

**BUILDING AUDIENCES:  
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER  
ARTS**

**AUGUST 2015**

## **Building Audiences: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art**

August 2015

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K Bridson, M Clarke, J Evans, B Martin, R Rentschler and T White (2015) *Building Audiences: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*, Sydney, Australia Council for the Arts.

Commissioning editors from the Australia Council for the Arts: Lydia Miller, Rachel Smithies and Amanda Coombe.

The project was commissioned by the Australia Council for the Arts and funding partners include Australia Council for the Arts; Faculty of Business and Law and Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University; Melbourne Business School, The University of Melbourne.

The Australia Council for the Arts, Deakin University and the Melbourne Business School respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and culture. Readers should be aware that this report may contain references to members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who have passed away.

We would like to acknowledge the Country where this research took place. We acknowledge the ancestral lands and traditional owners of the Wurundjeri, Wathaurung, Euroa, Turrbul, Larrakia, Kurna, and Noongar peoples. We pay respect to the elders of these communities both past, present and future for the privilege to produce this research on their lands.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this report is to scope existing knowledge on audience development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and the key issues and opportunities present in the arts ecology.

Key questions addressed include:

- What factors are present in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology that facilitate and impede audience development?
- What currently motivates audiences to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts?
- What are the barriers (perceived or real) to audiences engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts?
- What is currently being done to address audience development in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology?
- What opportunities exist to develop audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts?

This project examines Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts audiences from multiple perspectives. A mixed method approach is adopted and utilises multiple data sources: existing secondary information, interviews and consultation forums with key stakeholders, profiles of successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts institutions and artists, and focus groups with engaged and potential audiences for visual art, music, dance, theatre and literature.

The findings reveal that stakeholders, potential audiences and engaged audiences have a positive image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. The most dominant characteristics for stakeholders relate to the diverse contemporary nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. For audiences, they have formed a positive image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, however, it is important to note that this image is still quite stereotypical.

In general, audiences express a strong interest in attending and participating in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art experiences. There are six key motivators for audiences to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art experiences: an attraction to stories, contemporary experiences, unique experiences, personal connections, and a desire for cultural insight and for deeper understanding. There are a number of challenges that currently inhibit the development of audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. These challenges relate to perceived barriers for audiences to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art: uncertainty, awareness and image. They also include aspects of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait arts ecology that limit organisations' and artists' ability to develop audiences: capacity, representation and support.

The research identifies a range of approaches to developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in Australia. The strategies can be categorized under six key areas: capacity and career development, representation and authenticity, presentation, awareness, image and uncertainty. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander arts ecology is on a positive pathway to leveraging audience motivations and addressing the barriers to their engagement.

## BACKGROUND

Australians live in a unique country with over 70,000 years of Indigenous story-telling. This presents a diverse cultural and creative mix that is dynamic and highly valuable to Australian social and economic life. The diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia is seen in its many countries and language groups. This diversity of language and country is articulated clearly in the various art and cultural forms seen throughout Australia. The extensive heritage of cultural production has been traditionally manifest in many forms such as painting, wood carving, rock etching, weaving, body adorning and performative practices. This tradition has been retained and at the same time, transformed into an exciting contemporary artistic paradigm. Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture is seen in new media, contemporary dance, literature, acrylic paint on canvas and glass work, for example. The importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural production within Australia is evident in its ability to inform and contribute to a collective cultural identity for all Australians.

As expressions of the world's longest continuing living culture, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are globally unique. They contribute significant social, cultural and economic benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities and are seen as an important part of the broader Australian culture.<sup>i</sup> Estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology suggest it contributes a disproportionately large component to the Australian economy ENREF 1<sup>ii</sup> with Indigenous visual artists producing some of Australia's most valuable works of art<sup>iii</sup>.

*Arts in daily life: Australian participation in the arts* reveals that '92 percent of Australians believe that "Indigenous arts are an important part of Australia's culture"<sup>iv</sup>. Two-thirds (64%) of Australians have a strong or growing interest in art created or performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples<sup>v</sup>. However, this interest currently translates into only a quarter (24%) having attended an arts program in the last year that was created or performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples<sup>vi</sup>. There is a significant gap, therefore, between audience attitudes and behaviour. This presents an important opportunity to explore the current issues affecting audience development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts.

## DEFINITIONS

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander:* Refers to the original inhabitants of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. In the literature referred to in this report, 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' are often used interchangeably. When using a direct quotation from another author's work, the usage reflects that of the original author.

*Art:* Refers to creative activities, outputs, products and events. Within this report the focus is on art for broader public consumption. The term art is used to refer to a range of art forms including theatre, dance, literature, music and visual art. Visual art refers inclusively to arts and crafts. It is important to recognize that the status of 'art' in Aboriginal culture deviates from Western understandings. Art is a Western word and among the various languages in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia, the word 'art' is not at all common. The most vital aspect of Indigenous ideology, in an Indigenous framework, is that all aspects of culture, including art, do not stand alone. For example, art does not exist in isolation from life and culture. Art plays an important role in cultural life.

Throughout our research, contributors use the terms 'traditional' and 'contemporary' in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Contributors use the term traditional in reference to methods, images or stories that they understand as historically used within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. They use contemporary in reference to art that is produced in contemporary times, that tells contemporary stories and to art that may use a range of methods of art practice and production. It is also recognised that contemporary stories can be told via traditional mediums and vice versa.

*Arts ecology:* Refers to the interactions, interconnections and interdependencies among the network of members that shape the production, preservation, presentation and demand for the arts in society as a whole. The ecology encompasses practitioners, producers, presenters, sponsors, advocates, policymakers, commercial organisations, non-profit organisations, informal organisations, audiences and participants.

*Mainstream:* Many contributors to the research use the term 'mainstream'. They use mainstream to refer to both a type of presenting organisation and to a type of audience segment. Contributors use the term mainstream to define presenting organisations that present a range of art and stories representing people and communities from various cultural backgrounds. These organisations are not controlled and managed solely by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and they are not solely presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. In contrast, contributors define an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or Indigenous presenting organisation as an organisation that is controlled and managed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and that primarily presents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Mainstream audiences are those that seek experiences and engagement with the art presented by mainstream presenting organisations and do not specifically engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art presenting organisations.

*Arts participation:* Encapsulates the broad variety of ways a person can participate with arts events, programs, artists or organisations including and extending beyond being a receptive audience member<sup>vii</sup>. For example, creating works of art in workshops, co-curating community programs and exhibitions and audience participation in dance events

*Audiences:* Refers to people who view, read, listen to, or otherwise attend, engage and participate with art, artists, arts activities and events and arts organisations in ways that do not involve creating the initial art product.

*Audience development:* A part of a marketing strategy referring to the methods that arts organisations employ to attract, maintain or increase audiences for their programs.

*Audience engagement:* Is concerned with creating opportunities for extended engagement with and impact from an arts event, activity, artist or organisation<sup>viii</sup>.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This project scopes existing knowledge on audience development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and the key issues and opportunities present in the arts ecology.

Key questions addressed include:

- What factors are present in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology that facilitate and impede audience development?
- What currently motivates audiences to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts?
- What are the barriers (perceived or real) to audiences engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts?
- What is currently being done to address audience development in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology?
- What opportunities exist to develop audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts?

This project is limited to understanding, where possible, how the issues and challenges related to audience development in Indigenous arts differ along the following dimensions:

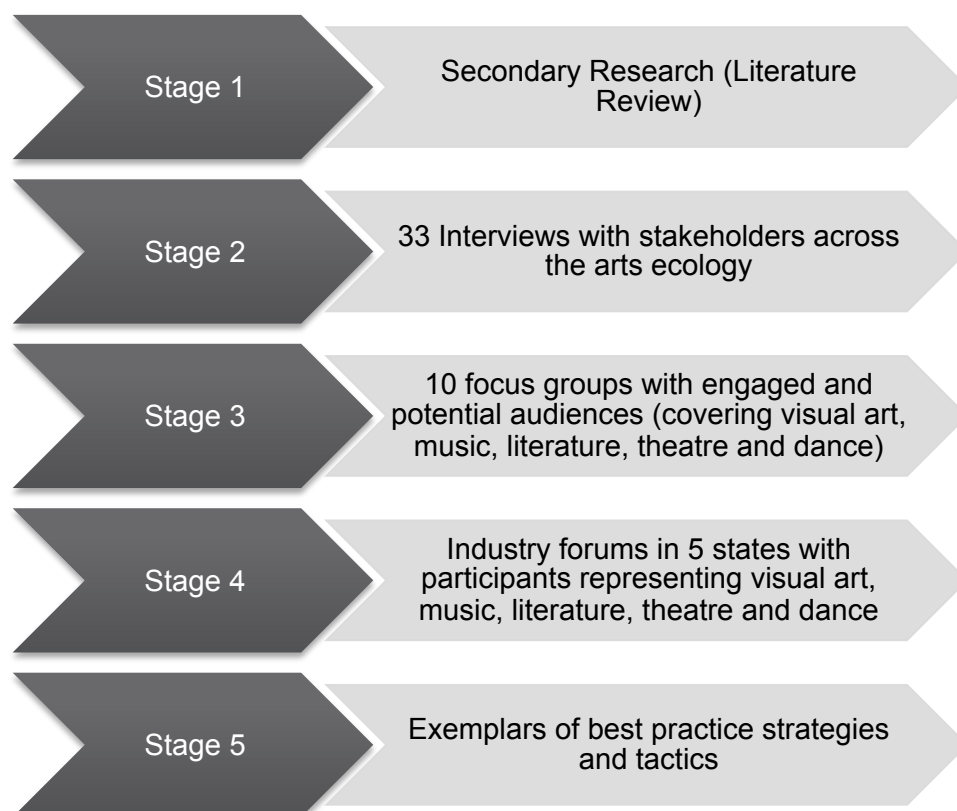
- Art forms including visual art, music, literature, theatre and dance.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences and non-Indigenous audiences.
- For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and organisations, and for mainstream organisations.



## RESEARCH APPROACH

This project examines Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts audiences from multiple perspectives. A mixed method approach is adopted and utilises multiple data sources: existing secondary information, key industry informants, engaged and potential audiences (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and arts institutions (across art forms and by state), to enable triangulation of evidence in meeting the research objectives (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research Approach



**Secondary research**, in the form of a literature review, includes academic and grey literature on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology. It includes relevant literature on audience attendance and participation. Existing literature on the network of members involved in the ecosystem and the issues that influence audience development is also reviewed. The purpose of the literature review is to document existing knowledge and identify gaps in knowledge to explore in more detail in subsequent research stages of the project.

**Stakeholder interviews** are conducted with a broad range of stakeholders canvassing the perceptions and knowledge of members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology. Stakeholders interviewed include a range from artists to producers to presenting organisations and advocacy bodies (profiles of participants are detailed in Tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1 Stakeholder profile by art form and organisation/role**

	Cross art form	Dance	Visual art	Literature	Music	Theatre
Practitioner		1		2	1	
Independent: Producer/Presenter /Manager			1			
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presenting organisation/company/ev ent staff member		2				1
Mainstream presenting organisation/company staff member (general program)	1 2	2	2	1		2 1
Mainstream presenting organisation/company staff member (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program or role)	3		1			
Education (University, Museum)				1		
Supporting organisation staff member	2 1	1	1	1		
Advocacy body <sup>1</sup>			2		1	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>					

Key to Table 1	Stakeholder who identifies as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person	Indicated in black
	Stakeholder who does not identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person	Indicated in blue
	Unknown if the stakeholder identifies as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person	Indicated in green

<sup>1</sup> Advocacy for either Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts or for all practitioners of a specific art form.

**Table 2 Stakeholder profile by art form and location**

	Cross art form	Dance	Visual art	Literature	Music	Theatre	TOTAL
NT	1	1	2				4
WA			1	1			2
NSW <sup>2</sup>	4	4	4	2	1		15
ACT							
VIC	3				1	1	5
QLD		1				3	4
SA	1			1			2
TAS				1			1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>33</b>

In order to capture the motivations and inhibitors to attendance and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander art across art forms we conducted a series of exploratory **focus groups**. This complements the literature review and stakeholder interview findings by introducing the voice of the audience into the project. The project reports on ten focus groups with engaged and potential audiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre, dance, music, literature and visual arts. Participants were selected based on their attendance behaviours and interest in specific art forms. They were characterised as either current attendees or potential attendees. The majority of focus group participants were non-Indigenous. Profiles of focus group participants are provided in Table 3.

**Table 3 Focus group participants profile by art form**

	Dance	Visual art	Literature	Music	Theatre
<b>Engaged audience members</b>	8	8	6	7	8
<b>Potential audience members</b>	8	8	8	7	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76</b>				

<sup>2</sup> NSW has a high representation due to the State and Federal government bodies included in the research.

A series of five **forums** (Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and a combined forum for Victoria/Tasmania/South Australia) were convened as a means of workshopping the drivers and inhibitors of successful audience development. To ensure that the voices of many members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology are represented in the research, the forums include a cross-section of participants from artists to presenting organisations, educators and government agencies, marketers and distributors (see Tables 4 and 5 for a profile of forum participants). Forum participants were asked to reflect on the stakeholder and focus group findings and identify the key challenges and opportunities in developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts in Australia. They were also asked to prioritise the issues and identify recommendations that would help develop audiences. The forums ensure that the project reflects a national focus for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology and fully explores issues from multiple perspectives.

**Table 4 Forum participant profile by art form and organisation/role**

	Cross art form	Dance	Visual art	Literature	Music	Theatre	Other
<b>Practitioner</b>			4	1	1	1	
<b>Independent Producer/Presenter /Manager</b>		1	1	1	3		
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presenting organisation/company/ event staff member</b>	2	1			5	2	
<b>Mainstream presenting organisation/company staff member (general program)</b>	7		7	4		7	
<b>Mainstream presenting organisation/company staff member (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program or role)</b>	1			2			
<b>State/Local government</b>	17						
<b>Advocacy body</b>		3	3	2		1	
<b>Education (University, Museum)</b>	1		1	1			2
<b>Other</b>	1						2
<b>TOTAL BY ART FORM</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>

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**TOTAL****81**

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**Table 5 Forum participant profile by art form and location of residence**

	Cross art form	Dance	Visual art	Literature	Music	Theatre	Other	TOTAL
<b>NT</b>	6	1	6		2	1	2	18
<b>WA</b>	8		5			3	1	17
<b>NSW</b>	4		1	2		4		11
<b>ACT</b>				2				2
<b>VIC</b>	4		3		5	1	1	14
<b>QLD</b>	4	1		5	1	1		12
<b>SA</b>	3			1	1	1		6
<b>TAS</b>			1					1
<b>TOTAL</b>	29	2	16	10	9	11	4	<b>81</b>

Finally, the project **profiles** artists and organisations that succeed in addressing the challenges of audience development. Six key challenges are identified based on the secondary and exploratory research. These include: capacity building, representation and authenticity in the ecosystem, mainstream presenting, reducing audience uncertainty, shifting the image, and awareness and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. The profiles provide a vehicle by which best practice strategies and tactics can be shared across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecosystem (see Table 6 for profile of best practice exemplars). A case study of each is presented in full in Appendix A

**Table 6 Best practice exemplar profiles**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Art form</b>	<b>State</b>
<b>Performing Lines</b>	Theatre/Dance	Multi
<b>Museum of Contemporary Art</b>	Visual art	NSW
<b>Black Diggers (QPAC)</b>	Theatre	QLD
<b>Cairns Indigenous Art Fair</b>	Multi	QLD
<b>Clancestry</b>	Music	QLD
<b>Yirra Yaakin</b>	Theatre	WA
<b>Kim Scott</b>	Literature	WA
<b>Country Arts SA</b>	Multi	SA
<b>Desart</b>	Visual art	NT
<b>Anita Heiss</b>	Music	VIC
<b>Ilbijerri</b>	Theatre	VIC
<b>Bangarra</b>	Dance	NSW
<b>Deborah Bonar</b>	Visual Art	WA

## SECTION 1: CURRENT STATE OF PLAY



## INTRODUCTION

This section of the report presents the current state of play presented by existing research and literature relevant to developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Using existing academic and grey literature, the section:

- introduces the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology;
- discusses existing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art;
- discusses challenges and opportunities for developing audiences across the five art form areas of visual arts, music, dance, theatre and literature;
- presents conclusions across the five art form areas.

Five key themes that relate to developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art are identified:

1. **Presentation and promotion:** Greater recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and more mainstream opportunities are sought. Increased and more strategic marketing and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is needed to boost recognition.
2. **Image:** Some non-Indigenous audiences have preconceptions and perceptions about the content of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art that may inhibit their engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Marketing that focuses on audience education is a recognised need.
3. **Capacity:** Enhanced professional development and business skills for artists and arts organisations are proposed by several reports. Existing research identifies professional development needs in areas ranging from arts practice skills to business and commercial skills in production, research, marketing and promotion. Better access to potential support is also required including awareness of funding opportunities, assistance with grant applications and flexible application processes.
4. **Representation:** Greater representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the arts ecology is sought. Research highlights that in some art forms limited numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed in roles throughout the arts ecology (with practitioners being the exception). Moreover, some reports suggest a lack of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and arts practice by non-Indigenous members in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology.
5. **Lack of research and data:** There is a lack of research and statistical data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, marketing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

## ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ARTS ECOLOGY

There are opportunities and challenges in all facets of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology that impact audience development. The ecology encompasses practitioners, producers, presenters, sponsors, advocates, policymakers, commercial organisations, non-profit organisations and informal organisations. This all occurs within a broader cultural context involving connections to community, language, heritage, land, sea, customary law and cultural and intellectual property rights. All have a role to play in developing audiences, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous. Given the level of interdependence between the various members in the ecology, no one member of the ecology can develop audiences in isolation. Existing research indicates that the key activities within the ecology include<sup>ix</sup>:

- Creation: The creation of works of art by practitioners.
- Production: The production of works of art, including external input from actors such as editors or support staff (such as recording staff).
- Support and Advocacy: The financial and professional development support for artists and arts organisations.
- Distribution: The facilitation of works of art being made public.
- Promotion: The marketing, promoting, publicising and showcasing of works of art.
- Consumption: The attendance, participation or engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

The creation component (cultural basis of content) is identified as the strongest component and the distribution and promotion as the weakest components of the ecology<sup>x</sup>. In the context of visual arts, 'the great strengths lie in the cultural basis of the product—it's design and production. Linking these to audience...is failing at the promotional stage'<sup>xi</sup>. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on understanding and supporting the distribution and marketing aspect of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts ecology<sup>xii</sup>. The diversity of the supply chain connecting visual art to audiences has also been noted as adding complexity to the process<sup>xiii</sup>. The implication of these types of complexities across the broad arts ecology then becomes a critical component in developing understanding of how to increase audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

## AUDIENCES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ART IN AUSTRALIA

'Nine in 10 Australians agree that Indigenous arts are an important part of Australian culture' and sixty-four percent (64%) of Australians have a strong or growing interest in Indigenous arts<sup>xiv</sup>. However, this interest is currently translating into only twenty-four percent (24%) of respondents having attended an arts program in the last year that was created or performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. There is an increase from 2009 in people who display a strong interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts<sup>xv</sup> and in people who attend arts activities created or performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander artists<sup>xvi</sup>. Arts Participation data also tells us something about who this current audience is.

Compared to those who have not attended, this audience is a younger, slightly more likely to be female and are more likely to be living in a regional area. Attendees are more likely to have an undergraduate or postgraduate university degree and, on average, earn slightly more. Those who are culturally or linguistically diverse, have a disability and those who are retired are less likely to have attended in the past 12 months. Arts Participation data also gives us insight into potential audiences.

A potential audience group that could be engaged easier than others, are those who have a strong or growing interest in Indigenous Arts but who have not attended in the last 12 months. This group is more likely to be female, more likely to be unemployed or retired and slightly more likely to identify as someone with a disability. Finding ways to overcome common access barriers for these groups could improve the likelihood of their interest converting to behaviour. A full profile of both groups can be seen in Appendix B.

Approximately a third of respondents in the *Arts in Daily Life* report have low or declining interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art<sup>xvii</sup>. The report notes that while 'not everybody was interested in attending; people continue to agree that Indigenous arts are important'<sup>xviii</sup>. Moreover, only forty-six percent (46%) agree that 'Indigenous arts are well represented in Australia'<sup>xix</sup>. The report also reveals that people in regional areas are more likely to attend a range of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander arts events than those living in metropolitan areas<sup>xx</sup>.

Research identifies a number of core audience segments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences, the international tourist market, the domestic consumer market, the public sector or government market and breakthrough markets (for example Elite international markets such as Sothebys)<sup>xxi</sup>. This reflects the findings in other existing research, which makes general reference to audiences in terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, non-Indigenous, mainstream, domestic, tourist or international. At different times Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art may be produced for either specific or multiple audience segments<sup>xxii</sup>.

The contemporary markets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art 'are complex and highly differentiated'<sup>xxiii</sup>. For instance, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts market segments can be 'defined by products, regions and market value', in which those 'segments are entangled, presenting considerable challenges in defining and understanding market forces and commercial and cultural strategies in play'<sup>xxiv</sup>. Understanding such complex markets is, therefore, a challenging task.

# DEVELOPING AUDIENCES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ART

Despite the rich diversity, complexity and contribution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art market, coupled with the relative length of the 'modern marketing of Indigenous art'<sup>xxv</sup>, there is surprisingly limited research into developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Reports outline a general lack of systematic and cohesive data concerning the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art market, with others acknowledging a lack of research directly into the marketing of or audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art<sup>xxvi</sup>.

Research appears to be focussed on the supply side of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. It is primarily about strategies for the promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and the opportunities and barriers perceived by practitioners as to promotion and marketing. As one paper notes:

*The consumption of Aboriginal and Torres art is a complex and entangled zone with competing and contrasting interests. It is also a zone rich with research possibility, though—despite the volumes of commentary—the only existing research into consumer and audience behaviour falls into two general categories: the analysis of auction data...and to an even more limited extent, audience surveys...Both of these approaches offer narrow and specific sets of information, but little insight into the motivations and triggers for consumers and audiences*<sup>xxvii</sup>.

Our review also identifies minimal primary research specifically looking at the behaviours and motivations of audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art<sup>xxviii</sup>. It is acknowledged that such research may exist in unpublished formats and that the gaps in existing knowledge present opportunities for future research to explore. However, research into building audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, particularly from the demand side, in published documentation, is clearly in its early stages.

Most related research focuses on a single art form. As such, the following sections discuss literature that provides insights into developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts in specific art forms—visual art, music, dance, theatre and literature.

## Visual arts

Research explains that, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have created visual art in 'ceremonial and secular contexts and produced and traded artefacts for millennia'<sup>xxix</sup>, that the emergence of the contemporary marketing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art was consolidated in the 1970s<sup>xxx</sup>. There is some consensus with this view across other explorations<sup>xxxi</sup>. Research also notes that it was during the 1980s that greater recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art emerged in public art institutions<sup>xxxii</sup>. Research argues that 'Aboriginal visual art has been one uncontested and spectacular area of success in Indigenous affairs in the last 30 years'<sup>xxxiii</sup>. In recent years a contraction of the market is noted by studies alongside an increase in production 'across remote Australia'<sup>xxxiv</sup>. In addition, issues concerning provenance of works of art, intellectual property rights and lack of research into the market are also acknowledged<sup>xxxv</sup>.

