue Mountains*, provided a model for the cultural cluster, concentrating on the publishing sector. The focus of the Creative Industries Cluster is to 'increase the productivity and competitiveness of [the creative industries] and further diversify the local economic base of the Blue Mountains' (BMEE 2014). In 2015 the brand name MTNS MADE was launched to represent the Blue Mountains creative industries and to position the Blue Mountains as a hub of creative excellence (Sandbach 2015: 4). The MTNS MADE Creative Industries Cluster was, until recently, managed by Ann Niddrie, who saw her role as being to 'facilitate opportunities and connections between people of the creative industries in the Blue Mountains, for collaboration and work on various projects that help in industry development throughout the creative industries' (interview 31 October 2019).. This facilitation entails increasing opportunities for cultural production, supporting people to work together and to pool resources.¹

Tasks of the role include advocating for cultural production infrastructure. Artists often approach MTNS MADE to help find particular kinds of production space, including co-working or studio spaces; MTNS MADE now has

five shared working spaces listed for the region. MTNS MADE also works in 'advocating for assets, whether they're private or Council-owned, to be used in a different way'. Examples of this advocacy include ongoing discussions with property owners to use buildings for cultural purposes, and facilitating development for productive uses such as studios - for instance by organising assistance from the BMCC planning department. MTNS MADE regularly receives requests from artists for spaces of different kinds and of different duration. Niddrie gives the example of, 'an artist who has a large-scale work that they've entered in a competition and who might be doing something for Sculpture by the Sea, something that they need space for six months and not ongoing'. This kind of project-based need is particularly relevant for temporary but high-intensity work such as a film production, which might require 18 months preparation, and then an intensive period of six weeks or three months filming. Even relatively small-scale film productions can generate considerable local impacts (see the film and screen media case study below).

Soft infrastructure: MTNS MADE is committed to supporting the all-important soft infrastructure, the people connections and capacity building that allow for a robust cultural ecology. To this end, MTNS MADE works alongside arts organisations such as the

Blue Mountains Creative Arts Network (BMCAN) and the Blackheath Arts Society, which cater for both amateur and professional artists. The MTNS MADE Salon is a monthly event that features Q&A presentations by artists about creative ventures. The Salon's effectiveness lies in what happens afterwards, such as introducing people, extending networks and opening up possibilities for collaboration. MTNS MADE might connect people with each other (in the case of new creatives), with the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre (facilitating plans for cultural activities), or with the Cultural Centre's Public Program manager (where an artist's work might fit in with a future program). An important element of creative support from an industry perspective is how to translate arts activities into sustainable ventures. While some artists are very entrepreneurial, others can struggle with the process of turning individual creative endeavours and 'lifestyles' into viable careers. As Niddrie comments:

An artisan may start selling their work at markets but can't earn enough. And then they get to this challenge of – how do I grow? Do I get someone to help me make my product? Do I now get someone, pay them, to do my paperwork? (interview 31 October)

MTNS MADE is able to support people through its own business workshops focused on creative industries, through workshops in partnership with Creative Plus Business and the Western

¹Niddrie has become the Economic Development Officer at Blue Mountains City Council.

Sydney Business Centre, through referral to Business Connect advisors (a NSW government program), and the BMCC's business workshops. MTNS MADE also partners with local business initiatives such as Women with Altitude and the Men's Altitude Network.

Challenges

The Blue Mountains Creative Cluster/MTNS MADE faces complex challenges in supporting creative industries in a LGA with such strong activity across diverse creative sectors. How are the needs of different groups met? Certainly, there is differing take-up among particular groups – writers and designers, for example, tend to keep to themselves and their own networks. This is largely a question of resources, since MTNS MADE has only one paid staff member, and there are geographical challenges, with the Blue Mountains townships being widely dispersed. This settlement structure can generate a sense of difference between parts of the Mountains. Creatives in the Lower Mountains may have a 'city-looking focus' because they are more able to connect with events and facilities in Penrith, for instance. People in the Upper Mountains are perceived to be more 'insular' — or perhaps more self-contained — because of the greater distances to Sydney. Nevertheless, some creatives in particular artforms such as film, artisanal producers and craft foods/beverages have been able to transcend these

issues of locality and establish strong networks and collaboration across the LGA.

There are challenges as well as opportunities in BMEE's arms-length relationship with Council. One advantage is that, as an autonomous body, BMEE (and MTNS MADE in particular) can apply for different sources of funding for projects. A smaller organisation can move more quickly than the Council bodies which, as Niddrie puts it, 'move at a different pace ... that sort of agility allows for different things and a bit of risk-taking that maybe Councils can't necessarily take'. However, the challenge in being a separate body entails the ongoing need to maintain effective communication with Council staff in order to, 'maintain relationships there so that we are actually being effective – not doubling up or missing out on things that we should be across'. It seems clear that MTNS MADE is making an ongoing contribution to supporting sustainable employment in the creative industries through its facilitation of and advocacy for infrastructure, both hard and soft. However, it is difficult to make those gains visible, and to develop benchmarks or metrics to measure progress. Nevertheless, the BMEE through MTNS MADE has played an important research role in informing the Council of the region's development in the creative industries. While BMEE is legally independent of Council, its funding is substantially tied to it. A recent Council meeting resolved to move forward an independent review of BMEE to April 2020,

proposing that there be greater consideration of tourism development in the BM. There is, it can be observed, potential for stronger links between tourism and creative industries (for instance, see the sculpture at Scenic World case study below).

Ideal scenarios

How could cultural infrastructure be further developed in the Blue Mountains? Niddrie says that its creative facilities should match the environment and scale of the place, and be distributed throughout the LGA, so that cultural production takes place not just in the main centres. Digital facilities are crucial, not just for film but also for sound recording and media production. Niddrie's view is that mixing education and production activity would be ideal:

We have amazing businesses like illuminart, who are award-winning, travel around Australia and the world, making their projection artworks and telling the stories of communities around the country. But they don't have a space and they want to teach people to do this. They're one of the only companies in the country that do it in this particular way. What we need is space where makers of all kinds of digital creation can come, connect and collaborate.
(interview 31 October 2019)

She also sees a need for the integration of more co-working style facilities into libraries throughout the Blue

Mountains, rather than having one large co-working space. Redevelopments in town centres and libraries could incorporate facilities in their

designs such as high-speed Internet, meeting spaces or little pods for private phone conversations. ‘This could really help people in the

villages throughout the Mountains to get out of their home-based business without really large costs,’ Niddrie emphasises.



Freedom Wilson Wollemi Markets Blue Mountains Cultural Centre.

Dance

Wagana Aboriginal Dancers, Wentworth Falls

PAWS Studios, 3/92-94 Batt St South Penrith NSW 2750

Across Western Sydney, dance performance mainly utilises theatres, alongside site-specific outdoor spaces and festivals (SGS 2018: 100). There are only two dance festivals held in Western Sydney which are the least of the region's many other artform festivals (SGS 2018: 62) and may represent a development opportunity for Penrith and the Blue Mountains. Research into dance is often problematic as theatre and dance are often categorized together, which limits understanding of the data. However, usefully SGS identifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) dancers with the highest level of creative engagement at 12 per cent, and also the second highest in terms of interest in audience engagement at 38 per cent (SGS 2018: 12). The lack of dance rehearsal spaces to support professional dance and 'little or no purpose-built infrastructure' were issues consistently raised by dance practitioners throughout the SGS consultations in their report into Western Sydney Infrastructure (SGS 2018: vii, 98). This is a curious anomaly given that increased attendance was noted in NSW for circus and physical theatre

and multicultural dance and theatre across the region (SGS 2018: 12). Many Western Sydney LGAs may have a space for dance performance, but they often fall short of being dedicated spaces:

provision may not adequately cater to demand for exhibition spaces from artists and/or audiences, the spaces may not be fit for purpose, the spaces may not be accessible for Western Sydney artists, and/or the spaces may not be in an accessible location. This suggests that further work is needed to determine how existing exhibition spaces may best meet the needs of artists and if additional spaces are needed. (SGS 2018: 99)

The issue of a lack of purpose-built spaces for dance can be addressed through attachments to theatres, dance schools, community halls (although generally these cannot supply purpose-built needs) and multipurpose community infrastructure. As SGS reports:

The use of local dance schools and community infrastructure has occurred due to the loss of existing rehearsal studios, or

because the organisations have never had access to purpose built facilities. These spaces are largely inadequate for professional practice. There are also a limited number of professional dance organisations based in Western Sydney, with a significant artist drain to inner Sydney noted by the professional organisations consulted. (SGS 2018: 100)

Two further issues emerge, one of which was echoed throughout the consultation for this research - the need for artist education in Western Sydney. First, there are currently no degree level programs available in Western Sydney for theatre and dance (SGS 2018: 103, 110). TAFE NSW at the Nepean Arts and Design Centre offers the only degree level visual arts and design courses within Western Sydney. Second, there are no professional Aboriginal arts organisations which receive continuous public funding. Wagana Aboriginal Dancers is a professional arts organisation yet it does not receive continuous funding from the NSW Government (SGS 2018: 103).



Wagana Aboriginal Dancers. (left to right) Jo Clancy, Michaela Jeffries, Becky Chatfield, Shana O'Brien.

Wagana Aboriginal Dancers

Wagana Aboriginal Dancers is a dance company founded and directed by Wiradjuri dancer and choreographer, Jo Clancy. The company has achieved international recognition, performing in Glasgow, Denmark, Canada and Hawaii, as well as festivals across New South Wales. Wagana ‘perform traditional and contemporary dances inspired by the beautiful Blue Mountains and NSW Central West country. They honour and respect the Dharug, Gundungurra and Wiradjuri peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands they dance on’ (MTNS MADE n.d.). Dharug woman, Jacinta Tobin, is one of Wagana’s song women from a respected local Aboriginal family. The company has

mostly women dancers between the ages of 2-50 years (Ausdance Vic n.d.). Wagana has a strong educational focus on local Aboriginal women and girls. The Wagana has an education program encompassing pre-school, primary and secondary schooling. Wagana is auspiced by Mountains Outreach Community Service (MOCS) and has a community partnership with Kindlehill School. MOCS, based in Hazelbrook, has been in operation for 30 years and is a community not-for-profit organisation funded through the NSW Department of Family and Community Services and the Department of Education and Communities. MOCS provides free and low

cost activities across the Blue Mountains (Mountains Outreach Community Service 2020). Kindlehill School is a Steiner-inspired school in Wentworth Falls, with a performance space for hire for events relating to drama, qi gong, yoga and dance. The space has basic theatrical lighting, with audio equipment to be supplied by the hirer. It has disabled access and can comfortably hold up to 150 guests. The school makes this space available to Wagana for rehearsals and performances in exchange for weekly dance classes delivered by Jo Clancy to their primary school children.

Clancy trained with the National Aboriginal and

Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) Dance College in 1989-1990 and went on to study a Bachelor of Arts in Dance, when it was still offered at Western Sydney University, graduating in 1992. Her contribution to dance education has been as a freelance artist and teacher, as well as Head of Dance at NAISDA between 2005-2007. She is a member of the Board of Studies for NAISDA and is currently head of Cultural Practice at NAISDA.

It is a place of connection where we can exchange ideals and learn from one another in the spirit of reconciliation, cultural affirmation and inclusion. It is a place where we dare to dance and tell the stories that cannot be told unless we move.
(NAISDA Dance College 2020)

Choreographed contemporary and traditional Aboriginal

dance projects of Wagana include: *Dancing My Dreaming*, Hawaii International Arts and Humanities Conference 2011; *Marramarra*, Arts OutWest 2011-2012; *Wagana Nguranbang*, Dance and the Child International, Taiwan 2012; *Keep the Dragonflies Dancing*, Blue Mountains and Western Sydney 2012; *Homeground Festival*, Sydney Opera House 2014 and 2015; Australian Youth Dance Festival, Melbourne 2017, and the Commonwealth Games Art and Cultural Festival 2018 (Clancy 2020).

In 2019, Wagana embarked on a six-week tour of international (as noted above) festivals that saw the company perform at the Coastal First Nations Dance Festival in Vancouver with the local Raven Spirit Dancers, with whom they have collaborated since 2017 on a work entitled *Wirawi Bulbwul*. Clancy then performed a solo

dance work *Yindyang*, a dance and film installation piece co-created with Wiradjuri filmmaker, Jamie Murray, and Canadian First Nations filmmaker, Gregory Coyes. The tour continued to Hawaii and the Australian Consulate in Honolulu, and the Honolulu Convention Centre was a venue for showcasing NSW Aboriginal dance (Blue Mountains Gazette 2019). As part of their significant educational focus, Wagana Aboriginal Youth Dancers premiered a new work by Jo Clancy in Glasgow in 2014 at the Commonwealth Youth Dance Festival. The company successfully fund-raised to get to Scotland for this festival (Williams 2014). Wagana uses or hires other sites to rehearse and perform. In this regard, the company takes advantage of flexible education, production and presentation spaces, but is also at risk of an insecure foothold on facilities.



PAWS Ensemble The Wizard of Oz.

PAWS Studios

Performance Art Western Sydney, better known as PAWS Studios, is a dance and performance school in Penrith established by Rebecca Liu-Brennan 15 years ago. PAWS was based in Kingswood for the first seven and, in Penrith, for the last eight years. The school both teaches different styles of dance (ballet, jazz, hip hop) and singing, drama and circus. At present, Liu-Brennan has approximately 600 students enrolled in the school, the youngest being two and the oldest 82 years old. PAWS has weekly 'Over 55' and tap classes to cater for that age

group. The main focus, however, are children and young people who can learn 'all styles of dance, circus, acting, singing and piano' and are building their performing arts options. Liu-Brennan states that dance and circus are very popular activities: the performing side is fun, creates confidence, and is preferable to after-school care or 'sitting over an iPad'. Liu-Brennan calculates that there are 20 dance schools (many now teaching 'cheer-leading') within a 10 or 15 minute radius of PAWS. The large number of

dance studios in Penrith is partly because dance teaching is not regulated, meaning that anyone can start teaching dance or open a dance studio.

There are creative synergies with the Blue Mountains as some students travel from as far away as Katoomba. The catchment of students could increase with expanded facilities, which is a development opportunity for the region. PAWS has an entertainment company attached to it, performing all over Australia in cabaret shows, pantomimes, circus and

other entertainment acts for special events such as conventions, shopping centre shows, grand openings and Christmas parades. Liu-Brennan also established a new business, Teacher Tribe, a training platform for dance studios and teachers. Another arm of PAWS, School Kids Can Dance, is more of an outreach program to teach dance in primary schools, and includes a program for more remote areas where Liu-Brennan teaches via online video. The intention behind PAWS goes beyond the physical aspects of dance to create confident performers through nurturing. Liu-Brennan believes that dance can teach children how to set their own goals:

We're very big here on not feeling judgement from other children. So you are running your own race in your own lane. (interview 22 November 2019)

PAWS delivers more than teaching dance, performance and circus. The organisation provides spaces and opportunities for health and well-being across generations, while developing public engagement through presentation and performance. The focus on personal wellbeing is part of the curriculum, where PAWS staff have a theme that is implemented during each class. PAWS has had some notable successes, with a student performing in *Evita* at the Sydney Opera House, another in *Billy Elliot*, and one working with leading actor Hugo Weaving at Sydney Theatre Company. Although it

is not the main focus nor necessarily parental expectation, some students have become professional performers: '17 in 15 years. It's a hard industry out there', according to Liu-Brennan. Some PAWS graduates are working on contract overseas, such as on cruise ships, for Disney Corporation or in a circus. Liu-Brennan's head of circus is also one of the 'biggest circus agents in the world', and PAWS has close connections with a Cirque du Soleil producer. One of PAWS's 15-year old contortionists is 'earning about \$1200 for a three-minute gig. So there's good money in the circus for these kids'. Many students also become teachers; the PAWS teacher training program is available from the age of fifteen.

Liu-Brennan pays \$6,500 a month to rent three large studio rooms in a warehouse-style shopping centre. Spaces include a 'huge' circus room with circus equipment, which cost \$120,000 to set up. PAWS employs 22 teachers and, although the business is 'doing ok', expansion has not necessarily improved its economic viability:

I think I was making the same amount of money at 200 kids as I am at 600, because there is more admin, more expenses. We're trying to systematise everything. But I do find that a lot of the money that you make gets poured back into it, be it renovating or getting new circus equipment. You really do it because you love it and you love the kids. You definitely don't do it to make millions of dollars.

(interview 22 November 2019)

PAWS receives advisory support from the Penrith CBD Corporation, which aims to promote progressive urban development in Penrith, working closely with Penrith City Council (PCC), and is funded through a special rate levy collected from local CBD property owners. Membership is free to CBD businesses to 'unlock opportunities' to be 'ready for our city's future' (Penrith CBD Corporation 2020). PAWS participates in the festival run by the Corporation that involves all local dance schools and performers, and is attended by 20,000 people. PAWS is also involved in the Seniors Festival organised through the Corporation.

Challenges

Key issues for PAWS concern infrastructure availability and costs, and having greater access to presentation opportunities. While the business is viable, the opportunities for students to perform are limited. Some students, for example, have gone to the Flying Fruit Fly Circus in Albury Wodonga. However, it would be a significant improvement to be able to offer a flying trapeze, for example, in Penrith. Liu-Brennan holds that access to larger studio space would be ideal, because then performances could be programmed. The safety aspects are crucial, which may include circus schools without proper trusses for the students and being taught by

unqualified trainers because the dance studio sector is not regulated by qualification. Liu-Brennan sees that as an issue because, 'a lot of these kids are finishing full-time practice but then they're going on to teach with no qualifications whatsoever'. She would like to see more support directly from PCC and is frustrated because she feels that local talent and expertise is under-utilised:

I am really about the local. I love local. I would love to have that opportunity to talk to Council about more involvement because I've been working in this

industry here for 15 years. There are amazing schools out here with amazing kids that want opportunities to perform.
(interview 22 November 2019)

The Little Mermaid is one of the PAWS productions that includes scripting, acting and film segments with live performance. To present *The Little Mermaid*, PAWS hired The Joan for at least four rehearsals and two concert performances:

The Joan is really the best place for us. It's got a catwalk at the Q Theatre, which is great for us because we do a lot of circus

stuff. I love the team there. They're absolutely wonderful to deal with. But it is expensive.
(interview 22 November 2019)

The Joan costs about \$11,000 for the rehearsals and concert hire. Liu-Brennan collects the box office, but after her costs are taken out it is unlikely that any profit would be made. The alternative, the Penrith Panthers Leagues Club, costs about \$13,000, which is prohibitive for PAWS. The Penrith Anglican College has a little theatre which PAWS can use for about \$4,000 for an afternoon hire.

Digital Arts and Culture

DiG Space Program, Allen Arcade, Penrith NSW 2750

TAFE Nepean-Penrith Campus, 117 Henry St, Penrith NSW 2750

TAFE Katoomba Campus, Parke St, Katoomba NSW 2780

The Digital Ecology Lab, Old Library, Civic Place, Katoomba NSW 2780

Creative practitioners across all disciplines work in the digital space. In Penrith and the Blue Mountains there is a willingness to adopt digital capabilities and to explore new options to extend their creative practice. Digital artists in Western Sydney are amongst the most collaborative creative practitioners, according to survey research undertaken by Western Sydney University, which shows that, among respondents, 86 per cent of digital artists also work across film and video (Stevenson et al 2017: 29). However, as with film and screen media, digital arts have 'limited purpose-built making spaces in Western Sydney and no dedicated exhibition spaces' (SGS 2018: 57), which means that non-traditional spaces (such as building facades and other accessible public spaces) are frequently sought to exhibit work. While digital artists benefit from technological

advances for both creative production and distribution (in particular international dissemination), access to high-end equipment and professional education is required to stay abreast of these advances:

While some TAFEs in Western Sydney are offering some visual arts and digital arts programs, the analysis of sector trends found that the majority of professional artists hold a Bachelor degree or higher. Limited opportunities for artist education in Western Sydney may have implications for the growth and development of professional practice in the region. (SGS 2018: 110)

The strong identification and local engagement of Western Sydney artists (Stevenson et al 2017: 15) presents opportunities to produce digital content for international exposure. For instance, SGS

observes that creating 'hyperlocal' works could enable Western Sydney artists 'to grow audiences in Western Sydney and beyond, as well as make connections and collaborate with other artists across Australia and around the world' (2018: viii). Practitioners in Penrith and the Blue Mountains may find new opportunities through improvements to the status of creative educational options, and also the establishment of new businesses spawned by major public and private investment in the development of the Western Sydney region, with adequate support to stimulate collaborative spaces and projects. The following case study of the DiG Space Program shows how a State-funded arts program stimulated collaboration and skills development and paved the way for innovative attention from TAFE NSW.



DiG Space Program Third Team

DiG Space Program (Penrith)

DiG Space Program was a mentorship and residency program that showcased the talented creative producers in the region. Initiated by Penrith City Council and funded by Create NSW (see also Penrith City Council Initiatives above), with support from the Design and Music academic programs of Western Sydney University, the Nepean Arts & Design Centre at TAFE NSW, and Penrith Performing & Visual Arts Ltd. The creative briefs were developed by Council departments, and participants worked under the supervision of established industry professionals. The program was designed for emerging digital artists, designers and

composers (not age related) from Greater Western Sydney within their first five years of professional practice, to provide a bridge between completing relevant creative education at Diploma and Degree levels and opportunities for employment and professional development within the creative industries.

The DiG Space Program also exposed participants to marketing and business development skills, including experience in collaboration and project articulation. During a 16-week residency program, participants were required to work *in situ* for a minimum of two days per week in Council-owned premises in the Penrith City Centre. The DiG Space-mentored group was provided with access to The Studio in

the Sydney CBD, a fee-charging but not-for-profit incubator. Penrith City Council (PCC) subsidised the DiG participants with payment for a 12-month Community Membership, giving them access to The Studio events, speakers' series, networks and investor-focused opportunities.

The DiG Space Program offered mentorship by leading artistic entrepreneurs, 'Creative + Business' workshops, stipends, industry networking and professional development and collaborative creative project opportunities. The inaugural DiG Space Program was held in the first half of 2018 and saw five participants mentored by David Clarkson, Executive Producer and Artistic Director of Stalker Theatre, to enhance individual professional practice and establish a multi-disciplinary team. The brief was developed by the PCC Sustainability Department to explore imaginative storytelling about the importance of trees and ground cover, resulting in the production of *Urban Futures*, a contemplative 17-minute video installation with an original score.

The second DiG Space Program, held towards the end of 2018, was mentored by award-winning Executive Producer Penny Robbins, known for her social documentaries with Film Australia, ABC, SBS, Canal Plus and the BBC. The creative brief given to the five participants was to highlight the values and benefits of public library services, which led them to create *Fox Tales*, 'a

collaborative e-resource aimed at encouraging teenagers to explore their local libraries and the world of books' (PCC 2019). It is an engaging and quirky interactive set of works around 'fantasy', 'romance', 'action' and 'sci-fi' complete with reading lists of similarly themed titles. Former Head of Television at the Australian Film Television and Radio School, Andy Nehl, mentored the third DiG Space Program in the first half of 2019. The creative brief was for an 'urban living room, an urban soundscape', to 'develop imaginative ways to explore community connection within public spaces' (Harris 2019: 10). The outcome was a set of eight videos, *NepeanRIVR360*, which utilises 360-degree video-making techniques to immerse the viewer in the environment and social activities (such as walking, theatrical practice and rowing) found along the river. Feedback from participants has been very positive. An example is the following statement from a composer and multi-media artist:

This was a game changer for my creative life and projects. It has opened new avenues of potential work for me and showed me

what I can offer the community from a creative perspective. The creative process whilst collaborating with like-minded practitioners has been invaluable. I would highly recommend this residency to fellow creative producers in the Western Sydney region. (participant, quoted in Harris 2019: 11)

Several DiG Space Program participants have gone on to secure full time employment directly in their fields as graphic designers, through positions within Western Sydney University or by establishing their own business. Others have been engaged with Symphony Orchestras, interstate film producers and commissioned for original compositions by theatre companies and for projects with Local Government and the Penrith Regional Gallery. These opportunities arose through the support of the program, opportunities for networking, and bridging the gap from education through to industry.

DiG Space Program is an exemplary professional development program. Attracting high-calibre industry professionals to work

with participants to produce quality digital media outcomes was the cornerstone of its success. The program also generated interest and engagement across PCC departments, highlighting the willingness of Council staff to work effectively together on creative projects. For a number of artists, this aspect of the DiG Space Program went beyond just a professional development program, as it strengthened creative participation and awareness across the departments of PCC. The program used a creative enterprise approach that reflected the capacity of PCC to generate 'start-up' projects in creative practice and production that warrants professional development attention to 'scale' the project up into a more sustained program. The success of the DiG Space Program has, in part, been adapted for an ambitious program that TAFE Nepean-Penrith intends to deliver. This creative enterprise approach also reflects the capacity and ability of PCC staff to develop creative production initiatives that attract the attention of educational institutions (such as TAFE NSW) to become part of the curriculum.

TAFE NSW Western Sydney (Penrith and Blue Mountains)

George Verghese is the Head of the Skills Team for Creative Design and Ideation for TAFE NSW Western Sydney. The creative design areas include fashion, visual arts, photography, screen and media, graphic design, interior design, dance and music and gaming design. Verghese aims

to reinvigorate the way in which TAFE delivers to creative endeavours, for example by providing accessible makerspaces or what he calls 'fab labs':

Makerspaces have been around, and 'fab labs', for about 50-odd years. They're places where

people tinker or make things, such as furniture, and it's becoming a growing movement where people really want to get their hands on and start doing things. It could be sewing, it could be making small products, from laser printing to 3D printing. (interview 21 October 2019)



TAFE NSW Lidcombe Campus Maker Space

Verghese is updating the concept of the fab lab to be more than just access to making tools, by extending the activities across the ‘value chain’ from concept to design to manufacture to marketing and business development. As he observes, there are, ‘so many individuals that cry out for that type of space to make, to create in, to apply back into society and into culture’. Verghese’s fab lab concept includes the fabrication of ideas - ‘it is a physical space where we have brainstorming sessions and workshops and gatherings’. At this stage he refers to it as the ‘TAFE Co. Fabrication and Business Lab (Co. F.A.B. Lab)’, which is envisioned as a distributed model across the Western Sydney TAFE campuses.

His view is that Penrith is at an interesting intersection of several opportunities: the proximity to The Quarter (the Penrith Health and Education Precinct located between Penrith and St Marys), which is set to become a leading centre

for excellence in health care, medical research and education; the emergence of the Aerotropolis, which could create a, ‘whole new future perspective of what the West is’; and the film and artisan activities of the Blue Mountains. These are distinct but complementary processes for Penrith and the Blue Mountains: the former was one of the early adopters of some of the ideas with which Verghese wanted to engage. The concept draft of the TAFE Co. F.A.B. Lab considers the Nepean-Penrith TAFE Campus to be ‘a digital hub, a creative hub’. It would provide a much broader range of activities than skills training in specific software, and would develop ‘over the next 10 years to be the real central digital hub’. It would include a green screen, Oculus Rift, Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality and other digital platform types. DiG Space Program would be brought into TAFE so that it can become a fully-fledged program and have an institutional home.

The Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise (BMEE) group is interested in establishing makerspaces and co-working spaces in conjunction with TAFE, which has a smaller footprint in the Blue Mountains than elsewhere. These spaces would operate closer to a studio model, working with artists and providing observational drawing and photography training in the first instance. Verghese sees the value of the Blue Mountains as having a distinct creative culture that is more ‘hands-on, tactile’. These ‘artisanal’ Blue Mountains artists will also be able to access the TAFE production facilities through digital means.

BMEE has dedicated resources since 2018 to working with NSW TAFE to establish more creative industries courses at Wentworth Falls TAFE and to encourage the NSW TAFE skills point team to advance its idea of a maker space and ideas studio at the TAFE building on Parke Street in Katoomba. BMEE prioritises the importance of connecting parties involved in the establishment of trade and creative industries courses at TAFE. BMEE conducted interviews with students aged 16-25 years for its 2019 Post School Pathways report to understand specific areas where young people would like to be able to develop their skills in a local context. Meetings with NSW TAFE at the Wentworth Falls campus aimed to progress the establishment of a sound production course by partnering with a successful Katoomba AV provider, KFM

media. Background research by KFM established that there was sufficient interest to begin the course, but the curriculum development is yet to be completed. According to Verghese, options for gaining access to TAFE are opening up. The training packages ‘enhance understanding’ and include individuals of all ages and backgrounds who are working in the visual arts, photography, screen and media, and want to update their skills and networks. Verghese aims to create a range of different types of platform that cater for skills-based learning as well as creative exploration for people from all backgrounds:

And we’re not just looking at the elite student who has creative ideas. We’re looking at all aspects of the community. Refugee components. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We’re looking at correctional services. How creative culture can impact life for all walks of life. (interview 21 October 2019)

One way in which this objective can be achieved is through an open studio model with low membership or

enrolment fees that allows artists to come on site. The aim is to attract industry, students and other professionals who can connect with each other through workshops and lectures, and ‘become a hub of activity’. DiG Space, for example, could be run on an open studio model at TAFE. Additive manufacturing and the digital transformation of the Internet of Things provide further opportunities. Verghese thinks that TAFE needs to be at the forefront of training:

Granted, the universities have a research mandate. We have the mandate to deal with industry that wants things done very quickly, which needs an agile system. That’s where the Co. F.A.B. Lab comes in - through agility and nimbleness.

(interview 21 October 2019)
He also sees this model as bringing in members of the community to be part of discussions with artists about their work. The timeframe for this vision is staged as one to two-year, three to four-year and five to ten-year plans. Verghese’s strategic proposition is backed up by research from Europe and Australia about the digital transformation and what it will

require. There is a growing group of creative digital entrepreneurs evident across Greater Western Sydney, a number of whom are located around Penrith and in the Blue Mountains. The Creative West website, developed by Western Sydney University design academic Katrina Sandbach, provides an interactive map of ‘local creative businesses and organisations, and a curated snapshot of what’s currently happening in the cultural space [of Western Sydney]’ (Sandbach 2020). Commercial enterprises include web developers and independent visual communication practitioners found across the region. Those in the Blue Mountains have started clustering, for example in Katoomba, where practitioners are located in one block. While those located in Penrith and surrounding suburbs are more spaced out, they are nevertheless mainly located near centres. One of the objectives of the Creative West website is to assist creative practitioners from the design field to find each other and to inspire students working in the region, thereby contributing to the often-expressed need for networking opportunities.

The Digital Ecology Lab (Blue Mountains)

The Digital Ecology Lab is a project of Toolo (see the creative co-working spaces and shared facilities case study below) that began in 2019. The Digital Ecology Lab emerged from an impulse to provide education for people in new technology and emerging media. Director of Toolo, Justin

Morrissey explained the reason for the name:

Digital Ecology is essentially the term for how all the digital media — the internet of things, our connectivity and all of the devices that we use — how they all sit together. As creative producers or creative practitioners, they need to know

that stuff as it’s happening, not after it’s happened. (interview 22 November 2019)

A major challenge is the lack of formal arts training in the Blue Mountains, and particularly in newer technologies. While it is possible to do a short course on Photoshop at the local TAFE, there is nothing in the

areas of new media, 3D printing or robotics. The Digital Ecology Lab brings together 10 creative practitioners from different disciplines living anywhere in western Sydney in a connected learning environment facilitated by experienced new media facilitators. Lab participants are paid a fee of \$500 for taking part, which is funded by Create NSW's Western Sydney Making Spaces initiative (Create NSW 2018). A program of presenters introduces participants to various aspects of technology and new media and their creative possibilities. For example, the sound artist Damien Castaldi presented on the possibilities of Adafruit electronics products and Arduino, the open source electronics platform designed for artists and hobbyists. Cindy Drennan of illuminart also gave a workshop on Projection Mapping.

The 10 creative practitioners are exposed to new technologies and encouraged to explore their possibilities, being given access to the space and equipment as an 'open studio'. They have the chance to try out equipment such as Google Tilt Brush, a 3D painting tool used in VR applications, or the Oculus Quest headset, a VR gaming device, both of which are available through Toolo's collection. Much of the energy and initiative in the Lab comes from making new connections, as Morrissey comments:

A lot of the stuff happens online in forums and groups and social media, amongst the Digital Ecology Lab participants all

sharing information around. The facilitators and presenters send their slides and things forward to the group and then the group meets up every now and then. (interview 22 November 2019)

The Lab takes place in the former public library in Katoomba, which was given over by the BMCC rent-free for a year. Toolo approached Blue Mountains Council to apply for funding to run the DEL program, and they discussed the suitability of the old library site with MTNS MADE, who gave them a letter of support for Toolo to access that particular site for the Digital Ecology Lab. The Digital Ecology Lab well illustrates synergies with Western Sydney and Penrith in particular. A field trip introduces participants to the Fab Labs at Western Sydney University (in Kingswood just east of Penrith). As Morrissey said, 'Like, there are no 3D printing places in the Mountains. So Penrith is our closest place. So getting that training in 3D printing has been part of that project. And virtual reality, as I mentioned'. And there are similarities to Penrith's DiG Space Program.

Connected, flexible and resourced hubs

The Studio in Sydney is referred to as a good model by some Penrith City Council staff, as it combines a recording studio, green screen, collaborative workspaces and meeting rooms, all of which are available for hire. The key is that the spaces are activated as well as managed - offering courses, seminars and

workshops, as Morrissey attests:

You can't just create a space and say 'there you go'. It's like creating a fabulous building and there's no programming. So you need that programming fund and you need somebody to run it. And it needs to be really well connected to make it happen. (interview 22 November 2019)

Sydney's The Studio also has prestigious resident companies which assist in drawing others into making connections. The experience of DiG Space Program is that those connections need to be built in the Penrith and Blue Mountains regions – with TAFE, universities, entrepreneurs and creative experts. The experience of the Digital Ecology Lab so far is to maximise spatial flexibility, with all equipment and furniture in the old library site being on wheels to facilitate changes in setup. Toolo has been an advocate for creative producers gaining access to spaces that are unused (or underused). At the same time, networks increasingly work in both physical and virtual space. For Morrissey, what is educationally important is the sociability in the spaces — physical and digital — and the networking and activity that it can trigger:

My experience of learning has been more and more that you only really need to touch base occasionally in a physical space, so at this Lab, for instance, people come here for a few days a week and they use the space as a campus. (interview 22 November 2019)

Yet it is clear that different creative workers have very different needs. Creative spaces should be maximising ways to accommodate these differences. Morrissey describes a very flexible space as needing, 'to be able to facilitate large groups of people, small groups of people. I think that's where we're moving to' (interview 22 November 2019).

The DiG Space Program and the Digital Ecology Lab are examples that demonstrate the demand for and benefits of the carefully considered needs of local creative producers, and the need to support them to work across digital and future technologies. Strategic

partnerships being established between PCC and BMCC and tertiary training institutions will require targeted and ongoing support from State and Federal government and industry to enable the provision of flexible and accessible workspaces that offer access to up-to-date creative technologies. The large, future-focused technological industries that are widely anticipated to result from The Quarter and the Aerotropolis precinct developments will require active partnership building by Council. These types of support are likely to attract quality creative and cultural practitioners given the unique inter-relations of professionals already in the area, the

willingness of students to train in Penrith, and the proximity to significant employment opportunities that will open up in this part of Greater Sydney.

Creative practitioners across all arts disciplines work in the digital space. In Penrith and the Blue Mountains there is a willingness to adopt digital capabilities and to explore new options to extend creative practice. This case study shows how a State-funded arts program that stimulated collaboration and skills development, DiG Space, has paved the way for innovative attention by TAFE NSW, the State's post-secondary vocational training provider.

Film and Screen Media

Independent filmmaking, Penrith

Filmmaking industry cluster, Blue Mountains

illuminart, Medlow Bath, Blue Mountains

Independent filmmaking in Penrith

As a small but growing sector of the creative economy in Penrith, filmmaking is characterised by small operators who balance their creative work with corporate projects and those who supplement their income with employment outside the creative industries. Rocknbob Media House is a videography business based in Emu Heights. Owner Tom Biddle set up the company in 2013 while working as a freelance cinematographer. Rocknbob are visual storytellers, generating and moulding creative ideas into video content from pre- to post-production. Rocknbob's day-to-day projects are primarily corporate in nature, but Tom's passion is in narrative entertainment, and he is currently working on a film in the thriller-horror genre. The company has also produced music videos and short films.

Shadow Wolves Productions is another example of a company in the Penrith filmmaking industry. Founder Brendan Byrne is an actor who created his own production company to generate more work to serve his passion. Currently, Shadow Wolves has three feature films

and six short films in different stages of production. Brendan spends approximately 20 hours a week on the business, dividing the rest of his time between a full-time job in juvenile justice and pursuing acting work. Both Biddle and Byrne remarked on how the established film and television industry in Australia is difficult for newcomers to break into. Byrne notes that many of his contemporaries chose to exit this 'challenging industry' and that Western Sydney creative producers are particularly prone to viewing other creative producers as competition rather than as potential collaborators.

It appears that Penrith filmmakers have chosen to avoid the mainstream industry and have forged their own path. Rocknbob has grown to a team of three and has established its own studio and post-production facilities in Emu Plains. In the last three years, several of Shadow Wolves' short films have been screened in film festivals around the world. Another component of the Penrith filmmaking industry is the utilisation of its locations for filming by external operators.

In 2013, scenes from the international blockbuster *Mad Max: Fury Road* were filmed at Penrith Lakes. In the last 12 months, approximately 47 days of filming have taken place in public space in the Penrith LGA, covering a range of projects including film and television, commercials, and student films (based on applications to Council). Penrith has much to offer as a location for filmmaking, as is evidenced by 25 per cent of applicants having filmed in the area before.

Challenges and opportunities

Given the opportunity, Biddle would like Rocknbob to produce more entertainment content in the future. With a much higher upfront investment required and limited returns, these projects are hard to fund on a regular basis. Biddle feels that, because the Australian film and television industry is small and tight knit, it is difficult to attract talent and funding. The explosion of digital content platforms such as YouTube and Netflix provide additional



Rocknbnb Media House. Production Shot for McGrath Foundation.

distribution channels, but the upfront production costs are still prohibitive. Funding is a big challenge for Shadow Wolves too. With more secure financing, owner Byrne estimates Shadow Wolves would be able to deliver 40-60 per cent more work than currently and could convert more part-time creative producers to full-time.

Another challenge for a filmmaker in Penrith is the limited access to suitable facilities. According to Biddle, having access to a larger studio locally - either one owned by Rocknbnb or available to hire - would help to broaden opportunities to create a more diverse range of content. Byrne notes, 'we have next to nowhere in Penrith to hold auditions for a reasonable

price'. He envisages that a multi-purpose facility would cater to several needs of the area:

I have always wanted to set up a building and office space, that gives access to meeting rooms (for production meetings), an audition space (to hold your own auditions), a self-tape studio (as that is where a lot of auditions are heading these days), and a rehearsal space with some limited furniture to help, for example, with walkthroughs and blocking of the location.
(interview 5 April 2020)

Having been in business for several years now, Biddle has navigated the financial and legal requirements that come with setting up and running a small business. He acknowledges that this is difficult for creative producers

to do as it is typically not a natural fit with their skill set. While he feels that he has a 'handle' on this now, Biddle would applaud and encourage any initiatives that seek to assist new start-ups in this area. The idea of building better connections between local creative producers and local business generally is one that appeals to Biddle. Keen to support other local creative producers, having a database to source contacts would encourage more collaboration. Similarly, more visibility would lead to more commercial opportunities within the region, which would help Biddle and other local creative producers become more financially secure and able to produce more creative work.

Filmmaking industry cluster in the Blue Mountains

Filmmaking forms a small but significant part of Blue Mountains creative activity. Around 6.25 per cent of employment in the Blue Mountains creative industries is in the 'motion picture and sound recording' category, although not all of these would be involved directly in filmmaking (REMPLAN 2017: 3). This level of employment points to a local cluster of skilled industry workers in the Blue Mountains that suggests there is capacity to generate local productions. There are several Blue Mountains companies working in the fields of animation and 3D design (Taylor Films), video production (Falls Productions, Wild Hive Studios), music and video recording and postproduction (KFM Media).

Cinema, due to its industrial scale and specialist technologies, is more reliant on the clustering of creators, particularly in regions located at a distance from production centres, such as Fox Studios in central Sydney. With the founding of the Blue Mountains Creative Industries Cluster in 2013, one of the first steps was to bring together film and animation practitioners. Included were 'local writers, costumiers, animators, directors, producers, 3D modelers, voiceover artists, actors, digital effects specialists, designers, event managers, musicians, composers, and sound designers' (Sandbach 2015: 4). From these connections several film projects were developed. Ann Niddrie of MTNS MADE

believed there was a strong film sector in the Blue Mountains, which she said is, 'becoming more and more connected and continuing to be supportive of each other and working on each other's projects' (interview 31 October 2019).

The Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise (BMEE) commissioned REMPLAN to carry out an economic impact study of four films made in a one-year period (2016-2017) that they were supporting. The four films were entirely made in the Blue Mountains. All were completed and distributed across various international channels and markets. Matt Drummond's *My Pet Dinosaur* was distributed worldwide and subsequently distributed via numerous airlines on DVD and on streaming services. Julia Morris' film *Can't I Sh#t In Peace?* was a finalist at Sydney's Tropfest short film festival in 2017. *Cul_de_sac* is a short film drama that is being turned by the director into a series, and *The Last Babushka Doll* screened at the St Kilda, Byron Bay, San Jose, Yonkers New York and Lorne Film Festivals. These four films generated around \$13.5 million in turnover and have supported around 40 jobs in the region, resulting in over \$3 million in wages and salaries and over \$5 million in value-added flow-on to the local economy. For these four film projects, 'producers acknowledge the role of the cluster in facilitating local producers, cast and crew'

according to the REMPLAN study. The report demonstrates the strong economic impact of films that have relatively modest budgets, particularly if all aspects of the filmmaking are done in the region.

Challenges

The clustering and interconnection of various creative groupings and businesses enabled by the establishment of MTNS MADE has delivered real benefits to the film industry in the Blue Mountains. Nevertheless, production opportunities are still being missed. As Niddrie recounts, recently a film could not be made locally despite MTNS MADE spending three months trying to find a suitable space for the filmmaker, which was:

A space where they can back up a truck and they can get out their gear and maybe set up a green screen. Physical space where they can bring all their actors in and do stuff for film. But it would also require sound dubbing facilities. Where they can look at the rushes right there and maybe send them off to somebody. (interview 31 October 2019)

The challenge is to address the need for these kinds of space, which may only be needed for relatively short periods, but which according to Niddrie 'contribute to our economy and also the sense of place and pride in what we're making up here, in the broader community'.



illuminart. Local artwork and animation projections onto the Hydro Majestic.

illuminart

Multimedia artist Cindi Drennan is the co-founder and creative director of illuminart, a company that creates, installs and manages projection installations and permanent illuminated attractions that tell 'stories in light'. Working with local councils, museums and businesses, the company's process draws upon visual arts, community development, digital media, creative writing and illumination. illuminart was established in regional South Australia in 2007 and now operates out of Adelaide and Medlow Baths in the Blue Mountains. Drennan lived in NSW for 13 years, including during her studies at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) in Sydney, and returning to Adelaide to establish illuminart with co-director

Craig Laurendet because she found that Sydney was 'too challenging financially to be an independent artist' (interview 29 February 2020).

Drennan chose to work back and forth between both SA and NSW, motivated by the broader creative opportunities on the east coast for the growing team in both states. Because Sydney is so difficult for artists to live and operate in, Drennan's view is that the choices are 'Blue Mountains, Melbourne or Newcastle'. The work of illuminart is associated with large-scale outdoor festivals and art events as either mobile installations (such as the Bilby at Penrith's Real Festival) or projections onto existing buildings. illuminart's reputation has grown steadily

and has a transformational aim at its core:

Beyond the spectacular, illuminart's visionary, interactive storytelling and community engagement projects are about reaching to the heart, and leading the transformation, of people and places. (MTNS MADE n.d.)

As creative director, Drennan works with a large network of creative specialists that includes 'artists, animators and projection mapping specialists' to deliver projects around Australia and has a 'mission' to employ artists based in regional Australia. There are two full-time staff in the Blue Mountains, four busy casual staff in Adelaide, regional SA and NSW.

Drennan is also connected to the Penrith area, having taken advantage of the small business training and mentoring offered by Western Sydney Business Centre (based in Penrith), which has added to the company's capabilities. The company has also worked with PCC on a number of projects, including Real Festival, Digital Salon and *The GeriActivists*, which involved collaborating with seniors from St Mary's to generate 'futuring' models using 360-degree virtual reality technologies (illuminart 2020). illuminart has received many awards, including two at the 2019 Australian Event Awards for the 2019 Adelaide Fringe Signature project *Yabarra – Gathering of Light*; the 2018 Creative Industries Award at the Blue Mountains Annual Business Awards; and in 2013 for PCC at the National Disability Awards for 'Excellence in Improving Social Inclusion' on the *No Boundaries Project*. The *No Boundaries Project* is described as:

an inclusive multimedia arts project demonstrating the benefits of social participation through art for people with disability, the capacity of technology to provide new opportunities for participation, and the influence their creative contributions can have for social inclusion. (illuminart 2020)

No Boundaries Project was directed by Drennan and brought together a range of partners that included Penrith City Council, the Sylvanvale Foundation, Accessible Arts NSW and artists and community members. The merit of the project was

evident in how the work of differently abled artists was presented to the wider arts community and in ways that led to recognition and ongoing engagement with those communities and wider audiences. The project extended over a two-year period and approached inclusion as a creative collaboration process. A high point of the work was a large-scale projection onto the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre in September 2012. Penrith City Council committed to the project's continuation and formally incorporated the *No Boundaries Project* into its disability action plan, maintaining the Visual Arts program of the project, including two annual exhibitions. The judges commended Penrith City Council for its commitment to *No Boundaries* over the time taken to produce the work, and its evaluative process to understand the impact of the project. PCC evaluation found that participants 'emerged from the program feeling confident, acknowledged and proud of their work'.