Investigations to date identify a number of important issues related to developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art:

- Demand: Audiences (including buyers) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art are often discussed in reference to tourist (domestic and international), domestic and international segments<sup>xxxvi</sup>. A study of three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art fairs and interviews with primary market consumers and sellers identifies some important demand factors<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Focussing on art produced in remote Australia, it was found that ‘while some buyers are interested in the ethical dimensions of provenance, other criteria—such as aesthetic appeal or price—often win out at the point of purchase’<sup>xxxviii</sup>.
- o International demand: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art in the international market is seen to have garnered considerable success. ‘Indigenous visual art has become arguably Australia’s most significant cultural export’<sup>xxxix</sup>. There exists an ‘undeniable international interest’ in international touring exhibitions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art<sup>xl</sup>. *Indigenous Art—Securing the Future Senate Inquiry* also notes opportunity in this segment and views tourist markets as an area of considerable market activity and potential growth<sup>xli</sup>.
  - o Domestic demand: Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in the domestic market is considered to be less developed than other markets<sup>xlii</sup>. One suggestion in existing research is that ‘apathy’ toward ‘national cultural treasures’ often exists due to ‘the relative availability and seeming everydayness’ detracting from domestic interest<sup>xliii</sup>. Evaluations of recent events such as the 2011 Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF), however, point to growing attendance<sup>xliv</sup>. Attendees who were surveyed following CIAF responded positively to the Fair and indicate that attending enhanced their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture. It also finds that audiences like the diversity of the event and the opportunity to personally meet artists<sup>xlv</sup>. The CIAF evaluation indicates the Fair pursues a marketing strategy that targets specific audiences identified in previous fairs and that develops the online presence of the Fair<sup>xlvi</sup>.
- Lack of research: Studies suggest that there is little examination of the consumption of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art, and that which does exist is often centred on auction results and the high end market<sup>xlvii</sup>. One author explains that ‘In the price tiers of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art market, in which most of these products are bought, this [consumer] understanding is ad hoc and anecdotal, with stakeholders operating according to widely held but unproven assumptions’<sup>xlviii</sup>.
- Image: Research argues that audiences’ ‘misperceptions’ about what constitutes ‘authentic’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art undermines audience interest in a wide variety of forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art, such as that created by south-eastern Australian artists<sup>xlix</sup>. It is proposed that audience education and ‘appropriate marketing [to] dispel perceptions at public, institutional and government levels’<sup>l</sup> are essential in changing the image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art.
- Presentation: For opportunities to increase audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art, research suggests that:

*Exhibitions at major art museums are an efficient way of introducing the general public to the history and complexity of contemporary Indigenous art. Successful exhibitions create audiences for, and engender respect for, the work of Indigenous Australian artists and increase audiences for contemporary art generally<sup>li</sup>.*

In the same report, it is later noted that within major art events, 'There is a need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the management of such events, commensurate with the contribution of Indigenous visual artists to the events and to Australian culture generally<sup>liii</sup> .

- New technologies: Digital media and technology are considered potential opportunities to increase audiences. Opportunities afforded to artists and art organisations when using new media technologies (i.e. social media) to increase audiences and reach a more global market are highlighted<sup>liii</sup>. The use of digital imagery, video of exhibitions and interviews with artists, websites and social media can all be used to foster deeper levels of audience engagement.

## Music

Studies describe how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music takes many forms and is accessed in varied contexts—both in terms of geography and format<sup>liv</sup>. The *Indigenous Contemporary Music Plan (The Plan)* acknowledges that within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music, there is 'Community-based music activity and participation in the commercial music industry'. *The Plan* further notes that there is a link between the two and additional social and cultural links between tradition and music<sup>lv</sup>. *The Plan* comments that, 'Indigenous contemporary music attracts large Indigenous audiences and a keen following amongst non-Indigenous domestic and international audiences, but systematic distribution methods are not in place to build on this audience interest and demand<sup>lvi</sup>'. The *Song Cycles* report also states that there needs to be better access and promotion to wider audiences and mainstream markets<sup>lvii</sup> .

These two reports (*Indigenous Contemporary Music Plan* and *Song Cycles*) identify a number of issues related to developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music<sup>lviii</sup> :

- Lack of research: There is a limited national level research or statistical data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contemporary music and a more systematic approach is required.
- Capacity: *Song Cycles* states that largest impediment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists 'accessing public funds is the kind of "functional literacy" demanded of artists by governments'.<sup>lix</sup> The report further explains that, 'Practical issues reported to us include barriers presented by public programs only being available to people with high levels of proficiency in text based English and programs that require substantial preparation time'.<sup>lx</sup> The report recommends more flexible and better supported access to funding programs. It argues that many musicians in remote communities 'were not aware of the existence of funding programs'<sup>lxi</sup> relating to career development. *The Plan* also notes the need to 'improve business skills in the Indigenous music sector...to help artists grow and survive in the music industry'.<sup>lxii</sup>
- Presentation: There is a need to improve touring circuits, with both reports proposing developing opportunities for community level, regional or international touring circuits.

Constraints around resourcing and infrastructure along with other factors were to compound the challenges associated with touring. One report indicated that some musicians reported experiencing discrimination by certain venues<sup>lxiii</sup>. Demand for more opportunities to hear Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander live in remote communities was noted by one report<sup>lxiv</sup>. The reports propose opportunities also exist to leverage audiences and share expertise through music festivals, collaborations and enhanced networks.

- Promotion: *Song Cycles* notes that a ‘lack of investment and planning in promoting is a significant barrier to extending the reach of Indigenous music to a wider audience’<sup>lxv</sup>. *The Plan* suggests that potential opportunities exist to leverage new media and community radio and greater promotion on Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and National Indigenous Television (NITV).

## Dance

While limited research is identified pertaining to audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance specifically, two key reports—*Creating Pathways* and *Darung Muru dance pathways*—provide insight into the area<sup>lxvi</sup>. In addition, *Scoping the Future*<sup>lxvii</sup> discussed in the *Theatre* section, refers to both theatre and dance and, as such, the findings relating to audience development have implications for both sectors. The two key reports find:

- Promotion: The need for greater recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance through enhanced promotion. At a NSW forum, ‘participants felt strongly that Aboriginal dance that was “culturally NSW” was under-recognised and expressed a strong desire for local stories and dance to be actively promoted...and more visible’<sup>lxviii</sup>. This was supported by *Creating Pathways* which reports that there is a lack of exposure to contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and mainstream audiences<sup>lxix</sup>.
- Capacity: The need for enhanced professional development opportunities in business skills and greater availability, appropriateness and awareness of funding opportunities. One report specifically outlines issues around ‘equity and access’ for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dancers regarding funding opportunities, proposing alternative application models, more flexible funding opportunities and assistance with grant application processes<sup>lxx</sup>.

## Theatre

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre companies draw on both traditional and contemporary practice to produce work for the ‘specific interests of their communities’ and to explore cutting edge contemporary performance<sup>lxxi</sup>. ‘Contemporary Indigenous theatre is produced for multiple and various audiences; sometimes for specific or general Indigenous communities and sometimes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities’<sup>lxxii</sup>. This description is supported by other research, which highlights that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing artists ‘seek to maintain the community and political foundations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre’ and others utilise professional development opportunities to develop innovative work for domestic and international audiences<sup>lxxiii</sup>. ‘Practitioners now appeal to a wide range of audiences’<sup>lxxiv</sup>. Examinations to date find:

- Lack of research: Despite the diversity of audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre, there has been little specific primary research into these audiences. ‘Primary research with audiences for Indigenous theatre is scarce, which further contributes to the underdeveloped marketing strategies of Indigenous companies’<sup>lxxv</sup>. Demand for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is increasing both domestically and internationally and audience demand is an area requiring research and ongoing consultation<sup>lxxvi</sup>. One report finds that while prior reports point to strong demand for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing arts from both domestic and International audiences, they provide little guidance as to how this may be met<sup>lxxvii</sup>.
- Representation: There is a recognised need for ‘Indigenous performers and producers to be strongly involved in audience education strategies. Audience education needs to be linked to Indigenous knowledge and control’<sup>lxxviii</sup>. There is a lack of cultural understanding in parts of the broader ecology about how to appropriately develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre (in terms of producing and presenting)<sup>lxxix</sup>. Cross-cultural and cultural awareness training is suggested along with increasing employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the broader theatre sector<sup>lxxx</sup>.
- Image: Primary research into building audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing arts uses the case study of Kooemba Jdarra<sup>lxxxi</sup>. Undertaking focus groups, the study found that audiences expect traditional productions ‘featuring spirituality and mythology’, or productions focussing on injustices and social issues in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience<sup>lxxxii</sup>. The researchers found that while the focus group participants acknowledged the importance of the latter and believe that theatre is a good medium to learn about such issues, they also felt it could alienate potential theatre goers seeking to be entertained and be a barrier to non-Indigenous audience development<sup>lxxxiii</sup>.
- Presentation and promotion: Research argues that ‘Indigenous theatre needs to urgently grow the understanding of its importance within the Australian theatre experience...It must engage in...strategies for national recognition’<sup>lxxxiv</sup>. Strategic alliances and collaborations with mainstream organisations, further research and strategic content development to increase mainstream audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre are proposed by existing research<sup>lxxxv</sup>. In addition to developing community and education projects, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners seek greater mainstream recognition<sup>lxxxvi</sup>. Current studies argue that marketing and promotion is required to educate audiences and increase recognition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing arts sector<sup>lxxxvii</sup>. Research also proposes a range of strategies to enhance opportunities to reach broader audiences. Strategies include building understanding of existing and potential audiences; strengthening relationships and partnerships with wider performing arts sector and members in the ecology; and leveraging arts markets, showcasing events and mainstream media to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre to national and international markets<sup>lxxxviii</sup>. Strategies proposed by other research include the programming of performances that both challenge and entertain and the provision of information and opportunities for post-performance discussion of material that may be confronting<sup>lxxxix</sup>.



## Literature

Existing research finds that while there is a range of broad issues of importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers, the marketing, distribution, appropriate reviewing of books, and developing audiences are ‘important factors in growing Aboriginal authorship and readership’<sup>xc</sup>. *To tell my story* and *Dhuuluu-Yala To Talk Straight* provide insight into the key issues<sup>xc</sup>:

- Promotion: Research suggests that getting published is the first impediment to reaching readers and finds that publishers’ lack of awareness about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and writing is seen to lead to works not getting published<sup>xcii</sup>. Other research finds that publishing houses often assume there is a lack of audience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writing<sup>xciii</sup>. ‘As a result of the assumption that the “reading public” is not interested in works by Aboriginal authors, the lack of profile given to Aboriginal works contributes to a general lack of recognition and appreciation of Aboriginal writers’<sup>xciv</sup>. The text further explains that, ‘members of the general community often comment to me that they want to read books by Aboriginal authors, but they simply don’t know who those authors are’<sup>xcv</sup>.
- Image: One text considers if the commercial success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works is in part impeded by the perception of some non-Indigenous audiences that works are more confrontational and challenging<sup>xcvi</sup>. To illustrate this point, the success of Sally Morgan’s *My Place* is compared to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works that the author explained explored issues such as discrimination or difficult life experiences. The author states, ‘These works have not had near the same success as Morgan’s work, arguably because their content and strong Aboriginal identification were more challenging to potential readers.’<sup>xcvii</sup>
- Representation: A great difficulty faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers is getting published ‘in a form which they believe maintains the integrity of their work, and returns a reasonable remuneration’<sup>xcviii</sup>. Both texts report that there needs to be greater numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations across the writing industry—as reviewers, editors and publishers—to enhance marketing and distribution. For example, one study has found many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers feel that non-Indigenous reviewers may have a limited understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writing, which has implications for a book reaching an audience.<sup>xcix</sup>
- Presentation: A contributor to one report notes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writing is marketable to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers and non-Indigenous readers across both domestic and international markets<sup>c</sup>. Both texts identify festivals as potential opportunities to leverage and develop audiences. Recent initiatives such as RealBlack<sup>ci</sup>, an initiative resulting from the Indigenous Theatre Forum, also provide the opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art to be showcased.

## KEY POINTS

Existing research recognises the great diversity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, its creation, purpose and audience. However, more diverse opportunities for presenting art and connecting with other practitioners are important issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners. Greater recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and more mainstream opportunities are sought.

Strategic marketing is particularly important in light of the challenges relating to audience preconceptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Some non-Indigenous audiences may have expectations and perceptions about the content of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art that may inhibit their engagement. Marketing that focusses on audience education is a recognised need, but it must be based on Indigenous knowledge and autonomy

Existing exploration calls for enhanced professional development and business skills for artists and arts organisations. Moreover, improved access to potential support is required to enhance awareness of funding opportunities, assistance with grant applications and flexible application processes.

Studies also indicate a desire for greater representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the various functions in the arts ecology. This representation is critical to the development of audiences who seek an authentic unmediated experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre, dance, music, literature and visual art.

There is a consistent lack of research and insight into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and the marketing of and audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Research pertaining to audience is limited across all art forms, but is particularly weak in relation to barriers to audience attendance and engagement.

## SECTION 2: STAKEHOLDER VOICE

## **INTRODUCTION**

This section of the report presents the stakeholder voice. The section identifies five key areas related to audience development as described by 33 stakeholders:

1. Image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.
2. Audience motivations for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.
3. Challenges to building audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.
4. Opportunities for building audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.
5. Issues specific to each of the five art form areas.



*Part of Indigenous culture, art and the expression of art is such a huge part of our lives and it's an artistic expression and culture that's embedded into the heritage. So we can't escape the artistic nature of our culture because it's so embedded (D2).*

## **KEY POINTS**

Stakeholders recognise the role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art plays in the cultural narrative of our nation.

The strong image is of a diverse, contemporary, connected, community-oriented, celebratory, challenging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology.

## 2. PERCEIVED AUDIENCE MOTIVATIONS FOR ENGAGING WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ART

In discussing audience motivations for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, many stakeholders point to a growing interest:

*What I'm detecting is a trend towards a growing want; a growing appetite; for wanting to engage with our history and to know our stories, our Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories. Australia, as a nation, as a white, western nation, is a very young nation, and hasn't come to terms with its past...The only way forward is to acknowledge the truth... And theatre is a platform for this process that we are going through as a nation. There's a maturation of ourselves as a country and our identity. I am feeling this incredible demand for the work (T1).*

Another stakeholder expresses how critical the current time is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art:

*The major trend is finally having a voice and being recognised for it and, I think, it's just emerging. So I think we're at a pivotal time where there needs to be stronger support for developing that (CAFS8).*

From a stakeholder perspective, there are a range of motivations for audiences to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Some stakeholders note that there may be differences in motivations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences and non-Indigenous audiences:

*There's curiosity, it's actually an education, it's an enjoyment, it's a particular entertainment they like it. There are probably the main three things I would say and that's non-Indigenous. I think Indigenous would come purely because of entertainment and support (CAFS5).*

Stakeholders' understandings of audience motivations for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art are broadly grouped into three categories: seeking a unique experience, motivations through connections and learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and stories. Stakeholders' perceptions of audience motivations are closely aligned with the motivations expressed by audiences in the focus group research.

### Attraction to unique experience

Many stakeholders feel that a motivator for audiences to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is because it represents a unique and distinct voice. Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is a way of experiencing that voice.

*I think the other motivator, especially for international audiences but also in Australia, is a sense of saying how is this country different to any other country? What makes it distinctive in its Aboriginal voice, in its Indigenous voice, is distinctive to this particular country and, therefore, I want to experience it (T4).*

Several stakeholders link audience interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art to its unique heritage. As one stakeholder states: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is part of ‘the oldest living culture in the world’ (L2). Another stakeholder explains:

*I think the motivation is this sense of being part of this unique part of Australia and a culture—it’s unique in the world really—that you would have something that would survive so long (SO4).*

### **Motivation through connections**

Familiarity and connections to other people are seen as a strong motivator for audiences to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art:

*Community. If someone knows someone who’s in a show here or part of that fashion event we recently had, it will be filled, we’ll be completely sold out. There’s definitely a huge community aspect to having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts happening here (T3).*

Similarly, stakeholders observe that word-of-mouth about an art event or activity by someone who has already experienced that event or activity is a motivation for others to engage:

*It’s word of mouth, I think if people come along and they’ve really enjoyed it then they’ll tell their family or they’ll tell their friends and it feels like they’ve given me the OK that it’s a really good play and a good place to go and they really enjoyed the experience. It’s almost a validation that it’s OK to go; it’s an endorsement (T5).*

### **Desire for cultural insight**

The desire to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and stories is considered by stakeholders as a powerful motivator for non-Indigenous audiences:

*I think curiosity and a search for some knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture...I think art is an accessible way for people to understand Aboriginal culture and understand Australian history in a meaningful way (V2).*

Another stakeholder notes that, for audiences who have limited experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture, art is a pathway for those audiences to engage:

*I guess a lot of people across the country don’t really have that much of a first-hand experience with Aboriginal people, or even more so, an in-depth understanding of Aboriginal culture. Visual arts plays a really strong role in that regard...I think families probably use Aboriginal art as a good way to introduce their children to that sort of culture (V8).*

Some participants propose that broader shifts in Australian society with people ‘becoming more considered about the world around them’ (CAFS8) may be driving a desire to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and culture.

*A lot of Australians want to engage with these stories now and want to embrace it. We all want to get to the same place. We all want to live in a country that celebrates and embraces...our rich Indigenous culture—the oldest living culture on this planet (T1).*



## **KEY POINTS**

Stakeholders believe that audiences are attracted to unique experiences. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art presents audiences with diverse opportunities to interact with the world's oldest living culture.

Indigenous audiences are strongly motivated to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art by their community connections. This highlights the importance of representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers across the arts ecosystem.

### 3. PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholders indicate a number of challenges to developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. These challenges relate to barriers to engagement and to the capacity of organisations and artists to develop audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

#### Uncertainty

Stakeholders suggest that audiences may have uncertainties about engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and that this may limit their motivation to engage:

*What if it's about behaviours of people? What if it's about the space? What if it's about people being unsure about their engagement with the arts? That's not ticketing, that's not car parks, it's not retiming performances. That's a valid discourse that we need to have with potential audiences to enable them to feel very comfortable in that space (SO2).*

Some stakeholders feel that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may have uncertainties about attending mainstream venues. They discuss the desire to make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel 'comfortable in our venue' (D5), 'to link in and encourage people to come' (T3), and 'making organisations or institutions safe for Indigenous communities and audiences' (SO6). Other stakeholders note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do attend mainstream venues for community nights. A stakeholder describes the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mainstream organisations as a proactive and positive approach to address this challenge:

*They've employed an Indigenous person who produces work and he also acts as an Indigenous consultant when they've got an Indigenous production on. And it encourages the theatre right across the board whether it be the audience, the people that actually work within [the theatre] itself, the staff at the theatre from the front of house right through to the artistic director. They embrace Aboriginal people in the communities, so it means we get an audience going along to these things. It's no longer for non-Indigenous people. So that's something good that's happening (CAFS1).*

Several stakeholders discuss the barriers stemming from non-Indigenous audiences' preconceptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art:

*The biggest obstacle is this big issue stuff. The general Australian out there—anything that's got the word 'Aboriginal' on it, they assume that they're going to either get brow-beaten, or it's going to be Didgeridoo, one stick, one leg up, ochre traditional thing. They already think they know what they are going to get and they don't like it. And, that's a huge challenge (T1).*

A lack of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and art is a potential barrier to non-Indigenous people's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. A stakeholder discusses this in reference to images:

*If I take some of these images, which are actually about cultural storylines within country and their level of history and dreaming around them, that is overwhelming for a non-Indigenous audience because they don't know. And the element about non-Indigenous audiences is they don't like saying they don't know because it's about status anxiety (SO2).*

Some stakeholders also comment that non-Indigenous audiences may feel that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art activities or events may only be intended for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people:

*It was kind of said at the time...that the general population didn't feel a great sort of response to going to an Aboriginal festival like that. They felt it was going to be only for Aboriginal people perhaps (V8).*

## **Awareness**

Challenges relating to the presentation and visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art are introduced by stakeholders. Many stakeholders feel that there is a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art being presented or distributed. Discussing visual art, one stakeholder explains:

*The lack of opportunities or platforms for our artists to exhibit their work to its full potential; not enough 'space' in the state galleries, little touring opportunity internationally; low levels of support for artist run/art centre organisations (V3).*

Limited distribution and presentation are considered particularly prevalent in the mainstream context or by major presenting organisations or publishers, which has implications for reaching broader audiences. Regarding literature, one stakeholder states:

*Aboriginal books do not appear in the major outlets where most people buy their books. So they're not seen, they're not visible, they're not part of the big conversation that's happening in bookshops, so I think that's a challenge (L4).*

Limited distribution and programming is attributed to risk aversion on the part of distributors and presenters:

*It's that willingness to—across all the other forms as well—but the willingness to take a risk on something that's slightly less known. So barriers, we've got barriers in that (D1).*

Another stakeholder agrees but feels that the risk aversion relates to the capacity of the presenting organisations:

*That often comes down to a lack of capacity. The programmers or presenters who, quite often are employed by local government, so they might be in charge of the local pool or garbage collection as well as the local venue. Often their capacity to reach a new audience or work with producers to change perceptions of their audience around Indigenous work is really limited. And quite often their capacity to engage in culturally relevant and appropriate marketing is really limited. And quite often they don't have a relationship with their local Indigenous community (SO6).*

Some stakeholders note that non-Indigenous art workers may not have a nuanced enough understanding of the cultural context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art nor a confidence in their own understanding of protocols in order to present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. One stakeholder explains: *'There is a great desire for many organisations to be doing good work in Aboriginal communities, but they find it difficult to find an inroad in how to do that'* (V8). Another comments:

*Reasonably informed as arts workers are, very willing but often fearful of making protocol mistakes, that's generally what you find out there in the sector, people are very willing but they just are worried if I step this way will I step on a toe (SO4).*

Several stakeholders note the need for greater exposure to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art for presenters and distributors but also for other gatekeepers in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology:

*There are good books out there and people don't know about them. And I'm talking people like librarians in English departments whose job is to know this stuff and they don't know it (L4).*

The above quote also suggests that while there is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art available, there may be a lack of audience awareness of what is available and a need for greater marketing to enhance the visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

*We've got people publishing books all the time. We've got dozens of texts coming out every year across genres, but you wouldn't know that (L4).*

Greater signposting of where to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is required for audiences:

*Where would you buy Indigenous music for instance? Where would you go to see a contemporary dance group here?... I think the signposting and having clearer knowledge of where to go and how to find it (CAFS8).*

## **Capacity**

The capacity of organisations to effectively market Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and to develop audiences is discussed by stakeholders. As one stakeholder suggests:

*Practically, I think without the employment of staff to activate spaces and activate and develop programming, you're not allowing for the growth of your audience. If you've only got one Aboriginal staff working at the organisation you're in that's been the same way for five or 10 years, it's not possible to grow an audience (V4).*

Some stakeholders note that to meet that challenge of audience development, the ecology requires greater skills development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners in the marketing frameworks of the mainstream art sector.

*The frameworks that we have been working in, not just in art forms but also in marketing or publicity and promotions, the formulas, the methods and the practices of all of that, they're not familiar to an Indigenous practitioner so that's why I say there's a lack of skills in relation to those fields (D3).*

The implementation of initiatives to enhance the marketing capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners and companies is positive and successful. One stakeholder explains:

*We have done some...very small little pilot interventions in...helping Indigenous artist leaders and companies start to do market scoping. What we find is that with very small intervention, which is some learning and development and going out into the field, they come back with very targeted programs and then become very competitive. And, people start programming them because they know they exist (SO5).*

Stakeholders point to the need to enhance the availability and accessibility of educational opportunities and career pathways for potential and existing arts practitioners in order to strengthen the ecology. A stakeholder explains that it is:

*...about maintaining consistency with the kind of training, skills development...also that there's an opportunity afterwards, so there's a kind of a skills development and those kinds of things, but making sure that there's somewhere to continue the training (CAFS5).*

## **Representation**

Stakeholders explain that there are limited numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers within key areas of the ecology:

*We identified that there is a significant gap in Indigenous people administering—beyond the creation—so the production, the distribution, touring, the buying and selling. So that's an issue in terms of cultural protocols. When you think about Indigenous ways of being and knowing and doing, it does require an Indigenous person to produce and tour that work... If we develop more Indigenous presenters that would be beneficial. But we also have to have the audience development strategy that comes along with it. I think that's a key component of the supply chain that we are totally missing. We don't have it. We don't have Indigenous audience developers (SO6).*

One stakeholder explains that the management and marketing of much Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is often by non-Indigenous people and that there are broad implications resulting from this for practitioners:

*Most Indigenous artists are still at the beck and call of the non-Indigenous artists and companies...To get a show, to build a career, often you are being curated by a non-Indigenous person. Now that could be a wonderful benevolent dictator, it could be a carpetbagger who just wants to make lots of money out of you, there's so many different ways, but the gatekeepers of your career are still not people who are sensitive to the cultural understandings of why you make the work and where it comes from (T4).*

Another stakeholder agrees and notes that this has a significant impact on the way that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is marketed:

*I think the key challenge has always been about audience and in marketing to target audiences and even secondary audiences because what we don't have are skilled marketing personnel who understand Indigenous art to adequately promote that (D3).*

## Support

Support is another challenge raised for the ecology with stakeholders believing that, while there is audience interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, there is not adequate resourcing to support organisations and artists to meet that interest.