Challenges

illuminart is an example of a creative enterprise that operates across state and national borders and manages to have multiple sites of activity. It is an example of a creative enterprise that chooses its base location on factors other than proximity to markets. These aspects of operating in a more global sense provide opportunities for creative producers in the

region. There are specific challenges that Drennan acknowledges. The company is heavily reliant on Internet connectivity and has invested in various strategies to avoid downtime. The need for affordable warehouse accommodation to establish and maintain an ongoing creative lab is also crucial as a facility where the work can be produced over a longer time period (i.e., that does not have to be removed at 17:00). While the company has recently found one such space in the Blue Mountains with comparatively low rent, the tenancy is uncertain and, therefore, the scope for development of the space and related business may be limited. The other issue is public transport: trains do not always stop at Medlow Bath and take over an hour to arrive in Penrith. Should Penrith wish to encourage artists from the surrounding areas and region, Drennan suggests that what is needed is a co-working space that is near the railway station that is more than a temporary hot desk, and is better set up for resting and even overnight stays. The provision of such a space, Drennan suggests, would see a great improvement for Penrith's reputation as a cultural and creative hub for regional artists and creative enterprises. Many of the "co-working spaces" offered in Sydney and Parramatta are expensive and do not suit an arts practice, and Drennan suggests that opportunities for businesses and artists to co-habit and co-create spaces in Penrith would be of more interest to illuminart.

Music

Former all-girl punk rock band *Violent Minx* (Penrith)

Live and Local Lockdown; Open Mic (Penrith)

Music Hunter and other Blue Mountains Music Entrepreneurs

Penrith Symphony Orchestra, Penrith Youth Orchestra, Choral Groups

The SGS Economics and Planning report on cultural infrastructure in Western Sydney (2018) identified issues around music production and presentation in the region. While there is at least one making space designed for music in most LGAs of Western Sydney, Live Music Venues were identified as a 'specific gap in exhibition spaces' (SGS 2018: 99). Orchestral music activities in Western Sydney have largely centred on the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre in Penrith, which as noted above provides music performance and rehearsal space (SGS 2018: 107). Katoomba is identified by SGS as a site for festivals, including music festivals such as Winter Magic (2018: 61).

Penrith hosted the international franchise of 'hard rock' festival *DEFQON 1* in 2015, which attracted 25,000 people (SGS 2018: 65) but was discontinued following safety issues for participants in 2018. This attempt to differentiate the types of musical offering across the region could continue to be explored.

The Live Music Office 2014 report into the *Economic and Cultural Value of Live Music in Australia* provided an overview of live music production and attendance in Australia. The report found that more intimate venues and bars and clubs were preferred by NSW audiences as spaces to experience live music. Two thirds of people from NSW

who attend live music venues also go to festivals, with the report noting that price, awareness of events, and access to public transport were key 'constraining' factors (SGS 2018: 14). Data provided by Australia Council's 2014 *Art and Daily Life* research indicate that music is the second most popular artform of audience participation (after literature) across Australia. It also notes that the age group of 15-24 has the highest level of participation, with the 35-44 age group having the largest audience growth (SGS 2018: 13). The relevance of these data for the Penrith and Blue Mountains region concerns the connection between young people and participation in music.

Former all-girl punk rock band *Violent Minx*

Michelle Catanzaro is a Senior Lecturer in Design in the School of Humanities and Communications Arts at Western Sydney University. She is also a Research Fellow in the Young and Resilient Research Centre and a Program co-lead in the Places and Platform stream, also at

Western Sydney University. Her interest in cultural infrastructure research comes from being both a creative practitioner and academic. Her doctoral research used a visual approach via photography to map irregular cultural spaces and patterns of gentrification in the Inner West (interview 23

October 2019). Catanzaro grew up in Werrington of Italian parentage. Her parents relocated 'to the "Wild West"' from Stanmore when they got married, and as Catanzaro explains:

We were the first people to inhabit a house on our street.

There were other buildings there but they were all empty. We were at the forefront of the move to Werrington at the time as part of that original 'move west' urban growth in Werrington specifically. My parents bought an empty block and they built their house on it. So I guess I've grown up with that being very much a part of my narrative, of this very proud of building something from nothing, starting from nowhere.
(interview 23 October 2019)

As Catanzaro grew up she became aware of the stigma associated with growing up in Western Sydney, and specifically Penrith. But, that awareness was counteracted by a resilience that she developed from being from the West, 'And a pride of being a Westie as well' (interview 23 October 2019). Catanzaro was part of Violent Minx, an all-girl punk rock band formed in 2003 when she was living in Penrith and which stayed together until 2008. While she was the only Western Sydney-based member, the band frequently played in Western Sydney. Venues included the Backdoor, as it used to be called, at Penrith's Panthers League Club; Penrith and Rooty Hill Police Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC's), and many different community centres around Western Sydney.

The Backdoor was basically just this very, very hot, small, tiny room that packed a lot of people in there. But Penrith was quite a hot spot especially for punk rock.
(interview 23 October 2019)

Violent Minx also attracted attention from Triple J Unearthed for their distinctive

style of punk rock and fearless approach to mixing genres. 'The Minx is the embodiment of the New York riot girl movement in Australia' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation n.d.). Catanzaro's story is one that embraced and forged youth cultures around the first decade of the 2000s. While she was performing in the punk band, she was also working at the first Western Sydney skate shop in Penrith, and thinks that the environment has changed since then:

At the time there was a lot of tension around this kind of skater culture being introduced in Penrith. And I think now that's a non-issue. When we were teens it was like if you brought your skateboard down the road it was a bit scary. Especially if you were going into Penrith Plaza. When I was about 14 I was at a gig at Melrose Hall, which was a really big venue in Western Sydney in Emu Plains. There was a lot of tension between different kinds of subcultural groups at the time. I'm not a young person living in Western Sydney now so it's hard for me to speak directly. But I think that aesthetically there's a lot more diversity, cultural diversity and subcultural diversity in Western Sydney than there was prior to the 2000s. (interview 23 October 2019)

Through their research, Catanzaro and colleague Katrina Sandbach affirm the importance of having the capacity to make art and culture in the West, rather than it being imported. Both are interested in the identity of the 'creative Westie'. Catanzaro

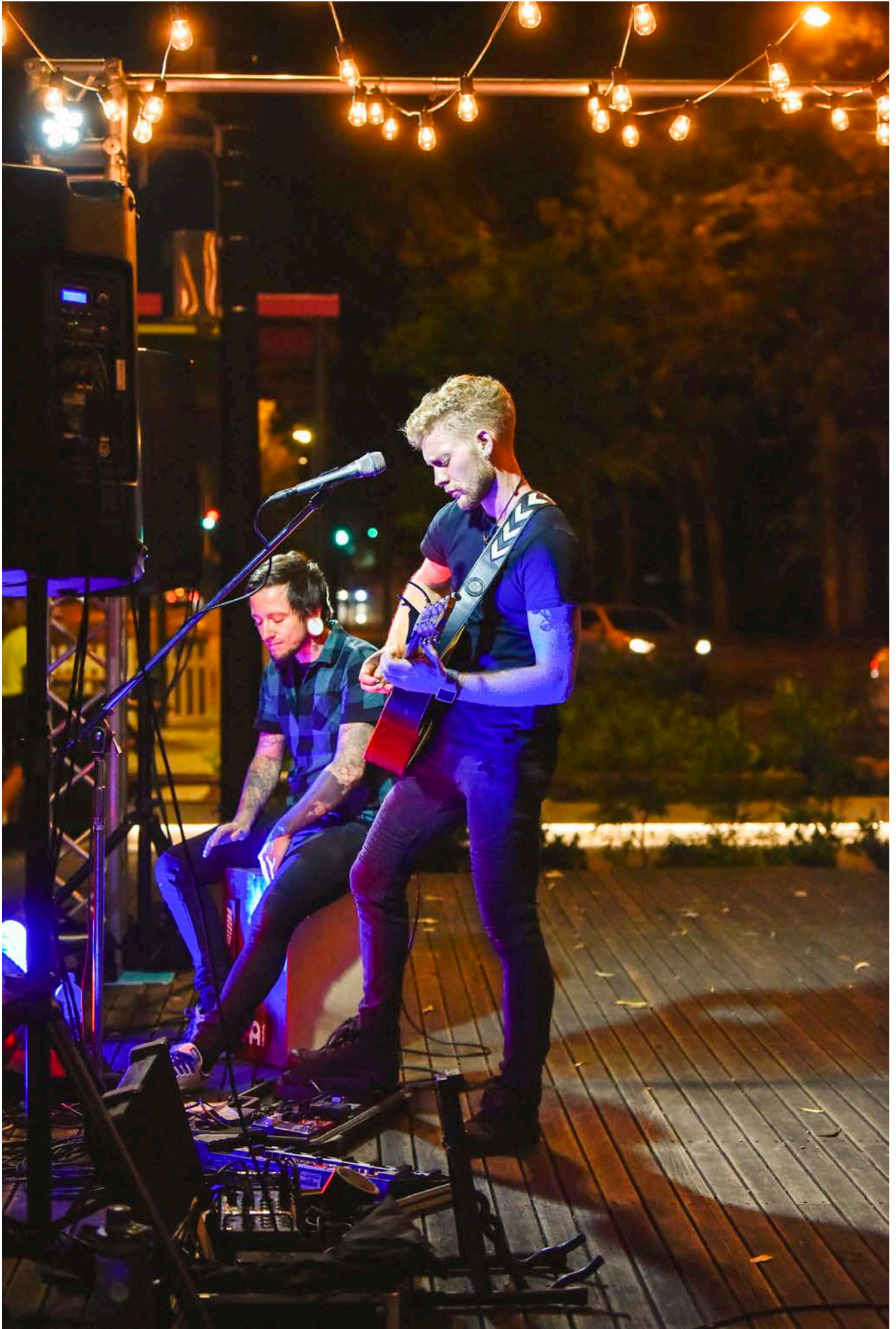
acknowledges the impact of the Western Sydney University's fine arts degree that she studied on this identity:

A lot of my friends who are successful artists are graduates of Western Sydney University, either arts or design. We do come in contact with a lot of the people who identify as creative Westies and we get to capture that and we see that evolving.
(interview 23 October 2019)

She finds the closure of several arts programs at the University a matter of considerable regret and a contentious decision given the needs and accomplishments of creative Westies.

Challenges

One of the challenges regarding creativity in the West is to find those who self-identify as being from Western Sydney as distinct from a broader 'Sydney'. Catanzaro sees that there are more people now who are 'reclaiming' Western Sydney from an art and creative perspective. She is interested in 'what it means to be creative in Western Sydney' and whether a distinct visual and/or sound language might develop in Western Sydney. Catanzaro views music as 'fundamental' when considering cultural infrastructure, including working and performance spaces. However, the performance spaces need to have character and ambience, requiring a rethink of what is already available:



Blue Sherlock for Open Mic and Penrith Producers.

It's actually the revalorised spaces and regenerated spaces that already have identity. Already have a kind of history, a memory. Craig [Donarski, CEO Casula Powerhouse, at the 2019 Western Sydney University Urban Research Week] was using The Servo [an independent music and arts venue in Port Kembla] as a successful example. It's because we're not going into that blank space and going 'make this creative'. And I think as creative practitioners, people are going to actually identify features that then become part of their practice and can actually feed into that and make things more exciting. (interview 23 October 2019)

It is less successful for emerging and speculative creative practices when a makerspace is 'put down the bottom' of a new high-rise development, as it would

generate a more commercial 'feel': 'I think what needs to happen is a real focus on young people and cultural production at a really grassroots, youth-led level' (interview 23 October 2019). To this end, Catanzaro has identified several characteristics of what she terms 'irregular performance spaces' (Catanzaro 2014: 12), which are:

- A space that has relationships with the night and darkness and 'sleeps' or has another role during the day.
- A taken-over or claimed venue space that is not native to performance.
- A space that deals with political, experimental and alternative performance subject matter, encompassing 'play' and/or 'resistance'. (Chatterton & Hollands 2003)

- A venue whose hosts do not run it solely for commercial gain.
- A space operating under a blanket of 'invisibility' and discretion. Having a tenuous relationship with exposure, these spaces teeter on the brink of recognition and have an agnostic relationship with promotion.

A certain characteristic of irregular spaces is that they do not stay fixed in one place for very long: these spaces embody temporality. (Catanzaro 2014: 12) Such characteristics also provide a challenge to those in public office to establish new ways to approach a more open, less confined environment for creative production. The *Open Mic* project is an example of how this can occur.

Live and Local Lockdown

Thursday Night Live, the successful Penrith Council initiative aimed at expanding the night-time economy and supporting the creative arts, was successfully moved online after COVID-19 saw the cancellation of its live gigs. *Thursday Night Live - Lockdown Series* was a six-week pilot program but was extended to deliver a three-month live music program. Each week performances were broadcast live from Jovi Studios, a professional recording studio in Cranebrook. The online series provided an avenue for the creative arts to

continue to work at a time when traditional live events were not possible. Penrith Mayor Ross Fowler OAM said that artists, musicians and performers are an important part of the city and that Council would do whatever it could to support them. 'There are many industries suffering at the moment, but we know that the music industry has been one of the hardest hit, and we're very happy to be providing local performers with a platform to share their music', Cr Fowler said (Western Weekender 2020).

Thursday Night Live performer Jacob Ross of *Covered in Cliches* acknowledged how "vitally important and special it is to find a paid gig during lockdown". The livestream performance enabled the band to engage with audiences they would not normally reach, from as far afield as Manchester, England. The increased engagement has been reflected in the group's nearly 200 per cent increase in social media followers and has prompted enquiries for other private livestream performances.

Open Mic

The *Open Mic* project provides a way for musicians and performers to establish themselves, enabling them to acquire a 'busking' or Street Performers permit from Council to present live music on the street. It has been delivered in St Marys and Penrith City Centre. The project is an active engagement with potential performers wishing to gain experience and knowledge about the logistics of presenting live performances in informal public venues. All ages are able to enjoy live music in an outdoor city centre location supporting music outside the cultural and licensed venues. This approach cultivates the talent of artists in Penrith and the region, providing a safe and inclusive space to perform, network with peers, and develop relationships that are essential to any thriving creative city. *Open Mic* promotes the new Street Performers Policy of PCC in a unique manner that builds a cohort of performers across the local area. It is a well-established open access performance opportunity, where anyone can come up to the microphone and perform a short piece (8 minutes) – typically a musical piece or

singing and playing, and can be solo or small group. In the case of this project, however, many underlying messages are being delivered, including how to become a more professional presenter or street busker. According to Dimity Mullane, City Projects Officer in the City Renewal Team, PCC would like to encourage more of it, and its message is being received:

We now have 60 registered buskers within our system which would've probably not eventuated if we just put it out on Facebook and said, 'We want buskers and for them to go to the website and apply for a permit'. (interview 21 October 2019)

The staff benefited from this initiative because they were able to, as Mullane comments, 'actually work with people and provide them with an opportunity to show their skills'. This activity was supported by staging, lighting, a Master of Ceremonies and a professional photographer. There have been three *Open Mic* events since October 2018, attracting an age range of 9 to 70, and music styles from 'alternative hip hop to operatic performers'. Several of the artists involved in *Open Mic* have been employed by the

local business community and PCC for public park concerts in Penrith and St Marys, with concerts running from 5-8 pm to attract the school-aged and working communities. Programming the concerts requires a level of curation, however, and the delicate issue of aesthetics or skill level judgement is not addressed. The role of *Open Mic* is not to be an arbiter of taste or judgement, but it is rather a 'true democratic project' that promotes cultural participation. This sentiment also underpins the justification for PCC running the project, as Mullane comments:

We come from a fair and equitable standpoint. We see the need to provide an equal and fair opportunity. I think we could partner and look to some of the [community groups or private tuition groups] to enhance it perhaps. (interview 21 October 2019)

Therefore, PCC's role is conceived as one of facilitating participation rather than setting quality standards. *Open Mic* offers a snapshot for those in the local community interested in performing from the beginner to the professional, and across all ages.

Music Hunter and other Blue Mountains music entrepreneurs

The Blue Mountains now has a thriving and diverse music scene. A cluster of small, independent promoters in the Blue Mountains, including Music Hunter, Fusion Boutique, Music in the Mountains, and Live at the Village, has enlivened and diversified the live music options over the past decade. Unlike many places, the live music scene in the Blue Mountains is not built primarily on a few commercial venues, such as hotels and clubs, booking acts as a supplement for poker machine revenue and alcohol sales, but on the work of mediating, entrepreneurial promoters who are embedded in local creative communities. Music Hunter's listing on the MTNS MADE online directory reads:

We curate innovative music events with a passion for opening your ears to something new. Live Music is a cost-effective well-being plan. We're your music matchmaking directory ... We can also provide you with impressive event styling; from elegant to quirky. We have our finger on the pulse for you.

Music Hunter is an example of grassroots music promotion practice that has been successful in generating more opportunities for musicians, as well as opportunities for audiences to have better experiences of music. Founded by Meg Benson in 2010, Music Hunter has not only aimed to promote quality music, but also to promote a high-quality aesthetic experience around musical events. For Benson,

audiences are 'curious explorers' willing to experience the 'joy of discover[ing]' something new. Music Hunter's strategy has been to develop an adventurous audience as a form of community building around the experience of music.

The approach is nevertheless a business model. Benson does not encourage 'free gigs'; rather, artists should be regarded as 'for profit' in the sense of worth paying for. She wants audiences to value music economically and to see themselves as 'co-sponsors' of the musical environment. This monetisation involves a commitment to fair payment for musicians, as well as to supporting other creative producers beside musicians, such as graphic designers and sound professionals. Sometimes, other artists are employed to enhance the aesthetic experience around music. Music Hunter organises a range of different kinds of musical experience, which could be in community venues, and so not tied to licenced premises. Different events or moments in events may privilege either 'the still listener' or 'the vibrant dancer'. Benson's interest in curated event management has also led her to involvement in multi-art experiences such as The Art of Lunch, where music is combined with fine dining, visual arts, and sometimes fashion or poetry. She also curated the Katoomba Live and Local event (see Blue Mountains City Council Initiatives).

Music Hunter is just one example of promoters of different kinds who create opportunities for musicians and audiences in the Blue Mountains. Promoters such as Benson can be located somewhere between a purely commercial enterprise and a not-for-profit tending to rely on grants. The term 'creative entrepreneur' seems appropriate to describe such cultural promoters. Thomas Aageson sees the creative entrepreneur as 'providing a bridge between creative talent and the market, what we might call "creative consumers"'. These people invest a great deal in understanding the local market and tend to cultivate their own aesthetic of cultural diversity. For Aageson, creative entrepreneurs 'are risk takers, change agents and resourceful visionaries' who attempt to 'create cultural value for both creative producers and consumers of cultural services and products' (Aageson 2009: n.p.). This view may seem rather too idealistic a conception of certain cultural businesspeople, but it does describe a kind of attitude around cultural promotion that is at once 'mission-focused' and 'market-driven'. Mission-based investors can be willing to try 'new models of risk and return' (Aageson 2009: n.p.).

Another example of creative entrepreneurialism is Fusion Boutique, a music promotion agency founded by Charity Mirow in 2009, which is described as 'a boutique agency driven by a passion for sourcing, presenting and

promoting national and international bands and events with a diverse range of genres, and a big focus on our local talent'. Fusion Boutique also displays a wider interest in music as a means of enhancing 'regional development and the reinvigoration of our existing spaces and the creation of new live entertainment venues' (Fusion Boutique n.d.). Music in the Mountains is a one-person operation that feeds on an intimate connection with musicians and styles of music. Chris Cannell, who 'is' Music in the Mountains, has a very hands-on engagement with musicians in venues such as the Hotel Blue in Katoomba, operating the small sound system and stage-managing the shows:

'I do this because I LOVE music and I don't want to have to go to Sydney to see touring talent, so why not come along to one (or all) of my events and share in a gift to humanity – live music!' Love of music is the predominant value for Cannell, but it is usually linked to a vision of a larger good.

A promotional practice of a different kind is the Blue Mountains Concert Society, which has a very long history of producing classical concerts going back to 1966, when they presented the Suk Trio from Prague. The BMCS became the main organisers of classical music concerts at the Blue Mountains Theatre Hub in Springwood from 2015 (Blue Mountains Concert Society n.d.). *Live at the Village* is a group of accomplished professional musicians living in or around Springwood who are committed to presenting

high-quality work in a range of eclectic styles at venues including the Blue Mountains Theatre and smaller venues such as church halls (*Live at the Village* n.d.). They have at times premiered new work, with the help of Australia Council funding, including Gary Daley's *Sanctuary* and Lloyd Swanton's *Ambon*. Unlike the examples above, *Live at the Village* professes to be a non-profit venture. Of course, both profit and non-profit cultural ventures always carry risk.

No one knows this more than Bob Charter, a former hotel operator whose Clarendon Hotel in Katoomba was the linchpin of the live music scene for many years. For 25 years, Charter has directed the Blue Mountains Music Festival, a three-day professionally directed festival with local, national and international artists. The combination of music business expertise and alignment to community benefits has given this festival a remarkable continuity. Being embedded in local social structures — including a supply of over 300 volunteers — has helped support the Festival's development as a major cultural event (Clements 2018).

Challenges

These vignettes point to a rich ecology of entrepreneurialism supporting musicians and audiences for music in the Blue Mountains. For Meg Benson, these small operators, who can create opportunities and 'make it happen', are an often-neglected link in the creative chain. Understanding

promotional activities that contribute to and support a music scene, is important when considering ways for local and independent music to contribute to further activating places.

The creative entrepreneurs that we have discussed take considerable risks in presenting artists in an uncertain market, since they are small players with little capital and do not own or control the venues. They face challenges in hiring venues (costs, insurance, and council 'red tape', for instance) and in advertising events.

The challenge for councils is to consider ways to support live music promoters who have a commitment to local musicians and local audiences. Councils could consider ways of facilitating such promoters, such as simplifying insurance arrangements and reconsidering rates for council venues (these are usually pitched at either a high-level 'for profit' rate or a relatively cheap 'not for profit' rate). Such considerations could fall within Blue Mountains City Council's policy ambit to consider ways in which to 'allow greater flexibility around the temporary use of sites, for festivals and events' (BMCC 2020). Another challenge for small promoters is to generate better information about events for the large potential audience of tourists who do not access local media. More detailed information about events through local tourism services and at key tourist areas would provide important support for all music promoters.



Penrith Conservatorium Scholarship Dominic Hart.

Penrith Symphony Orchestra, Penrith Youth Orchestra, Choral groups

For the past decade, Paul Terracini has been the Artistic Director and Conductor of the Penrith Symphony Orchestra (PSO), and of the Penrith Youth Orchestra (PYO) since it began as the Penrith Strings Program in 2015. He is an exemplar of the synergies and interrelationships between Blue Mountains and Penrith as he lives in the Blue Mountains, where he works with a chamber choir, The Academy Singers, and also conducts the North Sydney orchestra, the Ku-ring-gai Philharmonic Orchestra, which plays at The Concourse in Chatswood. He also teaches and conducts a brass ensemble at the Sydney Conservatorium. The PSO usually has 60 people playing all year long. The PYO has between 50 and 60 young

people playing. Since the inception of the PSO 30 years ago, there have always been musicians from the Blue Mountains playing in the orchestra. The concerts with the Penrith City Choir and two other choirs from the Blue Mountains concerts can see 140 people involved.