*There seems to be a lot of interest and how that translates into demand we don't quite know yet, but there seems to be a lot of interest in the work nationally and internationally and that we, as artists, are still paddling in the shallow end of some of the work. The resourcing that I've seen within Indigenous projects, they just literally pale in view of what non-Indigenous projects get... There's this kind of disproportionate sense of people are interested, but they're not accessing it, the resources are not flowing to it and therefore we don't see the high profile work... You can see that the opportunities are there, but why aren't we taking them up, what's going on? (CAFS8).*

Stakeholders also observe that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners may have difficulty in accessing support or funding through current application processes:

*It's really difficult with a small staff and, while we would love to teach them [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists] how to market themselves effectively and I would love to write the funding proposals for them, it's impossible. So in a way I wish that we had more capacity or organisation up here that was in between us, as a presentation venue, that they could go to as a first step maybe (T5).*

Discussing project-based work, one stakeholder notes that the consequences for project development due to the context of much Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work is not addressed in current funding frameworks:

*Most Indigenous artists are working in a deeply culturally engaged space and have to honour and acknowledge deep levels of protocol, it's quite often a very different type of development experience than perhaps other cultural groups or even non-Indigenous artists, there's a lot more to take into consideration so the process is long or longer and it's community engaged even if it may seem like it's not. Even if it's one person on stage at the end, there's a whole community engaged process that happens in the lead up to presenting that work and, therefore, the mechanisms to support creative development for Indigenous artists are not as accessible for people as they could be (CAFS1).*

## KEY POINTS

Challenges to developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art relate to both audience issues and some weaknesses in the arts ecosystem.

Audience uncertainty can be addressed by changes to other aspects of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecosystem. Increasing the visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art across a range of mediums will improve familiarity and awareness which, in turn, will help to reduce uncertainty.

The presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art requires a deep understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural protocols. The integrity and authenticity of the presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art requires a higher degree of representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all roles and functions in the arts ecosystem.

An important challenge for audience development is the limited number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers in the ecosystem. Corresponding challenges relate to skills development, funding and opportunities for career advancement.



## 4. OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP AUDIENCES

While all stakeholders identify challenges within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology, a number of stakeholders also indicate a sense of progress and optimism across many areas. One stakeholder explains that progress is evident in *'the relationships that are being built...There are initiatives...There's people out there who want the work. ...Evidencing this significant shift happening'* (T1).

Stakeholders identify a greater sense of empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners and communities. Stakeholders note, for example, that *'artists were really starting to take control'* (M3) and *'the top projects were all sort of Aboriginal projects. Really well thought of projects as well, with really strong input from Aboriginal arts workers and communities'* (V8). Another stakeholder claims: *'I think the grassroots. I think the Indigenous community themselves have become a lot stronger and I think that's a powerful part and it will spiral up'* (CAFS8).

This sense of optimism is also found in the fact that several stakeholders feel that there is progress in the ecology regarding the availability of quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art to present and also audience interest in that work. Despite the desire on the part of many stakeholders to increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in the arts industry, there is also a sense that this has been improving:

*I think that's exciting to me as an Aboriginal arts professional, because 10 years ago or 15 or 20 years ago, you used to count the number of curators on one hand, well two or three really, but now we've got to the point where there are opportunities—there's still challenges as well, we're still nowhere near where we'd like to be—but there are opportunities for arts professionals to bridge art and support one another through our arts community and to branch that into areas of education, curation and other departments within our organisation* (V4).

Stakeholders identify a number of opportunities with the potential to develop audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. These include both existing and new approaches. Strategies relate to audience education, connecting art with audiences, positioning, leveraging relationships and targeting specific audience or market segments.

### Audience education

A key opportunity is audience education about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture for non-Indigenous people. Such strategies may address barriers that relate to a lack of knowledge about the diversity or cultural context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art:

*I try to highlight Aboriginal art isn't just one particular style or one particular aesthetic and by highlighting the different types of works we've got, just gives people a bit more of an understanding around what's happening today and the diversity of that. Hopefully it just allows people to broaden their understanding of contemporary art practice and what that means to them* (V4).

Many stakeholders believe that greater audience education is needed to expose audiences to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and ensure that audiences understand what they are experiencing: *'How do people really understand what they're*



seeing? *I think education is really integral*' (L2). Several stakeholders feel that a broader discussion around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is required:

*If there was one thing I could do, find outstanding, relevant, cultural exchange. There's a gap in understanding and a need to fill that gap with language and... It's the discussion; it's broadening the scope of the dialogue and the discourse* (V3).

Stakeholders feel that audiences need to be involved in this discussion in order to motivate them to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art:

*What's missing is audiences talking about the work and understanding it and there's a kind of paralysis of integrity around these things. People think they don't understand Indigenous art and therefore won't do anything about it* (T4).

Another stakeholder explains that avenues for audiences to actively participate and interact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art enhances understanding, motivation and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art:

*I think at a general visual arts level, so if you were just having an art show of Aboriginal art they'd just attend and look and don't fully understand. Whereas when we do projects that actually offer opportunities for people to interact and engage, people are very willing to participate and engage* (V2).

Another stakeholder explains an approach their organisation is considering to address audience preconceptions:

*I think that the direction that we're going to go in is more like a celebration because we want to showcase work that is celebrating Indigenous culture, that is funny, that celebrates our commonality from a human perspective and it's not so negative, doesn't point the finger at so much... One of the things I've been struggling with is how to encourage audiences, particularly mainstream audiences, to come in to see Indigenous works with an open mind and not come in with a preconceived, negative, political lens on* (T3).

## **Community engagement**

Connecting with audiences through community-based experiences engenders in audiences a sense of deeper engagement, investment and empowerment. Community engagement opportunities that allow audiences to become active contributors to the experience are successful in deepening engagement:

*Instead of just coming to the theatre and sitting and watching, for interaction, I think to be active and to meet, to actually hear the stories, to meet the people, to have that conversation, to sit in a room together. I think it's very different being a passive audience member to being more active and engaging in a cultural workshop or a cultural development project where you actually get to meet people instead of sitting and watching* (CAFS8).

Opportunities and initiatives for audience development that stakeholders describe include:

- involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the development and presentation of work;
- involving broader community members as participants in workshops or classes by the company or artist, who then become audience members for the company's public performance;

- having shorter performances or events that are followed by a community engagement activity;
- interacting with audience members on social media; and
- opportunities to meet and interact with artists.

One stakeholder explains how connecting with communities through community engagement workshops can develop deeper engagement:

*There is a different tier of engagement because then there's the connection to it. They feel almost a sense of, not ownership, but a sense of connection to the company. But where we don't have that kind of workshop or community workshops in place, I think the engagement is really on a superficial level where they just simply go to view theatre (D3).*

Another stakeholder notes a similarly positive approach:

*Community engagement has been a big focus of what we're trying to partner into online marketing strategies so we have seen that people are a lot more, in general across the board, a lot more responsive when there is some other aspect in which they can engage with a work rather than simply attending a show (T5).*

## Positioning

Several stakeholders discuss the positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art or practitioners according to their cultural identity:

*At the moment it seems that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work is a bit separated from...there's been a big push and a lot of support for work that is developed by and creative control is in the hands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I think that's been a very positive move and a lot of good work is starting to appear, but there isn't the sort of cross cultural work happening at the same time (D5).*

Several stakeholders provide examples of this. One explains how, in the performance context: *'There are very few Indigenous artists playing anything other than Indigenous roles on the stage so there is still typecasting with this. I see that as a challenge and a problem and that's an opportunity too'* (CAFS3). Another stakeholder feels that uncertainty about expanding to mainstream venues prevents some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts organisations from encouraging their musicians to play to audiences broader than community. This has meant that musicians *'are getting ghettoised as to audiences and it's making it hard to expand their musical vocabulary'* (M3). Another stakeholder suggests:

*We've got to see some individual artists step out of that mode, which is very interesting to see...even though they are couched in Aboriginal terms and have got cultural perspectives, that they step out of the cultural ghettoising, if you like, of Indigenous art and start to exhibit and be shown and have relationships with a broader audience, as artists not just as Aboriginal artists (T4).*

## Leveraging relationships

Stakeholders propose that capitalising on existing relationships and leveraging associations and partnerships would help to develop audiences. Stakeholders suggest that continuing to develop opportunities for connections between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

practitioners and companies would strengthen the ecology. However, stakeholders also propose:

*The greatest opportunity is capitalising on the relationships with non-Indigenous companies and practitioners and tapping into their audience bases as well. There's seems to be like a great divide between the two (D3).*

Another stakeholder comments:

*I think one of the barriers is that there is a big separation between Indigenous arts and the others. I think then you reach a point where you get your market as much as you can of people that are interested at that point. But if you start [to] open [that] a little bit and collaborate with other kinds of artists, these collaborations could expand their market in interesting ways (CAFS7).*

Presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art at mainstream festivals is seen as a potential opportunity to engage a new or broader audience and enhance the overall accessibility to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

### **Expanding specific audience segments**

Two specific audience segments are considered to have potential for strong audience growth. They are digital and online media audiences and international audiences. Stakeholders discuss the opportunities for digital and online media to present and market Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art:

*You don't have to pay the transport, it's Internet based, people can find it for themselves. I think digital and new media are by far going to prove to be the most powerful tools to express and share Indigenous culture in the future...I think the digital side of things gives a lot of ownership back to the Indigenous communities to determine their own representation and, hopefully, in turn obviously benefit from that financially and culturally (V2).*

Other stakeholders discuss harnessing the power of online media to reach audiences through marketing and promotions, in particular for a younger age group. Discussing literature, one stakeholder explains:

*I think there would probably be some good audience development opportunities in the 20 to 30 age group particularly with emerging Indigenous authors or writers and tapping into all the digital networks that are happening around that age group because they are more inclined to be on social media. There could be some great promotions that happen via different social media and blogs and online publishing and things like that (L1).*

The other audience segment that stakeholders believe has potential for expansion is reaching international audiences through international presentation and distribution work: '*I think we're really missing out on international markets*' (L4). Another comments:

*I think certainly the international market. We haven't even really gotten there in terms of pushing works through. Like there hasn't been a lot of consolidated research. There are a whole lot of places you can go where there's an affinity and connection, but where are the points for sales? We don't know yet. So that's all kind of uncharted territory (L2).*

Stakeholders give examples such as large scale international touring exhibitions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art and developing the international market for

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature. One stakeholder notes that international collaborations may be an avenue to accessing audiences, commenting: *'I think those collaborations on a global scale would be quite interesting. So when you go international, you'll always get an impact locally as well'* (CFAS7).

## KEY POINTS

There are significant opportunities to strategically build on the strengths of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology and develop audiences.

Education is seen as a major pathway to developing audiences that can overcome barriers to engagement that relate to uncertainty and a lack of knowledge about the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art experiences.

Community engagement activities that enable audiences to become active contributors to their experience may deepen the level of audience engagement. Such experiences then generate word-of-mouth marketing and help to address the lack of awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

The positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art within a mainstream and community context is critical to developing audiences. Suggestions include more colour-blind casting and more opportunities for 'main stage' or 'mainstream' performances and exhibitions.

The development of new or potential audiences could be enhanced by leveraging relationships with non-Indigenous companies and arts practitioners. Such relationships could give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists more opportunities to present their work to diverse audiences.

Opportunities also exist to develop and strengthen growing audiences. Digital and online media enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to connect directly with a wide range of audiences.

## 5. INDIVIDUAL ART FORMS

It is recognised that the development of audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art differ according to art form. The art forms are at different stages of maturity when it comes to developing audiences. Whilst there are some unique issues, many of the factors impacting audience development (motivations, opportunities and challenges) are relevant to all art forms, but in different ways and for different reasons. Stakeholders across all five art forms of visual arts, music, dance, theatre and literature highlight the importance of festivals in developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

### Visual art

Whilst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art still faces challenges in developing audiences, it is viewed as an inspiration for other arts forms:

*There was a big surge in Aboriginal visual arts over the last 20 years and I think the other art forms are using that as an example. I think because they really led the way in making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. I think that was a bit of a trailblazer and other art forms are now coming up (M3).*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art faces some unique challenges in developing audiences. Stakeholders describe it as having waning purchase levels and audiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art from art centres, but ‘with a *growing trend toward large scale exhibitions in institutions*’ (V2). It is also seen to be ‘*stronger in the international context*’ (M3) and is ‘*really strong in certain domestic regions*’ (T3). Overall, commercial sales of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art is ‘*experiencing a plateau*’ (D3).

Varied audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art are also acknowledged by stakeholders who speak of segments including tourists purchasing art and audiences of exhibitions within art institutions. Some stakeholders feel that there is a need for audiences to better understand and appreciate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art practice:

*We’re working with a lot of other entities up here to make sure that visitors to the area see that there is a lot more on offer than just the paintings and the dotted boomerangs that you see on the main strip in tourist towns (T5).*

### Music

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music has enjoyed strong success in recent years. Practitioners such as Gurrumul, Jessica Mauboy, Dan Sultan, Griggs and Thelma Plum are all cited as examples of commercial success. The quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians is also mentioned: ‘*Music seems to do quite good. There are high quality Indigenous musicians*’ (SO5). Music is considered very accessible to audiences due to modes of access, such as radio and personal purchase:

*I think something like music is very accessible...its online, iTunes, you can see it live, it’s on television...I think music is the most accessible (CAFS5).*

One stakeholder notes that audiences can also be passively introduced to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music through commercial radio without actively seeking the engagement:

*Music gets played daily, not only on community radio stations, but mainstream radio stations as well. So there's a huge audience being brought up even if they're not aware that they are listening to a particular Indigenous band at the time (L4).*

Another stakeholder explains that despite the success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music, they do not feel it is a gateway to audiences engaging with other forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. It is felt that it is timely to leverage the existing success of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music because, *'I think audience development is the right time to grab it. You need to grab it and develop it now; it's really in that exciting stage'* (M3).

## **Dance**

Stakeholders feel that there is interesting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance being developed and produced. Practitioners and companies that are mentioned include Bangarra, Vicky van Hout, the Gary Lang Company and Ochre Contemporary Dance Company. Despite some success stories, stakeholders discuss difficulties in the support structures for dance:

*There is no lack of talent but there is a lack of supporting mechanisms and career sustainability in dance... The dance works are not made in isolation, they're quite resource heavy because works are made on the body. You have to bring people together and pay them and you have to have access to safe dance spaces and so those things are not necessarily readily available (SO1).*

Many stakeholders feel that audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance are underdeveloped:

*I think it's a relatively underdeveloped audience for Indigenous dance, but you'd say that about all contemporary dance in Australia. It's not articulate or growing strongly enough and I think Aboriginal dance is in that same vein. It's still trying to find where its audience is (T4).*

Some stakeholders feel that there is a lack of interest or awareness of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance beyond Bangarra, whom many stakeholders acknowledge have *'pioneered'* (SO6) or *'driven'* (M3) the visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance in the broader community:

*Bangarra has played a big role in getting traction and visibility for independent Indigenous dancers. People might go and see Bangarra, but they don't necessarily...go and see emerging artists or new artists in their dance works so that's interesting (CFAS1).*

## **Theatre**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre is viewed as a mature art form, with many stakeholders pointing to progress in the amount of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre being produced:

*It's just such an obvious time of change and I think definitely for the better, but momentum has built up so much that I'd say that four or five years ago we would have said it was very difficult to access contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and theatre. I would say now that's totally turned around (D5).*



Another stakeholder identifies a significant increase in the popularity of the work with audiences, stating: *'There is absolutely no doubt that a piece of Indigenous theatre is more popular than it was say 10 years ago'* (D4). One stakeholder notes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories are told in a broad theatre context and that it is an art form that enables active participation from audiences:

*The very nature of theatre is that it's not just there for an aesthetic beauty or aesthetic understanding. It's basically there to throw ideas out there in a collective way and that an audience and performers have that kind of dialogue back and forward about crucial ideas or particular stories that have not found an audience before. So they are interested in a kind of critical debate and often a broader social debate about the nature of the stories* (T4).

## Literature

Stakeholders discuss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature in regard to the quality of work being produced and to barriers to readership:

*With literature, most of the Miles Franklin winners over the last ten years have been Aboriginal writers or people writing about Aboriginal Australia. So, they're kind of trends that probably aren't recognised, just how strong Aboriginal representation is* (L2).

One stakeholder highlights that the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature is its ability to tell diverse stories:

*I think in literature, just because of storytelling, there are a number of individuals who show quite diverse images of Indigenous Australia through their storytelling and they're articulate individuals* (T4).

Visibility and literacy are two critical barriers that stakeholders note in relation to developing audiences. Visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature is discussed in relation to limited mainstream exposure: *'You still don't see things like texts by Aboriginal Studies Press or IAD Press in a normal bookshop and certainly not in Kmart and Target'* (L4). Distribution is an important driver of awareness, particularly when promotion budgets are small. The limited shelf presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature in mainstream outlets presents a significant obstacle to developing audiences.

Literacy issues also present a challenge to developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences. As one stakeholder explains, *'amongst our own communities, there is such a high level of illiteracy that, until that illiteracy is addressed, we'll never know what the market is within our own communities'* (L2). This is a unique issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature. Developing audiences for this art form is partly dependent on addressing the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Festivals

Beyond the traditional five art form areas, festivals are also introduced by stakeholders as a current area of audience interest: *'I think there's also a bit more of an interest in festivals...a bit of a resurgent interest in festivals generally, Indigenous festivals'* (D3). Another stakeholder expresses a similar sentiment, stating: *'We have brilliant Indigenous festivals across Australia that are amazing. We have a burgeoning focus'* (SO5).

A stakeholder explains that festivals are an opportunity for audiences to engage with a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and practitioners. The stakeholder also notes that festivals may initiate future audience engagement:

*We might have people who go to that concert. They also go to a workshop, they attend the family day and one or two exhibitions, they go to a talk and might even go and see something new that they haven't seen before because it's on in the performance space or they'll see a film. It depends on the environment so definitely those who come to that festival for example are more deeply engaged and will spend the day and visit all the different things and then potentially and hopefully come back to all...Indigenous presentations we have throughout the year (CAFS3).*

Some stakeholders describe an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander festivals managed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people:

*I know festivals have been around a long time, but as far as getting indigenous people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, actually producing it and running it themselves in their communities or in the cities wherever they come from is a new thing. It's a new phenomenon I reckon (CSF1).*

Another stakeholder notes that while there is 'absolutely a commitment to Indigenous programming in all the major festivals' (CAFS3), there are challenges associated with this:

*There is absolutely a platform in those major festivals environment and they think in some ways that they're delivering a significant Indigenous program but very few of the works actually are written by Indigenous writers and made by Indigenous theatre makers for example. And so although I think we're definitely moving forward in making a statement through Indigenous contemporary arts and culture on main stages, I think we still don't have it right in the way that we present non Indigenous writers who are writing about Indigenous stories (CAFS3).*



## KEY POINTS

Visual art faces some challenges in reinvigorating the commercial art market, but is strengthening its presence in large scale exhibitions.

Music has enjoyed great success in recent years with a number of breakthrough performers. Music has the potential to be an accessible entry point for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

Dance has great strength regarding the depth and quality of dance being developed and performed. The challenge relates to the underdeveloped audience and the need to build awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance.

Theatre is viewed as a mature art form, which has made significant inroads in developing audiences. There is a great sense of optimism and a sense of momentum behind the growth and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature is particularly strong in its ability to tell diverse stories. Awareness and literacy levels, particularly in remote and regional communities, are identified as two critical challenges to developing audiences.

Festivals are identified as a major opportunity for engaged and potential audiences to experience a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Festivals that are produced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are particularly important in celebrating communities and providing people with opportunities to develop new skills.

## SECTION 3: THE VOICE OF THE AUDIENCE

## INTRODUCTION

This section of the report explores audiences' experiences with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. It considers audience perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and describes how engaged audiences perceive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in comparison to that of potential audiences. It is structured around engaged and potential audiences' key motivations and barriers to their engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art for each of the art form areas. The implications of factors for attracting audiences and increasing audience engagement are also considered.

Participants were selected based on their attendance behaviours and interest in specific art forms. They are characterised as either engaged audiences or potential audiences. While some participants may identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, the unit of analysis is their attendance to the art form rather than their cultural identity. The majority of participants were non-Indigenous. Engaged audiences are frequent attendees of their preferred art form and are attracted to and actively seek out Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art experiences. Potential audiences are regular attendees of their preferred art form. They have an inherent interest in the arts, but have limited experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

## THE IMAGE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ART

A strong positive image is essential when competing for the attention of arts audiences today. Image influences audience perceptions of and the formation of attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. These, in turn, affect audiences' attendance choices and levels of engagement. The image that audiences have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art differs greatly according to their engagement level. Figures 3 and 4 below are *word clouds* depicting audience perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. In the word clouds, the most frequently used words to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art across art forms are depicted—the larger the word, the more often it is used by audience members. Figure 3 is a word cloud of the words engaged audiences use to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Figure 4 is a word cloud of the words potential audiences use to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. By considering the key descriptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art of both engaged and potential audiences, we can begin to understand the image held by each group and how this impacts their expectations, attendance and level of engagement.

## ENGAGED AUDIENCE

Audiences that are actively engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art have formed a positive, rich and diverse image. It is important to note, however, that this image is still quite stereotypical, especially when compared to the image held by stakeholders.

“Proud” is one of the most frequently used words across all art form focus groups. Proud, in this context, refers to two aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. First, engaged audiences are proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and its place in the broader landscape of Australian art and culture. Second, engaged audiences identify the art itself as proud. Proud of its heritage, uniqueness, the stories it can tell and the diverse communities that are represented. “Storytelling” is another strong association for engaged audiences. Engaged audiences identify the unique storytelling nature of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art forms as a particular strength and something to which they are attracted.

For many engaged audiences, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is seen as embedded in traditional cultural practices, with strong associations with ceremonial practices, the didgeridoo, ochre, fire, dots, dust, protest, celebration and the Dreamtime. These associations engender a high degree of respect from engaged audiences and also create an image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art that is quite serious. Engaged audiences also recognise and value the diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. Some engaged audiences also have strong connections to the contemporary nature of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Such a strong image is formed from a range of past positive experiences, which creates an expectation and desire for more experiences in the future.



**Figure 3. Engaged audiences' image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art**

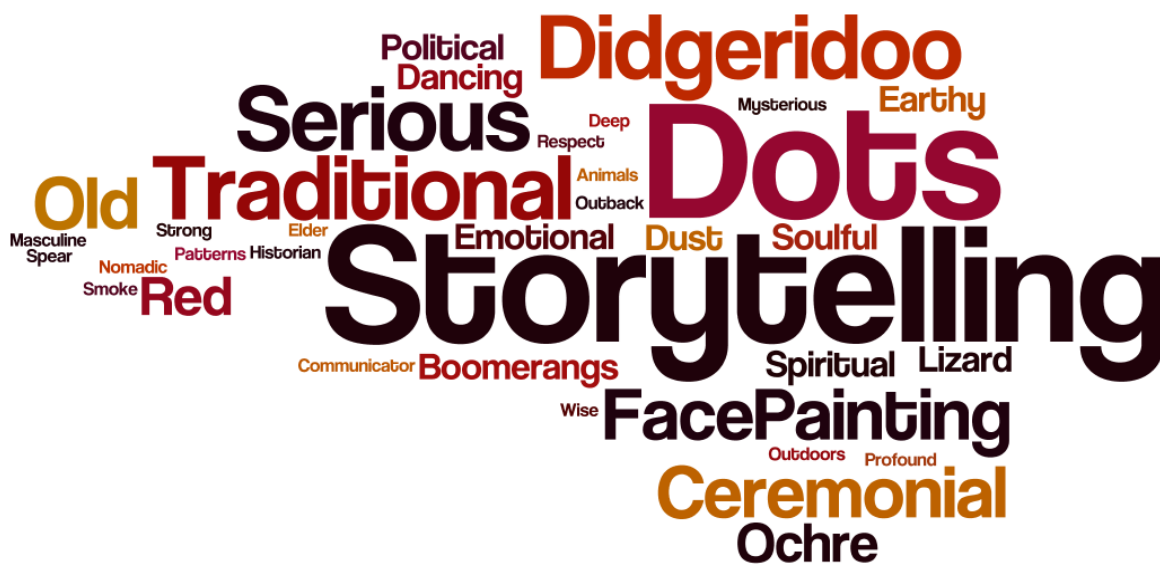
## **KEY POINTS**

Engaged audiences have the potential to be strong advocates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. However, they still need to be educated to diversify their stereotypical understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts.

The focus should be on reigniting and maintaining interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and developing the image with new experiences.

## POTENTIAL AUDIENCES' IMAGE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ART

Potential audiences have the most superficial and stereotyped image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. The strongest image they hold is about the storytelling quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Perhaps because of their limited exposure to diverse experiences, potential audiences anchor their perceptions on the ceremonial nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Such an image is linked to traditional and historical (old) cultural practices that involve the use of the didgeridoo, ochre, dots and body art. Potential audiences view such experiences as spiritual, soulful and serious. The image is positive, but lacks depth and strength.



**Figure 4. Potential audiences' image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art**

## KEY POINTS

Potential audiences have a positive, but weak image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

Potential audiences need to be encouraged to experience a wide range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art as a means of deepening or strengthening the image.

## MOTIVATIONS

Audiences express a strong interest in attending and participating in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art experiences. There are five key motivators for audiences to attend Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art experiences:

1. An attraction to stories.
2. An attraction to contemporary experiences.
3. An attraction to unique experiences.
4. A desire for cultural insight.
5. A desire for deeper understanding of an art form.

Identifying key motivations for attendance and engagement can provide members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology with a strong basis upon which to craft audience development strategies. Table 7 summarises the key motivations by art form and audience and the following discussion brings to life the voices of engaged and potential audiences.

**Table 7. Motivations by art form and audience**

	Stories	Contemporary experiences	Unique experiences	Cultural insight	Understanding
<b>Visual Arts</b>					
Engaged audience	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Potential audience	✓	-	-	-	-
<b>Music</b>					
Engaged audience	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Potential audience	✓	✓	✓	-	-
<b>Dance</b>					
Engaged audience	✓	✓	✓	-	-
Potential audience	✓	-	✓	-	✓
<b>Theatre</b>					
Engaged audience	-	-	✓	✓	✓
Potential audience	-	-	✓	✓	✓
<b>Literature</b>					
Engaged audience	✓	✓	-	✓	-
Potential audience	-	-	-	✓	✓



# 1. ATTRACTION TO STORIES

Members of all engaged audience groups appreciate and are attracted to the storytelling quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, with the exception of theatre. Theatre audiences did not explicitly cite storytelling as a motivating factor despite the narrative nature inherent in the art form. An attraction to these human stories is a strong motivator for engaged audiences to experience Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Potential audience groups for visual arts, music and dance are also attracted to the storytelling aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

## Engaged audience

Engaged visual arts audiences identify storytelling as an important component of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art and note it is a key area of interest. Engaged visual arts audiences note that, while visual art is a way for audiences to experience stories from the past, it is also a way to experience contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories. The diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art is particularly valued by engaged audiences and they see it as a reflection of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stories. One engaged audience member explains:

*You can see a difference between paintings and the artwork from each different tribe and how they tell their stories...You can go into different art communities in the north—they were all different—the techniques were different, the stories were different (VAEA).*

Some engaged visual arts audiences are attracted to the visual storytelling within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art:

*I love the story telling about the landscape because you can see that they are one with the bush and spirit. You can actually see it, see it and feel it (VAEA).*

Engaged audiences appreciate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art is a visual language for sharing stories. They are strongly attracted to this aspect of the art form, which suggests that engaged audiences are seeking a deeper experience and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and experiences through visual art. The marketing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art should, therefore, emphasise both the aesthetic and unique storytelling qualities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art.

Engaged music audiences appreciate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music is an opportunity for musicians to share their own stories. An engaged music audience member explains:

*They do take music as an opportunity to communicate about their stories and culture and so on. I think it's a very valuable avenue for communication (MEA).*

Engaged music audiences are attracted to the human stories portrayed in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music. In particular, engaged audiences value the honesty and sincerity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music:

*There's a certain amount of honesty there too, willing to share their stories. The word sophisticated is not a good word, but compared to perhaps other performing artists that honesty seems to come across, the sincerity (MEA).*

The engaged music audience notes that it is the true stories within the lyrics that make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music powerful and that they find attractive. Such honest human stories can be utilised as a valuable differentiator for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, producers, distributors and promoters.

Engaged dance audiences also value the storytelling quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. One audience member discusses what attracts them to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance: *'Storytelling, because there is probably more of that in Aboriginal dancing than a lot of other dance that you see'* (DEA). Telling stories through dance is seen as a core attribute of all dance genres, but is viewed by engaged audiences as a unique strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance:

*To me I see the dance dancing out sentences of stories, but in movement, and I find it really incredibly powerful (DEA).*

This storytelling quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance should be emphasised as a means of developing deeper levels of engagement and more frequent attendance.

Engaged literature audiences are interested in reading uniquely Australian stories. They value the experiences and stories depicted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature and this is a strong motivator to seek out Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers:

*I think what's interesting about Indigenous writers is that they have a really important story to tell, and where they've come from, where they are, this clash of identity, and all that kind of stuff. (LEA).*

Engaged audiences are interested in literature that provides them with insight into a range of areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, both historical and current. It is apparent that there is a strong appetite for Australian literature and that engaged audiences are a receptive audience for established and new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers.

## **Potential audience**

Potential audiences appreciate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art is a way to preserve and share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, experiences and stories. One potential audience member describes: *'It's like a book in other words—what we call a novel or a biography—they actually put it in art form'* (VAPA). Potential audiences are particularly attracted to the imagery and colours of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art can, therefore, leverage the powerful and accessible storytelling nature of the medium to attract potential audiences.

For many potential music audiences, it is the storytelling quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music in which they are primarily interested. Potential audiences highlight the importance of lyrics and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lyrics have a powerful narrative quality. As one audience member explains their attraction to certain music: *'It's all based around the lyrics in the songs and they do tend to tell a story don't they?'* (MPA). Emphasising the honest, human stories told through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music can attract new audiences.

Potential dance audiences are interested in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance because they expect it will incorporate storytelling. One potential audience member explains:

*If you go to the ballet or a dance you're kind of watching people that are perfecting skills, they're perfecting movements, they're looking at technique. Whereas when you go to an Aboriginal dance, I understand there will be a lot of technique, but I feel like they're more concentrated on translating the story across than they are at just perfecting a technique (DEA).*

For some potential dance audiences, a 'storyline with meaning' (DPA) is what makes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance different than other forms of dance. This can be harnessed as a powerful differentiator from other forms of dance and used to attract new audiences to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance.

## 2. ATTRACTION TO CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCES

Engaged audiences are attracted to opportunities to engage with what they perceive as *contemporary* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. These audiences recognise and appreciate the diversity of artistic expression, but are increasingly attracted to contemporary art experiences: the stories being told and the ways in which they are presented and communicated. The only exception to this is the theatre audience. Neither engaged nor potential theatre audiences emphasise the contemporary nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Theatre audiences, as is demonstrated in the following section, are motivated by the uniqueness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre and by a desire for deeper insight and understanding into Australia's oldest living culture.

### Engaged audience

Engaged visual arts audiences appreciate that visual art is a way that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories and experiences, both historical and current, can be preserved and shared. Engaged audiences also express a strong interest in what they refer to as “contemporary” Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art. For some engaged audiences, this is about a preference regarding the aesthetic of the art. One participant explains that they enjoy *‘contemporary Aboriginal art because it can be quite bright and colourful with a modern twist’* (VAEA). In this way, engaged audiences demonstrate their interest in a diversity of artistic expression and have an appetite for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island visual art across a range of mediums (i.e. painting, drawing, multimedia, photography, sculpture, ceramics etc.).

For many engaged audiences their interest in contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art relates to the contemporary stories depicted in the works of art. An engaged visual arts audience member explains that their preferred experience:

*Would probably be the gallery that does the younger and the contemporary Aboriginal artist. And giving them the opportunity to stand up and say ‘I am Aboriginal and I am proud of it and this is my art. It might not be the storytelling of a hundred years ago, but this is what I did today’* (VAEA).

Engaged audiences are motivated by a desire to experience the full range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art. They are, however, particularly motivated to engage with artists and work that captures and explores the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia today. This represents significant opportunities for presenting organisations when commissioning works and developing exhibitions and public programs.

Engaged audiences are attracted to contemporary music as part of an inherent interest in the full spectrum of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music. Specific artists mentioned include Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, Yothu Yindi, Dan Sultan, Busby Marou, Archie Roach, Kutcha Edwards with the Black Arm Band, Jessica Mauboy and Christine Anu.

Engaged audiences appreciate the combination of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander instruments with more modern instruments and music production techniques to develop a new contemporary practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art:

*It's diverse as well as far as genres and the instruments. They incorporate their traditional instruments, but they obviously use modern instruments and techniques as well, really current stuff (MEA).*

Engaged music audiences are interested in new sounds, new stories and new artists. They have an appetite for contemporary music and appreciate a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists involved in the contemporary music scene. Engaged audiences are interested in supporting established artists, but are also actively seeking out new talent. This points to a time of great opportunity for emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians to connect with audiences within their community and across Australia more broadly.

Many engaged dance audience members express a preference for experiencing what they perceive as modern or contemporary dance, rather than traditional or ceremonial Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. For some engaged dance participants, this is because they are yet to experience contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and it has the appeal of something new and different. For others, it is because they believe that contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance is exciting and evolving:

*I saw Bangarra...it was really professional and it was obviously modern contemporary dance, so it was pretty impressive. I'm glad it was, I'm glad it's gone away from the more traditional style, but it still has that flavour to it, which is important. I think they need to step away, to get away from just that simple kind of traditional dance...and that's where the edgy art world is so I think it's important (DEA).*

This presents an opportunity for dancers and dance companies to deepen the level of engagement for existing audiences and have the courage to present more contemporary works.

Engaged literature audiences are interested in contemporary stories written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors. Engaged audiences believe, however, that there is an expectation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers or authors to focus on historical material or on material that is specifically about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander experiences. One engaged audience member explains:

*I don't think Indigenous people should be limited...I think that it's focusing a lot on historical past, but not like the future. Because we're going more modern and such and I don't think there's enough emphasis on the contemporary Aboriginal literature and art (LEA).*

Despite interest by engaged audiences in such historical content, audiences are seeking stories written about the here and now by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers. Engaged audiences are attracted to contemporary Australian literature and book publishers and distributors have an opportunity to increase readership by showcasing contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature.

## **Potential audience**

Potential music audiences are attracted to a diverse range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music. They discuss a similar, although not as extensive list, as the engaged audience, including Jessica Mauboy, Dan Sultan, Yothu Yindi, Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu and Archie Roach. One potential audience member explains:

*I like a variety of Indigenous performers, rather than just traditional or just modern. Artists are all different. Some like Jessica Mauboy, they're in the mainstream part and you mentioned Dan Sultan and he's kind of country, so a variety of music (MPA).*

Potential music audiences' experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is more limited than engaged music audiences. They have generally been exposed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists that have received national attention. This exposure had ignited an interest in contemporary music, and the stories being told by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and also new artists telling new stories.

### 3. ATTRACTION TO UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

For potential and engaged audiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music, dance and theatre, the perception of the distinctive sound, energy and spirituality of these art forms is a motivating factor for their engagement.

#### Engaged audience

Engaged audiences appreciate the unique qualities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music. Audiences are motivated to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music, in part, because of its distinctive energy and performative nature (combining music and dance/performance):

*When I was saying about energy, I was thinking that they often perform and dance too as well, there seems to be that movement in performing in the songs (MAE).*

The uniqueness of the music is linked to stories told by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists through their music and the distinguishing instruments used to tell their stories. There is an opportunity to deepen the connection between engaged audiences and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music through the use of live performance.

Engaged audiences describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance performances as ‘innovative’ (DEA) and ‘completely different’ (DEA). One engaged dance audience member describes her appreciation of the Bangarra dance company for this reason:

*I just think they're innovative and fantastic to watch. I think there's a lot of symmetry and rhythm in their movement that's very engaging (DEA).*

Engaged dance audiences are passionate about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and particularly motivated to attend contemporary and experimental dance performances that are unique in style and tell unique Australian stories. The passion of such audiences can be harnessed as a source of word-of-mouth marketing to encourage new audiences to experience Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. The interest of engaged audiences can also be maintained through the production of unique innovative works of art.

Engaged theatre audiences are specifically interested in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art because they view it as a unique experience:

*I definitely find it educational and I value the opportunity to learn more about that culture, but more than anything it's just seeing something different too (TEA).*

Another engaged theatre audience member agrees, stating: ‘I like choosing something different’ (TEA). Engaged audiences believe that emphasising such unique attributes may attract new audiences to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre.

*I would imagine if you were trying to increase [audiences]...what are the unique aspects that Aboriginal theatre or performances could bring? I think they own certain sounds and noises and instruments, certain ways of dancing, colouring themselves and I think it can be the integration of those elements, which can make something unique and different and unique and different always sells (TEA).*



As this engaged audience member states, '*unique and different always sells*'. Engaged audiences are actively seeking out such experiences and value these qualities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre.

### Potential audience

Potential music audiences describe aspects of their attraction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music that relate to the uniqueness of the musical instruments, the sound and the performative nature of the music:

*I think it comes with the dance and the movement and the sound. It's a combination of the music and the dance and it's spiritual (MPA).*

When discussing how distinctive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music can be, a number of potential audiences note the spiritual or soulful nature of the music:

*I find it very soulful. I went to a festival for Indigenous people about five, six years ago and an Aboriginal guy was singing and he had the most beautiful voice...it really touched my heart. That's what I like about Aboriginal music; it's very soulful (MPA).*

It is clear that live performance is a major attraction for both engaged and potential audiences. In the case of potential audiences, providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to perform at a diverse range of festivals and events could be a key strategy to develop this audience.

Potential dance audiences have had very little experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance performances beyond festivals and cultural celebrations. However, there is general consensus amongst the group that one factor that would motivate them to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance is its uniqueness. As one potential audience member states:

*I think in terms of normal dancing I'm not amazingly interested in going to see it. I'm more into see[ing] something different, such as an Aboriginal dance, than a normal dance. But it would have to cross my path for me to go in that direction and I can't see it having done that (DPA).*

Potential dance audiences do perceive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance as '*something different*' (DPA) and this is part of the attraction. It is not, however, a strong enough motivator to outweigh this audiences' lack of awareness and uncertainty about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. This has significant implications for the marketing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance to new audiences. Messages should focus on the unique qualities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance, such as the style and stories, to attract potential audiences.

While potential theatre audiences have a more limited experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre, many are also attracted to what they perceive as its uniqueness. One potential audience member comments:

*I love experimenting with new things...for me it would be a different thing altogether and I would enjoy it because, with other shows you anticipate something, but with this one it's going to be something fresh, something very different (TPA).*



Potential theatre audiences are willing to try new productions when they are presented by companies that they have had positive experiences with in the past. There is an opportunity to attract new audiences to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre by presenting new works in venues in which traditional theatre audiences are comfortable.

## 4. DESIRE FOR CULTURAL INSIGHT

In general, engaged arts audiences across art forms have a strong aspiration to discover more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, both its historical roots and more contemporary experiences. Art in all its forms is seen as an important and valued source of cultural insight. Potential audiences lack awareness of many art forms and what is available and require pathways into greater cultural insight. Potential audiences identify art as an important means of understanding Australian history and culture, but the focus of much of their discussion was on how much they were unaware of, did not know or understand. As will be discussed, this presents significant opportunities to craft strategies that overcome such barriers to attendance and engagement.

### Engaged audience

Engaged visual arts audiences have a strong desire to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Some engaged audience members feel that pathways to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture are difficult to find. For example:

*Even in Melbourne, I mean, if you want to go and learn a bit more about Aboriginal culture, it's not that easy (VAEA).*

Visual arts is seen as an access point for people to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. One engaged audience member explains that visual art is:

*...is one way of tapping into [the] culture of Aboriginal people, I find that it is extremely difficult to find that on a daily basis here. You'd be really hard pressed to find anything Aboriginal other than a token sign (VAEA).*

A desire for cultural insight suggests that engaged visual arts audiences are seeking outcomes from their experience that extend beyond their engagement with the art. These outcomes are about increased knowledge, insight and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences and culture. This finding can inform exhibition and public program development for presenting organisations and provides a valuable way to augment the visual art experience.

Some engaged music audiences have a strong interest in gaining cultural insight through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music. Several engaged audience members recount experiences with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music that were 'powerful' (MEA) because of the knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences that was shared. One engaged audience member describes a powerful experience:

*When I was a teenager I had a CD that was a collection of different female Indigenous rappers and that was pretty powerful music...I think the lyrics were quite powerful. They were all about Indigenous issues in Australia and growing up in Australia as an Indigenous person (MEA).*

An engaged visual arts audience member also describes a similar response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music:

*I remember when I was back at school, there was a guy called Archie Roach... he spoke about the culture and the heritage. I think it really got to me because at the time I didn't*

*understand it enough...you could actually hear the pain, the emotion that he suffered during that. You could hear the colour in his voice –the emotion and the presence he has (VAEA).*

It is the experiences that afford audiences with the opportunity for rich cultural insight that engaged audiences focused on the most in our discussion. These experiences are valued by engaged audiences and they are also the experiences that they recount to others. When seeking to deepen the level of engagement and attendance of such audiences, the cultural insight embedded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music should be highlighted.

Engaged audiences acknowledge that there is potential to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre. This potential is a strong motivating factor for their engagement:

*It's very educational I find, as opposed to just your normal musical. You hear the stories and you learn about Australian culture and really how it all began (TEA).*

One engaged theatre audience member explains that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre provides a pathway to less confrontational content that they feel they may otherwise not have access to:

*I was thinking as a general rule your interaction or understanding is normally from TV or news, it's normally controversial. Whereas here you often hear about matters that are normal, mundane, average, or that are unconflictual and in theatre or play you get to hear their voice about something that doesn't necessarily have to involve a controversial subject (TEA).*

Engaged audiences are interested in learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through theatre. Their interest is not only in relation to historical insight, but an insight into a living culture. This is an important finding that can inform both the content and delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre.

Engaged literature audiences have a keen interest in diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander non-fiction that can provide cultural insight. An engaged literature audience member explains:

*I would say to sort of educate me in something that I perhaps haven't thought about. There's sort of something in me that makes me want to go and learn a bit more about something else (LEA).*

Another area that engaged audiences also show interest in is gaining cultural insight about the impact of colonisation on Australia by non-Indigenous peoples.

*Connection with the land, how they would live day-to-day if they were living in their previous manner, not so much assimilated into white culture. But also, given that they are assimilated, the effects of that on sense of identity (LEA).*

Engaged literature audiences are self-motivated learners. They have an appetite to know and understand more about both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and the lived experience today. This appetite is insatiable and there are significant opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and publishers to emphasise these aspects of the work produced. It also provides an interesting opportunity to foster deeper engagement during writers' festivals with writers sharing more of their personal experiences.

## Potential audience

Potential theatre audiences are interested in the cultural insight that is embedded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre. This audience values the opportunity to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through theatre:

*Certainly educational because you're going in and, if you're like me you don't have much knowledge, you may learn something. There will definitely be symbolism in it, but it's more just a whole new cultural experience (TPA).*

Many potential theatre audience members focus on the attraction to theatre because it is through the stories that they can learn more. As one member states: *'The stories that they tell, to learn more about culture, to just hear another perspective I think' (TEA)*. Potential theatre audiences are interested in this aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre, but are uncertain about how to access it. In order to leverage this motivation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre will need to address awareness and uncertainty issues.

Potential literature audiences also demonstrate interest in cultural insight, but lack any awareness of the authors or texts available:

*I just think in general it would be nice to know more about their culture. I know that there's the group Bangarra and I think a lot of their performances are based on their traditions and culture. But I'm not sure how much is available in books (LPA).*

There is evidence of interest in historical material alongside contemporary topics such as *'current day politics'* (LEA) and *'the stolen generation'* (LEA). Potential literature audiences also recognise literature as a pathway to obtaining cultural insight into other forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, such as visual art.

*It's more on the arts side, but books that have... like a coffee table type book with paintings and then sort of the meaning and the history with each of the paintings and the areas of the tribes where they come from, the history behind the tribes and that sort of thing. If there was more available of that sort of thing, then you'd be able to get more of history, as well as being able to know more about the artwork (LPA).*

Potential audiences are conscious of how much they do not know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. As regular readers they are accustomed to using literature, both fiction and non-fiction, as a source of cultural insight. Potential audiences are interested in using literature in this way to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. The challenge in developing this audience is in addressing awareness and image issues.

## 5. DESIRE FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

Engaged audiences across art forms have a desire to extend and deepen their engagement with and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. There are strong aspirations to know more about the context and content of the art being presented. Opportunities for greater engagement with practitioners in order to understand the motivations and background of artists and their works are sought by audiences.

### Engaged audience

The most prominent way that engaged visual arts audiences seek a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is through direct contact with the artist: either meeting artists personally or hearing them speak about their practice. As one participant explains:

*To have a connection with the artist and I find that really helps you to connect personally with what's going on, rather than just to seeing something that's in front of you and going 'well, that's was fine'. But actually connecting to people who wrote the story or the dance or music or something like that. It helps your understanding...the accessibility... I find that for me that's why I go because I can stand and talk to the artist (VAEA).*

Engaged audiences are attracted to visual art experiences that give them the opportunity to understand more about the artist and how the work is created. This desire for deeper understanding is a major motivator for engaged audiences attending public lectures, artist talks and also using online sources for research. By satisfying this need artists and presenting organisations can foster stronger relationships with engaged audiences and develop a loyal following.

Engaged theatre audiences have a strong desire for deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre. Many engaged audience members recall positive experiences with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre when activities that facilitate deeper engagement were provided:

*The most striking kind of Indigenous play is the one about Jack Charles and it was amazing because it was his life story and he was telling the story on the stage, but later on you got to meet him. He was this tiny little man who has been through all this stuff and it was almost after the show that you kind of realised the significance of what you'd just seen (TEA).*

Another engaged audience member explains that seeking deeper understanding is part of the attraction to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre:

*Aboriginal plays, they're kind of hard to describe unless you're there...the good ones you want to talk about and think it through... I find that the best things that I see are the ones where I learn more about what I saw talking about it afterwards than during the moment because each person has a different perspective and an inflection in a voice can mean so much to different people (TEA).*

Given the desire that engaged audiences have to deepen their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture, theatres could provide opportunities before and after performances for facilitated audience conversations.

## Potential audience

Potential dance audiences have uncertainties about engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. This stems from a lack of knowledge about the cultural content or context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. While these audiences did not indicate that a desire for deeper understanding or engagement is a motivator to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance, what they did indicate is that they appreciate opportunities for cultural understanding so they feel comfortable enough to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance:

*...before they did the dance they got up and explained where they were from and what the dance was going to mean and it had a lot more meaning to it for me (DPA).*

Potential dance audiences' desire for a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture relates to their perceived lack of understanding being a barrier to attendance. They are seeking opportunities that would provide them with a deeper understanding into the cultural content and context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance to help them navigate a dance performance. Such an understanding would alleviate the anxiety that some potential audience members feel about how to behave during a dance performance and how to engage in conversations about the performance.

Potential theatre audiences feel that they do not know what is culturally appropriate behaviour when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre. Potential theatre audiences have a desire for deeper cultural understanding in order to alleviate their barriers to engagement, rather than viewing cultural understanding as a potential outcome that is desired from engagement within itself. Such audiences would be attracted to theatre experiences that provide guidance for audiences prior to the performance and opportunities to ask questions before and after performances.

Potential literature audiences are interested in festivals where practitioners speak about their practice or people speak about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history:

*If they have seminars at the same time and you can also have the cultural, historical component of it. You know, we've got great strong leaders. And even having authors come out, or whoever it is from society, to get to know people. Present them, so we can hear them speak (LPA).*

Potential literature audiences are interested in both the interactivity and variety of choices offered within a multi-art form festival context. Potential audiences are attracted to opportunities for interactive participation, such as workshops or classes, either within or beyond the festival context:

*If you [are] doing a big event...on the open land and you've got a few different things, it's entertaining for the kids too, make it interactive, you know? You can paint as well, you can all sit and listen to stories, or get involvement in cooking, demonstrations for cooking (LPA).*

Such opportunities provide context for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature and enhance audience understanding. This, in turn, makes potential audiences more interested in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and literature.

## KEY POINTS

Visual arts audiences are attracted to stories; stories of Australia's landscape, history and people. Marketing communication that focuses on both the aesthetic and unique storytelling qualities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art may well attract both engaged and potential audiences.

Engaged audiences are particularly motivated to engage with artists and work that capture and explore the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia today. This represents significant opportunities for presenting organisations when commissioning works and developing exhibitions and public programs.

Engaged audiences are seeking a deeper experience and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and experiences through visual art. This desire for deeper understanding is a major motivator for engaged audiences attending public lectures, artist talks and also using online sources for research. By satisfying this need, artists and presenting organisations can foster stronger relationships with engaged audiences and develop a loyal following.

## Music

Music audiences are primarily interested in the storytelling quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music. It is the true stories within the lyrics that make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music powerful and that they find attractive. Such honest human stories predicated on lived experience can be utilised as a valuable differentiator for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, producers, distributors and promoters.

Music audiences are interested in new sounds, new stories and new artists. They have an appetite for contemporary music and are actively seeking out new talent. This is a time of great opportunity for emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians to connect with audiences within their community and across Australia more broadly.

It is the experiences that afford audiences with the opportunity for rich cultural insight that engaged audiences most value. When seeking to deepen the level of engagement and attendance of such audiences, the cultural insight embedded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music should be highlighted.

Live performance is a major attraction for both engaged and potential audiences. Providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to perform at a diverse range of festivals and events could be a key strategy to develop audiences.