The PYO was established as a partnership between the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, the Australian Chamber Orchestra (ACO) and the PSO, with one of the aims being to nurture talent to feed into the PSO. The PYO was established through a successful application to the Crown Resorts Foundation's Western Sydney Arts Initiative, initially as a string ensemble, which after three years became a youth orchestra with wind,

brass and percussion. The funding has been continued for a further three years. CEO of PP&VA, Hania Radvan, observes the:

amazing experience for those kids to work with professional ACO players. And every time the Youth Orchestra performed at one of the ACO fundraisers, I have heard that [artistic director] Richard Tognetti's jaw would drop and he'd say - 'oh they can play!' (interview 21 October 2019)

The cultural background of the PYO members is also beginning to change, reflecting a shift in the local population demographic, which now has a sizable minority of Asian families and young people. The PSO is mainly supported through Penrith City Council

and receives a modest \$30,000 annual grant from Create NSW because of its Western Sydney location, which means that the PSO is compelled to pay some people some of the time. This is the case, for example, for some inner-Sydney musicians from the Sydney Conservatorium, who may be reluctant to come out to Penrith otherwise. PSO is the orchestra that plays at The Joan more often than any other. Once or twice a year, a reduced version of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra may come to Penrith, and also when accompanying Opera Australia on occasion. The PSO plays the classical orchestral repertoire and also commissions new music, which is encouraged through awards, such as composer prizes and an annual young soloist award.

While the new live arts and entertainment venue in Chatswood, The Concourse, is now considered to be the best in Greater Sydney, The Joan remains a highly-regarded venue for classical music concerts. At the same time, it should be noted that there is no large concert hall in the Blue Mountains west of Springwood. Currently, this means that only very small-sized concerts can be held in the Blue Mountains. To some extent, the dearth of professional concert halls in the region has developed a good flow of audiences and musicians between Penrith and the Blue Mountains. The potential for expanded and more diverse programming is becoming more evident. In December 2019, a Sydney-based gamelan orchestra

performed in a concert with The Academy Singers in Katoomba's Saint Hilda's Anglican Church. It attracted a good audience and for many may have been their first experience of hearing a gamelan orchestra live. The event included a successful workshop with the gamelan orchestra and a local percussion ensemble. This type of programming would work in The Joan as well, although the PSO needs to be careful to retain the current mainstay audience which, as elsewhere, is ageing and may be more conservative in terms of musical taste, but has more disposable income. The approach adopted to extend the orchestra and audience is carefully to program the occasional experimental composition within the traditional repertoire. The relationship with Western Sydney University is evolving and its more experimental composition focus could help extend the PSO into musical styles found in Asian, African or South American cultures, which according to the PSO spokesperson, may be an interesting possible direction for the orchestra.

Challenges

One of the challenges facing this sector is the limited number of professional employment avenues for classically trained musicians, as the spokesperson for PSO observes:

Australia keeps educating musicians at conservatoriums at tertiary level and does not create

any more places for them to play. So, we keep getting better and better amateur musicians. The PSO is a really good place for current students but also ex-students to play if they've been unable to get a professional playing job. (interview 21 November 2019)

The ultimate concern, nevertheless, remains that of adequate funding for arts and culture in Penrith and the Blue Mountains. PSO is considered fortunate in comparison to the other orchestras in greater Sydney because it has income and is housed in The Joan. The spokesperson sees Penrith's unique location as providing the rationale for supporting Western Sydney because of the reluctance of many Sydney residents to travel there for cultural purposes:

people from the centre of Sydney don't seem to think that Penrith is getting any closer. I mean it's a lot further from Sydney to Penrith than it is from Penrith to Sydney. And it's not changing. Doesn't matter. They could build ten freeways and I don't think it would make any difference. So that aspect is always going to be there. (interview 21 November 2019)

The vision of the PSO is to have a core group of full-time professional musicians based in Penrith. The concept aims to have as high a standard of artistic product and of musicians working in areas outside the capital as exist in the capital. It is a system that could build the PSO into a semi-professional orchestra.

Theatre

Q Theatre, Studio Q, Originate, Art/Science, Q LAB,

Penrith Performing and Visual Arts, 597 High St, Penrith NSW 2750

Acting Factory Inc

Penrith Region

Theatre practitioners are located across Penrith and the Blue Mountains and are supported by the Joan and the Blue Mountains Theatre Hub. The history of theatre practice in the region is one of grass-roots dedication to presenting high-quality, challenging and relevant theatre to those in the West. The established programs of The Joan also encourage experimentation and professional performance in the Blue Mountains. Research by an independent think tank for investment in the arts, A New Approach, reinforces the benefits of performance and especially that 'theatre, drama and dance

have been found to improve young people's social skills and emotional well-being' (ANA 2019b: 60). ANA also reinforces 2017 findings from Live Performance Australia that more Australians attended theatre, music and dance 'professional live performances than live games of competitive ball sports' (ANA 2019b: 76).

Despite the evidence of support, benefit and attendance, SGS found that theatre (including physical theatre and parkour) and dance to be at the low-range of 12 per cent of Western Sydney theatre, dance and parkour

practitioners (2018: 12). Western Sydney University research also found that dance and theatre were the least common activities among respondents, although 92 per cent of theatre practitioners had the highest interdisciplinary connection (Stevenson 2017: 27). Capacity and experience in the rigorous logistics and demands of a theatrical production would lend itself well to facilitate arts projects and events. The major infrastructure need identified by Western Sydney theatre practitioners was rehearsal studio space for theatre (SGS 2018: 98).

Q Theatre

The Q Theatre was established in 1963 by a group of six actors who contributed five pounds each to form a theatre company. The company performed contemporary and often controversial theatre in the AMP Theatrette in central Sydney. The company grew quite quickly and, by 1966, had 16 members and had presented 17 original productions, going on to receive federal and State subsidies to continue to expand their work. From 1976,

the company ran free weekend theatre workshops in areas ranging from Sutherland to Castle Hill and Mount Druitt. By 1975, the Q Theatre company had outgrown the AMP and, as rents in central Sydney became prohibitive, the company decided to take up the offer from Penrith City Council to use the-then vacant Railway Institute Building, attracted by the strong community feel of the area and local theatre and music groups.

The teaching arm of the company expanded and, by 1984, there were 150 enrolled students, and early appearances at the venue including by international actors Judy Davis and Toni Collette. The fortunes of the Q Theatre rose and fell over the coming decades due to increased emphasis on 'economic rationalism', but rose again with the reopening of the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre in

2005. The Q Theatre had acquired a new home in the 378-seat purpose-built theatre. In 2007, the Q Theatre Company merged into Penrith Performing and Visual Arts. This short history is noteworthy for revealing the legacy of challenging independent theatre practice alongside development opportunities (McPherson 2015).

Nick Atkins continues this legacy as the current Director of New Work at the Q Theatre. Atkins is a graduate of UNSW in practice-based research, and brings to the Q a very active creative practice and contacts developed through a range of residencies, including with

Blacktown Arts Centre, Urban Theatre Projects, Performance Space, PACT and the Centre D'Art Marnay Sur-Seine. He has directed productions of *Daisy Moon Was Born This Way*, *Frankenstein* and *Teacup in a Storm* for Q Theatre. In 2019, a co-production partnership between Q Theatre and the Australian Theatre for Young People (ATYP) saw *Bathory Begins* premiere at The Joan on 11 September. In 2020, ATYP lost its four-year funding from the Australia Council, so it will be difficult to mount productions of the scale of *Bathory Begins*. This play was co-written by Emme Hoy and Greta Vella and won the 2017 ATYP Foundation Commission for a cast aged between 14 and

17 years old (Australian Plays 2020). The production was directed by Penrith resident Rowan Bate, who also manages theatre education at The Joan. Radvan explains that Bate was Theatre Nepean-trained when 'WSU still had its fabulous theatre program and is now the education person at ATYP' (interview 21 October 2019). The Joan continues to invite him to direct, but he also commutes to ATYP because, as Radvan observes, 'You can't stay here and have an entire career. You do have to move around. And Sydney's the kind of place where people travel ridiculously long distances for work' (interview 21 October 2019).



Studio Q Access Ensemble.

Studio Q, Originate, Art/Science

As a significant regional cultural facility, The Joan takes its access program to a very high level, with a dedicated program for young people aged between 5 and 18 years old who live with a disability. It is a skills-based training program tutored by professional theatre practitioners in which 'participants will be considered a "young artist" preparing for rehearsals and performance' (Penrith Performing & Visual Arts n.d.):

Originate is a program which is designed to assist the more vulnerable post-secondary school age group in being able to

consolidate an interest in creative production. With a focus on production skills through a workshop program Originate provides the venue and the opportunity to learn about producing a performance work and crucially meet other people with whom to collaborate. (Penrith Performing & Visual Arts n.d.)

The Joan has also trialled an independent series of events and activities relating to scientific themes, which have included dancers, musicians, visual artists, and choreographers. For example, David Clarkson, artistic director of Stalker, has a

residency in the Mullins, funded through The Joan. Stalker is an internationally successful immersive physical theatre company which increasingly integrates digital technologies into the presentation of its work (Stalker n.d.). Stalker had approached Penrith City Council for support to relocate to Penrith if they could find a suitably large warehouse, which unfortunately was not achievable. While Radvan concedes that it is not 'their speciality', the arts and science strand is an area that is continually being explored but 'actually needs expert support'.

Q LAB

There is a wide range of programs delivered through The Joan which focuses on early career artists and pathways for their creative practices. The energetic way in which these programs are delivered brings life to the statements about the centrality of education in the PP&VA's constitution. Through the Q Theatre, 'education' is treated in a playful and professional manner, offering audiences the opportunity to experience provocative, inspirational works from the region's local contexts. The Q Theatre aims to 'build pathways for established and early career artists to train, experiment and create' (Penrith Performing & Visual Arts n.d.). The Joan generates theatre projects mainly with school-age

students. To address the issue of what support and engagement is available after school, Q LAB was developed to provide early career programs and pathways. The Director of new work at the Q Theatre, Nick Atkins, has worked to establish the programs, which include theatre residencies that, as Radvan, explains:

support artists to make work that you weren't controlling necessarily. It was about their individual artistic exploration. (interview 21 October 2019)

Q LAB has been running since 2014, encouraging cross artform exploration (dancers, composers and sculptors are amongst its alumni) through the annual residency program,

which provides opportunities for about six resident artists per year to 'make creative space and time for the development of dynamic projects at an early stage of their conception'. Notably, and unusually in Australia, the residents receive a stipend along with a work space in the 100-seat capacity Allan Mullins Studio. Residents are also matched with a dramaturg (someone who advises on script development and the flow of a piece) and technical advice as part of the creative development process. Q LAB aims to develop 'independent artists and projects in the local Western Sydney area and the vibrancy that occurs' (Q Theatre 2020). Some of the work initially developed by the residents goes on to full

development, into production and presentation at The Joan's facilities. The female performance collective Black Birds was established in 2015 by Emele Ugavule and Ayessha Ash. The eponymous production was developed during a Q LAB residency that went on to be produced by Q Theatre for its 2017 subscription season, and was well received by *Time Out Sydney*.

Black Birds is a searing and scathing look at the politics of blackness in a majority white society. The show is organised as a series of sharp vignettes in which Ugavule and Ash explore their experiences as Black women in a society that designates them as 'other' or 'wrong' – as having the wrong hair, the wrong colour skin, the

wrong kind of names. (Tongue 2017)

According to the Black Birds, their collective responds to:

the lack of representation and misrepresentation of Women of Colour in the Australian arts industry [and they are proud to make] work that is intersectional, interdisciplinary and intercultural. (Black Birds Creative Arts Co.)

Another example of a production that also did not shy away from understanding social issues is 'Bananas in the Bedside Table', which explores 'the impact of dementia and Alzheimer's disease on families and the greater community'. This production was developed by Suzy Dunne during her 2015 Q LAB residency. 'Bananas in the

Bedside Table' went onto further development in conjunction with Blacktown Arts Centre. The work crossed disciplines of physical theatre, text, music, comedy, and digital media and was performed by Western Sydney and Blue Mountains artists. The model of the creative productions that is developed through the Q LAB is to be commended, as it includes essential aspects of the creative cycle including strategy, deployment of financial resources, access to physical infrastructure, and expertise to realise a project through to presentation in a high visitation venue like The Joan. Q LAB also demonstrates the enhanced relationships that can be developed across the region for creative production.

The Acting Factory Inc

The Acting Factory was incorporated as a non-profit members association in 2001 and is another part of the legacy of the Q Theatre. Although the current programming is that of popular theatre and children's pantomimes, The Acting Factory first presented the controversial play by Graham Gordon, *The Boys*, which went on to become an award-winning Australian film. The reason for The Acting Factory's existence in some ways mirrors the need for creative production (factory or warehouse) spaces today. The association developed from Richard Brooks' Three Stage School of Acting, which had

begun as part of the Q Theatre run by Doreen Warburton OBE, who was the sponsor of The Acting Factory until her death in 2017 (The Acting Factory n.d.). A Shakespeare workshop program in 1998 led by Brooks for Q Theatre and Three Stage graduates gave rise to an ambitious, finely-tuned production entitled *Shakespeare, No Hold Bard*. To publicise the performances, the group needed a name and, since the Three Stage was housed in a factory unit in South Penrith, the name The Acting Factory was coined (The Acting Factory n.d.).

The Acting Factory presents work across the region, such as

at the Penrith Regional Gallery and the Norman Lindsay Gallery in the Blue Mountains, as well as at the annual Shakespeare by the River, which attracts audiences from across the 'Greater West, Blue Mountains, Sydney Basin and beyond' (The Acting Factory n.d.). The members are professional theatre practitioners who aim to enhance the local arts scene and increase appreciation of theatre across Western Sydney by fostering and producing new work relevant to the area. It is one of the focal points for theatre workers and offers 'vital, affordable theatre to the broad community' (The Acting Factory n.d.).



The Acting Factory cast in *Dimboola* by Jack Hibberd.

Challenges

In many ways the practitioners who have access to the specific theatres and programs of The Joan, across all creative cohorts of young and emerging, early career and established, are in an enviable position. They are provided with structured and supported access to work within a regional facility which has stayed (and improved upon) the course set for it at inception. Similarly, The

Acting Factory contributes to the more conventional theatre ecology of the region and broadens the various ways in which practitioners can be supported and encouraged. One challenge is to see these works programmed on the mainstages across Australia. The Western Sydney 'border' is a perceived or real barrier to wider audiences being able to see these new works. The

arena of experimentation in the arts-science nexus that is opening up through the Q LAB residency programs contributes to the establishment of Penrith as a centre for cutting-edge creative production. To realise this potential fully, considered investment of resources and adequate built infrastructure and expertise are required.

Visual Arts in the Public Domain

Modern Art Projects Blue Mountains non-traditional sites

Sculpture at Scenic World Violet St and Cliff Dr, Katoomba NSW 2780

Independent activation non-traditional sites in the Blue Mountains

Local Charm Werrington Youth Centre; Colyton; Cambridge Park; Londonderry; North St Marys

Black Door Gallery 4/116 Batt St, Penrith NSW 2750

The highest level of national creative participation at 30 per cent is from visual artists (SGS 2018: 12). There is a high level of cross discipline engagement as 85 per cent of Western Sydney visual artists who participated in the survey by Stevenson et al. (2017: 29) also work in the design field. While only 17 per cent of Western Sydney residents attended a gallery at least once during 2013-2014, there was an increase in attendance for sculpture and installation art (SGS 2018: 11, 12). SGS reports that the Blue Mountains has a large number of visual arts events and that Western Sydney local government programs and events directed towards children, families and seniors most frequently involve the visual arts (SGS 2018: 60, 61). The Blue Mountains also has a substantial number of visual

arts spaces which are primarily individual studios that double as small, privately-run gallery spaces (2018: iii, 80). The audit undertaken by SGS found that art centres were most likely to provide visual arts facilities, including exhibition, dry and wet studios. Whilst Penrith Regional Gallery contains a modest making space for workshops, there are insufficient spaces for making and storing visual arts in Western Sydney.

As with digital arts, alternative spaces are sought to exhibit art and mostly in public places, including council building foyers, shopping centres and community halls. Western Sydney University provides some studios at the Hawkesbury campus and modest galleries are located at the Bankstown and Parramatta North campuses (SGS 2018:

102). Visual artists identified the need for more visual arts studios, especially those that support sculpture and ceramics production (SGS 2018: 98). Artistic projects and initiatives can take place outside the confines of the formal arts and cultural infrastructure facilities (such as the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre and the Penrith Regional Gallery). The following visual arts case studies provide an insight into the ways in which artists claim non-traditional spaces as a stimulus for their practice. The range of spaces afforded to artists working in Penrith and the Blue Mountains indicates the flexible ways in which creative production can activate public spaces and localities, and can encourage a wider range of audiences to access artworks.

Modern Art Projects Blue Mountains

Modern Art Projects Blue Mountains (MAPBM), an artist-run collective in the Blue Mountains, was started by Billy Gruner and David Haines and others as MAP (Modern Art Projects) around 2010. The significant project that first drew attention to MAP's

exhibition of contemporary, multi-art in the Blue Mountains, with the aim of developing a new critical agenda for contemporary art in the region. It exhibits the work of its members and facilitates opportunities to discuss it. The current president, Fiona

a collegiate environment where people can respond to work (interview 15 November 2019)

With an expanding membership base of 37, which includes curators and arts workers, the exhibitions can generate promising opportunities for discussion of arts and cultural matters. Davies sees the expertise of curatorial members, such as Tony Bond (formerly Curatorial Director at the Art Gallery of New South Wales) and Lizzy Marshall (formerly of Casula Powerhouse), as bringing a 'strong curatorial direction which is an invaluable experience for all of us' (interview 15 November 2019). MAPBM also generates opportunities for artists to work with others in unusual ways, such as transferring performative type skills to visual artists. *ARTHouse* is a Radio Blue Mountains program that is one avenue for broadcasting artists in conversation about their work, with the dual function of providing that content for their websites. Davies is 'constantly surprised by how many people have heard me on it'.

Anne Graham, "The Beehive Lady and the Beehive Observatories" in *The Explorers: narratives of site in contemporary art practice*.

model was an open house program, highlighting notable modernist houses in the Blue Mountains from Springwood to Blackheath, as temporary spaces for the exhibition of contemporary art. MAPBM is a not-for-profit incorporated association which supports the development, production and

Davies, describes this role as increasing the 'rigorousness' of contemporary art practice.

We have what's called the 'show and tell platform' where we meet every six weeks to two months and three to four people will present on their work within

A more direct example of bringing performance into dialogue with visual arts was *Explorers: narratives of site in contemporary art practice*, held in and around the Woodford Academy over October and November 2017 (MAPBM n.d.). The Woodford Academy is the oldest complex of colonial buildings in the Blue Mountains and is of State





Miriam Williamson, "Seeds of Empire" in the *The Explorers: narratives of site in contemporary art practice*.

significance. Today, it is a museum that offers an innovative program of site-specific art events, performances and talks on monthly open days (National Trust 2020). *Explorers* was funded by Create NSW and invited artists responded to a particular aspect of the Woodford Academy's built heritage or of its social history. As Davies explained:

Danica Knezevic wore her grandfather's work clothes for her [own] performative work, Ready to Hand. Her father was responsible for the outdoor chores in their home. At Woodford, Knezevic cared for the museum by doing the sort of male chores around the outside of the house, during the hours the Academy was open. So she cleared the gutters, cleaned the drain, washed the windows. (interview 15 November 2019)

Presenting works in such non-traditional spaces shows that

art that is conceptual in its development is not just an object, because it translates into referencing 'a whole public, civil space'. The MAPBM model includes a two-day research development component prior to exhibition and, when possible, a publication from that event. In the case of *Explorers*, art historian Dr Jacqueline Millner wrote the catalogue essay and was interviewed for the local Blue Mountains paper, the *Gazette*:

When artists enter a museum or historic house they work not only with collections but also new ways of thinking. [They] have the potential to animate museums in novel ways, bring in new audiences and extend our thinking about things about which we may have become complacent. (Blue Mountains Gazette 2017)

In 2020, MAPBM will have an 'expose show' in the more conventional 'white cube' of

the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, an exhibition in the atelier in Lyttleton Stores funded by the Blue Mountains City of the Arts Trust and also an exhibition with Penrith Regional Gallery. These moves indicate an increasing profile for the MAPBM collective. However, for Davies, her work has often been presented elsewhere:

I see myself as a Blue Mountains artist. I also see myself as a Western Sydney artist. Quite strongly. I've probably had more instances of presentation of my work in Western Sydney. And have been provided with much larger opportunities in Western Sydney than in the Blue Mountains. (interview 15 November 2019)

Alongside the mainly self-directed presentation opportunities, a key issue is the expense and small size of studio space available in the Blue Mountains. Davies

admires the Parramatta Artists' Studios (PAS) model as the most successful of which she is aware. As discussed above, supported by both local and State governments, PAS provides disused or underutilised spaces for artists to rent at minimal cost, and also runs an ambitious engagement program for local residents. Davies says that councils could assist artists by properly understanding which spaces they have that are temporarily vacant and realise that artists don't necessarily want them forever. For example, artists would benefit from temporary access to a venues that may be publicly accessible.

property while Development Applications are in process. Davies identifies spaces such as the former Lawson Rural Fire Service property and other *Other spaces like the Old Lawson Community Hall, which is a fantastic venue for performative events. The Braemar and The Hub, for example, could be interesting if available for low-cost temporary use by artists.* (interview 15 November 2019)

Davies says that an annual call for expressions of interest would enable artists to take advantage of interesting temporary vacant spaces. In

the 'mix' are also businesses that work with artists. Lyttleton Stores in Lawson is a café that began as an organic food and home products store, where half the original space was allocated to homewares and objects made within the Blue Mountains. It has now expanded to accommodate paid seminars, workshops and events. The salon type of creative and cultural activities generated by artists and local businesses is an example of an enviable key strength of the cultural life of the Blue Mountains.

Sculpture at Scenic World

Sculpture at Scenic World (SaSW) is the annual sculpture exhibition that began in 2012 in the tourist park, Scenic World. It takes the form of a sculpture trail through a spectacular piece of rainforest in the Jamison Valley, often described in the marketing as a 'Jurassic Forest'. Scenic World is a wilderness theme park, combining natural landmarks of the Jamison Valley and technological experiences – the Skyway, a cable-car crossing a steep ravine, and the Scenic Railway originally constructed as coal-mining infrastructure. In 2017, Scenic World achieved one million visitors in a single year for the first time (Australian Leisure Management 2017). Scenic World's use of art as an add-on to its business demonstrates the growing value of arts-based tourism. Recently touted

as regional Australia's premier arts exhibition, Sculpture at Scenic World has certainly contributed to Scenic World's success over the past decade. A 2019 visitors survey showed that 55 per cent of Scenic World visitors came from outside the Blue Mountains, and said that Sculpture at Scenic World was the primary purpose for their visit (Destination NSW 2019).