## Dance

Audiences are deeply interested in the stories being told through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. For some potential dance audiences, '*a storyline with meaning*' is what makes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance different, unique and appealing. This can



be harnessed as a powerful differentiator from other forms of dance and used to attract new audiences to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance.

Engaged dance audiences are passionate about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and particularly motivated to attend contemporary and experimental dance performances that are unique in style and story. The passion of such audiences can be utilised as a source of word-of-mouth marketing to encourage new audiences to experience Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance.

## **Theatre**

As the audience states, *'unique and different always sells'*. Audiences are actively seeking out such experiences and value these qualities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre.

Potential theatre audiences are willing to try new productions when they are presented by companies that they have had positive experiences with in the past. There is an opportunity to attract new audiences to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre by presenting new works in venues in which traditional theatre audiences are comfortable.

Engaged audiences are interested in learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through theatre. Their interest is not only in relation to historical insight, but an insight into a living culture. This is an important finding that can inform both the content and delivery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre.

Audiences are attracted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre because they can gain a deeper cultural understanding through the stories that are presented. In order to leverage this motivation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre will need to address awareness and uncertainty issues.

## **Literature**

Audiences are attracted to contemporary Australian literature and book publishers and distributors have an opportunity to increase readership by showcasing established and new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers.

Engaged literature audiences are self-motivated learners. They have an appetite to know and understand more about both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and the lived experience today. To some extent, this appetite is insatiable and there are significant opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and publishers to emphasise these aspects of the work produced. It also provides an interesting opportunity to foster deeper engagement during writers' festivals with writers sharing more of their personal experiences.

As regular readers, potential audiences are accustomed to using literature as a source of cultural insight. Potential audiences are interested in using literature in this way to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

Audiences are interested in festivals, public events and programs where writers speak about their personal experiences or speak more broadly about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history.



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Audiences are interested in festivals, public events and programs where writers speak about their personal experiences or speak more broadly about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history.

## Barriers to audience engagement

There are a number of barriers to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art that have resonance for audiences across multiple art forms. While the identified barriers exist across multiple art forms, individual themes are not necessarily relevant to audiences in all art forms or to both engaged and potential audiences across art forms. Three key barriers to audience attendance and engagement are identified:

1. Awareness
2. Uncertainty
3. Image

Table 8 summarises the key barriers by art form and audience and the following discussion brings to life the voices of engaged and potential audiences in relation to these barriers.

**Table 8. Barriers by art form and audience**

	Awareness	Uncertainty	Image
<b>Visual Arts</b>			
Engaged audience	✓	✓	-
Potential audience	✓	-	-
<b>Music</b>			
Engaged audience	✓	-	-
Potential audience	✓	-	-
<b>Dance</b>			
Engaged audience	✓	-	-
Potential audience	✓	✓	✓
<b>Theatre</b>			
Engaged audience	-	✓	✓
Potential audience	-	✓	-
<b>Literature</b>			
Engaged audience	✓	-	✓
Potential audience	✓	✓	✓

## 4. AWARENESS

Awareness emerged as a key barrier across both engaged and potential audiences, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art and music. Given that there is not a critical mass of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, it is harder for the genre in general to be seen amongst the broad range of arts marketing. For some art forms, a lack of awareness is about specific events (i.e. lack of advertising). For other art forms, such as literature, it is a lack of general awareness of the art form itself and its visibility in a cluttered marketplace.

### Engaged audience

Engaged visual arts audiences perceive that there is a lack of available Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art. One engaged visual arts audience member explains that:

*There's not a lot on offer. Unless you are really looking for it, it's hard to find. It's not advertised with the same gusto as art, say, traditional Anglo-Saxon art or theatre productions (VAEA).*

Compounding engaged audience perceptions of the limited presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art, is their lack of awareness of specific art activities and events: 'Awareness is a problem' (VAEA). Some engaged audiences feel that this is due to inadequate advertising or promotion:

*Even when there's really good events on, they're not advertised. Unless you are on a mailing list or you're in that area of arts or you have a connection, you wouldn't know it's on (VAEA).*

This presents a simple means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art to further develop communication with this engaged audience. More promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art across a range of media will address this barrier to engagement.

Engaged music audiences also consider a lack of adequate promotion as a barrier to their engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music events, activities and products. One engaged audience member explains: 'You can't see something if you never know about it' (MEA). Engaged audiences note a lack of visibility in mainstream media and suggest increased visibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians on radio and in print media.

Several engaged audience members desire greater inclusion and visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians in mainstream festivals, as a way to enhance audience awareness and familiarity: 'You go to festivals they'll all be white artists and then you go to a specific Indigenous festival and then it's Indigenous artists, but otherwise you never see them intersect' (MEA).

Engaged dance audiences express a strong desire for greater recognition, visibility and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture. The group spoke about the lack of promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance to international tourists. Some audience members spoke about the celebration of Māori culture at Auckland airport

and questioned why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is not celebrated to the same extent at Australian airports:

*I flew into Auckland and when I got there, the first moment you're in Auckland...it's all about their Maori art and music...the terminal is decked out inside and you come back to Melbourne and there's nothing in there (DEA).*

Another engaged member also expresses a desire to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance more widely and accessibly promoted:

*I find a lot of interesting stuff pops up on NITV, but I think it's aimed at Indigenous people directly and unless you move it out the masses, no-one knows about it because they're not looking for stuff like that. I would like to see it on Channel 10 advertised, that's where the focus should be because they should be proud of it (DEA).*

Once again, mainstream media sources are identified as the primary tool to build awareness.

Engaged audiences attribute their lack of awareness of new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers to the limited inclusion of Indigenous writers in festivals. Another engaged audience member comments that there may be a lack of emphasis on literature within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander festivals:

*I've been to a NAIDOC Festival...they don't really emphasise a lot on literature. It's more dance and music and art, so not really words, but more of the like art type of stuff (LEA).*

Engaged literature audiences suggest that greater inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers in literature festivals and broader cultural festivals would go some way to addressing this awareness issue.

## **Potential audience**

Potential visual arts audiences also identify a lack of awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art as a barrier to their engagement. Some acknowledge that they: *'..just generally don't seek this stuff out;* (VAPA). Several potential audience members feel that unless they actively seek out information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art events or activities they are unlikely to come across any: *'You just don't hear that much about it. You have to seek it out'* (VAPA). The potential audience members explain that the frequency with which they passively connect with information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts is, *'Not that often anyway. It might be once in a blue moon'* (VAPA).

The perceived lack of visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts, within the types of media that potential visual arts audiences ordinarily access is a clear barrier to their engagement. When asked whether they considered engaging, one engaged audience member comments:

*I'll be honest, not often. But not because I wouldn't, but I haven't heard. Somewhere out there I'm sure it's going on, but it would be good to know where it is (VAPA).*

Potential visual arts audiences are unaware of opportunities to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts. They believe that there is a distinct lack of adequate promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts. Potential audiences feel that they would need to actively seek out information, but admit that they are unlikely to do so.

Similar to engaged audiences, promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts in traditional arts press and also more popular media would assist in engaging potential audiences.

Potential music audiences also have a strong belief that a lack of awareness of specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music events, activities or products resulting from inadequate promotion is the primary barrier to engagement. One potential audience member comments that:

*There is a lack of promotion I find, very little advertised or promoted Indigenous. I get tons of emails from different venues and stuff like that, these bands playing and never see anything that stands out as being specifically Indigenous or anything like that (MPA).*

The lack of awareness is seen as a clear barrier to engagement for potential audiences: 'That would be great to go to, but I never see them promoted. Really I have never hardly seen anything promoted of the culture' (MPA).

Broader visibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians is also desirable. One potential audience member suggests that a large showcase event is an opportunity for this:

*I would like to see, say select two or three of the top current Aboriginal acts in like an Aboriginal spectacular supported by the up and coming Aboriginal artists. I think that would be a good promo for them because you've got the known artist, you've got lesser known artists and I reckon that would be absolutely fantastic (MPA).*

Potential dance audiences admit that they are unaware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance, with the exception of Bangarra. Potential dance audiences attribute their lack of awareness to issues with advertising and promotion:

*I think its lack of advertising and media exposure and stuff like that. I think you'd get a lot more people attend if there was more exposure (DPA).*

Some potential audiences indicate that, while they are open to the idea of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance, they are not likely to actively seek information in order to do so:

*I wouldn't actively think of it, not that I don't want to, but it actually wouldn't pop into my mind as something to consider seeking out...I lead a very busy life and it would literally have to come across the TV or through a newspaper that I read (DEA).*

This reluctance to actively seek out information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance is a consistent issue across all art forms. The perception of a lack of promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art through avenues accessed by these potential audience groups, coupled with the disinclination to actively seek information, illustrates the significance and complexity of awareness as a barrier to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

Unlike other art forms where audiences indicate a lack of awareness of specific events, activities or products, potential literature audiences display a lack of awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature as an art form. One potential audience member comments:

*Yeah. I've never really actually thought about it and I don't think there really is much literature as far as I know. I certainly haven't seen any really, but I don't know much about it (LPA).*

Many audience members agree that they simply 'haven't seen it' (LEA). Potential audiences attribute their general lack of knowledge and awareness about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature to perceived inadequate advertising:

*It's just shocked me to realise that I have read practically nothing on it, and you know, being someone who reads an awful lot, I'm thinking oh my god I haven't except for what I did at school. So, it's obviously not advertised very well (LPA).*

One audience member comments that they have not seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature: *'On booklists. I don't see them in the paper, book clubs. Even in the TV show, they don't put it on the book show. No mention of any artists'* (LEA). It is apparent that there are many avenues to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature to a broader audience.

## 5. UNCERTAINTY

Some challenges for greater engagement stem from audience uncertainty about how they can and should behave at live events. Audiences also desire authentication of the provenance when purchasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art or products. While such uncertainty is currently a barrier, it is also a sign of deep respect for a culture that audiences do not understand in general or within art forms. Such uncertainty is not insurmountable with both engaged and potential audiences suggesting a variety of opportunities to alleviate their uncertainty.

### Engaged audience

Engaged visual arts audiences recall feeling uncertain about the commercial market for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art or products depicting visual art imagery. They have uncertainties in determining if artists are exploited in the sale of works of art or if artists have given permission for the work to be presented in the way it is. These uncertainties are a barrier to consumption and audiences look for cues of known brands in order to engage. One engaged audience member comments: *‘That’s exactly why I go to NGV Australia, as opposed to any other kind of gallery just trying to like flog the stuff’* (LEA). Engaged audiences are seeking reassurance about the authenticity of work being presented and also the provenance of works offered for sale.

Theatre audiences emphasise that if they do not understand the content of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre, then they find it disappointing and difficult to relate to the production. One engaged theatre participant explains:

*I saw a show last year by Black Arm Band in the theatre. I have heard so much about them and they’re amazing musicians and Archie Roach and all these amazing people and I sat there and I just felt nothing. It was like the music and the harmonies and everything they were singing was beautiful but I have no idea what was going on the entire concert and they were telling stories, but it just wasn’t crossing over to me and I was so disappointed* (TEA).

Other engaged audience members agree that not understanding content may be a barrier to future engagement, due to difficulty relating to or maintaining interest in the production.

*Not understanding actually. I don’t like feeling stupid unless I know I am, but when I go it’s like ‘what’s that about?’ I like to research everything...if I watch a film, any movie, and I don’t get it, it frustrates me, but if I go in knowing that I’m not going to know what it’s about, no* (TEA).

The disappointment and frustration expressed by engaged audience members has significant implications for marketing. Engaged audiences play a critical role in developing audiences through word-of-mouth and referral behaviours. Theatre companies could consider ways of reducing the audience’s uncertainty about their experience as a means of managing expectations and improving satisfaction with the experience. Increasing satisfaction can, in turn, increase positive word-of-mouth behaviours.

## Potential audience

Potential dance audiences have significant uncertainties about engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. Potential audiences have uncertainties as a result of their lack of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and the impact this has on their ability to understand the content or context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. Potential dance audiences are concerned that they will offend or appear disrespectful as a result of their limited knowledge.

*I think it's really hard if you're not Indigenous to know how you'll actually react to the dancing, whether you should be rocking your body with the beat of the didgeridoo or whether you should be concentrating on being solemn and respectful, because you don't know whether you're going to offend someone... we haven't been educated on how to react to that type of dance (DPA).*

Potential audiences acknowledge that their lack of exposure to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance contributes to their uncertainty:

*I think often we're unsure of the expectation. As you were saying, you got to a comedy festival and you laugh, if you go to listen to a band the aim is to move with the music. I think that because we're not that exposed to it as a general group, we're not quite sure how to react (DPA).*

Potential audiences perceive their lack of knowledge as a personal deficit. One audience member comments: *'I'm embarrassed, I get very embarrassed'* (DPA). To which another responds: *'I don't know whether I'm embarrassed, but I'm offended with myself the times I don't understand'* (DPA). One audience member remarks that, due to a lack of exposure to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance, they feel audiences prefer alternative experiences that they are more familiar and comfortable with:

*I think a lot of people these days have so much choice that they are going to choose things that they're comfortable with or they're familiar with or that they have experienced before and know that I experienced this and I walked away happy or I felt good, I really enjoyed it. You take that positive aspect away and think of it so when you have something new that comes up and you've never been exposed or experience to it, it's hard to choose that. Some people will, like some people will be 'I want to try something new'. I'm going to go do that, but a lot of people will not (DPA).*

Potential dance audiences have an inherent interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance, but are uncertain about how to behave during and after such performances. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance could also be showcased in mainstream and popular media, which would both increase awareness and reduce uncertainty.

Potential audience members express a high degree of anxiety and uncertainty about attending Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre. They believe that they would be less uncertain and anxious about engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre if theatre companies provided an audience orientation. Such an orientation would enhance their understanding of expected audience behaviours and reduce their sense of uncertainty. Several potential theatre audience members spoke of their attendance at Aboriginal and



Torres Strait Islander cultural experiences where they are made more confident about their engagement because they are guided through the experience:

*I went to the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary Indigenous show and dinner thing last year and they did have rules and they told you what they were. You weren't allowed to talk during the things and you weren't allowed to pass the guide or whatever it was, so they did kind of guide you through the experience and that was really good (TPA).*

Potential theatre audiences explain that they would be more likely to engage with theatre productions that they are familiar with and that they felt more certain that they would enjoy than with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre:

*If I have to spend a lot of money I would definitely choose things like Jersey Boys or Lion King because I'm guaranteed it will be good. There'll be dancing and singing that I love, rather than struggling and trying to figure out (TPA).*

There is a strong connection between the uncertainties of potential dance audiences and potential theatre audiences. Both audience groups are inhibited by their lack of knowledge of the content, context and expectations of audience behaviour for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and theatre.

## 6. IMAGE

The theme of image is an interesting finding from the potential and engaged audience groups. The image that some audiences have formed in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art presents a barrier to engagement with performing arts and literature. This is particularly the case for potential audiences, but engaged audiences also discuss their reluctance to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art because their image of it as a serious and educational experience. Whilst these qualities can often be a virtue, when competing for audiences' leisure time and entertainment dollar, it can also be a barrier to attendance. The discussion of image below is within each art form group and focuses on the inhibiting aspect of image.

### Engaged audience

Some engaged theatre audiences indicate their image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre is that it is an educational or cultural experience, rather than a form of entertainment: *'I think I would either expect it to be Dreamtime or to be a human rights statement, one or the other... But that just speaks for the time, I mean Australian history I guess'* (TPATEA).

One engaged theatre audience member explains how this image may at times impact their decision to engage:

*It kind of depends just on what mood I'm in. So a lot of the time these plays are educational or culturally whatever, but sometimes I just want to relax and just not worry about what's wrong with Australia or what happened to them and not forget about it but just focus on something else. Yes, and if they are the same price, if I'm paying \$30 or \$40 or \$50, I'm probably more inclined just to go down the entertainment path than the educational route (TEA).*

The above quotation suggests that, even for audiences interested in educational experiences, they may not be interested in such experiences all the time. The image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre as educative may, therefore, present a barrier at times for these audiences. The engaged theatre audience discussed the popular appeal of Disney's stage production of *The Lion King*. The audience members suggest that a similar production anchored in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture could appeal to both engaged and new audiences seeking entertaining experiences.

Producers and marketers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre need to be careful when crafting their communication messages. Communication could emphasise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre can be as funny, entertaining and emotionally stimulating as other theatre. Wider promotion of the diverse range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre would also address this image challenge.

Engaged literature audiences indicate a perceived lack of diversity of available Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature as an image issue. For instance:

*What's holding me back from investing more time into Indigenous literature is specifically that I feel like I'm going to hear all the same stories over and over again. I want something new, hopefully something more experimental, something that's going to push my boundaries*

*a little bit. Give me something that I haven't heard. And I'm not really into the history side of things, like we learnt a little bit about it in school and I've seen enough films, yeah I want something new (LEA).*

This image challenge is linked to the lack of awareness of the range of genres and writers present in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature. Addressing the awareness issue is likely, therefore, to improve the image engaged audiences have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature.

### **Potential audience**

Some potential dance audience members recognise that their image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance depends on, '*..how it's being portrayed, it depends what it is*' (DPA). These audience members note the diversity of experiences with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance including learning about culture or participating in celebrations. However, many potential dance audiences have an image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance as an educative, rather than entertaining, experience and this does present a barrier to engagement. Explaining why they rarely attend Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance performances, one potential dance member explains: '*It's always got a story to tell and it doesn't come across as entertainment, it comes across as a cultural thing*' (DPA).

Potential dance audiences also have an image that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance is a serious experience without any opportunity for interactivity. One audience member compares their image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and music to their image of other cultural performances:

*When it comes to music and I can go to an Irish festival or a Spanish festival and not know anything about the story they're telling me, but the music is lively and fun and that keeps you captivated with the dance. With the Aboriginal dance, Indigenous dance, it's sombre music and the two go hand in hand. It's not really foot stomping, clapping music (DEA).*

Audiences again attribute this serious image to early experiences, with many potential audience members explaining that this image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance as an educational experience is formed in childhood. :

*Just from school, when we were shown at school as far as I'm concerned the experience you have was sit down quietly and watch this and that's how we were taught. Even at that time it wasn't move around or get involved, it's watch and interpret and understand and do it quietly and calmly sort of thing. So we can only go from that experience (DEA).*

Another factor relating to the image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance causing a barrier for engagement is the perception by some audiences that there is repetition in the stories that are presented within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance:

*Without being critical, and I think I said before [about] Indigenous dancing, I think you can only take so much of, it seems to be all the same, that's my point of view so once you've seen it once you've seen it a number of times (DEA).*

Potential audiences would be more responsive to marketing messages that emphasise the entertaining aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. As one potential dance audience member explains, this could make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance:

*(a) be more relatable and (b) it would be more, 'Yes, I know about that'. You could relate, you could feel, you could talk about it, as opposed to just getting historical for learning (DPA).*

Potential literature audiences have a strong perception that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature is predominantly non-fiction writing presented in a very factual manner. Audiences comment that, while they are interested in reading factual information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, they would be interested in the information being presented in a more storied form.

*Isn't Indigenous literature more factual rather than fiction? You know, do they have many books that are available that are perhaps more storytelling books rather than factual books? Because that I think would make it more appealing to a lot of people (LPA).*

This perception is shared amongst many of the potential audience members who perceive this lack of narrative storytelling to be a barrier to them reading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature. As illustrated in Figure 2, storytelling is a prominent word used across art form audiences to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. This suggests that the perception of a lack of storytelling by potential literature audiences is an exception. Once again, this image is based on a lack of information and limited awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature. Building awareness will, in turn, shift the perceived image of potential literature audiences. For instance, a potential literature audience member comments that they are interested in reading a diverse range of genres written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers and authors, but they do not believe that is this available:

*I mean there are poets, there are artists, and there are different stories, fictional stories, and different things you can write about, even the life experience and biographies of people. But you know, we don't see any of that. There's not even a range or selection to go to if you wanted a coffee book to put on your table or a good book (LPA).*

## KEY POINTS

### VISUAL ARTS

Engaged audiences are uncertain about the integrity in the process of presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts. Audiences are, however, seeking reassurance about the authenticity of work being presented and also the provenance of works offered for sale.

The biggest barrier to engagement and attendance is a lack of awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art. Potential audiences feel that they would need to actively seek out information, but admit that they are unlikely to do so. Promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts in traditional arts press, but also more popular media, would make a significant contribution to developing audiences.

### MUSIC

Music audiences have a strong belief that a lack of awareness of specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music events, activities or products resulting from inadequate promotion is the primary barrier to engagement. Greater inclusion and visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians in mainstream festivals would enhance audience awareness and familiarity.

### DANCE

Awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance is a significant issue for dance audiences. Dance audiences have a strong desire for greater recognition, visibility and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture.

Potential dance audiences have an inherent interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance, but are uncertain about how to behave during and after performances. Curated experiences could help to reduce the anxiety and uncertainty for both potential and engaged audiences.

Many potential dance audiences have an image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance as an educative, rather than entertaining, experience and this does present a barrier to engagement. Potential audiences may be more responsive to marketing messages that emphasise the artistic and visual aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance could also be showcased in mainstream and popular media, which would both increase awareness and reduce uncertainty.

## **THEATRE**

Given the desire that audiences have to deepen their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture, theatres could provide opportunities before and after performances for facilitated audience conversations. Such curated experiences would also help to reduce the uncertainty and anxiety expressed by potential audiences.

The image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre as educative, rather than entertaining, may present a barrier to attendance for some audiences. Producers and marketers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre need to be careful when crafting their communication messages. Communication could emphasise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre can be as funny, entertaining and emotionally stimulating as other theatre. Wider promotion of the diverse range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre would also address this image challenge.

## **LITERATURE**

There is a distinct lack of awareness of the range of genres and writers present in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature. Audiences suggest that greater inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers in literature festivals and broader cultural festivals would go some way to addressing the lack of awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature.

## SECTION 4: STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP AUDIENCES

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the forums was to communicate to members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecosystem the findings from the earlier stages of the project. Participants were invited to workshop these findings within smaller groups and consider the key challenges and opportunities in developing audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. In response to the findings, forum participants presented new approaches to building audiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in Australia across six key areas: capacity building and career pathways; representation and authenticity; presentation; awareness; image; uncertainty. Following the forums, profiles were compiled of organisations and individuals that were identified as successfully addressing the challenge areas. Each organisation or artist and their approach is introduced within the relevant challenge area in this section and a case study of each is presented in full in Appendix A.

## CAPACITY BUILDING AND CAREER PATHWAYS

Critical to audience development is the need for capacity building within the ecology as the foundation for developing audiences. This capacity building is concerned with developing strong career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in various roles across the ecology: *'...it's about nurturing the sector and Indigenous producers, curators and individuals' (NSWFP).*

The desire for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working within the ecology relates to ensuring appropriate presentation and marketing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art to audiences, which is based on their community connections and the authenticity of the experience. One forum participant explains:

*Really if you look at any audience development, it's about an authentic voice between the customer, the audience and the art (QLDFP).*

Forum participants believe that strategies to promote working in the arts as a viable career choice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be critical in providing a solid foundation for audience development. These strategies include raising the visibility of arts roles and also making careers in the arts a more financially stable employment option for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Regarding raising the visibility, one forum participant explains:

*You need to get people into that career path...just simple things like career expos, getting people into schools, letting students know that this is a viable career path and you don't have to go down the traditional route of law, health or engineering which are all viable but we're talking about the arts (VICFP).*

Financial bursaries and programs to enable the arts to compete with other career choices are also raised as a potential strategy to provide financial stability for potential Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers:

*The infrequency of employment in the arts is a big issue: why couldn't there be a sponsorship of Aboriginal people going into the arts that is like an amount of money that they get paid that keeps them in between the jobs?... A lot of Aboriginal people don't have the family support who can bail them out, so that's a really important thing (VICFP).*



Forum participants acknowledge that initiatives that offer long term approaches are successful. One example provided by forum participants is a project, which had '*Indigenous trainees employed across different areas of the gallery basically [and] of art museum practice*' (QFP). Forum participants recommend the expansion of existing capacity building opportunities and the development of new ones. One forum participant comments that a key recommendation is to address the challenge for access to support through strategic initiatives:

*We acknowledge the Australia Council [for the Arts] particularly, that there was some really good stuff...Things like the Indigenous theatre producers, business, the BlakFella Boot Camps stuff (QLDFP).*

Forum participants also provide ideas for new opportunities and initiatives that build capacity within the ecosystem. Using the example of literature, one forum group proposes:

*Applying for funding to get young writers in for short term workshops, at festival time, and tell them in a weekend what it usually takes you three, four or five years as a writer to understand: this is what writers do, this is what editors do, this is how the industry works, this is what an agent does, this is what to look out for at a festival, this is what to look out for in exploitative vanity publishing...so they see established writers and people...to come in and say, 'I was once a little young kid...and now I'm a writer and this is how I got from A to B' (QLDFP).*

Another recommendation raised in regard to capacity building within the ecosystem is to provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers to connect with each other for support and for professional development. One forum participant explains:

*We have three or four Aboriginal people out of a staff of 250 so it's very difficult and especially when you're on your own journey and then you find yourself taking on the community's journey and everybody else's stuff and it's very difficult for them. It's important for these people to be connected to their peers in a state and nationally so they keep doing the work (WAFP).*

## SUCCESS STORY

Karilyn Brown from **Performing Lines** explains that over the past decade Performing Lines have worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners and organisations to facilitate and drive opportunities. She feels that it is a critical time for all organisations to be providing skills development, advice and resourcing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners. Karilyn comments: '*The performing arts in the Indigenous world is really on the cusp of something quite extraordinary and we need to be backing that in every way we can.*'

## KEY POINTS

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology is on a positive pathway to valuing its arts workers and recognising their critical role in connecting with audiences.