Natural environments have often been understood as an inspiration for art (as in Romanticism and its many later permutations), or as a 'value' which it supports (environmental art). In the case of SaSW, the forest could be considered to be arts infrastructure, and so it has the potential to enrich the experience of art *and* natural environments at the same time

as providing opportunities for artists to exhibit their work to an expanded audience in a unique way. While the sculptural works for SaSW are not produced in the forest, neither can they be produced independently of the forest site. The sculptures are *made for* the forest, more than *about* it. They are a kind of gift *to* the forest that also draws *from* the forest. This relationship is made clearer in this description of the winning work in 2013 by Blue Mountains artist Daniel Kotja:

Reflect Phi (a monument) uses the geometrical principle of Phi, which recurs in the growth cycle of plants, as the basis for the work. The sleek, multi-angled objects made from highly polished stainless steel are clearly at odds with the irregular curves of the natural world.

However, the mirrored surfaces reflect the environment in shifting planes, softening the sharp edges and creating a confounding dimensionality to the object. Via these reflections the sculpture both takes from and gives back to the site.
(Priest 2013)

While one commentator considers that virtually all works for SaSW have been site-specific (Scarlett 2017), Lizzy Marshall's characterisation of them as site-responsive might be more accurate. As SaSW is organised as a competition, works are conceived in advance but with regard to possible locations, which themselves change constantly, just as natural environments do (Priest 2013). SaSW works delicately within Scenic World's claims to be presenting work within a pristine and ancient (Jurassic) landscape. In this regard, SaSW has followed a consistent strategy of attempting to minimise its

impact on the landscape. From the first exhibition in 2012, SaSW sought to minimise soil impacts, and by 2019 qualified for an ecological footprint certification of 'zero'. This result entailed rigorous procedures involving compliance with Scenic World's own environmental management strategy and BMCC environmental regulation. Sculptures cannot compact the forest floor, suspended works should not damage trees or vines, and arborists ensure works do not touch plants and trees by wrapping them with hessian and other materials. Sculptures must be constructed from organic, biodegradable or at least inert materials, so that they do not leave chemical or physical contaminants or waste in the valley. The transport of works to the site requires an equal level of care. Achieving this environmental outcome requires a multidisciplinary team (artists,

curator, arborist, environmental consultant and technical coordinator) to work together.

These conditions or 'affordances' affect the very conception of each work, which would be necessarily imagined in response to the forest's requirements. As a site of artistic intervention, the forest initiates an ongoing working together where 'hard' infrastructure – physical spaces, management, rules and regulation – meshes with 'soft' infrastructure – creative imagining, improvisation, care and making connections. The forest at Scenic World is arts infrastructure in the sense that it provides the conditions of possibility for SaSW. It is not simply a space for works to be placed, but offers ways for artists and those working with artists to engage with it materially, ecologically, conceptually and aesthetically, and in sundry other ways.

Collaborative activation and presentation

Miriam Williamson is an independent curator and creative community project organiser in the Blue Mountains. She produces exhibitions with artists who work with multimedia artforms, presenting them in under-utilised spaces that have some sort of cultural significance. Her first project was in partnership with Linden Observatory, which was built in the late 1940s by Ken Beames, who crafted every aspect of the observatory, including the lenses: 'It was sort of this

mysterious place that everybody had heard of and very few people had ever been to' (interview 21 November 2019). Around 150 people came to that first event. A successful application to Create NSW followed to realise *The Altitude Project*, which had a theme of exploration of the sky. Linden Observatory and the parks in Katoomba, named after aviators Kingsford Smith and Melrose, were the sites of three events which drew close to 500 people in February 2018 (Blue Mountains Gazette 2018). There was a strong community

engagement with the sound and light artists in Kingsford Smith Park. Williamson then worked with Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre on Melrose Park in North Katoomba, the lowest socioeconomic status area in the Blue Mountains, to deliver a free day for children and the local community:

Dauntless Movement Crew from Fairfield came for the day. The women and children from the women's refuge attended and the Katoomba Neighbourhood Centre provided free food. That

was a fantastic way to end the project. (interview 21 November 2019)

These projects are small but significant in their innovative approach to 'activate' spaces through artistic contributions across the Blue Mountains region via a modest injection of funds. In Williamson's view, the Blue Mountains has a wealth of 'rather eccentric venues'. She also likes the freedom of working outside of the institutions and has observed, particularly in the past five years, the increasing number of professional artists moving to the Mountains. Building on her previous involvement with the Modern Art Projects group (see above), Williamson has enabled several events/exhibitions which bring together artists living in the Mountains who are increasingly supportive of each other and their practices:

These are artists that just love these sites and become engaged and help me out. I've got a great team of volunteers and people who will collaborate with artists and help them with their technology and so forth. (interview 21 November 2019)

Alongside such supportive networks is the need to have greater audience reach to move beyond 'artists making work for artists' or showing work to the same people. The use of a

variety of non-traditional exhibition sites is a way to diversify audiences, and also to generate future opportunities. For example, Williamson met Hania Radvan, the aforementioned CEO of Penrith Performing Arts and Visual Arts (PP&VA), at the events at the Linden Observatory. This meeting, in part, led to the formation of the Nepean Science Hub, a network of partnerships between community and arts organisations, local schools and university campuses to promote more community engagement with science through programs and events in the Nepean region (Nepean Science Hub 2018). A small satellite group has formed around opportunities at the Linden Observatory and has attracted sponsorship from property developer, Celestino. One of its projects aims to encourage the development of Astro-tourism across the mountains, and to utilise artist responses as part of that process, in order to highlight themes relating to the environment and astronomy. It could, therefore, highlight the benefits of a STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics) approach to innovation. Astro-tourism is a burgeoning offering in New South Wales (Destination NSW 2019) and aligning it with arts and cultural practice provides an unusual form of place activation.

Regarding creative production facilities, Williamson can see the value for artists in being able to access high-end audio and visual production equipment that cannot be easily afforded at home. Affordable technologies, such as Arduino and Raspberry Pi, are in demand at a domestic level, but she values the importance of spaces where people from the Mountains can access film production and sound recording equipment in a digital hub:

I know that's all expensive but that's the whole idea isn't it? There are artists up here now who have left university and they're hungry for coming together in a group and working together, and that sort of collaboration with equipment at their fingertips. And being able to critique each other's work and collaborate. And if you're not connected to a university, you don't have access to it. (interview 21 November 2019)

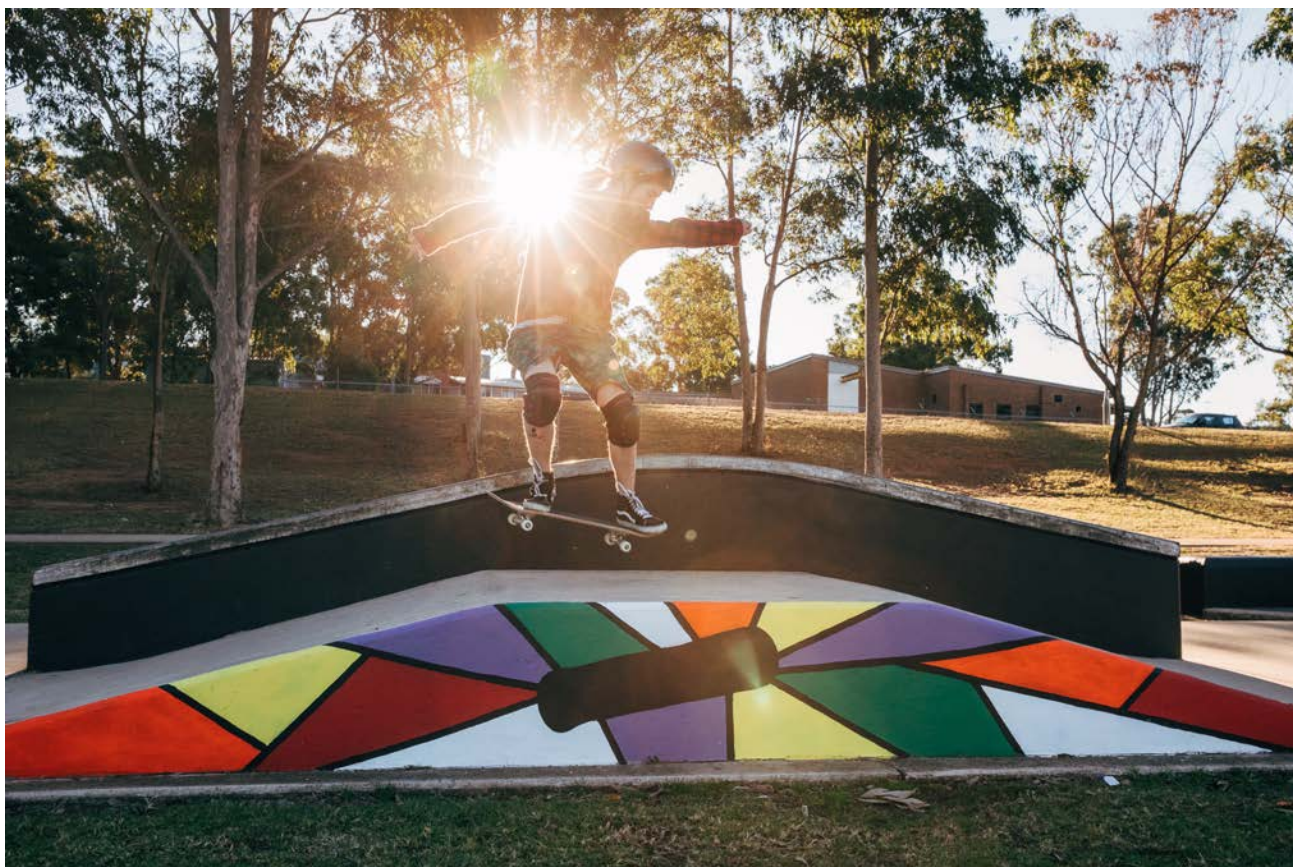
Penrith is 45 minutes by road and / or rail from the mid-Mountains and an hour from Katoomba. As Williamson comments, the artists, 'absolutely would travel to Penrith. They may not travel to Parramatta, but they would travel to Penrith. We're used to doing that' (interview 21 November 2019).

Local Charm

Local Charm is a program run through the Place Management team at Penrith City Council

which creates public art, often in the form of visual art on exterior public walls, in order

to enliven local neighbourhoods. The program has been running since 2015 to



NCNS Youth Team Cranebrook Skatepark Mural for the Magnetic Places Program.

express local ideas through public images which are developed with residents. Sometimes, the residents will also play a role in producing the work, depending on the approach of the employed artist. *Local Charm* is a type of place activation that illustrates what is important to local groups. The initial project was at Werrington Youth Centre, with SPICE (aka Sharline Bezzina), a St Clair-based, internationally-recognised Hip Hop identity whose activities include working enthusiastically with young people. This project also became an opportunity for staff from PCC's Facilities and Recreation department to understand the benefits of the program to the Council. Penrith City Council has expanded the number of artists to whom expressions of interest are sent, as more local street artists make themselves

known to it. Since that first foray, *Local Charm* has delivered annual projects.

The Colyton neighbourhood, which was the location for *Local Charm* in 2017, is a high-traffic area where the

activation work extended through conducting workshops in parks and artist placements in schools. A young aspiring but 'shy as all get out' artist, Michael, had just finished high school and wanted to work on creative projects. Through the Colyton project, he was connected to the Magnetic Places grant program and contributed significantly as an emerging artist to a project in nearby Oxley Park. As Cultural Engagement Officer in Neighbourhood Renewal, Donita Hulme describes it:

And by the end he was conducting pop-up workshops at their celebration, with people. Which spun me out because when I first met him he came along to the meeting in St Marys with his girlfriend, as his support person, to chat to me. (interview 21 October 2019)

Londonderry, the *Local Charm* site in 2018, is a semi-rural location, and so, as Hulme explains, 'it was different to our other ones because we couldn't just set up shop and chat to people, hoping that they'd walk by because everything's spread out' (interview 21 October 2019). The City's Neighbourhood Renewal team spent over 18 months slowly getting to know people, as anecdotally it is a place where residents could be considered 'new' even though they had lived there for 20 years. The Londonderry project was able

to engage an artist who lived around the corner from the site, which meant that the mutual recognition of artist and community encouraged a familiarity and trust that otherwise may have taken longer to establish.

The first year of the project produced porcelain ceramic ornaments. Public workshops were complemented by some at the primary school, where the children created ornaments and glazed them. At the local market people would string them together for hanging later in the trees at the site of the painted works. In the following year, Christine Huynh painted water tanks, 60

bollards and also identified walls that she had always wanted to paint, on both sides. A greyhound dog, which was of symbolic significance for local residents, featured in the work, and Penrith staff think that would not have happened had a non-local artist been involved. According to Hulme, the project has ‘provided an incredible focal point in a town where people can feel forgotten about by Council’ (interview 21 October 2019).

Local Charm is a community arts and cultural development visual arts project that is supported through the time taken to meet residents and

new artists, and to connect them to projects in order to understand the quality of the local experience for residents. It links to the broader issue that Council’s City Activation, Community and Place Manager, Jeni Pollard, identifies, which is the need to attract and retain visual artists. For her, the focus needs to be on mechanisms to encourage creative production, which may include facility provision as a focus for creative outcomes, and also to offer opportunities to draw artists into communities.

Black Door Gallery

Black Door began in 1987 as a picture framing business that, in 2015, expanded to include Black Door Gallery, highlighted by its motto, ‘Bringing Culture & Creativity Together’ (Black Door Gallery n.d.). The Black Door Gallery is Aboriginal-owned and managed, and showcases and sells Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island artworks. As part of the authentication process, Black Door Gallery is a member of the Indigenous Art Code and is registered and awaiting certification with Supply Nation. The Indigenous Art Code is a system to preserve and promote ethical trading in Indigenous art. Supply Nation is part of the movement to increase the number and capacity of Indigenous businesses able to supply professional contracts in areas

such as hospitality, construction, consulting, education and design. It is a database of accredited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, which can be considered viable for private and public procurement contracts (Supply Nation n.d.). The two arms of the business – custom picture framing and Aboriginal art gallery – make Black Door a unique commercial enterprise in the Penrith region, and it was recognised as such as a finalist in the 2018 Penrith City Business Awards.

The Gallery has a strong online presence through website and Facebook pages which present the development of the two businesses over time. Postings on the website include digital mock-ups of the Indigenous artwork design for the Black

Door Gallery renovations. The artwork is described as referencing the Nepean River catchment, through the use of the colours of the Blue Mountains and images of the Goanna, Snake and Eel, all of which are culturally significant animals of the region. Since 2019, Black Door Gallery has held Aboriginal Art Classes with Dalmarrri Aboriginal Art, an Indigenous-owned company that provides educational and engagement opportunities relating to Indigenous culture. It is led by Trevor Eastwood and Jason Douglas, who met as firefighters in Western Sydney.

Our fathers are respected elders in their communities and are deeply worried their knowledge, skills and culture are not getting passed down and are happy their



Black Door Gallery Penrith.

legacy continues with the work we are doing. DALMARRI comes from the meaning MEETING PLACE and is perfect for what we want to teach in learning, engaging and connecting to all communities. (dalmarri.com.au)

Dalmarri works with 'people from all walks of life', including corporate leaders and employees, primary and secondary school students, and volunteer organisations, to introduce them to the 'oldest civilisation on earth, the

Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people and their amazing culture' (dalmarri.com.au). The art classes are open to all people, not only those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage. As the Co-ordinator Lee Hampton explains on Facebook:

The idea is to share our beautiful culture with as many people as possible, in order to get an understanding of the world's oldest living culture, we share our history through song and art, this will give you an insight

into the importance of Aboriginal culture. (Hampton 2020)

The classes begin with an Acknowledgement of Country and expectations about 'cultural respect'; they include a lesson on the technical skills involved in the processes of painting Aboriginal art, and are run as fun social events with wine and food platters, and a lucky door prize. The frequently asked questions on Facebook include one proviso, which is that non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders

cannot sell their work as this would be 'disrespectful'. In this way, the creative enterprise engages across cultures, yet also provides clear boundaries as to the protocols involved in Indigenous art. In this way Black Door Gallery contributes to the reconciliation process, and the classes appear to be popular, as Hampton reported a few years ago: 'We had a great mix of guests, including

teachers, uni students and corporates' (Hampton 2020). The Black Door Gallery represents artists from across Australia and from a wide range of Indigenous people, including the Ngarrindjeri of South Australia; Noongar of Western Australia; Wangkumara and Yirrganydji of Queensland; Yamatji, Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi, and Wamba Wamba, Noongaburrah and Dharawal

of New South Wales. Two Blue Mountains artists are also represented by Black Door Gallery: Ray Giles and Sue Gasser (Black Door Gallery n.d.(a)). This listing provides an insight into the reach of the Black Door Gallery, and also the larger artist population across Australia that benefits from this creative (and cultural) enterprise.

Challenges and Opportunities

In different ways, the case studies discussed here all raised the importance of extending mainly informal visual arts professional development opportunities. The examples describe different approaches that create 'pathways' into opportunities to extend artistic professional practice. The common thread is that all the projects are designed to activate local community amenity with quality artistic outcomes, whether that amenity be a temporarily unused architectural landmark, a heritage environment, a science facility, or a local wall. The street art is perhaps less ephemeral than the other artforms, but each holds the purpose of engaging in the public domain. However, there is limited access to visual arts education opportunities in the region, as is evidenced by the greater independent visual arts activity in the Blue Mountains because, in general, the artists have been trained elsewhere. Karen Harris, Senior Cultural Development Officer of

Penrith City Council, identifies a State-wide need, and so opportunity, for professional training for public art practice:

A big thing that's lacking is there's no training for public art artists in NSW. If you want to be trained as a public art artist, who specialises in that field, you have to go to Melbourne. Or you have to go to Queensland. And I think that's a whole new avenue because it's becoming so prominent here. And I know quite a few professional public artists and they are in so much demand that they travel all over Australia and internationally. Incorrectly, the perception is that any artist can make public art. That is not the case as this is a specialist field with many challenges. (interview 15 November 2019)

There are few Western Sydney ATSI artists represented by Black Door Gallery, which presents both a challenge but also an opportunity to increase connections across the region. Investigating why this is the case is beyond the scope of this

study. More informal professional development opportunities could materialise with a change in the perception of the divide between the 'Westies' and the Mountains. Williamson reinforces the need for strengthening local geographic connections and trajectories alongside the role of local government to foster these connections.

I would like to see some sort of pathway. Some sort of flow. Because there's a lot of artists up here that, they've come from Canberra, they've come from Melbourne. Not necessarily just Sydney. And even to exhibit in Penrith would be a stepping stone to then perhaps exhibiting in Parramatta or eventually the city. I think that's what's needed up here. And I see Penrith as a really great area to do that. You know how there's a lot of focus on Parramatta? If Penrith had that same attention, if it builds a production centre and there are more people coming from the Mountains down, and [it would be beneficial] if it's looked at

more as a unified group by government agencies and by the arts in general rather than two very different tribes. (interview 21 November 2019)

Increasing the transport and communication links between Penrith CBD and the universities and TAFE, particularly the Nepean campus, is seen as a way to reinvigorate creative opportunities that will begin to build activities if handled carefully. Williamson can see further reach into areas such as St Marys as beneficial if

activities are, 'more youth-oriented'. The need for TAFE to reinvest in the Nepean campus is paramount because, 'Courses have been cut. It's not the TAFE it was ten years ago' (interview 21 November 2019). This observation reinforces the aims for creative production facilities and 'blue-sky' industry developments through networking with entrepreneurs described in the Digital Arts and Culture case study of this report. The view here is that local government could encourage short-term use by creative practitioners of

spaces in transition and promote the message to real estate owners that some artists see impermanence as beneficial. Cultural staff within Councils are seen to be of 'enormous value' to practitioners in terms of brokering opportunities, such as practitioner networking and making connections to available resources, including transparent mechanisms to allocate community and Council-owned temporary or more permanent spaces.

Writing and Literature

Varuna, The Writers' House 141 Cascade St, Katoomba NSW 2780

WestWords Centre for Writing 91B Grose Street, North Parramatta
NSW 2151

The SGS Economics and Planning report on cultural infrastructure in Western Sydney (2018) identified several factors relating to the lack of visibility of literature and writing in the region. These factors included the lack of bookstores in the region, of a 'unified voice for the artform' and of 'coordination of activities of professional literature organisations' (SGS 2018: 101). And yet literature is the artform that the greatest number of people in NSW

engage with — some 85 per cent, according to the Australia Council's *Arts in Daily Life* report (SGS 2018: 12). From the vantage point of the Blue Mountains, however, the lack of visibility of writing and books scarcely seems an issue. The Blue Mountains has at least 12 bookshops; the only significant venue for literature training mentioned in the report - Varuna, The Writers' House - is located in Katoomba; and books and writing are conspicuous in the

identity of the Blue Mountains. The mappit.net website that maps the location of book settings lists 69 books set in the Blue Mountains, and the Lambda bookshop catalogue lists over 120 Blue Mountains books, mainly non-fiction — and these titles are surely the tip of the iceberg. The Blue Mountains would seem to be the exception to the 'cultural deficit' regarding writing and literary output in Greater Western Sydney.

Varuna, The Writers' House

Varuna was the home of writer Eleanor Dark and her husband Eric Dark. After the death of Eric Dark in 1987, their son Mick Dark, who had inherited the house, decided to gift the house as a residential retreat for writers. A long process followed to ensure that the house could be supported as a writers' house. In 1989, funding from the NSW government was given for a director and some administrative support. Writers led by Richard Neville were active in fundraising for the project. It was not until late 1990, though, that Varuna was officially established as a

writers' house by the NSW Minister of the Arts. The house, situated in two acres of beautiful gardens, has five bedrooms and adjoining writing spaces, three bathrooms, an extensive library, and living and dining rooms, kitchen and laundry. Varuna's original mission statement was that it should provide 'a unique environment in which the best of Australian literature may be created; and to support it with rigorous development programs and ready engagement with the reading public, fellow writers, literary organisations and publishers' (Ommundsen and

Jacklin 2008). The model of the residential retreat was that writers would:

live and breathe their writing for two weeks, three weeks, four weeks: that sustains people. That sustains people for a year. They make connections here that sustain their writing. They make networks with other writers, and they find pathways and points of contact that sustain them.
(Ommundsen and Jacklin 2008: 18)

Almost all Varuna's programs are delivered on site. However, during 2007 Varuna worked with 'developing' writers from



Varuna writing space.

regional Australia, people who were deemed to be outside the cultural orbit of the metropolis. The Varuna director travelled to writers' centres in NSW and across Australia to provide one-on-one consultations with approximately 18 writers in each location and offer advice on their manuscripts and the pathways that might be available to them (Ommundsen and Jacklin 2008). In this way, it was argued that 'the structure and pathways Varuna has generated, in strategic partnerships with writers' centres and with industry, are a crucial component of Australia's literature infrastructure' (Ommundsen and Jacklin 2008).

The approach to developing writers has been relatively constant over the 30 year history. The wide range of

competitive fellowships, set up in partnership with many literary and cultural organisations across Australia, are offered to support writers across different genres and at all stages of their writing careers. Successful applicants are rewarded with a one to four weeks' residential stay at Varuna. One of the fellowship schemes is the WestWords Fellowships for five emerging writers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in Western Sydney. There are three international fellowships, the Kill Your Darlings fellowship and fellowship partnerships including with the Griffith Review and the Next Chapter fellowship with the Wheeler Centre. In 2020, Varuna is also offering five Writing Fire, Writing Drought Fellowships for writers from regional NSW and outer-western Sydney to

support new writing in response to the drought and bushfire crises. Writers can apply to stay at Varuna either through one of the many fellowship programs, or via the Invited Residency program. Each year more than 175 writers from across Australia benefit from the residencies and associated professional development at Varuna. It also hosts a varied program of events, including talks, Open Days, public lectures, writing workshops, masterclasses, book launches and youth writing groups.