For audience development to be most successful, strategies to attract and retain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers throughout the ecosystem are critical.

In some instances, strong connections to community are only available through the personal associations and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers.

Through long term career planning, arts workers will remain a constant in the ecosystem, which will provide ongoing audience development benefits.

## REPRESENTATION AND AUTHENTICITY

The recommendation for greater proactive appointment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers across all functions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology was raised at multiple forums. A group at the Victorian forum identifies this need as a key recommendation:

*As an Indigenous producer my biggest bugbear at the moment is that there are no, or there aren't enough Indigenous arts workers. So that's not only producers, but set designers or lighting operators or sound engineers or curators or art conservators: just across the whole spectrum. There's not enough in marketing either, so our biggest issue was the lack of Aboriginal arts workers (VICFP).*

Participants assert that there needs to be more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers across the ecology more broadly, but they also highlight that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are needed in decision making roles. There is a belief that such representation will help to ensure the appropriate programming of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

*How do we create more curators, presenters, programmers, people in positions of power to program in the right context and appropriately Indigenous stuff and looking at skills development leading to a much higher level of Indigenous people in decision making positions? (QLDFP).*

The engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers is seen by forum participants as a contributor to developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences. A participant explains how their organisation's employment of an Aboriginal staff member has a direct impact on the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences:

*We have a producer on staff...who works on our projects and we know that Indigenous artists come to our shows because [his] name is on it as he's there; the community knows they have a contact in the organisation; and that [he is] involved in producing, making and*

*communicating work and issuing invitations. It's critical to make sure that an organisation... that's making work for main stages has a community contact (VICFP).*

Another participant at the Western Australian forum provides an example of this:

*I got asked last year by non Indigenous performing arts companies: how do you get out into the communities, how do you get out into rural and remote regions and connect? I said: How many Aboriginal people have you got on your staff? And they answered: 'None'. I said: 'There's your problem'. Get that connection with communities and you will get those audiences. It's a big challenge for every arts organisation in this country. If they want to engage with Aboriginal audiences, they have to have Aboriginal people on their staff. It's a no brainer (WAFP).*

The marketing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is raised across several forums as an area needing strategic attention. A Victorian forum group feels that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art requires marketers specialised in marketing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and recommend the development of such roles. One forum participant explains:

*There's no dedicated Indigenous arts marketing out there or persons who do that...I mean to market for Indigenous arts you've got community on one hand, which is unique the way you market to that is unique. Then you have mainstream and the arts as well. So to market Indigenous art is specific, it's a niche marketing strategy (VICFP).*

In marketing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, other recommendations include the development of a national marketing summit to collectively harness and leverage knowledge across the arts ecology. The group explains one recommendation:

*To have national marketing summits for Indigenous artists and organisations across art forms because we thought we could see some synergies between the art forms. Getting into marketing, I think we're all really involved in what we're making, but how to get it out there is still something that we need to find and work on with each other (NSWFP).*

## **– Success Story**

Deborah Murphy explains that, as a non-Indigenous organisation, the two key challenges faced by the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) in producing **Clancestry** are the navigation and implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols and presenting a diversity of work. QPAC address this issue through extensive community consultation and the engagement of guest curators to drive the program. Deborah explains: *'Diversity of representation is an issue due to the availability of work that is eclectic and the support for development of making new and affordable work. Due to the processes we engage in order to work with curators and the wider community, we respect and acknowledge their decision-making with regards to not only notions of authenticity, but the very definitions that underpin the term'.*

## – Success Story

Heather Whitely Robertson, Director, Audiences & Creative Learning and Keith Munro, Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs at the **Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA)**, Sydney explain that the MCA only acquire the work of living artists, which alleviates some issues around representation and authenticity that may arise for institutions working with the secondary market. They note that despite increased representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners in exhibitions and holdings, *'more can be done'* (Whitely Robertson) considering this representation, opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners to initiate and develop projects, and audiences' understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art practice. They explain that the MCA have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board and a *'commitment within our strategic plan to integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives'* (Whitely Robertson). Alongside these initiatives, the MCA maintains a strong connection to community and provides audiences with education opportunities that involve significant development input from artists.

### KEY POINTS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts audiences value authenticity and seek signposts for trustworthiness and legitimacy. Such authenticity is best communicated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers.

Arts practitioners recognise that the marketing and brokering of relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and audiences requires specialised knowledge and expertise.

In particular, developing expert marketers from within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community would help to establish stronger relationships with community audiences.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and organisations would benefit from opportunities to share knowledge and new approaches to reaching diverse audiences.

## PRESENTATION

The presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, particularly within mainstream venues or by mainstream organisations is an area that attracts a range of recommendations by forum participants.

Forum participants express a desire for ethical codes of practice to be developed and implemented within organisations regarding the presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Some recommendations by forum groups indicate that these codes of practice could take the form of protocols and plans across the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology and within individual organisations. One Queensland forum group recommend the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Manifesto to drive strategies for arts and cultural institutions and organisations.

*A First Nations Manifesto for Australian arts and cultural institutions...that then leads directly to positions like Indigenous directors of Indigenous sections or Indigenous decision makers (QLDFP).*

All participants want to see more programming of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art across a broad range of presenting organisations.

As part of the mainstream presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, participants recommend the development and implementation of plans and protocols for individual organisations and venues. One forum group propose that all organisations commit to developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols and Reconciliation Action Plans:

*A commitment that all arts and cultural organisations should be involved in is developing their own Indigenous cultural protocols...but it can be three steps that you commit to do over the next couple of years about who you are, where you're located, who your Indigenous community is, how are you connecting with them through to a Reconciliation Action Plan that is relevant (NSWFP).*

The New South Wales forum further acknowledges the need for deeper understanding by many presenting organisations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture and recommends:

*We also had [as a recommendation] cultural awareness training as a mandatory part of every arts and cultural institution and organisation in Australia (NSWFP).*

With presentation, a number of participants highlight the need for the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts or cultural institutions of scale. One Queensland forum participant explains:

*We need those trained personnel to help form, set up and run Indigenous major cultural institutions and...there was the National Museum of Indian Art in America and the Banff Centre in Canada. So it's those long term visions for investment that we're looking for... (QLDFP).*

Forum participants note two caveats with such institutions. The first is the complexities of developing a single representative institution due to:

*Problems with centralising that stuff, the Indigenous nations are so diverse and there's so many of them and the country is so big, we need to be decentralised (VFP).*

The second is the need to ensure that such an institution would not overshadow the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts in regional or remote areas:

*I was just going to say we're talking about large scale there, but we also realised the need for greater focus on remote and regional areas as well. Talking specifically about financial investment there and that then leads to Indigenous employment because the majority of people in remote and regional areas are Indigenous people (VFP).*

- **Success Story**

**Kim Scott** notes two key challenges associated with the presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art within a mainstream context: 1. When art is viewed as a product for mainstream consumption it can reduce the possible richness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. 2. Reconciling mainstream success with value to home communities.

His most recent approach to these challenges is to have a *split focus* of his literary writing and the Wirlomin Language and Stories project, which has a collective approach to language revival and to the creation of the illustrated books it produces.

- **Success story**

**Yirra Yaakin** Artistic Director Kyle Morrison explains that the key challenges and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre are about where and by whom Aboriginal theatre is being produced and presented. Yirra Yaakin maintains strong community connections while also fostering collaborations and partnerships with major organisations in order to address this. Kyle explains that Yirra Yaakin aim: *'To keep the sense that Yirra Yaakin is part of a wider Aboriginal community, but also very much part of a professional theatre company and also a part of a wider Aboriginal arts community'*.

## KEY POINTS

Greater audience engagement could be achieved by increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander artistic works to be presented more broadly and proactively across the country.

Increasing the visibility and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander art works being presented will provide audiences with more opportunities to participate and broaden their engagement.

Presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art should be governed by culturally-appropriate protocols.

A dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts or cultural institution of scale could elevate the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander art within Australia and internationally.

## IMAGE

A number of forum groups present recommendations that seek to improve preconceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art that may be inhibitors to audience engagement. These recommendations primarily relate to audience education or to direct community engagement strategies.

Several forum groups recommend audience education to counter incorrect perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. One forum participant explains:

*Countering perception...It's not changing what we do as practitioners; it's actually countering the perception. In order to do that we talked about the formative years, presenting quality artwork as an education in itself and then leading people through what that art actually means. So dance, opera, theatre, understanding it as a consumer (VICFP).*

Another forum participant explains that both school and direct community engagement programs have the potential to break down barriers to engagement that may result from preconceptions:

*Schools programs. This is our really big idea. Let's clone Deborah Bonar programs and community programs. We need people that can translate artistic product in a community event where everybody can participate and break down the barriers and say wait a minute you're not an Aboriginal person, you're a person, and I appreciate that engagement and it would be great to get to know you (WAFP).*

Across multiple forum groups, community engagement is seen as critical to the development and presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. This is not only for preconceptions, but also for connecting with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous communities in a meaningful and long term way. One forum participant describes:

*Community engagement at a local level and extended engagement for continuity... So this is about doing it longer, sooner, in advance and it's about sustaining a relationship with local communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, so big things for us is to bring non-Indigenous communities on that journey as much as it is important for Indigenous communities to access non-Indigenous opportunities (NSWFP).*

One specific recommendation to provide an access point for audiences to be educated about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in a fun and light manner was provided at the Queensland forum. Forum participants express a clear desire to shift the image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art as something serious and intimidating, to one that is more human and approachable. The group propose an opportunity for a question and answer session for people about everything they ever wanted to know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art or culture:

*Whether it's a place online or at a festival, all the questions you always wanted to ask, but were too scared...[at] some big mainstream festival, a spot where people can go and ask those stupid questions...it's meant to be a humorous thing as well and if it was ongoing it could become tedious and educational and we don't want to be tedious and educational. We want to be funny and spur of the moment and break down fear (QLDFP).*

Profiling and promoting human stories within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts ecology is also proposed as a way to introduce potential audiences to Aboriginal and Torres



Strait Islander art. Such strategies could help to shift the intimidating image that potential audiences have formed of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. One forum participant suggests:

*Simple ways that you can profile Aboriginal people. For example somebody like Wesley Enoch and who he is and what he does and getting that out through social media in a nice simple marketing campaign that just introduces people (NSWFP).*

- **Success story**

**Country Arts SA** note that for audiences that are not familiar with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art there can be challenges associated with the image these audiences hold. For example, Sam Yates, Country Arts SA Manager of Arts and Cultural Development Manager explains that:

*There's that expectation from people that know nothing about Aboriginal culture that they're going to get some kind of traditional experience rather than the contemporary experience. So there is a challenge there to shift people's mind-set.*

Country Arts SA addresses these challenges through programming that seeks to increase familiarity with and image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts:

*To actually put more shows, as many shows as possible on the stage or in regional galleries. I think the more shows we put out there the more the people are going to understand this is legitimate art and the equal of anything that white Australia can produce. I'm pretty sure that we're making some inroads in that regard. So I think the more we can put out there the more diverse programming we can do.*

- **Success story**

Phillip Watkins of **Desart** explains that the biggest challenges for the image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art relate to stereotypical audience perceptions. He explains that audience perceptions are often *'about the dot, dot and lots of Western Desert style and it's a real challenge to change perceptions.'* Desart has undertaken a number of initiatives to alter this *'image issue'* such as showcasing other styles and mediums. These initiatives include a photography prize and sculpture exhibition.

## KEY POINTS

Despite evidence of positive image associations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander art, inaccurate preconceptions are recognised as an inhibitor to audience development and engagement.

There is an urgent need to correct misconceptions through engagement strategies bridging non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Early education with children and families could provide a platform for positive image formation that would help to develop potential audiences.

Bringing the fun and humour to engagement strategies as well as profiling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and arts workers represents a significant opportunity to craft a more human, approachable and relevant image for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.

## AWARENESS

Forum participants introduced a range of strategic approaches to raise audience awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Key amongst these strategies is a focus on engaging children and youth with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in their early years, both within the education sector and through funded extracurricular activities. One New South Wales forum participant questions:

*If we want to develop audiences for the future, how do we tap into the education sector at primary, secondary, tertiary? (NFP)*

Another New South Wales forum group recommends engagement through the school education system and refers to the strengths of long term approaches to school engagement:

*We talked a lot about engaging school students from the word go with contemporary art practice and we talked about the Arts NSW Fresh AIR program with artists in year-long studios so that students get to see them in contemporary practice. It's a three year strategy, it's not just one year or even a small residency going there for two months and you're out. The school needs three top practising artists in their school for three years, which is exciting. If people can pick up and inspire along the way, it's going to have long term impact (NSWFP).*

Participants recognise the challenge of making audiences aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art experiences. Engaging audiences through online and social media access points was a recommendation across multiple forums to raise awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts events and to connect with audiences. One participant describes:

*Social media, it takes a lot of time to do that, but we think social media is an avenue to develop audiences. It would be nice if we could have someone full time who did that interactively with punters through Facebook, not just publicising an ad (NTFP).*

At the Northern Territory forum, one participant group explains that the potential reach through the use of online and social media allows artists to connect directly with international audiences:

*We think a key point is to develop your artist and then develop your audiences, specific for what the group is and where they live. Our biggest international market is Germany and the USA and I think there's a huge potential for online and international music (NTFP).*

Another forum participant explains that there is potential for social media that may be currently underutilised for certain audience segments.

*Social media is changing the way collectors and potential collectors are engaged with galleries and that's not being exploited. So the 30 year old interested, a potential collector, how are we connecting for that person who might engage in the market very differently from the 50 year old collector or somebody who has been in the game a bit longer? (WAFP).*

– **Success story**

**Anita Heiss** expounds that the limited marketing and distribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is a significant challenge. She frequently appears at writers' festivals and uses social media to engage with her audiences and to raise awareness of her writing. She comments:

*I participate in social media so that I can actually engage with those who read my books. Most of my followers are in some way interested in Aboriginal art, culture, politics and want some level of engagement...Everybody needs to be part of social media because that's where audiences are.*

– **Success story**

Stephen Page, Artistic Director of **Bangarra**, explains that the company's strong brand image and the strong audience awareness of the company has, as its foundations, the work itself and the integrity and internal processes from which the work is created. A core component of these processes is having deep community connections and engagement. Complementing these foundations is a strategic and collaborative approach to mainstream marketing.

## KEY POINTS

In an increasingly cluttered world of marketing messages it is critical to find opportunities to successfully reach current and potential audiences.

Making young and new audiences aware of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander arts is a particular challenge.

Early education through schools, communities and the use of social media will help to make potential audiences aware of the diverse range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander arts experiences that are available.

## UNCERTAINTY

Recommendations to alleviate audience uncertainty about engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art are proposed by forum participants. These strategies relate to presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in spaces that audiences feel comfortable, the development and use of cues about appropriate behaviour for audiences, and the development of co-creative and collaborative activities to more deeply connect audiences and artists.

A group at the Western Australian forum propose the idea of festivals as an entry point for multiple audience segments to feel safe and comfortable with engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art:

*Our key challenges: people not feeling comfortable going to art venues in any art forms for various reasons and that can be Aboriginal people or non-Aboriginal people. So we were interested in the idea of putting effort and energy into festivals...different multiple entry points, families, adults, youth sector so you can have something that families can go to earlier in the day and a young couple goes to something in the evening. Making spaces where everyone feels safe culturally (WAFP).*

Another group proposes having ‘cultural sharers’ to welcome audiences and answer questions about the art being presented:

*Permission is a big thing. Permission to be able to laugh, permission to be able to engage and interact and feel, cry. It's not just about laughter, but also about sadness and working on their own emotions. So we talked about having money for cultural sharers within venues and exhibitions and other things so there are people that are casual, laid back, ‘hey how do you like this show?...great to see you here, have you been with Aboriginal people before?’...so there are people there that they know they can talk to (VFP).*

From the Victorian forum, various strategies are proposed to address inhibitors to participation relating to audience uncertainty about how to behave or respond when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. One proposed strategy at the Victorian forum is to use emoticons or visual cues to illustrate to audiences that they have ‘permission’ to behave in particular ways, for example, permission to clap or permission to laugh.

*Marketing money for developing emoticons. We all know the ‘no smoking’ [emoticon] and things, what about if you had ‘permission to’ emoticons... So signs, signage, you have signs when there's comedy shows, so people who are low literacy or kids can see here's a big tick, here's a big sign, so you are able to laugh out loud, you are allowed to clap (VICFP).*

Considering strategies for audiences to make sense of their experiences, it is also proposed by the Victorian forum that debriefing opportunities and counselling following engagement is desirable:

*Where that comes up also for counsellors and people afterwards. We've had a couple of shows where it wasn't pre-warned what was within the show and even if it is, a trigger is a funny thing to say to people, so there should be counsellors after they've seen the show (VICFP).*

Across multiple forums, the use of co-creation and collaborative opportunities to engage audiences and create a sense of belonging through participatory experiences is recommended.

The long term, deeper audience engagement established through artists spending time with communities pre and post the presentation of art activities or events is noted as significant:

*We've been learning a lot with touring, the audience engagement strategies. So our recommendation there is Stay Longer Grow Stronger. When the tours are actually on the road, you're not just going bang, bang, bang for the dollar of your seat, but with our southern audiences we're getting involved in the community spirit of that local land and being able to share aspects of it. I think we all had examples at our table where when we tried that strategy we had larger audiences coming to our attendances and for connectivity post the tour between the audience and the artist because they've had that time on the ground to talk about what their differences were and what their commonalities were, which is a normal standard human nature thing... More time on the ground to do workshops or developing more internet engagement on the ground and leaving positive outcomes behind which generate more participation for the next project because there's been understanding of what the exchange was, so it actually really builds on artistic development (NTFP).*

Another forum participant describes the success of arts activities that, while presenting potentially challenging material, give audiences the opportunity to feel like they are understanding and addressing the challenge within the material being presented:

*It is a difficult subject because there are difficult social issues that are discussed in the theatre and so people stayed away for the same reason. We were looking at a way that you offer absolution alongside a discussion around a subject that's going to evoke guilt and a great example of that is Pinjarra Pinjarra, subtitled a comedy about a massacre, which has been performed for over 10 years now. It discusses the massacre down in Pinjarra. It allows the audience to understand the magnitude of what happened, but allows them also to feel like they've been a part of setting it straight (WAFP).*

#### – Success story

**ILBIJERRI** addresses audience uncertainty through the content of the theatre they present. Artistic Director, Rachael Maza explains, *'I believe it's through the work that we start to break down that uncertainty, if that's the term, or I would call it awkwardness, and start to demystify'*. ILBIJERRI also use specific initiatives to encourage deeper audience engagement, thus minimising uncertainty. Rachael explains that, *'it is about engaging with your audiences in a meaningful way...I realised that they had become active, actively engaged. The relationship [with audiences] becomes very real in that moment as opposed to "I'm just a passive audience member". It's like "You're actually a partner now"'*.

#### – Success story

**Deborah Bonar** observes that while some non-Indigenous audiences may be "curious" about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, they may have uncertainties about how to engage with the art or the practitioner. Equally she notes that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists may not be 'culturally secure engaging

*with the wider community*'. Deborah addresses these challenges by running community workshops that allow participants to actively engage in the creation of large canvas works and speak personally with Deborah. Deborah encourages other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to proactively engage with audiences.

## KEY POINTS

While audience uncertainty about how to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander art exists, it is not an insurmountable challenge.

A focus on accessible experiences that are within audiences' comfort zones (i.e. festivals) could provide an entry point into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art for potential audiences

A focus on assisting audiences in navigating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art experiences could substantially reduce the sense of anxiety that many audience members express about terms of how to behave and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. The use of emoticons and cultural sharers are simple, but impactful tools.

Audiences often feel uncertain about engaging in new experiences and with people they do not know. Providing opportunities for artists to engage directly with communities over long periods of time could help to foster a sense of deeper connection and comfort between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and communities.

## CONCLUSIONS

Audiences value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. This is a time of great opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and organisations to connect with audiences within their communities and across Australia more broadly. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander arts ecology is on a positive pathway to leveraging audience motivations and addressing the barriers to their engagement. It is recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander arts workers play a critical role in connecting with existing and new audiences. Audiences value authenticity and seek signposts for trustworthiness and legitimacy. Such authenticity is best communicated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts workers.

Audiences have a positive, but weak and stereotypical image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Audiences need to be encouraged to experience a wide range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art as a means of deepening or strengthening the image.

Audiences seek a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through art. Their interest is not only in relation to historical insight, but an insight into a living culture. Audiences are motivated to engage with artists and work that capture and explore the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia today.

Audiences are interested in the storytelling quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. It is the ability to communicate human stories through a range of mediums that makes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art unique and appealing.

Greater audience engagement could be achieved by increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic works to be presented more broadly and proactively across the country. A dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts or cultural institution of scale could elevate the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander art within Australia and internationally.

The biggest barrier to engagement and attendance is a lack of awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Audiences feel that they would need to actively seek out information, but admit that they are unlikely to do so.

In an increasingly cluttered world of marketing messages it is critical to find opportunities to successfully reach current and potential audiences. Early education through schools, communities and the use of social media will help to make potential audiences aware of the diverse range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander arts experiences that are available.

Audiences have an inherent interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander live performances, but are uncertain about how to engage. This uncertainty is intensified by their misconceptions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Audiences have an image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art as a serious and educative, rather than entertaining, experience.

Early education with children and families could provide a platform for positive image formation that would help to develop potential audiences. Bringing the fun and humour to engagement strategies would help in crafting a more human, approachable and relevant image for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.



A focus on assisting audiences in navigating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art experiences could substantially reduce the sense of anxiety that many audience members express. The use of emoticons and cultural sharers sound simple, but are valuable and impactful tools.

Audiences often feel uncertain about engaging in new experiences with people they do not know. Providing opportunities for artists to engage directly with communities over long periods of time could help to foster a sense of deeper connection and comfort between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and communities. A focus on accessible experiences that are within the comfort zone of the audience (i.e. festivals) could provide an entry point into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art for new audiences.

# APPENDIX A: SUCCESS STORIES

## PERFORMING LINES

Performing Lines specialises in producing and touring emerging independent artists in the Australian performing arts sector<sup>cii</sup>. Performing Lines works with these emerging artists to increase their skills and sector awareness and connects them with national and international presenters<sup>ciii</sup>. They also work with established artists and companies and a network of producers, partners and collaborators both nationally and internationally<sup>civ</sup>.

Performing Lines was founded in 1982 by Wendy Blacklock as the Australian Content Department of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust (AETT)<sup>cv</sup>. In 1990 they re-established as an independent non-profit organization named Performing Lines<sup>cvi</sup>. They tour many noteworthy contemporary theatre and dance practitioners<sup>cvi</sup>.

Performing Lines works with the Australia Council for the Arts and state government arts agencies to run multiple programs that support and develop emerging artists. Their current initiatives include MAPS NSW and MAPS WA, which support emerging theatre and dance groups in NSW by building their skills in creative producing, administrative and financial tasks, networking and advocacy and strategic planning<sup>cvi</sup>. Other initiatives include: Black Lines (connecting contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and theatre to Australian presenters and audiences); Tasmania Performs (developing, producing and touring new Tasmanian work); Mobile States (a partnership with Australia's major contemporary arts spaces presenting contemporary performance); Road Work (encouraging regional audiences to engage with performing arts)<sup>cix</sup>.

Performing Lines is involved in significant presentations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre and dance. In 1982 they managed Robert Merritt's tour of *The Cake Man* in Denver, Colorado, which was the first time an Australian Indigenous production was invited to perform at the World Theatre Festival<sup>cx</sup>. *The Cake Man* has gone on to be the first Indigenous theatre piece to be published and televised and was re-released in 2013 at the Sydney's Belvoir Theatre<sup>cx</sup>. They also toured Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman's *The 7 Stages of Grieving*<sup>cxii</sup>, Wesley Enoch's *I am Eora*, the Chooky Dancers and Nigel Jamieson's *Ngurrumilmarrmiriyu (Wrong Skin)*<sup>cxiii</sup>.

### How *Performing Lines* addresses challenges associated with capacity building

Performing Lines offers a significant contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts. They provide emerging Indigenous artists with resources to establish themselves in the Australian art sector. Karylin Brown, Performing Lines CEO, comments: 'We've done a lot of work over the recent decades in working with Indigenous artists and companies in facilitating opportunities, in driving those opportunities'. Karylin describes the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts scene in Australia as 'very diverse, healthy and rich in comparison to 30 years ago'. However, she further explains:

*There is clearly enormous capacity for growth, for multi-layering work, for opportunities for the work to be created both in terms of its traditional lineage but importantly its contemporary expression.*

A challenge for Performing Lines, as a non-Indigenous organisation, is to ensure that contemporary Indigenous art is expressed through its own voice. Karylin explains: 'Our Indigenous cultural colleagues are saying we want to drive this ourselves, it has to be our voice, but at a time when there isn't quite yet sufficient knowledge and experience.' Karylin goes on to say:

*Everybody is doing their bit to a certain extent around commissioning Indigenous work, Indigenous writers, Indigenous actors, but we need to be doing that underpinning that's not there.*

Professional development is identified as a challenge for Indigenous artists. Karylin explains that the 'non-Indigenous arts sector do not easily critique Aboriginal work' and feels this can act as a barrier to professional development. She goes on to say: 'It's that critiquing and that professional development that is sometimes missing.' She discusses the need for:

*Opportunities to be in a safe environment to get this critical response, followed by opportunities to have your work exhibited, to have your work showcased, to have your work developed, to have it toured, and to have it presented.*

Performing lines is currently working towards overcoming this barrier for emerging Indigenous artists through specific strategies for capacity building. Karylin explains:

*We are looking at commissioning a new work by an emerging Aboriginal artist once per year. We would work with that artist over a period of probably two years, possibly three, to have the work developed as a partner, do the creative development, do the showing and then if it's not going anywhere then have that conversation. It will be over a period of time, but I would think that we'd be working on the basis that it comes to fruition and then we'd be working on the tour, whether it's national and/or international touring of that work.*

Increasing capacity for skill development, in particular business skills development, is 'incredibly critical' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, says Karylin. She comments, 'There's certainly a desperate need for more organisations to be providing skill development resources, information and advice to artists.' Karylin advises other arts organisations to ask the question:

*What are you doing as an organisation that could in some way support the development of Indigenous arts practice, whether that is through advice, assistance, resources, commissioning, development or through providing some space or a workshop?*

She goes on to say: 'The performing arts in the Indigenous world is really on the cusp of something quite extraordinary and we need to be backing that in every way we can.'

## BLACK DIGGERS

*Black Diggers* is a Queensland Theatre Company and Sydney Festival production and is considered a 'significant work of cultural sharing and truth-telling'<sup>cxiv</sup>. *Black Diggers* is written by Tom Wright and directed by Queensland Theatre Company Artistic Director, Wesley Enoch. The production toured nationally in 2014 and continues in 2015. It was developed for the Sydney Festival and Brisbane Festival as part of Australia's 2014 commemoration of the centenary of World War One<sup>cxv</sup>.

*Black Diggers* is based on research into the lives and deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander soldiers who fought for the British Commonwealth in World War I<sup>cxvi</sup>. The production draws from in-depth interviews with the families of black diggers, veterans, historians and academics<sup>cxvii</sup>. There is an all-male Indigenous cast, who tackle multiple roles, encompassing different ethnicities and genders<sup>cxviii</sup>. *Black Diggers* offers an untold representation of Indigenous experiences and stories from before and after World War I. The play explores the motivations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to enlist in WWI and tells the stories of soldiers who felt disconnected from their homeland on their return from war<sup>cxix</sup>.

The *Black Diggers* production is well received by Australian audiences, attracting 'a standing ovation on its opening night at the Brisbane Festival'<sup>cxx</sup> and 'positive critical reviews'. John McCallum from The Australian states that the subject matter is 'fascinating and revelatory'.<sup>cxxi</sup> The direction from Wesley Enoch is praised by Larissa Behrendt from *The Guardian*, commenting on his success in 'connecting the audience with themes, iconography and myths they can all relate to'. She went on to say that *Black Diggers* is 'not just one of the highlights of this year's festival but a new high point in telling a national narrative on the stage'.<sup>cxxii</sup>

The production is successful in providing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective to the well-known white Australian narrative of World War I<sup>cxxiii</sup>. Wesley Enoch has expressed his concern with the 'diversity of voices in Australian theatre' and hopes that the *Black Diggers* production will 'bring audiences in their droves' and 'spark greater interest in Indigenous stories'<sup>cxxiv</sup>. Writer Tom Wright comments on the anecdotal feedback he receives, saying 'many Indigenous people, particularly those who are ex-service people themselves, loved the show'. He goes on to say 'people from an older generation of Indigenous people in Queensland and New South Wales are very pleased with the show as it neatly ties in a big Australian national narrative with their Indigenous experience.'

### How *Black Diggers* addresses challenges with authenticity and representation

The *Black Diggers* production addresses the challenge of representation and authenticity within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait arts ecosystem, by acknowledging and presenting multiple perspectives and through the engagement of an all-Indigenous cast who hold multiple roles encompassing different genders and cultural identities. Writer Tom Wright comments on the authenticity of indigeneity in Australia, saying it is a contested site where 'everything gets mediated through white terminology [where] the aspect of listening to authentic Aboriginal voices can be placed to one side'. He continued by sharing his views on representation, saying:

*Representation of Indigenous experience in Australia ranges everything from tokenism all the way through to a deeply problematic and troubling question of what nationalism is and in an anthropological sense what indigeneity is.*

Wright takes the view that there is not 'an objective Indigenous experience and objective truth and objective history' but more a series of experiences, truths and histories depending on the individual. He therefore discounts that there can be a 'pure Indigenous voice' in theatre, particularly due to its collaborative nature.

The biggest challenge about working in Indigenous arts, as Wright sees it is:

*...as someone who doesn't identify as Indigenous, having cultural permission to appropriate Indigenous stories is by far the most challenging aspect of my job as a writer or as a director or anything else, so issues of cultural permission for non-Indigenous artists is the biggest challenge for me.*

He continues that the second biggest challenge is 'not finding yourself recolonised by white expectation.' By 'recolonised by white expectation', Wright means that white audiences treat the play as an '*experience of cultural tourism*', which is different to Aboriginal community work. He sees it as providing a 'tension' particularly when the work has a 'political slant.'

Wright explains that having an all-Aboriginal cast playing multiple and diverse roles alleviates many challenges around representation and authenticity, stating:

*At the simplest level we just didn't have to [develop strategies to overcome challenges of representation and authenticity] because we had Indigenous actors and the premise of the show, although it was a very complicated show, the premise of the show was quite clear. It's understood and you could read indigeneity into the faces and bodies and I tried to make it quite clear that I was not taking a position and so the show has moments which are a direct opposition and contradicting moments that have happened five minutes before.*

Equally importantly to authenticity and representation, is Wright's explanation that the show acknowledges multiple voices and a re-imagined experience rather than attempting to recreate a factually correct experience:

*Black Diggers doesn't seek to be a photographically realistic depiction of individual experiences of Aboriginal people but it was more we've taken on board all of the experiences but then fictionalised them. I've given soldiers invented names...because I didn't want to run the risk of misrepresenting the way families, communities or for that matter the Australian War Memorial understands the truth. I wanted it to be emotionally and historically truthful of a range of the black experiences of war but I didn't want to get caught up in having to be so accurate that the minute I made a mistake the whole thing came crashing down. So it's an act of fantasy, it's an act of creation, it's still an active storytelling and it still comes out of one of the Aboriginal senses of truth which is the emotional and family truth of experience but it's not designed to be a stage version of the history of the war.*

# THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) is Australia's first major cultural centre dedicated exclusively to contemporary arts<sup>cxxv</sup>. The museum opened 1991 with the University of Sydney as its holding company<sup>cxxvi</sup>. The museum was first instigated in 1962 after John Power, graduate of the University of Sydney, left his sizable inheritance to the university. Power left his inheritance for the purpose of 'future endowment of the people of Australia [and] to facilitate the exposition and dissemination of knowledge of the plastic arts'<sup>cxxvii</sup>. The University of Sydney remains the museum's major creditor<sup>cxxviii</sup>.

In 2010, the MCA received \$53 million from Sydney architect Sam Marshall and the New South Wales Government Architect's Office for the redevelopment of the museum<sup>cxxix</sup>. The museum reopened in 2012<sup>cxxx</sup>. The MCA is regarded as a major cultural centre and the best contemporary museum in Australia<sup>cxxxi</sup>. The museum provides a home for education and interpretive programs, as well as two floors of galleries for exhibitions<sup>cxxxii</sup>. The MCA now offers the National Centre for Creative Learning which includes: a library, digital and multimedia studios, a seminar room and lecture theatre<sup>cxxxiii</sup>. In addition, the expansion offers a new café, a sculpture terrace, and two harbour-side venues<sup>cxxxiv</sup>.

The MCA holds collections incorporating 4000 works across multiple art forms including painting, photography, sculpture, works on paper and moving image, as well as an extensive Indigenous art collection.<sup>cxxxv</sup> Liz-Ann Macgregor, MCA Director, explains:

*We are the only public institution in Australia that's dedicated to both collecting and exhibiting contemporary art so we felt it was important to declare ourselves as an Australian asset, not just a Sydney asset.*<sup>cxxxvi</sup>

The MCA is committed to maintaining a strong association with Aboriginal communities and see their Indigenous collection as a 'valued resource' and a 'core function' of their programs.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> The MCA holds three Aboriginal collections including the Maningrida Collection, the Ramingining Collection and the Arnott's Collection. Each collection compliments the other and their curatorial position comes from within the Indigenous community. The MCA develops its policies and programs in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and communities. These include professional development initiatives, increasing engagement of contemporary art through special MCA public programs and our Djurali Youth Art Careers Workshops.

## How the MCA addresses challenges associated with representation and authenticity

Keith Munro, Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs explains that the MCA only acquires the work of living artists, making challenges associated with representation and authenticity less difficult than is the case when institutions acquire work through the secondary market. In this way, MCA puts 'artists at the heart of all that we do as a museum,' seeking to bring 'artists and audiences together,' as Heather Whitely Robertson, Director, Audiences & Creative Learning at the MCA states.

Nonetheless, Munro is of the view that 'there is a lot more that can be done.' Even though he is well aware of the national program for Indigenous arts, he sees that 'the activities are fairly sparse in terms of projects that my colleagues get to initiate and develop and present' at other institutions. Whitely Robertson supports Munro's view, stating that 'it's also fair to say that particularly over the last 10 years that there's certainly from the engaged perspective

increased representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in major exhibitions and in holdings of collections in galleries in Australia [however] there's still a huge amount more to be done'.

Another challenge is for audiences to understand what constitutes contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts practice, with Munro and Whitely Robertson noting that audiences may have preconceived or stereotypical notions of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, or be overwhelmed by understanding the diverse ideas and meanings within the work. Whitely Robertson explains that the MCA address this challenge by:

*Work[ing] with the artists to help provide that interpretation to the public. So we interview artists, they make videos, we try to represent their voice as much as possible because our remit is about bringing artists and audiences together, so because of that the representation is a representation through the authentic voice of the artist, whether they are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists or not.*

Alongside the MCA's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programming, representation and authenticity is secured through the Indigenous Advisory Board, chaired by a member of the MCA board. They provide MCA with 'advice, support, feedback, links, opportunities,' with their expertise critical to MCA's success. Overall, their approach is one of 'finding a balance' between curatorial and audience focus in their work, to ensure that the Indigenous art is promoted and marketed appropriately, recognising authenticity of representation. Whitely Robertson also explains:

*We don't pay lip service to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs or audiences or artworks or exhibitions, we actually have a strong integrated approach right across the museum...I think that [a] major consideration of our positioning and relationship with Australian Indigenous culture is quite a driving force for the museum and certainly it is one of the strategic goals of the museum to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and we are also at the final stage of defining an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy which actually spells out what our commitment is across the museum in different areas of the business*

Developing relationships with communities 'around Australia' is crucial for authenticity and representation but also in helping build audiences from these communities. Munro says that the MCA makes a 'concerted effort to engage as much as possible and build networks and create a space where they feel comfortable coming to the MCA or engaging with our programs whether it's on site or offsite.'

## THE CAIRNS INDIGENOUS ART FAIR

The Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF) is a three-day event held in Cairns, Queensland each year that celebrates, showcases and markets the art of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners<sup>cxviii</sup>. CIAF is considered unique in that it 'is the only art fair in Australia to welcome commercial art galleries and Indigenous art centres'<sup>cxix</sup>. CIAF showcases visual arts through the Fair component of the event alongside theatre, performance, workshops, children's events, public programs, specialist events and professional development opportunities for artists. CIAF commenced in 2009 and the overview<sup>cxl</sup> of the 2014 event provided by CAIF indicates continued growth. The overview reports record attendance and quotes Arts Minister Ian Walker as commenting that 'this event continues to grow each year...the number of people who attend and as a sophisticated showcase for Queensland's Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander artists'<sup>cxli</sup>. CIAF is one of the programs supported by the Arts Queensland *Backing Indigenous Arts* initiative designed to develop an ethical and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts industry in Queensland<sup>cxlii</sup>.

Two key commitments by the CIAF suggest the Fair's consideration of and approach to issues within the challenge areas of the *representation and authenticity* of the art and event they are presenting. The first is that one of the core goals of CIAF is to 'celebrate the rich and vibrant practice of contemporary and traditional Indigenous art...including education and inspiring the community about the value and significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and cultures'<sup>cxliii</sup>. The goal speaks to the CIAF's recognition of and commitment to representing a diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art practice and ensuring that audiences are provided with education to contribute to understanding that diversity. Speaking to the breadth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists represented, the 2014 overview notes that to date the CIAFs combined involve 'participation by up to 1000 Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and performers'.<sup>cxliv</sup>

### How CIAF addresses challenges associated with representation and authenticity

Chair of the CIAF Board Cameron Costello explains that while he perceives that there are challenges currently around the sale of high-end Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual art due to the global economy, he also perceives that 'from a broader community engagement perspective, it's becoming increasingly more popular. The broader community engagement or desire to experience Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through art is growing'. Cameron noted that this growing interest was running parallel to 'growth in significant support from government around engagement or promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through the arts'. Cameron explains, however, that the lack of extended government support or the withdrawal of government support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts organisations, before they are wholly self-sufficient, is problematic.

CIAF is part of Arts Queensland's *Backing Indigenous Arts* (BIA) program. Cameron explains that BIA was 'very successful in its holistic approach to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts sector.' Cameron goes on to explain that three of the four elements of the holistic approach of the program 'were based around maintaining culture and product development and then the art fair was around the market—around sales and showcasing'. The program includes funding of arts centres, development initiatives for skills, projects and products, and the establishment of a print making centre. Cameron explains that these initiatives provide a foundation for each future CIAF. In addition, BIA supports the



development of networking opportunities for involved art centres to discuss issues around ethical representation and authenticity.

Cameron explains that he does not find authenticity challenging in terms of the work being produced, but rather in terms of the production of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts events: ‘..the key thing for me is that I’m not too concerned about the product development side of things regarding authenticity but one of the key challenges is about Aboriginal ownership of Aboriginal events and the authenticity about that’. Cameron explains that an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait arts events is crucial. He explains that as CIAF came out of a Queensland government model, that consideration of authenticity around the event itself, ‘means and models of Aboriginal ownership are something that needs to be explored.’ Cameron also explains that all galleries and art centres that are included in CIAF are required to ‘commit to ethical representation in accordance with the code of conduct’. He goes on to comment that the Artistic Director undertakes a form of screening of participants to ensure there is adherence to ethical representation. Cameron notes that the integrity around authenticity and representation is part of the reputation of CIAF that attracts audiences and collectors. Cameron comments that having a good Artistic Director and engaging with art centres and reputable galleries is essential to maintaining the authenticity and ethical representation within any Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander visual arts event.

Cameron comments that CIAF has been very successful in representing a diverse range of practitioners and communities the ‘diversity is across such a geographic region, Torres Strait as well as Aboriginal, urban as well as remote’. He explains that the diversity of representation is a big part of the audience attraction that underpins CIAF: ‘..the beauty of the art fair is that it provides a platform for that’. One existing challenge that Cameron notes in involving diverse groups of people and organisations in the CIAF is navigating a diversity of views about the ‘the model of delivery’. Another future challenge for CIAF that Cameron questions is if a concentration on Queensland art practice will prove to be diverse enough for audiences going into the future.

Cameron describes how CIAF employs multiple marketing strategies to engage multiple audiences segments. He comments that ‘the success of the event relies on purchases by international or national collectors, but at the same time the experience that the Fair brings them revolves around the festive vibe of having a lot of people there engaging authentically with Aboriginal people as well’. Cameron describes how the tourist audience segment is currently significant and having a greater understanding of how to engage with and harness that audience segment is critical moving forward.

CIAF successfully addresses challenges related to representation and authenticity through the implementation of initiatives to ensure the ethical representation of artists within CIAF and the inclusion of a diversity of artists and art practice.

## CLANCESTRY

Clancestry is 'A Celebration of Country', and is an 'annual festival celebrating the arts and cultural practices of the world's First Nations People with a particular focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders'<sup>cxlv</sup>. Produced by the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) the event commenced in 2013 and has a focus of cultural preservation and education. The annual event is held at QPAC, the cultural precinct and South Bank areas of Brisbane.

Held over three days, the festival showcases a variety of both traditional and contemporary art forms including music, dance, crafts, visual arts and storytelling within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Key to its development and ongoing success has been major consultation and involvement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

*It was very important to us that the event wasn't imposed on the community, rather that the community felt ownership of the event and a partner in its success. QPAC has a relationship with many Elders in the community and our first step was to pull together as many community leaders as we could to discuss our plans and seek advice and support. They demonstrated their support by being at the festival every day in big numbers<sup>cxlvi</sup>.*

The festival concept was developed from the priority of QPAC to better consolidate and focus the various strands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programming by the organisation. Relationships and partnerships are managed with local and nationally significant Indigenous organisations. This is done in order to develop and increase new works with an aim to build capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners and arts workers, and contribute to cultural maintenance. For Clancestry, QPAC's approach as a non-Indigenous organisation is to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curators who drive the artistic program and pass on their knowledge and expertise.

The week-long program features traditional and contemporary performances; concerts which include some level of professional development (for example a mentorship program with professional musicians such as Bernard Fanning in 2014); workshops; an arts and craft market; visual arts exhibitions; and a curated panel series called *Conversations*. A highlight is the closing ceremony which, on its first year, attracted an unprecedented number of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups to meet and collaborate. The closing ceremony was noted as the largest gathering held on the peninsula for over 100 years. Ten Aboriginal nations were involved<sup>cxlvii</sup>.

2015 sees Clancestry's third year in production. Since its inception, the guest curatorial involvement has gone from three curators in 2013 to six in 2015. In 2014, the festival successfully coincided with the Australian Performing Arts Market (APAM) 2014. Guest Curator (opening) Rhonda Roberts states that the opportunity enables Indigenous performers to convey their culture and ensure real employment outcomes for Indigenous artists:

*Not only is it essential that we have events like Clancestry to engage with each other but also for these artists who make this their livelihood and continue their practice<sup>cxlviii</sup>.*

Key achievements are also showcased via:

- the engagement of an emerging Indigenous producer position with QPAC. QPAC was successful in the first round of the Australia Council for the Arts Indigenous Emerging Producer Mentorship Program (EIMP)<sup>cxlix</sup>;

- the festival being awarded a Queensland Reconciliation Award, Partnership Category in 2013 for its partnership with Nguni Warrup Limited for the delivery of Clancestry;
- a rolling curatorial program with a series of guest curators drawn from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community that is crucial to addressing audience engagement, representation and notions of “authenticity”;
- the Clancestry Pathways Project mentoring program in 2014, offering Indigenous musicians hands-on experience with senior industry professional<sup>cli</sup>;
- and successfully gaining support in its first two presentations from Arts Queensland and the Queensland Government through its Backing Indigenous Arts initiative<sup>cli</sup>.

### **How Clancestry addresses challenges with representation and authenticity**

Deborah Murphy of QPAC explains that Clancestry is produced by a non-Indigenous organisation and so in order to address challenges with representation and authenticity:

*The way we have structured our working approach, as a non-Indigenous organisation, is to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curators who drive the artistic programming and remit for the festival...QPAC provides the catalyst for the presentation of work in Clancestry—it does not drive the artistic decisions.*

Deborah explains that the two key challenges faced by QPAC in producing Clancestry are a ‘lack of variety and affordability of new performance works’ due to a lack of investment in such work, and as a non-Indigenous organisation and the navigation and implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols. QPAC address this issue through community consultation and the engagement of guest curators to drive the program. Deborah explains how these approaches address notions of authenticity:

*Diversity of representation is an issue due to the availability of work that is eclectic and the support for development of making new and affordable work. Due to the processes we engage in order to work with curators and the wider community, we respect and acknowledge their decision-making with regards to not only notions of authenticity but the very definitions that underpin the term.*

Community consultation is a crucial strategy for the organisation to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait audiences and create positive and rich environments for them. Another strategy adopted by QPAC is building strong ongoing partnerships, for example with organisations such as Bangarra Dance Theatre, 98.9 FM Radio Station, the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts and Nguni Warrup. Deborah notes that this also enables capacity building within the sector.

## THE YIRRA YAAKIN THEATRE COMPANY

The Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company (Yirra Yaakin), based in Perth, was founded in 1993. Over the years it has commissioned and presented over 50 productions, ‘reached 13 countries in five continents and...won awards for theatre, governance and partnerships’<sup>clii</sup>. A review of Yirra Yaakin’s performance history on the company’s website indicates a long and diverse performance history across community, festival, schools and mainstream contexts and in local (metropolitan, regional and remote), national and international locations<sup>cliii</sup>. The Company’s name means “Stand Tall” in Noongar language and is under the Artistic Direction of Kyle Morrison. It has a commitment to the presentation of quality theatre alongside education and community programs<sup>cliv</sup>. The company has, at its core, the desire to produce theatre that is ‘exciting, entertaining, educational, authentic and culturally appropriate’<sup>clv</sup> and that ‘remains under Aboriginal control’<sup>clvi</sup>.

### How Yirra Yaakin addresses challenges associated with presentation

Kyle Morrison views the Aboriginal and Torres Islander theatre ecology as ‘Always in a phase of growth...It’s a point now where real sustainability is just around the corner.’ Within this growth, he perceives a number of opportunities and challenges within the ecology more broadly, such as presentation and more specifically, presentation in the mainstream. A key area of both opportunity and challenge is about where and by whom Aboriginal theatre is being produced and presented. Kyle notes that there is the growing support for Aboriginal people within mainstream theatre organisations:

*One of the beautiful things about it is there is more support for Aboriginal people in mainstream and major orgs, like Malthouse Theatre, like Belvoir St Theatre. The investment in Aboriginal directors, writers, producers has been really good.*

A challenge for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre companies according to Kyle, however, is that they do not receive the investment to enable them to have the capacity or resources to produce and present their own stories to the same capacity as mainstream organisations:

*The investment for Aboriginal people to do that ourselves is still not where it needs to be for the authentic Aboriginal voices to be told. Belvoir and Malthouse are investing for people to do this and that’s really fantastic but the [Aboriginal theatre] companies aren’t able to access that kind [of] investment to tell our own stories our way.*

Connected to this idea of ‘investment’ and the opportunity for Aboriginal theatre companies to tell their own stories, Kyle explains, is the need to increase the number of experienced Aboriginal people working in theatre by developing the opportunities for viable and consistent work for practitioners:

*We don’t do works by non-Aboriginal people so we have to be taking up works from the Aboriginal community and so there’s a kind of catch 22 in that we need to be producing more work to inspire more people, to get more people invested and enthused in the work, but we need more people [already] invested and enthused to help us produce the work.*

The challenge here also is the potential for those who are currently in the ecology to “burn out”. In addition, Kyle notes that limited investment means that there is only a limited number of productions that Yirra Yaakin are able to produce each year, which leaves little room for experimentation or error.