In 2019 Varuna extended its local impact by presenting the inaugural Blue Mountains Writers' Festival. Funding support was obtained from the federal government's Building Better Regions Fund, Create NSW, The Australia Council for the Arts, and the Blue

Mountains City Council's City of the Arts Trust. Festival events took place mainly in Katoomba's Carrington Hotel and the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre. Participating writers included nationally prominent authors such as Michelle de Kretser, Kerry O'Brien, Tishani Doshi, Tim Flannery and Markus Zusak. There was a children's program and a program of writing workshops – on writing sentences, dialogue, experimental writing and so on, and the offer of a one-on-one discussion with a Varuna writing mentor. The Blue Mountains Writers' festival program delivered at the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre

featured a session on negotiating with publishers, establishing boundaries in memoir, and a talk by David Brooks on animals in fiction. The festival was an opening up to the Blue Mountains community of the literary world that Varuna has cultivated over 30 years.

Other Blue Mountains' intangible writer infrastructure is a Blue Mountains Writer group run by Writers NSW. There is also the Blue Mountains Fellowship of Australian Writers Branch, which was founded in 1973 in Springwood. 'Hemingway's Polydactyl Kitten Club & Speakeasy' is an intriguing

spoken word event that takes place monthly in the stylish Avalon Cocktail Bar in Katoomba. Featuring a guest speaker at each event, writers are welcomed to share their own works or read the works of others in a group setting. An important program supporting children's books especially is the Pinerolo residency for illustrators: Pinerolo is housed in a private cottage in Shipley near Blackheath in the Upper Blue Mountains, and is owned by author and illustrator Margaret Hamilton. The Children's Book Cottage also hosts exhibitions and schools programs, and is now a partner of WestWords.

WestWords Centre for Writing

Regarding writing infrastructure, relationships have started to change. The SGS report presented Varuna Writers' House as if it were the only significant writers' institution in Western Sydney (SGS 2018). There is now some emerging writers' infrastructure in Western Sydney, apart from the 'deep' immersion of the writers' retreat. The Western Sydney Young People's Literature Development Project (WestWords) was established in 2007 to address the low level of literature development in Western Sydney. It was an initiative of the NSW Government, and Blacktown City Council was invited to host the project in the initial stages. In 2015, WestWords Pty Ltd was established as an

independent company with a Western Sydney-wide remit. Initially, it was based at Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) in Parramatta, before recently gaining its own premises, the WestWords Centre for Writing in Parramatta. WestWords receives funding from Create NSW, the Copyright Agency, the Crown Resorts Foundation and the Packer Family Foundation. It has a strategic focus on children and young people, and provides a comprehensive program of workshops, residencies, fellowships and support for writers to help stimulate distinctive voices and stories of the people, places and cultures of Western Sydney. For example, there is the WestWords LGBT+ Writers'

Group, which meets monthly, and the WestWords Academy, a year-long training and mentorship program for emerging writers and multidisciplinary artists between the ages of 16-25.

WestWords has set up Writers' Rooms in Katoomba and Campbelltown. In Katoomba, The Den 24/7 WestWords Writers' Room was established in partnership with an art gallery, Gallery One88, at whose premises the writers' room was housed. However, after a number of months the initiative was discontinued. The Writer's Room in Campbelltown continues to operate with some support from Campbelltown City Council. The WestWords Western Sydney Writers'

Rooms are part of the NSW Government's Making Spaces initiative funded through Create NSW.

Challenges

The arrival of WestWords is a sign that a writing and literary culture is emerging in Western Sydney, although these beginnings are still fragile and require continued developmental support to mature. There is no dedicated writing infrastructure in Penrith, but there are several activities to support creative

writers. The Penrith City Library organises a Teen Book Club and an occasional Teen Writing Workshop; the South Penrith Neighbourhood Centre has a Creative Writing Group that meets weekly; St Marys has had a Creative Writers Group since 2001, and Penrith Library hosts some Sydney Writers Festival events. In partnership with Penrith City Council, WestWords also once organised a writing workshop for year 7-9 students with award-winning author James Roy. The image of this part of Western Sydney as a 'literary wasteland' will take time and

investment to overcome. By contrast, the Blue Mountains has a relatively well-developed writers' and writing culture. The Blue Mountains' reputation as a writer's hub has been assisted by the existence of Varuna that has attracted many writers to the Blue Mountains. The launch of the Blue Mountains Writers' Festival will significantly enrich community engagement with writers, writing and literature, and can be expanded to benefit the writers of Penrith and surrounding areas.

Creative Co-working Spaces and Shared Facilities

Nauti Studios Hazelbrook

201 Great Western Highway, Hazelbrook, New South Wales 2779.

Creative Fringe

Unit 6, 52 York Road Jamisontown, Penrith 2750.

Blue Mountains Tool Library and Artist Resource Centre (Toolo)

142 Katoomba Street, Katoomba 2780.

Co-working spaces are becoming an accepted part of the urban landscape as work is progressively displaced from traditional workplaces. A co-working space is a place with a flexible layout where people who are self-employed, freelancing or telecommuting can rent office space to work on their own businesses or professional activity, while sharing facilities such as printers and photocopiers, kitchens and lounges, and

meeting rooms (Pollio et al. 2018). This trend has reached the Blue Mountains: five co-working spaces are listed with MTNS MADE. Some are 'regular' co-working spaces - that is, simple shared office setups. INDY MTNS Co-working in Springwood is just such a shared office space, and its aim is to extend it to other Mountains locations (Indy Mtns n.d.). Cyber_Shed in Blackheath is more focused on digital literacy programs,

supported by the Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre, where people can also hire a hot-desk space for remote work (Blackheath Area Neighbourhood Centre n.d.). Other co-working hubs are aimed specifically at creative workers. These include Z Space Contemporary Arts Residencies in Wentworth Falls. This is a studio where an 'arts holiday' with tailored arts workshops can be organised.

Nauti Studios Hazelbrook

Nauti Studios Hazelbrook is the creation of Natalie Cheney, an artist, builder and activist who works entirely on her own. She had the experience of converting an old warehouse in Stanmore in Sydney's Inner West to a shared working space accommodating 30 artists and creative producers (Pollio et al 2018, 54-57). According to Cheney, the

studio structure was created in dialogue with users, 'like talking to lots of people and seeing how much space they wanted and then deciding how big to make the spaces' (interview 11 October 2018). Cheney sought to achieve a balance of professionalism and flexibility in creating the spaces for a specific mix of people. The

Hazelbrook studios were constructed after friends located an old building on the Great Western Highway and asked Cheney to build a studio modelled on the Stanmore Nauti Studios. When she asked if there was a demand for a co-working studio, she was told, 'there's nothing like this up here'. Building the Nauti Studios was 'a lot of hard



The Creative Fringe.

work' and a 'huge risk', not only because Cheney works on her own, but also due to the complexities of dealing with local government planners. Creative co-working spaces (as opposed to office spaces) entail a wide range of possible, sometimes 'messy' uses, and hence fall between zoning categories - for instance, between 'light industry' and 'exhibition'. These classification problems make it difficult to work with planners who want bureaucratic clarity:

It would be great to have that security and also to have that understanding from town planners of say 'My primary use is light industry, my secondary uses are entertainment, exhibition'. I think a lot of people in creative work just end up doing stuff illegally because there isn't a classification that describes what they do because

this is a new thing. (interview 11 October 2018)

This account supports the recommendation in the Greater Sydney Commission's Western District Plan to investigate ways to 'reduce the regulatory burden for arts, creative and temporary uses' (Greater Sydney Commission 2018). But, the problem is not only empathy on the part of planning staff to grasp what the creative worker is trying to do. The difference between regular and creative co-working spaces is that the former are modelled on office structures and have quite circumscribed forms – offices, hot desk areas, meeting rooms and the like. Hazelbrook Nauti Studios, by contrast, provides workspaces for a diverse range of creative producers, including people working in fashion, painting, art therapy, massage therapy, illustration and drone photography (Nauti

Studios). Cheney sees catering to this diversity as an exciting challenge, even though standard office spaces are more lucrative. In 2019 prices at Nauti Studios were \$15 a day or \$59 a week for a six metre² office space — far cheaper than equivalent business co-working facilities. But for Cheney:

So it's less profitable, less lucrative but for me I find it more rewarding. (interview 11 October 2018)

Challenges

Creative co-working spaces certainly present challenges, so much so that it is doubtful whether standard business models would work as well. Natalie Cheney's description of the kind of skill set required to develop and operate the Nauti studios is very broad:



The Creative Fringe.

...carpentry to build stuff, I do a little bit of marketing, a little bit of advertising, administration, accounting and bookkeeping, social media, like customer service and correspondence, people management, just general management and upkeep, event

organisation. (interview 11 October 2018)

The development of Nauti Studios is useful to grasp some of the issues around shared creative spaces, including: understanding the demand for flexible spaces and the need for

more manageable planning and regulatory pathways to creating ‘mixed use’ workspaces; and the need to incorporate strategies to enable this mix of professionalism and flexibility in future creative co-working developments.

Creative Fringe

Creative Fringe is a shared working space in Jamisontown near Penrith, and is specifically designed to cater to the needs of creative workers. Founder Debbie O’Connor has operated a successful design business, White River Design, but wanted to develop a shared working space focused on creative people. This ambition was grounded in her desire for the creative synergies that come with clustering. What O’Connor wanted was something more than a co-working space and to harness

and share ‘the collective energy of creative producers and to encourage communication, collaboration and innovation’ (O’Connor cited in Sandbach 2015: 4).

This goal was a new idea in Penrith at the time, and O’Connor faced many hurdles in developing The Creative Fringe. She initially looked for a space in Penrith CBD, but parking restrictions and planning requirements made it too difficult and expensive. Planning and zoning issues are

complex for developments that entail studio spaces. Anything that involves activities classified as printing or manufacturing encounter difficulties with some land use zonings. O’Connor considered renting a space, but it would not have been possible to do an extensive fit out and so would have been ‘dead money’. It took O’Connor two years to find a suitable space in a light industrial park in Jamisontown, 2.6 kilometres to the south of Penrith CBD: ‘Which is why we’re called the

Creative Fringe — we couldn't get into the city, so we're on the fringe'. An extensive fit out aimed to enable a range of new businesses, including creative businesses, to share a space and perhaps work collaboratively on projects. The Creative Fringe opened in 2014, with a vision to create and increase recognition of the 'many more talented and creative people out in Sydney's West' who 'aren't showcased enough' (O'Connor in Sandbach 2015).

The Creative Fringe is large and visually striking, with two levels of quite distinctive spaces (workshop spaces, studios, office spaces, meeting rooms, and spaces for relaxation) and lots of colour, walls and ceilings constructed from repurposed doors, painted slogans, and a stairway like a colour chart. O'Connor wanted to 'create a space that, no matter where you're standing, you can see something that's always going to interest you or engage you or make you want to go - oh, I want to photograph that, that's cool, let's Instagram that' (interview 22 November 2019).

Challenges

The Creative Fringe has succeeded as a commercial co-working space. Its permanent spaces are fully subscribed, and the only vacancies are in the hot-desk area. Yet, The Creative Fringe has had challenges in attracting creative clients. As O'Connor puts it, 'we've had to pivot and focus more on businesses that want to work in a creative space, instead of only going to

creative producers' (interview 22 November 2019). It has also proven difficult to attract creative workers that want to invest in permanent working spaces, even to identify and connect with creative producers in Penrith. O'Connor thinks that creative producers in the area may struggle in having:

a mindset where they don't want to have to pay for something that they can get for free. I think that that comes down to the fact that people are always asking them to do their work for free or to do their work for really cheap prices. Money becomes a big issue for these creative producers and how they then spend it in what they're doing. (interview 22 November 2019)

She also encountered negative attitudes about The Creative Fringe's location in Penrith: 'We had people say there is no way I'm stepping foot in Penrith'. O'Connor has worked hard to establish connections with creative people and to develop creative infrastructure and opportunity for building networks. The Creative Fringe runs workshops with presenters who demonstrate art or craft techniques in drawing, resin art or dreamcatcher making. It does the publicity for these events in order to give presenters a platform, 'without having the anxiety and stress of trying to get people in'. In 2015, The Creative Fringe ran a series of monthly professional development workshops called *Fringe Benefits*. While uptake was initially encouraging, there was not enough support to sustain the program.

Recently, O'Connor has launched an online creative network called *Fringe Connections*:

The idea behind that is we want to connect, collaborate, inspire and educate commercial artists — well that's our space — graphic designers, photographers, videographers, marketers, that type of thing. And visual artists — painters, sculptors. Performance — so singers, actors. And then also makers — people who are actually making products and selling them at markets and that type of thing. (interview 22 November 2019)

O'Connor is hopeful that *Fringe Connections* can build connections in Penrith as well as develop a stronger creative producer presence at Creative Fringe: 'See if we can draw them in because it's amazing the synergy that starts to happen'. She recalls the memory of the collaborative dynamic that can develop:

At one stage we had a copywriter in here and a photographer, and we landed up working on a project where we built a website - so my studio is the design studio - we designed and built the site, we had the photographer doing all the photography for the site, we had the copywriter doing all the writing. It was fantastic. (interview 22 November 2019)

The Creative Fringe is a testimony to the drive and vision of O'Connor. The co-working space is possibly the most extensive creative-friendly shared working environment outside inner

Sydney. The reasons for the difficulties that O'Connor has encountered in substantially

involving creative producers in The Creative Fringe demands consideration. It points,

perhaps, to the lack of a mature cultural ecosystem in Penrith.



Toolo

Blue Mountains Tool Library and Artist Resource Centre (Toolo)

The Blue Mountains Tool Library and Artist Resource Centre, or Toolo for short, is an intriguing model for creative enterprise and is run by the only paid staff member, Kathleen MacDonald. On first appearances it is a community tool library where members can borrow a ladder or a log splitter for a moderate annual fee. A closer look at the tool catalogue shows that the range of items extends considerably beyond garden tools. Board member Justin Morrissey explains:

Those resources are tangible, hard resources. Things like the very things you need to produce work. So that is things like 3D printers, cameras, guitars, drill presses, sewing machines. Anything that you need for that job, that one-off project perhaps, or something that's going to

help facilitate an exhibition such as a projector or a digital screen, something like that. (interview 22 November 2019)

Toolo is 'an artist-run initiative to supply resources and equipment to the community, with a focus on supporting the creative industries'. A sustainability ethic runs through its various activities, but Toolo differs from other sustainability and reuse ventures, such as Reverse Garbage and The Bower Reuse and Repair Centre in Sydney, in its focus on creative industries. As Justin Morrissey states, 'it's a charity whose objective is to further promote the creative industries and provide opportunities for the creative industries, provide education to creative industries practitioners and provide resources for creative

industries practitioners'. *Toolo Limited* was founded in 2016 as a not-for-profit limited company set up with tax deductible gift recipient status. It is conceived as a proactive and sustainable enterprise that is not primarily reliant on grants, and that can initiate creative projects itself.

Toolo projects and activities

The Tool Library serves as a resource for creative producers as well as the general public. According to Morrissey, 'Anyone can join the library and get a lawnmower. OK, a lawnmower's not a creative tool, but a performance artist could use it. But it's a way for us to generate money, to kick back into having creative resources available' (interview 22 November 2019).

The Kiosk:

Toolo's membership has been strongly interested in finding ways to access studio space, particularly where buildings are under-utilised. Toolo's advocacy for creative resources and spaces led to an interest in the Katoomba Falls Kiosk, a State-listed heritage building owned by Blue Mountains City Council that had been empty for some time. In 2017, Toolo was able to lease the Kiosk building at a reduced rent from BMCC; Toolo could then offer three studio spaces for rent to artists at a very affordable rate. Artists were offered the studio spaces for short periods as a residency or to develop ideas for exhibition. The period during which The Kiosk was managed by Toolo — roughly one year — was a busy and productive time, with many activities being generated, including exhibitions, artist workshops, and book launches attracting strong audiences. In collaboration with MAPBM, Toolo was able to access Create NSW funding to support *The Kiosk 3x6 Project*, a series of three intensive curatorial residencies held in the last four months of The Kiosk's lease. Each residency was led by an artist-curator who worked closely with five other artists to develop complex multi-layered exhibitions, generated in only six weeks (MAPBM n.d.(a)). For Justin Morrissey, 'The Kiosk was a very successful project for the creative industries. We saw major artists visiting and travelling to the

Mountains'. While there was some dissatisfaction at the ending of Toolo's lease, The Kiosk projects showed the viability of taking on disused spaces for creative purposes.

The Digital Ecology Lab is described as 'The Kiosk Mark 2' by Justin Morrissey. Its aim is to address the lack of creative education and training opportunities in the Blue Mountains, particularly in the area of new media and digital technology (see the above case study of the digital arts and culture). The *Creative Equity Fund* (CEF) was set up by Toolo with Bendigo Bank for future development of the Blue Mountains' creative industries, and is administered by the Toolo Board of Directors. According to the description on Toolo's website, the Creative Equity Fund 'seeks to provide a firm footing for the tool library and fund for artists by leveraging the equity and interest on the fund to create wealth within small communities of rich creative resource' (Toolo n.d.). CEF's

initial aim is to raise \$2 million through philanthropic donations over 20 years for the use of creative producers in the Blue Mountains. There is no doubting the ambition of the scheme; as Morrissey notes, 'funds are rarely established with such goals'.

Toolo, like MTNS MADE, shares a creative industries approach. Recognising that creative industries workers comprise a relatively high proportion of the workforce in the Blue Mountains, Toolo seeks to maximise the benefits of working collectively and to build its own resources and infrastructure from the ground up. As Morrissey puts it:

Arts organisations tend to get caught and tied into that model of seeking government funding; 'we never have any money' is a kind of catchcry of the arts. We're called creative producers, you need to be creative, so you need to generate money. (interview 22 November 2019)

Toolo exemplifies an activist approach to building infrastructure to support the creative and cultural industries in the Blue Mountains. At the same time, it has been careful to ensure that its fundamentals are strong; for instance, it has a Board including a BMCC Councillor and a team not only of artists, but stakeholders with expertise in law, sustainability and reuse, arts research, community fundraising and disability services.



EDACC (Energy, Data, Abstraction and Cognitive Capitalism) Kiosk 3X6 Project Poster.



Real Festival. Jumping Girl *Illuminated Bilby*.

Findings and Recommendations

Penrith and the Blue Mountains are home to a growing cultural sector that is poised to be more prominent as the region's population diversifies and grows. Artists across all artforms make the most of career opportunities in the region. This research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, but this means that planning for creative production will be even more important in recovering from the major shock of COVID-19.

The key finding is that Penrith and the Blue Mountains City Councils would benefit from continued collaboration dedicated to fostering creative production across the region.

Activities to be considered as part of such collaborations include:

- the development of creative hubs where arts and cultural practitioners can work, connect and collaborate, supported by professional development programs, and involving digital facilities for production needs in film, sound recording and media production.
- to advocate for increased education and training roles of TAFE NSW and Western Sydney University in delivering comprehensive creative courses

- to encourage TAFE NSW and WSU to provide pathway programs with industry experts, business training and career development mentors to assist in bridging the gap to employment, professional career opportunities or business ownership within the creative industries.
- to initiate informal professional development opportunities to promote the connections between artists and creative producers across the region.

Four key areas of attention and five strategies have been identified that will lead to greater creative production and development in the local area and the broader region:

Creative and Cultural Synergies identifies complementarity and collaborations between Penrith and the Blue Mountains through Strategy 1: Continue and strengthen the work that the two Councils have already begun both independently and jointly, and advocate for new funding and partnerships to enhance and expand opportunities for creative practitioners in the region.

Creative Spaces focuses on the specific needs of creative practitioners through Strategy 2: Expand and establish regional creative hubs, nodes and digital facilities that are coordinated by cultural staff to lead and support professional development programs and networking opportunities.

Building Creative Capital identifies ways to enhance the capacity of emerging and established creative practitioners in the Penrith and Blue Mountains region through Strategy 3: Increase the education and training opportunities offered by institutions to deliver comprehensive creative courses which include employment/self-employment pathway programs across the Penrith and Blue Mountains region; and Strategy 4: Expand professional development and collaboration opportunities that promote Penrith and Blue Mountains creative practitioners.

Regional Resourcing opens a discussion about how these needs might be met through Strategy 5: Continue to actively pursue cross-institutional partnerships that benefit the growth of the creative and cultural sector in the Western Parkland City.

Creative and Cultural Synergies

Strategy 1:

Continue and strengthen the work that the two Councils have already begun both independently and jointly, and advocate for new funding and partnerships to enhance and expand opportunities for creative practitioners in the region.

Between Blue Mountains City Council and Penrith City Council

There are many regional institutions and multiple cultural services activities. In the Blue Mountains, these are focused on *presentation* with limited support for creative *production*. In Penrith, The Joan, and to a lesser extent (because of size constraints), Penrith Regional Gallery, undertake significant programs of creative production that invest in regional talent. It is recommended that a creative production agenda is extended across all regional institutions. An increase in outreach activity within regional institutions will expand cultural services activities explicitly to enhance infrastructure for cultural and creative production across the region.

Investment to support cultural production synergies between Penrith and the Blue Mountains will benefit the creative capacity of the region. Much of the creative and cultural activity in Penrith and Blue Mountains occurs through the initiative of dedicated artists, cultural practitioners, and staff working across these Councils.

The 2015 Mayoral Arts and Cultural Summit laid the foundation for how Penrith and Blue Mountains Councils can work together, and with other local government areas (in this instance, Hawkesbury City Council) to broaden their perspectives to achieve a regional impetus for the creative and cultural sector. This is a strength to be built upon, and especially to ensure sustained purpose, vision and achievement.

Extending to other local governments

The large, future-focused technological industries that are widely anticipated to result from government investment through the Western Sydney City Deal, the Western Sydney Aerotropolis, and also in Penrith's The Quarter Health and Education Precinct, will require active partnership between LGAs across the region. It also necessitates cooperation with associated key industries, such as health delivery, medical and aeronautical technologies and design.

The Quarter is an opportunity for significant arts and health programs to be integrated as the precinct develops to become a flagship exemplar in the practice of arts and health initiatives. Students from the region undertaking the Western Sydney University Master of Art Therapy at its Parramatta campus or Master of Creative Music Therapy at the Penrith campus would benefit from placements in The Quarter. The Aerotropolis development will benefit enormously from the presence of creative activity and processes to enhance the vitality of the precinct, but will also enable a productive STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) environment. This aim is also achievable through Celestino's dedicated Sydney Science Park, a precinct aimed at lifelong learning with a STEAM focus.

Paving the way for expanded creative opportunities is likely to attract quality practitioners given the unique inter-relations of professionals already in the area, the willingness of students to be educated and train in Penrith,

and the proximity to employment opportunities that will open up in this part of Greater Metropolitan Sydney. As well as generating new	opportunities for arts and culture to be applied in different settings, performance and exhibition opportunities could be developed	throughout the region - for example, across the Western Parkland City, Blacktown and Parramatta.
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Recommendation 1.1: The PCC and BMCC strengthen partnerships with entities in Penrith’s The Quarter (Health and Education Precinct) and the Aerotropolis precincts, in continuing to pursue cross-institutional partnerships and opportunities for regional creative industries through the Western City Deal.

Co-working spaces

Whilst Councils contribute to the income of artists and creative practitioners, either through direct employment or support programs, much of the time artists are not paid for their work and will struggle to afford co-working spaces.	To help overcome this barrier, a Penrith-Blue Mountains cultural alliance could assist property owners to provide subsidised spaces for creative practitioners by transforming under-utilised spaces into creative hubs.	Both Councils could increase the number, size and duration of use of spaces made available to artists and cultural workers.
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Recommendation 1.2: Councils review regulations to enable and support creative production spaces and consider broader utilisation of existing neighbourhood or community facilities for creative purposes, and in any upgrades or refurbishment programs engage with artists and cultural practitioners about their needs.

Arts entrepreneurs

The rich ecology of arts entrepreneurialism that supports, for example, musicians and audiences for music in the Blue Mountains, can be a neglected link in the	creative chain. It is important for Councils to understand these networks and activities and their contribution to the ‘scene’.	Councils also need to consider how they can support these small companies in ways that benefit musicians and other artists and contribute to activating places.
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Recommendation 1.3: PCC and BMCC continue and develop their efforts to understand and address the needs of small-scale entrepreneurs, and attract new audiences, particularly visitors from outside the area, to events and other cultural activities.

Creative Spaces

Strategy 2: *Expand and establish regional creative hubs, nodes and digital facilities that are coordinated by cultural staff to lead and support professional development programs and networking opportunities in the Penrith and Blue Mountains region.*

Creative Technology Centre

<p>The case study research identified the need to establish a Creative Technology Centre in the region.</p> <p>Film and screen media production facilities provided in a Creative Technology Centre need to be flexible, and managed to allow for various production sizes and durations. They also need to accommodate production truck access; equipment storage; actor rehearsal and filming spaces; green screen facilities; sound recording and dubbing</p>	<p>facilities, and rushes screening facilities. The Studio in Sydney is a State government-funded and fee-paying organisation that combines a recording studio, green screen, collaborative workspaces, and meeting rooms for hire. The key is that the spaces are activated as well as managed – offering courses, seminars and workshops. The Studio also has prestigious resident companies which help draw others to make connections with it. It is held up as a useful model (and was a successful</p>	<p>element in the DiG program of PCC).</p> <p>The Studio is a central Sydney model and the research must be mindful that smaller hubs and more dispersed facilities could be more appropriate in a regional setting. PCC and BMCC should collaborate to establish film and screen media production facilities in the region. One option could be to explore working and /or partnering with the Sydney Studio to form a Western Sydney Studio.</p>
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Recommendation 2.1: Establish a major regional Creative Technology Centre in Penrith servicing the Nepean and Blue Mountains that is co-designed with creative producers in the region.

Regional Arts Centres

<p>Penrith Regional Gallery is a modest-sized suburban gallery that plays an essential role in supporting visual arts practice and outreach programs in Penrith and the surrounding region. However, limited space is a critical issue for the Gallery. Expanding the Gallery's footprint would</p>	<p>increase accomodation of already vigorous educational, professional, school, and outreach programs. As Penrith grows it will also need to consider establishing more exhibition spaces in its centres</p>	<p>It is important that PCC, BMCC and The Joan collaborate to ensure that any proposed cultural infrastructure includes purpose-built space for contemporary production, performance, and exhibition similar to the multi-artform complex Carriageworks in Redfern.</p>
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Recommendation 2.2: Explore options for easily accessible galleries and exhibition spaces in Penrith centres.

Tertiary education: TAFE and Western Sydney University

Penrith City Council has a good working relationship and connection with TAFE and Western Sydney University through Council’s Cultural Development. Over the years many partnership initiatives and projects have been formed for creative professional development. These are important relationships that should continue to strengthen the connections and partnerships with TAFE and WSU. There are further opportunities to connect and	build relationships with national and international cultural organisations, entrepreneurs and creative professionals. The need for TAFE to reinvest in its Nepean campus is paramount. The potential for the TAFE Wentworth Falls or Nirimba campuses to establish a sound production course with successful Katoomba AV provider, KFM media, is an example of a productive partnership which should progress.	The DiG Space Program and the Digital Ecology Lab projects have demonstrated that there is demand for the TAFE NSW initiative to develop and resource creative production facilities and start-up enterprises (see the digital arts and culture case study). The Kingswood Campus of Western Sydney University hosts <i>Launchpad</i> , which could be approached to extend its program to become a creative incubator (Western Sydney University 2020).
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Recommendation 2.3: PCC and BMCC continue to advocate to TAFE NSW and Western Sydney University to develop and resource creative production facilities and to support start-up enterprises.

Spaces for Creative Production

Penrith and the Blue Mountains City Councils regularly support projects that activate local community amenity with quality artistic outcomes, whether they be a temporarily unused architectural landmark, a heritage environment, science facility or a local wall. It is well established that the provision of different types of cultural space, including production and presentation hubs or workspaces, attract different types of creative practitioners and can lead to the development of a regional cultural ecosystem. A cultural ecology implies a thriving ecosystem that enables artists	and cultural practitioners to make culture within an interactive system of mutually beneficial and generative relationships with other cultural producers, presenters and users (Holden 2015). Programs associated with co-working and making spaces that encourage connection, collaboration, and education are demonstrably effective in attracting the interest and, eventually, the commitment of cultural workers. The lack of creative production space in the region was identified by both the case study research for this project and in the <i>Creative Production Enablers and Support Survey</i> (Penrith City	Council, Blue Mountains City Council and Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2020). It was found that suitable production spaces are needed to attract creative practitioners from Penrith and the surrounding areas. These spaces might incorporate meeting spaces, but it is important not to expect one building to satisfy the needs of all artists and cultural practitioners (see the Regional Cultural Institutions – The Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre section above). While short-term artist spaces have been productive for exhibitions in the Blue Mountains (e.g., The Kiosk), longer-term facilities are also needed.
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Recommendation 2.4: Establish a range of affordable makerspaces and adaptable studio spaces in collaboration with artists and creative practitioners.

Training and performance centre

There are many independent dance studios operating across Greater Western Sydney providing access to dance, physical theatre and circus training to all age groups, particularly school-age students.	The absence of available, affordable and suitable infrastructure is limiting training and presentation opportunities. To complement and expand existing cultural offerings, as well as providing a point of difference, a circus school, for example, could be	established that aligns with Penrith's positioning as an 'Adventure Capital'. Relevant federal government funding opportunities, such as the National Institute of Circus Arts' outreach program <i>Social Circus</i> , should be taken into account.
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Recommendation 2.5: PCC and BMCC collaborate to establish a unique training and performance centre, such as circus and physical theatre in the Penrith area.

Building Creative Capital

Strategy 3: Increase the education and training opportunities offered by institutions to deliver comprehensive creative courses which include employment/self-employment pathway programs across the Penrith and Blue Mountains region.

Education

The decision over 20 years ago by Western Sydney University continues to be felt as a great loss. BMCC and PCC should	continue to raise this issue with the Vice Chancellor of WSU, and lobby for visual arts, theatre and dance education to	be reintroduced and to create new learning pathways in creative and performing arts at its Penrith campus.
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Recommendation 3.1: Encourage TAFE NSW and Western Sydney University to provide pathway programs with industry experts, business training and career development coach/mentors to assist in bridging the gap to employment, professional career opportunities and or business ownership within the creative industries.

The limited access to visual arts education opportunities in the region is heightened with	regard to public art, which currently requires students and	practitioners to relocate to Melbourne or Brisbane.
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Recommendation 3.2: Encourage Western Sydney University to reintroduce theatre, dance and visual arts education and introduce a public art and sculpture program for the Nepean region.

Schools

Penrith is home to a Creative and Performing Arts High	School, but it is neither well known nor integrated into the	local region’s cultural milieu.
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Recommendation 3.3: PCC and BMCC partner with Nepean Creative and Performing Arts High School to expand its creative reach and support young performers, musicians, designers and artists by working with local creative practitioners.

Strategy 4: *Expand professional development and collaboration opportunities that promote Penrith and Blue Mountains creative practitioners.*

Institutions

Both Penrith and the Blue Mountains City Councils support various performing and visual arts professional development opportunities that create ‘pathways’ to extend artistic professional practice. The partnership between the Australian Chamber Orchestra and Penrith Youth Orchestra	(outlined in the music case study above) is a model that can be expanded across other institutions. Providing presentation and development opportunities to artists and directors is a key strength of The Joan. However, there are limited numbers of professional artists and directors in the region.	Opportunities should be explored between NIDA (National Institute for the Dramatic Arts), for example, and The Joan to provide support for the education of regional talent and to extend The Joan’s network of professionals.
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Recommendation 4.1: PCC and BMCC undertake discussions with a number of leading state and national creative institutions and cultural organisations to expand their professional development and collaboration opportunities, particularly aimed at increasing career pathways in the region.

Mentoring and professional development

The twin areas of mentorship and professional development are a strength of Penrith’s creative and cultural programs, and could form part of the framework of a future PCC cultural policy and strategy.	Those practitioners who have access to the specific theatres and programs of The Joan across all creative cohorts of young and emerging, early career and established, are strongly supported with good	infrastructure. They are provided with structured and supported access to work within the regional facility. This provision, as a model, could be extended to other arts and cultural sectors.
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Classical Music (Penrith Symphony Orchestra, Penrith Youth Orchestra and Choral Groups)

There are limited professional employment opportunities for classically-trained musicians because, while conservatoria provide excellent training, it is not matched by a growth in classical music companies. The members of the PSO are mainly employed in other occupations and are, therefore, limited in their availability to rehearse and perform. PCC and BMCC could work with the PSO to establish a core group of full-time professional musicians based in Penrith and the Blue Mountains. This arrangement could establish the foundations for building	the PSO into a semi-professional orchestra. Penrith Conservatorium and The Joan are working to build closer connections with the Western Sydney University music precinct on its Kingswood campus including, for example, by co-organising the Penrith Music Network Forum. This was held in 2019 with the aim of demystifying the music industry and identifying career pathways and options and was funded by PCC’s Cultural Development section through the River Walk Foundation Grant. The connection with WSU is productive and	sponsorships could be sought to enable the continuation of the Penrith Music Network. Many WSU students are employed at the Penrith Conservatorium as tutors; however, the career pathway post-graduation for these practitioners is uncertain. The WSU Music Precinct is an important asset for Penrith's developing music scene. The focus of the precinct is to provide education across many music styles and forms, such as jazz, contemporary music and screen composition, as well as research opportunities in so-called ‘world music’.
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Recommendation 4.2: PCC and BMCC work together with PP&VA, WSU, PSO and the Penrith Conservatorium to support and advance musicians' and composers' professional development and the growth of the region's music scene.

Writing and Literature

The arrival of WestWords is a sign that a writing and literary culture is emerging in Western Sydney, but these beginnings are fragile and will require continued support to mature.	By contrast, the Blue Mountains has a relatively well-developed writers’ and writing culture. The launch of the Blue Mountains Writers’ Festival will significantly	enrich the engagement of the community with writers, writing and literature and could be encouraged to develop outreach sessions in Penrith.
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Recommendation 4.3: PCC and BMCC establish a regional writing program that builds on existing Blue Mountains writing networks and supports an increased presence of writers in Penrith.

Providing and enhancing opportunities for young people

PCC and BMCC are not alone in being challenged to address the need for employment	opportunities for young people living in the region. Many cultural projects supported by the Councils are actively	working towards this end and have, as described in the City Council Initiatives section of this report, achieved some
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success. These projects are valued by young people regardless of their socio-economic background or	circumstances. The largest investment by PCC in public cultural programs is the Real Festival, but, despite increasing	overall attendances, it has struggled to attract many from the 18-25 year old demographic.
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Recommendation 4.4: Provide an increased focus on the needs and participation of young people when programming Council-led events and creative initiatives.

Opportunities to involve experienced and senior artists	within any program for young artists is another proven way	for the PCC and BMCC creative alliance to generate productive collaborations.
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Recommendation 4.5: PCC and BMCC establish intergenerational creative practitioner mentorship programs.

Regional Resourcing

Strategy 5. *Continue to actively pursue cross-institutional partnerships that benefit the growth of the creative and cultural sector in the Western Parkland City.*

Federal and State government

Funding for the arts and culture in Penrith and the Blue Mountains is inadequate. Whilst the share of local government funding in arts and culture needs to be increased, the emphasis must be placed on increasing State and federal arts funding. The emerging Aerotropolis, government attention under the Western Sydney City Deal, and the support for existing regional facilities provide opportunities for leveraging investment in creative production facilities and cultural infrastructure. Dedicated commitment across the three tiers of government, such as through the Western Sydney City Deal, will be needed to realise these opportunities.

Partnerships

PCC and PP&VA are to be commended for a strong culture of partnership development, with an extensive range of partners. Partnerships with philanthropic benefactors should continue to be nurtured to maintain and expand the creative sector across the region.

Local Government

The development of a strategic cultural alliance between the City Councils that underlines the complementarity of cultural production and presentation across the region would formalise the creative and cultural relationships, and send a strong public signal of

future intentions. Penrith and Blue Mountains City Councils should jointly fund programs through the Western Sydney City Deal Health Alliance. This creative alliance should consider joint funding for regional creative and cultural programs.

The cultural grants programs run by PCC benefit the whole LGA and, therefore, the guidelines, eligibility and advertisement of the programs should encourage applications from a broader range of regional cultural entities.

Creative practitioners

Creative practitioners are seeking alternative ways of addressing their financial needs, especially in such a tight funding environment. One such example is the

Creative Equity Fund (CEF) (in partnership with Bendigo Bank) to develop the Blue Mountains’ creative industries. The CEF aims to raise \$2 million over 20 years through philanthropic donations for the use of creative practitioners. This bold idea highlights the potential of alternative funding models that support cultural practitioners who work collectively to build their own resources and infrastructure. PCC and BMCC could work together with financial institutions and philanthropists to support the creative workers in the region.

There have been several cases of major Sydney-based cultural institutions receiving special

government funding to work with Western Sydney arts organisations, and which expect underfunded local entities to ‘partner’ with them to deliver the projects, essentially as an in-kind contribution. The PCC and BMCC alliance needs to raise this issue directly with Create NSW and the Australia Council, and seek to have the funds directed to their regional institutions which, in turn, can initiate and manage their engagement with the Sydney-based institutions.

Funding art practices

PCC tends to rely on external funds to support projects. The *Music Pathways* program, for

example, could easily continue with an allocation of modest funds. The *Magnetic Places* grant program could also be expanded to stimulate creative activity. Publicising the availability of funds creates more demand and awareness of the benefits of locally-produced creative projects.

Extending the existing program to market PCC creative grant schemes to include the grant programs of Create NSW and the Australia Council would help disseminate knowledge of those grants and perhaps address the very low numbers of grants going to artists in the Penrith LGA.

Consideration of planning, property, location, transport access, facilities

Many artists, writers and other creative workers want more than an office-type, co-working space: they wish to communicate and collaborate with other artists and cultural practitioners. They also value suitable, comfortable co-working spaces and affordable overnight accommodation. Artists and cultural workers

from the surrounding areas and region will be attracted to a co-working space that is near a railway station, has reliable Internet, is more than a temporary hot desk, and can be set up for resting and even overnight stays. This research identified Penrith as a potential cultural and

creative hub for regional artists and creative enterprises. One of the challenges is to find artists and creative workers who self-identify as being from Western Sydney as distinct from the broader ‘Sydney’. This challenge relates to the Penrith area, in particular.

Recommendation 5.1: PCC and BMCC continue to profile and celebrate home-grown creative practitioners and engage with other City Deal councils to promote regional creative practitioners.

Parking restrictions, planning requirements and expensive rent and property in the Penrith CBD and, increasingly, the Blue Mountains, restrict the development of co-working spaces. Planning and zoning

requirements are often also barriers to the developments of studio space. For instance, anything that involves activities classified as printing or manufacturing encounters difficulties in those areas

zoned for some business purposes. To address these issues effectively PCC and BMCC need to implement the recommendation of the Greater

Sydney Commission to investigate ways to ‘reduce the regulatory burden for arts, creative and temporary uses’ (Greater Sydney Commission 2018). Both Councils need to examine, and alter if necessary, their planning and zoning requirements to encourage creative take up. Apart from	regulatory issues, both Councils could jointly develop awareness training for planning staff in order to ensure that they understand the dynamics of creative work, its needs and benefits. For example, to understand that primary cultural production often occurs in a light-industrial environment, and	that entertainment and exhibition are secondary functions in that they are necessarily preceded by production processes. Creative expression - including public art, sculpture and informal performance spaces should be encouraged in Council planning documents.
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Transport issues

Public transport is unreliable in parts of the Blue Mountains and the service is inadequate beyond the Penrith CBD. This is, of course, an issue that goes well beyond arts	infrastructure and the cultural and creative industries, but the need for enhanced public transport by the Greater Sydney Commission identified continues to be reinforced	by creative practitioners. There is also a need to improve public transport links between Penrith CBD, Kingswood TAFE campus and the Penrith campus of Western Sydney University.
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Recommendation 5.2: Each Councils’ respective transport planners consider the accessibility, efficiency and frequency of public transport across the region with a view to better servicing creative practitioners and cultural facilities.

Digital Connectivity

The Blue Mountains is home to creative enterprises that operate across State and national borders and which have multiple sites of activity. They choose their base location on factors	other than proximity to markets. Operating across geographical boundaries provides opportunities for creative producers in the region, but there are significant issues that must	be addressed. Interviewees have reported frequent Internet downtimes in the Blue Mountains, which is expensive for individual enterprises to remedy.
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Recommendation 5.3: PCC and BMCC advocate for reliable and affordable internet connectivity with service providers and government as an essential element of cultural infrastructure.



Q Theatre *The Ugliest Duckling*.

Further Considerations

Creative and Presentation Spaces

The research also revealed further areas of attention for PCC and BMCC to consider in relation to fostering and developing a broad range of creative and presentation spaces.

Multi-purpose and artform spaces

A diverse mix of creative, exhibition and meeting spaces would generate a dynamic social and creative environment to stimulate audiences and attract creators. This long-term project could be

achieved through the refurbishment of existing buildings to include creative practices and cultural services. Another option is to build a flagship structure which will make a very strong impression on the cultural and physical landscapes, but will also require significant negotiation and dedicated resources. The best way forward is to aim for both options and to place the flagship structure as part of a 10-year plan, while acting immediately on the cluster. Whichever approach is decided upon, the buildings

must allow for multiple artforms and adaptable uses.

The cluster or flagship should extend into the arena of experimentation in the arts-science nexus that is opening up through the Q LAB residency programs.

Considered investment of resources and adequate built infrastructure and expertise is required to realise this opportunity. This initiative would contribute to the establishment of Penrith as a centre for cutting edge creative production.

Penrith City Council should commit to develop strategic partnerships with Councils across the region, institutions such as TAFE NSW, WSU, and the MCA, and corporate sponsors to realise a multi-artform production centre or cluster. To ensure the relevance of this flexible space, the PCC and BMCC alliance (and other regional partners) should directly involve artists and cultural workers in the design and planning process.

Libraries

Integrating co-working-style facilities into local libraries throughout the region would benefit some practitioners rather than having one large co-working space. Libraries could also incorporate facilities such as high-speed Internet, meeting spaces, and small pods for private phone conversations.

Libraries have always played an important role as access points for knowledge and, increasingly, activities associated with writing and literature. They are the most evenly distributed and 'democratic' public cultural space. The libraries in the Blue Mountains hold sessions where writers can develop work, have access to professional assistance with manuscripts, and attend workshops on self-publishing. Maker spaces and options for a 'library as publisher' (see Strategic and Policy section), are also recommended.

Warehouse spaces

To address the lack of suitable, affordable, long-term tenancy warehouse space, PCC and BMCC could investigate and try to negotiate affordable and secure warehouse accommodation, and establish and maintain ongoing 'creative labs' where works can be produced over an extended timeframe (meaning that materials and tools do not have to be removed at 17:00 when the facility closes for the day).

Informal spaces

There is a shortage of curated and informal meeting spaces for artists to network and co-design collaborative projects in both Penrith and the Blue Mountains. The physical and digital sociability of space is important in an informal educational sense because of the networking and activity that it encourages. Networks increasingly develop and work in both physical and virtual space. Both Councils should provide or enable meeting spaces to attract creative practitioners and be a venue for meetings with creative producers and industry. While many existing facilities in the region are at capacity, others, such as some located in Queen Street, St Marys, could be managed to be more adaptable to multidimensional uses.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

Research is required to better understand the issues facing Western Sydney Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in order to increase

connections, production and exhibition across Penrith and the Blue Mountains.

Youth-led spaces

It is important to engage with young creators and their cultural production needs by building spaces that are youth-led, which will mean a rethinking of the spaces that are readily available.

'Characterful' spaces, such as The Servo in Port Kembla, have become 'revalorised' because its regeneration by artists has built on the existing identity of the space.

Both Councils should identify unusual and informal existing spaces that can be adapted for performance and production, protect them from demolition, and work with artists (especially musicians and visual artists) to regenerate them as 'irregular performance spaces'. Such spaces tend to be of a temporary nature in terms of tenure and use. Both Councils should distribute to, and discuss with, their departments a list of characteristics of such spaces. Key features will include a capacity to: be activated at night regardless of their day-time function; become a venue space even though it is not conventionally used for performance or exhibition; deal with political, experimental and alternative performance subject matter, encompassing 'play' and/or 'resistance'; be run by hosts who are not solely interested in commercial gain, and operate under a blanket of 'invisibility' and discretion (Catanzaro 2014: 12).

Spaces for specific artforms

Visual Arts

Studio spaces similar to those of the Parramatta Artists' Studios (PAS) for independent artists should be sourced and resourced appropriately across the region.

An artist-in-residence program at the Braemar Gallery would provide a valuable extension to the exhibition program. Expanding the Summer Residency currently offered to one artist per year through Penrith Regional Gallery and Lewers Bequest could also be considered.

Digital Arts

To address the lack of flexible and accessible workspaces for up-to-date creative technologies, spaces need to be located, secured and equipped to accommodate the different ways in which creative practitioners and artists work individually and in groups. Professional development and mentoring programs should be delivered through these spaces.

Theatre

The Blue Mountains Theatre and Community Hub (BMTCH) is a valuable regional entertainment venue; however, its potential to support capacity building in the performing arts and the creation of new work is still in its infancy. Making rehearsal spaces available and developing a range of performance opportunities outside programming hours would benefit professional and amateur artists. BMTCH requires additional capacity or policy direction in order to provide more opportunities for creative production, particularly for the performing arts.

Spaces for Presentation

Audiences

The Western Sydney 'border' remains a perceived or real barrier to attracting wider audiences from Greater Sydney. Melbourne and Adelaide may generate more interest in the work being produced in Penrith. Interstate attention may then translate into Sydney-wide audience attention. It is recommended that both Councils develop partnerships with major cultural institutions beyond Sydney.

It is difficult to attract sufficient interest to present weekday programs, because many audiences may work, but tend not to live, in Penrith.

Penrith and the Blue Mountains could investigate an outreach program that 'buses' residents from outer suburbs to The Joan and the BMTCH during weekdays. Audience interest can also be built through sharing development phases of new or 'challenging' productions and word-of-mouth encouragement of audience participation. The response to COVID-19 is generating many ideas about online streaming of performances, and The Joan and PSO could offer live streaming shows, concerts and workshops. This may be another income stream

through online subscribers or memberships, and also offer further employment opportunities for Production Managers, Theatre Technicians, Lighting and Sound Engineers, Film Producers, Online Marketing staff and Graphic Designers.

It is recommended to research and develop a Western Sydney creative producers marketing campaign for an online and live streaming platform for performances, interviews, workshops, public lectures (all artforms) and so on, some of which would involve subscription and membership relationships.

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P10. Q Theatre with ATYP *Bathory Begins*. 2019. Photo: Tracey Schramm

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P58. Wagana Aboriginal Dancers (left to right) Jo Clancy, Michaela Jeffries, Becky Chatfield, Shana O'Brien. Photo: Brigitte Grant

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P87. The Acting Factory cast in *Dimboola* by Jack Hibberd. 2014. Photo: The Acting Factory Inc.

P90. Anne Graham, "The Beehive Lady and The Beehive Observatories", in *The Explorers: narratives of site in contemporary art practice*. Woodford Academy. 2017. Photo: Mandy Schoene-Salter

P91. Miriam Williamson, "Seeds of Empire" in *The Explorers: narratives of site in contemporary art practice*. Woodford Academy. 2017. Photo: Alex Gooding

P92. NCNS Youth Team *Cranebrook Skatepark Mural* for the Magnetic Places Program. 2019. Photo: Jordan Wheatley

P97. Black Door Gallery Penrith. 2020. Photo: Black Door Gallery

P100. Varuna writing space. 2018. Photo: Anne Spudvilas

P106. The Creative Fringe.
2019. Photo: Phillip Mar

P107. The Creative Fringe.
2019. Photo: Phillip Mar

P108. Toolo. 2020. Photo:
Roman Mar

P109. *EDACC* (Energy, Data,
Abstraction and Cognitive
Capitalism) Kiosk 3X6 Project
Poster 2017. Photo: MAPBM

P111. Real Festival. Jumping
Girl *Illuminated Bilby*. 2019.
Photo: andre&dominique

P122. Q Theatre *The Ugliest
Duckling*. 2019. Photo: Teniola
Komolate

Appendix 1:

Creative Production Enablers and Support Survey Summary

Penrith City Council, Blue Mountains City Council and Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise collaborated to conduct an online survey of creative industry practitioners in November 2019, the questions for which were designed with advice from the project researchers from the Institute for Culture and Society. Several relevant excerpts from the subsequent Penrith City Council report, *Creative Production Enablers and Support Survey*, are included in this section.

The intention of the survey was to provide insights into the infrastructure and support needs of people currently working in the arts, culture and creative industries in Penrith and Blue Mountains. It directly targeted current practitioners in arts, culture and creative industries through the Council’s distribution lists via a link to an online questionnaire created by Penrith City Council using Web Survey Creator software. The survey asked 18 questions in relation to creative practice, including: location of work, type of creative field, willingness to travel to access facilities, and the types of supportive infrastructure needed to continue their work in the region.

Respondents

A total of 167 creative practitioners completed the survey, including 110 Blue Mountains residents and 38 Penrith residents: 29 per cent had lived in the area for more than 20 years; 41 per cent identified as male and 57 per cent as female, with the majority over 61 years of age. The number of respondents based on age group were: 16-20 years (4); 21-30 years (11); 31-40 years (25); 41-50 years (42); 51-60 (32), and aged over 61 years (48).

Types of creative production

The survey showed that Penrith and the Blue Mountains creative practitioners are engaging in a diverse range of creative activities. However, the distribution of creative fields among survey participants is likely to have been influenced by the presence of existing infrastructure and venues such as the Joan Sutherland Centre in Penrith, whereas theatre was more prominent than in the Blue Mountains.

Visual arts was the most prominent creative field at 25 per cent among Blue Mountains respondents, and was 24 per cent in Penrith. The largest proportion of creative practitioners in Penrith work in theatre and in music, each

artform representing 29 per cent of Penrith respondents compared to 7 per cent of respondents from the Blue Mountains. The creative fields of design and film combined represent a small but not insignificant proportion of respondents from both the Blue Mountains (13 per cent) and Penrith (8 per cent).

Two creative fields that were notably represented among respondents in the Blue Mountains, compared with Penrith, were writing (6 per cent) and photography (6 per cent). Creative fields that were under-represented in both regions were digital arts and contemporary dance. This result does not necessarily reflect a lack of digital arts and dance practitioners in the region, but is possibly an outcome of the way in which survey respondents were recruited. The types of creative practice that were reported under the ‘other’ category, which accounted for 15 per cent of respondents from the Blue Mountains, included multi-arts management, education, circus, social engagement, curating, directing and festival organisation, audio-visual production, editing, publishing, business advice, and working with specific media like textiles and fibre art.

Length of time working in a creative field

Most Penrith and the Blue Mountains creative practitioners are well established in their creative field. The largest proportion, 43 per cent of respondents, have been working in their creative field for more than 20 years and 13 percent for 16-20 years. Nearly one in five respondents (18 per cent) are emerging artists, having worked in their field for 0-5 years. Of this cohort, the largest proportion was aged 41-50 years and 73 per cent under 50 years, while 75 per cent of those who have worked in the field for over 20 years were aged over 51 years. This age profile suggests a potentially emergent middle-aged group which may be transitioning into new artistic endeavours at a similar rate as the highly experienced group of artists. This is a finding that also suggests that there are significant numbers of people who may benefit from the development of creative production pathways.

Work location

A high proportion of creative practitioners works from home. Respondents in the Blue Mountains were more likely to work at home (48 per cent) compared to Penrith (42 per cent): 47 per cent of Penrith's respondents were working at various locations, requiring frequent travel, compared to 34 per cent of respondents from the Blue Mountains (a pattern that may be related to the relatively high number involved in theatre and limited

local employment opportunities. For those currently working at home, access to affordable spaces is frequently named as a need. One designer working from home in Penrith described their need as:

more affordable working spaces and job opportunities. I am able to freelance and work in the area in my spare time, but part time I am required to travel into Sydney to receive regular work as it is close to impossible to find in the Penrith and Blue Mountains area. Travelling this far is taxing and I am considering moving out of the area for this reason.

Distance respondents would travel to access professional creative facilities

Most respondents were willing to travel beyond their local government area (LGA) to access professional creative facilities. Almost a third from both LGAs would be willing to travel within the Western Sydney region, with more than one in five willing to travel anywhere as required. In Penrith, the largest proportion (38 per cent) of respondents was willing to travel within the Penrith and Blue Mountains region. Just 8 per cent said that they would be happy to travel only within Penrith LGA. In the Blue Mountains, respondents were less inclined to travel outside their LGA, with the largest proportion (43 per cent) stating that they would only be willing to travel within the Blue Mountains LGA. Despite this reluctance, 29 per cent were happy to travel to Penrith specifically or across Penrith and the Blue Mountains. Responses from

both regions, then, reflect a strong willingness to travel within the Penrith and Blue Mountains region, reinforcing the need to have professional facilities available for creative production within local areas.

Creative businesses

Creative production in the Blue Mountains and Penrith is an important contributor to the regional economy: 72 per cent of respondents work in or operate a creative business. More than half (58 per cent) of those businesses are related to music, performing or visual arts. Almost half (48 per cent) of those working in creative businesses are producers, artists or designers, closely followed by owners and directors (41 per cent). Performers make up about 18 per cent of this cohort and teachers represent 16 per cent of respondents working in the creative business sector. With increased support, creative businesses could further expand in the region. This point is illustrated by the following statement from a long-term Penrith resident and theatre practitioner who identifies the need for:

Better understanding that there are already many groups within the region that provide excellent creative and performing arts services to members of the community - but that these groups require support (financial, promotional) to really increase awareness of them within the community and council itself. With generally only a small group of committee members steering these groups and associations (all volunteers, offering their time outside of

their daily jobs), gaining wider exposure can be a difficult and costly endeavour.

Income from creative practice

Many respondents rely on creative practice for most of

their income, with just under half of the respondents surveyed reporting that they earn a large proportion of their income from their creative fields (as shown in Figure 1 below). Of the 147 respondents who answered this question, 39 per cent stated that they earn 75-100 per cent of their

income from working in their creative fields. Another 10 per cent of respondents make 50-75 per cent of their income through their creative practices.

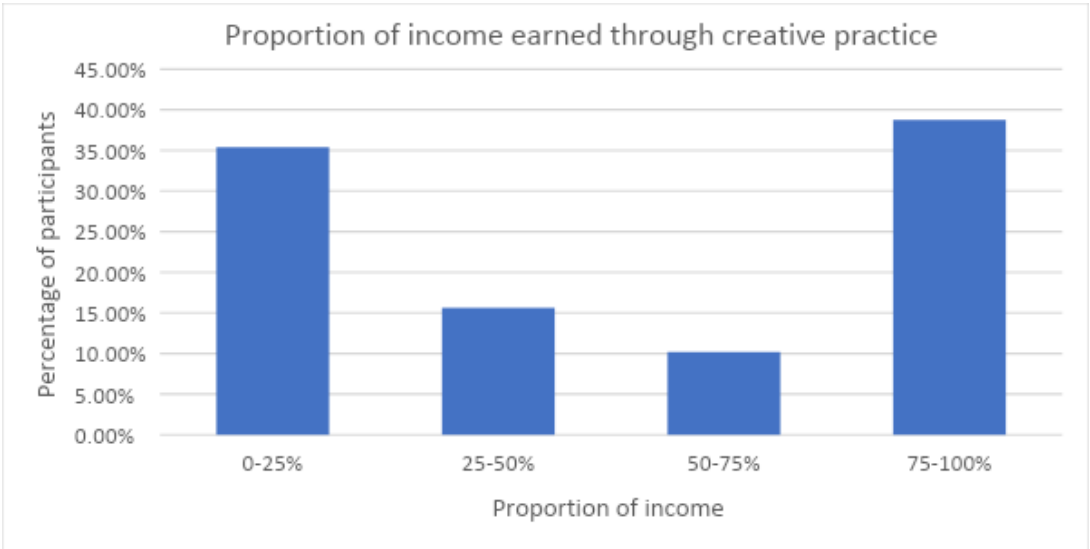


Figure 1: Proportion of income from creative practice

Facilities needed for creative production

The key facilities identified as needed by creative practitioners were small creation spaces (20 per cent), closely followed by performance spaces (14 per cent), rehearsal spaces (13 per cent) and collaborative spaces (11 per cent). Collectively, these represent 58 per cent of

responses (as illustrated in Figure 2 below). The need for affordable physical space was repeatedly mentioned throughout the survey: 13 per cent identified the need for facilities that related to digital technology and 6 per cent required specific equipment. Respondents also commented on the need for an efficient Internet connection to support their creative practice. The link

between studio space for practice and presentation was highlighted by a visual artist and teacher, who said that they needed affordable studio space within the Penrith/Blue Mountains region and would like to see co-creative art studios that host free exhibition (see visualised responses to facilities needed for creative production in Figure 2 below).

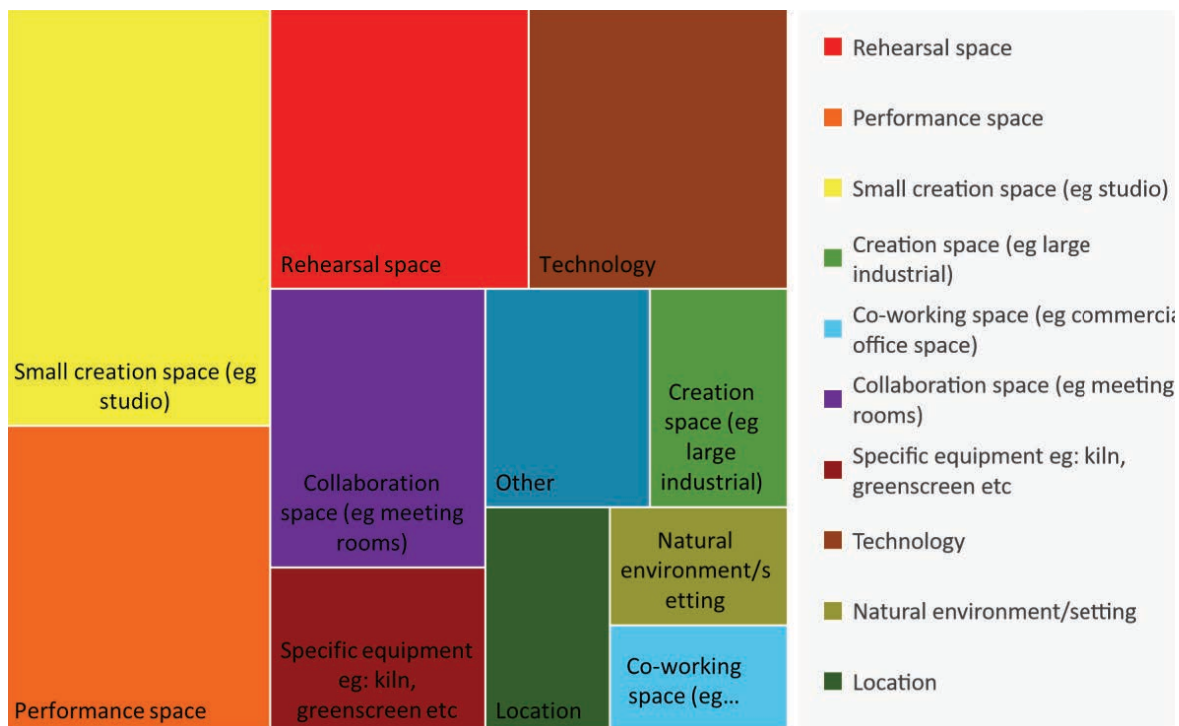


Figure 2: Facilities needed to support creative production

Support services needed for creative production

When asked about the support services needed for their

creative practice, 21 per cent of respondents nominated marketing and promotional

support, 21 per cent opportunities to exhibit and perform, and 15 per cent creative networks (see Figure 3 below).

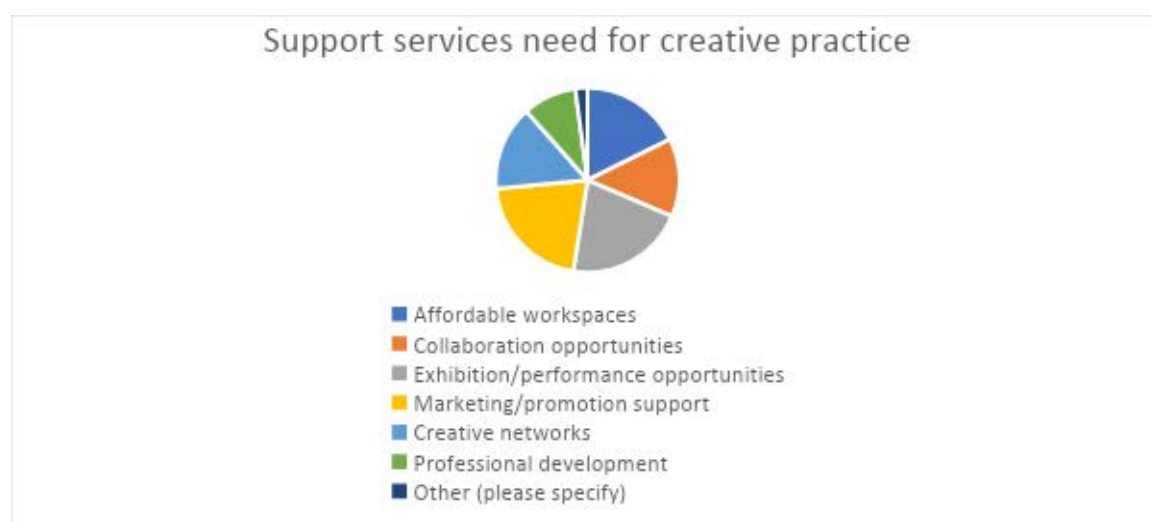


Figure 3: Support services needed for creative production

Appendix 2: Interviews

Interviewee	Role/Organisation	Date
Karen Harris	Senior Cultural Development Officer, PCC (P)	17/10/2019
Rachel Pagitz	Advocacy and Government Relations Officer, PCC (P)	17/10/2019
Paul Brinkman	Arts and Cultural Services Manager (BM)	17/10/2019
Dimity Mullane	City Projects Officer (City Renewal), (P)	21/10/2019
Donita Hulme	Cultural Engagement Officer (Neighbourhood Renewal, Place Management), PCC (P)	21/10/2019
Lila Kennelly	Neighbourhood Renewal Coordinator (Place Management), PCC (P)	21/10/2019
Jeni Pollard	Place Manager, PCC (P)	21/10/2019
Hania Radvan	CEO The Joan (P)	21/10/2019
Sheona White	Director Penrith Art Gallery and Lewers Bequest (P)	21/10/2019
George Verghese	TAFE NSW (P)	21/10/2019
Michelle Catanzaro	Western Sydney University (ex P)	23/10/2019
Anne Niddrie	BMEE/MTNS MADE (BM)	31/10/2019
Fiona Davies	MAPBM (BM)	15/11/2019
Miriam Williamson	The SLAB (BM)	21/11/2019
Rebecca Liu-Brennan	PAWS (P)	22/11/2019
Justin Morrissey	Toolo (BM)	22/11/2019
Debbie O'Connor	Creative Fringe (BM)	22/11/2019
Spokesperson	Penrith Symphony; PYO; Choirs (P)	25/11/2019
Meg Benson	Music Hunter (BM)	25/11/2019

Katrina Sandbach	WSU (ex P)	2/12/2019
Christine Glasson	Real festival (P)	3/12/2019
Thomas Biddle *	Rocknbob Media House (P)	1/4/2020
Brendan Byrne*	Shadow Wolves (P)	5/4/2020
Natalie Cheney	Nauti Studios (BM)	11/10/2018

*Interviewed by Penrith City Council staff.

Appendix 3: Researcher Biographies

Professor Deborah Stevenson

Professor of Sociology & Urban Cultural Research, Institute for Culture and Society

Deborah Stevenson’s research interests are focused on arts and cultural policy, cities and urban life, and place and identity. Recent publications include: *The City (Polity)*, *Cities of Culture: A Global Perspective* (Routledge) and *Tourist Cultures: Identity, Place and the Traveller* (co-authored, Sage). She is co-editor of the *Research Companion to Planning and Culture* (Ashgate) and *The Australian Art Field: Practices, Policies, Markets* (Routledge). She is the co-author of *The City after Dark: Cultural Planning and Governance of the Night-time Economy in Parramatta*. Professor Stevenson is an editor of the *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events* and a member of the editorial boards of leading journals, including the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. Her research program has been supported by external funding and as a Chief Investigator on numerous ARC grants including *Recalibrating Culture: Production, Consumption, Policy; UNESCO and the Making of Global Cultural Policy*, and *Australian Cultural Fields: National and Transnational Dynamics*. Professor Stevenson has worked as government advisor including to the Ministerial Reference Group for the NSW Arts and Cultural Policy Framework.

Emeritus Professor David Rowe

Emeritus Professor of Cultural Research, Institute for Culture and Society

David is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and the Australian Academy of the Humanities; Honorary Professor, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Bath; and Research Associate, Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy, SOAS University of London. Formerly he was Director of the Cultural Institutions and Practices Research Centre, The University of Newcastle and the Centre for Cultural Research, WSU. His latest book is *Making Culture: Commercialisation, Transnationalism, and the State of Nationing in Contemporary Australia* (co-edited, 2018). David’s work is translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Korean, Spanish, and Turkish. He is a consultant to public and private organisations and an expert media commentator on social and cultural matters. His awards include: the *Australian Sociological Association Distinguished Service to Sociology Award* (2018), Top Researcher in the Field of Communication, *The Australian’s 2019 Research Magazine* and the 2020 International Communication Association Sport Communication Interest Group Legacy Award for lifetime achievement.

Distinguished Professor Ien Ang

Professor of Cultural Studies, Institute for Culture and Society

Distinguished Professor Ien Ang was the founding Director of the Institute for Culture and Society. She is one of the leaders in cultural studies worldwide, with work dealing broadly with cultural flow and exchange in our globalised world. Her most recent books include *The Art of Engagement: Culture, Collaboration, Innovation* (2011, co-edited with Elaine Lally and Kay Anderson) and *Chinatown Unbound: Trans-Asian Urbanism in the Age of China* (2019, co-authored with Kay Anderson, Andrea Del Bono, Donald McNeill and Alexandra Wong). She has produced numerous commissioned research reports and collaborated with a range of organisations, including the Australia Council, the Australian Council for Learned Academies, NSW Migration Heritage Centre, The Art Gallery of New South Wales, The Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), the Museum of Contemporary Art, the City of Sydney, Inner West Council, Penrith City Council and Blue Mountains City Council. She currently serves as a member of the research working group for *A New Approach (ANA)*, a new independent think tank championing effective investment and return in Australian arts and culture.

Dr Cecelia Cmielewski

Research Officer and Program Manager Cultural Infrastructure program, Institute for Culture and Society

Cecelia Cmielewski completed her doctorate at the Institute for Culture and Society (ICS) in 2018. Her thesis researches the relationship between the experiences and practices of artists of non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) and key arts policies through a consideration of the roles of creative and organisational leadership. Her research interests address inclusion in the creative sectors with a focus on the relationship between creative production and cultural policies.

She has undertaken cultural infrastructure research for the City of Parramatta, Penrith City Council and Blue Mountains City Council, and was a contributing author on *Recalibrating Culture:*

Production, Consumption, Policy (2017). Cecelia held senior policy and research roles at the Australia Council for the Arts between 1998 and 2011. Cecelia is a contributing researcher on the ARC project *UNESCO and the Making of Global Cultural Policy: Culture, Economy*. Her most recent publication is "Arts Activism in a Cultural Policy Void" in *The Australian Art Field. Practices, Policies, Institutions* (2020 co-edited by Tony Bennett, Deborah Stevenson, Fred Myers and Tamara Winikoff).

Dr Phillip Raymond Mar

Research Associate, Institute for Culture and Society

Dr. Phillip Mar completed his doctorate in social anthropology from Sydney University in 2002. His doctoral research was on immigration from Hong Kong and the transnational experience of urban spaces. He has lectured in sociology and anthropology at Sydney University, UNSW and Macquarie University. Phillip has worked as a researcher with the Institute for Culture and Society at Western Sydney University since 2008. He has made research contributions in the areas of:

Social impacts of art and cultural programs; collaborative practices and contemporary art; cultural policy; diversity in the arts case studies; Australian cultural diplomacy in the Indo Pacific; museums and urban regeneration; gender inclusion in screen industries; regionalism in the Asia Pacific; young people and refugee settlement; educational outcomes of sports programs in western Sydney and Sydney's Chinatown. Dr Mar's research interests also include migration studies, transnational Chinese communities, urban space, the politics of emotion, violence and contestation, and conceptions of control in social theory and theories of knowledge.