Kyle acknowledges the importance of collaborations or partnerships in both reaching audiences and also in providing opportunities for capacity building for practitioners:

*Those collaborations, so working with Black Swan [State Theatre Company] or looking to work with other State theatre companies, major arts organisations because they have a. the audience, b. the resources and c. some of the expertise that might be lacking. I think these partnerships are definitely very important.*

He explains that the engagement with mainstream companies in the present day is likely to contribute to a stronger future for Aboriginal theatre companies as skills development for practitioners will benefit the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre ecology:

*The investment that Aboriginal theatre companies can put into our writers is still quite small compared to what these large scale companies are able to do...We'll see the benefits of that in the years to come and in a much more sustainable vibrant healthy theatre ecology. We'll grow up around that.*

In recent years, Yirra Yaakin has had creative partnerships including a community cultural partnership with the Western Australian Museum and the Belvoir St Theatre. The former involves Yirra Yaakin being resident at the Museum for a three year period<sup>clvii</sup>. Laurie notes that the resident partnership 'will give Yirra Yaakin direct access to 300,000 museum visitors a year'<sup>clviii</sup>. Sally Richardson of Yirra Yaakin also comments that the partnership will give Yirra Yaakin access to the tourist market<sup>clix</sup>. The latter was a co-production the same year with Belvoir St Theatre, also providing potential new audiences and capacity building.

Another key challenge to presenting in mainstream venues that Kyle explains is that they may not be a very 'welcoming place for Aboriginal audiences to come'. Yirra Yaakin has experimented with a number of different spaces and venues to try and find 'places that our Aboriginal audiences feel comfortable in'. Yirra Yaakin also connects with their audiences through 'Being visible in the community'. This is done through having a presence at community events, festivals, on community radio and working with people who have a strong visibility in the community. Yirra Yaakin's success in meeting the challenges associated with presentation of Aboriginal theatre is seen in Kyle's comment that Yirra Yaakin try:

*To keep the sense that Yirra Yaakin is part of a wider Aboriginal community but also very much part of a professional theatre company and also a part of a wider Aboriginal arts community.*

## KIM SCOTT

Kim Scott is the celebrated author of a number of novels and short stories, two novels of which were recipients of the Miles Franklin Literary Award—*Benang: From the Heart* in 2000 and *That Deadman Dance* in 2011. The former was the first time an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander author has won the award<sup>clx</sup>. Kim is a member of the Noongar community and is recognised for his novels having ‘positioned Noongar culture before the wider Australian and international communities’<sup>clxi</sup>.

Kim is one of the founders of the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project, which aims to ‘reclaim Wirlomin stories and dialect, in support of the maintenance of Noongar language, and to share them with Noongar families and communities as part of a process to claim, control and enhance Wirlomin Noongar cultural heritage’<sup>clxii</sup>. The project has published four illustrated books telling Noongar stories in Noongar language with accompanying English literal and prose translations<sup>clxiii</sup>. Kim is acknowledged as ‘helping to return oral histories and archival language material to their home communities’<sup>clxiv</sup> through his involvement in the project.

Kim was acknowledged as Western Australian of the Year 2012 for his achievements as a novelist and for his contributions to the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project<sup>clxv</sup>. Kim is also a Professor of Writing at Curtin University, Queensland.

### How Kim Scott addresses challenges with presentation

When reflecting on the presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art within a mainstream context, Kim notes two key and related challenges. He notes that ‘one of the dangers...is it can set up a sort of reductionist or reductive loop which reduces the possible diversity and richness of Aboriginal or Indigenous art across Australia’, when such art is viewed as a product for mainstream consumption. He further explains that this may have a consequent impact on emerging artists, communities and audiences. The second challenge is reconciling mainstream success with value to home communities. Kim explains that while his novels have perhaps reached a ‘wide and international audience’, the issue is that ‘my home community is a minority of that audience and that community may not engage with the text of those works. And so this is the issue of mainstream presentation: you can get there, but so what?’

Kim explains that his most recent response to these challenges is to have a ‘split focus’: his literary novel writing and the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project. Across both of these foci there are challenges and opportunities to reaching varied audiences that Kim reflects on. He makes note, however, that neither focus is underpinned by a primary desire to reach a mainstream audience.

Regarding his literary writing, Kim is clear that the nature of the work is ‘different then trying to be a best seller’, that his writing is ‘art as a meta language, reflecting on itself...[and] reflecting on the nature of the exchange.’ He comments that this is what ‘makes it hard to be appealing to a wide audience’. He notes that because his writing does not necessarily fit into a neat category, ‘It may make it difficult for people to read because it’s not what they’re wanting or think they’ll get...people haven’t got the context or cultural literacy to...know where I’m coming from’.

Kim's literary writing, however, has engaged audiences in Australia and internationally. Kim perceives that winning mainstream awards or prizes for his literary writing are key moments that enable his literary writing to reach a broader audience. In addition, he comments that despite the complexities inherent in the premise of such awards, they also break 'the niche in a really attractive ways. It points to the importance of Indigenous Australia to national identity without being niched'. Kim also notes that a 'useful function' of his literary career is that it 'shines a light back on the other more regionally grounded work of a different nature the [Wirlomin] language project'. The Wirlomin Language and Stories Project is the other of his two foci.

The Wirlomin Language and Stories project has a collective approach to language revival and to the creation of the illustrated books it produces. A number of people within the community work to create and illustrate the books. Kim comments that illustrated books were chosen for the project because 'you can have a multiplicity of people at the cultural interface'. It is this collective approach which arguably allows the books to engage people both as audiences and contributors. The process engages the home community deeply in the books being created and allows as Kim explains 'sharing that [Noongar] heritage with, incrementally and ever increasingly wider circles [starting] with our own home community'. At the centre of the circles are the workshops where the books are created. Within these workshops, Kim explains, there is an awareness of audiences, for example in terms of the workshop participants decision making regarding what does and does not want to be shared with a wider audience. Just out from the centre of the circle, a pre-publication phase takes place where a draft version is presented to the wider Noongar community through events and school tours. This pre-publication phase allows for people—including wider community, Elders and young people—to actively experience, respond and present the books enabling them to 'work in that space between audience and consumer or producer'. Kim explains that this is important in ensuring that you 'bring that home audience who is connected to place with you, or with the product.'

Regarding publication of the books more broadly, Kim explains that there are complexities around locating a publisher willing to publish the books with illustrators from the home community rather than with high profile artists: '...keeping that integrity made it harder to publish'. The four books were however ultimately published as they were intended. The Wirlomin Language and Stories Project engage home communities, but also has the potential to reach broader international and mainstream audiences.

Kim addresses the challenges he views in the presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in the mainstream context by pursuing a 'split focus' in his practice: his literary writing and the Wirlomin Language and Stories project. He explains that there are other strategies yet to be explored that may provide other avenues for working with these two areas, such as the use of social or digital media:

*I am also interested in digital media as a way of working with this split focus. So you can reach a very wide audience but there's also a lot of potential to have a home community engaging and participating via social media or 'uploading' to a website, for example.*

## DESART

Desart provides economic, social and cultural support for Central Aboriginal art centres<sup>clxvi</sup>. They act as a non-profit peak industry body representing approximately 3000 artists from a diverse range of Indigenous communities in the Central desert region of Australia<sup>clxvii</sup>. Desart is based in Alice Springs and has been working to provide development opportunities for Indigenous communities for over two decades<sup>clxviii</sup>.

In Central Australia, art centres contribute to the preservation of Australian Indigenous history and culture<sup>clxix</sup>. Desart has over 40 member art centres<sup>clxx</sup>, all of which receive support to promote and market Indigenous art<sup>clxxi</sup>. Desart significantly contributes to the Indigenous art code of practice through their commitment to 'Aboriginal-owned and controlled' art centres<sup>clxxii</sup>. Desart provides employment opportunities, skills development, and sustainable business training to promote lifelong success for Indigenous art centres and artists. In 2014 they introduced the Art Worker Professional Development and Training Week. This program provides practical skills training for arts workers, including professional and technical skills for art centres. The program promotes representation and participation of indigenous art workers in governance, management and marketing of Aboriginal art<sup>clxxiii</sup>. Desart also provides a range of support programs including governance and human resource support, IT technical support, and photography and digital imaging training<sup>clxxiv</sup>.

Desart endorses collaboration between Indigenous art centres and has achieved successful development opportunities for Indigenous art<sup>clxxv</sup>. In 1991, the Araluen Arts Centre, in partnership with Desart, introduced Desert Mob, an exhibition that promotes Indigenous art from Central Australian art centres to a broader audience<sup>clxxvi</sup>. Desert Mob is put on annually as the only exhibition of its kind in Australia<sup>clxxvii</sup>. It continues to celebrate contemporary indigenous art trends with over 300 works exhibited in three Araluen Arts Centre galleries<sup>clxxviii</sup>. Desert Mob provides a meeting place for Aboriginal culture and arts.

### **How Desart overcomes challenges associated with the image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art**

Desart Chief Executive Officer, Phillip Watkins, explains that the biggest challenge regarding the image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is stereotypical audience perceptions. Watkins explains that audience perceptions are often: '...about the dot, dot and lots of Western Desert style and it's a real challenge to I suppose change perceptions.' Desart has undertaken a number of initiatives to alter this 'image issue' such as showcasing other styles and mediums. These initiatives include a photography prize and sculpture exhibition.

Watkins sees that the challenges for audiences are to understand the 'diversity' of Aboriginal arts, where some people still relate to it 'ethnographically,' creating tensions between the 'ethnographic and contemporary'. He believes it is vital not to be 'complacent' but to 'continually review and innovate ourselves.' While Desart does not have a specific program to shift the image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, their 'significant public investment,' 'major shows,' and 'blockbuster shows' move the image in the public mind. However, Watkins notes that these initiatives have not happened 'for a very long time' and this opens up opportunities to do it again as they 'make a difference.' Watkins recognises the challenge of Aboriginal people being 'under-represented' where it is 'others who are speaking on behalf of us.' His response at Desart is:



*Our art worker program that's been given significant priority because also from our side artists or art workers once they leave the community don't know where it goes, don't know what happens with it, how it's being presented, so our art worker programs attempt to address that.*

## COUNTRY ARTS SA

Country Arts SA is situated within the Regional Arts Australia's (RAA) member network, which forms a national advocacy and industry development body for the arts within rural and regional Australia. The purpose of the network is to provide access to art and culture for rural-based Australians whilst offering a platform for a multitude of diverse, artistic voices to be heard.<sup>clxxxix</sup>

Country Arts SA offers an array of services and programs focusing on the management of performance and visual arts venues whilst allocating resources through the acquisition of grant funds. Initiatives that showcase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts include *Blak Nite*<sup>clxxx</sup> an initiative to bring local, regional and rural performers throughout South Australia together. Another program, *Our Mob*<sup>clxxxi</sup> celebrates statewide, regional and remote Australian artists. *Young Mob*—an extension of *Our Mob*—showcases young Indigenous artists. *Tough(er) Love* profiles both Indigenous and non-Indigenous sculptors and painters within South Australia<sup>clxxxii</sup>, whilst the *Spirit Festival*<sup>clxxxiii</sup> is considered South Australia's leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander annual event to celebrate the cultural richness of Australia's First Peoples.

### How Country Arts SA addresses challenges associated with the image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art

Sam Yates, Country Arts SA Manager of Arts and Cultural Development Manager, explains that Country Arts SA have a holistic approach to their engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in how they operate internally as an organisation and in their external activities:

*So all of this stuff we're shifting across the organisation. Yes, it's making change within and without, so within our organisation but also that has an impact on how we work with community as well.*

Sam explains there are a number of initiatives such as 'the engagement strategy, we've got the welcome to country protocols, we've got cultural sharing policy and training opportunities' that inform how the organisation works. Other initiatives Country Arts SA note include the development of an Indigenous reference group, capacity building opportunities for Aboriginal arts workers in South Australia, and engagement opportunities designed to encourage both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous audiences to feel welcome and comfortable engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art across a range of spaces and venues.

Within this broader organisational approach, Country Arts SA describe specific approaches to address challenges associated with the audience image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Both Sam and Steve Saffal, Country Arts SA CEO, note that image is a challenge that is more pronounced for audiences who have limited experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Steve comments that image is not an issue for 'those in the know'. Sam and Mandy Brown, Country Arts SA Indigenous Arts and Cultural Engagement Officer, explain that the challenges about image for audiences with limited experience, relate to these audiences' preconceptions and expectations about the content or style of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. These audiences therefore may not value a diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art practice. Sam and Mandy both note this audience group holds a strong expectation of traditional art practice. Sam explains:

*There's that expectation from people that know nothing about Aboriginal culture that they're going to get some kind of traditional experience rather than the contemporary experience. So there is a challenge there to shift people's mind-set.*

Sam also notes that some non-Indigenous audiences may view Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art as an educative rather than entertaining experience. She comments:

*The Aboriginal community understand that, they get it, people that do already experience that get it, but there's a lot of people that don't [get it and] wouldn't go for entertainment's sake. They go to these things expecting to learn something and they are people that are open minded normally or they might be already converted to experiencing and acknowledging Aboriginal culture within Australian society.*

Steve, Mandy and Sam all acknowledge the impact of programming and marketing on audiences' image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Increased and diverse programming, Steve explains is one approach Country Arts SA is undertaking:

*To actually put more shows, as many shows as possible on the stage or in regional galleries and I think the more shows we put out there I think the more the people are going to understand this is legitimate art and the equal of anything that white Australia can produce and I'm pretty sure that we're making some inroads in that regard. So I think the more we can put out there the more diverse programming we can do.*

Mandy provides an example where Country Arts SA use strategies that address challenges associated with audiences' image or familiarity by providing the opportunity for audiences to have deeper engagement in order to develop their understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art:

*Artists...wear a label as the artist and they get to talk to buyers and general public on their artworks. So that's people who might never have spoken to an Aboriginal person or want to know more about the art and how they do their art can talk to them personally.*

Mandy and Sam both note that Country Arts SA have an increasing awareness of the impact of marketing on audiences' perception of the image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. Mandy comments:

*We need to talk more with marketing on how we're going to do this rather than portray...for example the Chooky Dancers were traditional dance but most of the performances were humorous and contemporary and whether the audience expects that or not, the expectations rely heavily on preparation of performances and exhibitions and marketing. So we're going to look further into that.*

## BANGARRA

Bangarra is based in Sydney and is an 'Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander organisation and one of Australia's leading performing arts companies'<sup>clxxxiv</sup>. Bangarra celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> year in 2014 and has been under the Artistic Direction of Stephen Page since 1991<sup>clxxxv</sup>. Amongst many notable productions during its history are *Ochres*, *Blak*, and *Patyegarang*. The company celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage by presenting deeply moving contemporary dance performances with excellence and integrity. Their 'relationship with Australian Indigenous communities are at the heart of the company with a dance technique forged from over 40,000 years of culture, infused with contemporary movement'<sup>clxxxvi</sup>. Alongside a considerable touring program (both domestic and international), Bangarra has ongoing community engagement and education initiatives, such as the *Rekindling Youth* program. Speaking of Bangarra's engagement with both community and mainstream audiences and venues, Bangarra Choreographer and Artist in Resident, Frances Rings, comments: 'It does the Opera House, it does have...the big gigs but also it is not afraid to step into its own backyard and do the community performances on river banks and the backs of trucks'<sup>clxxxvii</sup>. The company reports a dedication to observing cultural protocols and long history of maintaining 'strong relationships with a number of traditional communities' including through a 'return to country' practice<sup>clxxxviii</sup>. Bangarra is recognised for having a 'signature dance vocabulary fusing contemporary and Indigenous dance styles'<sup>clxxxix</sup>. Stephen Page explains that the company draws on:

*Heritage and tradition, and presenting that in contemporary ways. Through stories you are given you can care-take the integrity, breathe contemporary life into them and somehow awaken people's spiritual consciousness by getting them to feel they can connect to the beauty of Indigenous heritage'*<sup>cxc</sup>.

Bangarra has met considerable critical acclaim as indicated by being the recipient of many awards and accolades including multiple *Helpmann Awards* over the years.

### How Bangarra address challenges associated with awareness

During its 25 year history, Bangarra has built a strong awareness and brand image with audiences. Stephen explains how this image is based on the strength of the works themselves thanks to the deep community connections and mainstream marketing mechanisms.

A central contributor to audiences' awareness of Bangarra and the Bangarra brand that Stephen describes, is the work itself and the integrity within the process of the work. Stephen explains the key initial stage of the process of developing a work relies on a deep connection and relationship with families on country. The company engages with 'a lot of backstory and talking cultural protocols with community that then helps us take the heart of that process into our contemporary process'. Stephen discusses moving into their contemporary process: 'From out of that would come how do we work in the mainstream? How do we maintain the integrity and the spirit of that story and then layer it over this physical form that then has to attract a dance audience?' Stephen agrees that Bangarra's deep connection with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is part of what contributes to the audiences' image of the company. He states, 'A huge part of our values is the continuing of our relationships with immediate communities and families that have been the inspiration behind our reconnection to stories'.

Stephen explains that the brand development of Bangarra has been very much about focussing on internal process, which then have external outcomes:

*The internal process, it is about trying to keep all the different cultural satellites close to you whether it's the dancers, the creative team, the marketing team, the cultural Elders consulting. There's a whole line of process and cultural protocols that you go through that if you keep massaging the energies and the spirit of them, all being communicative, you somehow hope to think that its strength or outcome is going to be able to shift a consciousness and if it connects to people in different ways...then you feel that that audience has some-how connected.*

Stephen explains that there is 'also a mainstream mechanism or infrastructure that has developed with new technologies, especially over the past decade' that is a key component of the success of Bangarra in building audience awareness. He comments that when Bangarra tours performances through main stage venues the company also works in partnership with the in-house marketing teams of those venues. Stephen uses Bangarra's 10 year residency with the Sydney Opera House to illustrate how both groups contribute and collaborate in this type of marketing and audience development partnership: '[The Opera House contributes] their knowledge of how they play with all the different technologies and satellites and mediums of marketing...and they learn from what we do because of the stories that we work with...and they definitely utilise Bangarra's cultural glossary or protocols as part of their tools.'

The success of Bangarra's strong brand image and strong audience awareness of the company has, at its foundation, the work itself and the integrity and internal processes from which the work is created. A core component of these internal processes is having deep community connections and engagement. Complementing these foundations is a strategic and collaborative approach to mainstream marketing.

## ANITA HEISS

Dr Anita Heiss is a renowned author of Aboriginal literature and is a member of the Wiradjuri nation of central New South Wales. Currently Anita works as a full-time writer and Adjunct Associate Professor (unpaid) at the University of Western Sydney<sup>CXCI</sup>.

Anita is an accomplished writer, with published works in multiple genres including non-fiction, children's literature, fiction, poetry, social commentary and travel articles<sup>CXCII</sup>. Her most recent novel, *Tiddas* (Simon & Schuster, Australia 2014), has been optioned for a 6-part television series<sup>CXCIII</sup>. She has published works in many genres including poetry, social commentary and travel articles<sup>CXCIV</sup>. Anita's literary success is evident through her ability to manage diverse genres and engage in the challenge of contemporary storytelling. She has invented a genre of contemporary Indigenous literature known as 'Koorie chic-lit' or 'choc-lit', inspired by the release of *Not Meeting Mr Right* (Random House, 2007) and *Avoiding Mr Right* (Bantam Books, 2008)<sup>CXCV</sup>. The series was successful in attracting an audience that was not engaging with Indigenous arts. In an interview with *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Anita commented: '...these are Aboriginal women who did not appear in contemporary Australian literature until I put them there'<sup>CXCVI</sup>.

Anita has built a network of partnerships and a strong presence in the sector. She dedicates a large proportion of her time to promoting Indigenous arts and education. Anita is an Advocate for the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence and an Indigenous Day Ambassador for the Indigenous Literacy Foundation (ILF)<sup>CXCVII</sup>. She is proud of her heritage and passionate about creating opportunities for the next generation of Indigenous writers.

### How Anita Heiss addresses challenges with awareness

Anita is accomplished in developing audiences for her writing. She has 10,826 followers on Twitter<sup>CXCVIII</sup>, 2,520 likes on Facebook<sup>CXCIX</sup> and regularly travels internationally to lecture on Indigenous literature and to perform her work. She also appears frequently as a guest at writers' festivals nationally, including Sydney Writers Festival, Perth International Arts Festival, Adelaide Writers Week, Byron Bay Writers Festival, Message Sticks, and Brisbane Writers Festival<sup>CC</sup>. Social media has contributed greatly to her marketing strategy. 'I participate in social media so that I can actually engage with those who read my books. Most of my followers are in some way interested in Aboriginal art, culture, politics and want some level of engagement,' she explains.

Creating awareness has been identified as a challenge to developing audiences for Indigenous writers. Anita explains:

*It's about marketing and distribution, that's where we're falling down. We've got people who are writing award winning titles, but they may be published by publishers who don't have the actual capital to put into decent marketing and distribution.*

A lack of resources to develop marketing strategies for publishers and writers is a challenge within the Indigenous arts sector. 'Everybody needs to be part of social media because that's where audiences are, but it's not a free platform for promotion, it takes human resources. I think there's no point in doing it if you're not going to do it properly,' says Anita. She goes on to say: 'we're talking about the Indigenous mob here. They don't know what it requires and that's what's missing in terms of understanding how the marketing mission works.' She

advises that Indigenous publishers and writers need to understand how social media ‘works’ and how ‘essential it is for their product’ and for them to ‘engage’ with their audiences.

## ILBIJERRI THEATRE COMPANY (ILBIJERRI)

ILBIJERRI, meaning “Coming Together for Ceremony” in Woiwurrung language, was established in 1990 and is ‘Australia’s leading and longest running Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre company’<sup>ccci</sup>. The Company is currently under the Artistic Direction of Rachael Maza. Since its establishment, ILBIJERRI has commissioned 36 new productions and presented productions to 250 000 audience members across national and international locations<sup>ccii</sup>. Notable recent productions include *Jack Charles V the Crown*, *Beautiful One Day* and *North West of Nowhere*. The company has a vision that, ‘Our voices are powerful in determining the future of Australia. Our culture is respected, celebrated and embraced’. The company has a commitment to Indigenous protocols, ways of working, self-determination, diversity and respect for Elders, culture and country<sup>cciii</sup>.

ILBIJERRI is described as a ‘leading light in Australian theatre, creating innovative contemporary works that challenge and connect with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences’<sup>cciv</sup>. A 2013 comment by ILBIJERRI Executive Producer Brad Spolding, indicates recent growth in audience engagement with the company: ‘Over the last four years **ILBIJERRI** Theatre Company has experienced a growing audience for our work. We believe this is reflective of a growing interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performance from audiences across the country’<sup>ccv</sup>.

In addition to its productions, ILBIJERRI engages in a number of other initiatives such as artist development programs like the ILBIJERRI Writers Residency and educational theatre productions such as *Body Armour*<sup>ccvi</sup>. The company is acknowledged for both theatre productions and partnerships in awards such as Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award and a Creative Partnerships Arts and Health Award<sup>ccvii</sup>. The company’s website notes the importance of collaboration with community and artists as central to their work<sup>ccviii</sup>. ILBIJERRI is acknowledged as using creative processes that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to tell a diversity of stories<sup>ccix</sup>.

### How ILBIJERRI address challenges associated with audience uncertainty

Rachael Maza explains that ILBIJERRI acknowledges that they are still developing their profile and building audiences across both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences and non-Indigenous audiences and that the company has an awareness of the uncertainties across both segments.

Rachael prefaces her discussion about audience uncertainties by noting that contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre is a relatively young industry. She further explains that it comes from strong political foundations and was therefore rightly often ‘unapologetically political and in your face, it was about getting a message out there’. She explains though that, ‘The dialogue we are now having with our audiences has moved on and I think that the conversation is the same but the way we talk about it has shifted.’ Rachael explains that due to the hard work and strong foundations laid by the company’s predecessors, ILBIJERRI can now focus on both the political message driving the work alongside the artistic creativity around the presentation of the work, which has allowed a *maturation* of what is being presented.

Rachael explains that one of the key ways to break down audience barriers for non-Indigenous audiences is through the work itself. Using the example of *Jack Charles V the*



*Crown* she describes how access to his story and his generosity and graciousness in sharing his story allows the work to reach audiences in a 'very affecting way'. She further suggests with such work, it is not possible to 'sit in the audience and not...get over your uncertainty or awkwardness. I believe it's through the work that we start to break down that uncertainty if that's the term, or I would call it awkwardness, and start to demystify'. Mindful of the connection between the work itself and audience uncertainty, ILBIJERRI employ a range of strategies related to arts development in order to develop a strong sector producing quality work. Regarding arts development, Rachael posits that one of the approaches is 'around artist development. We grow the writers and develop the actors, through initiatives like Writing Labs'. The *ILBIJERRI Writers residency* is a specific initiative designed to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writers develop their practice.

ILBIJERRI also employs a number of strategies to reach both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous audiences and deepen their engagement, therefore minimising audience uncertainty. Rachael notes the importance of marketing to reach audiences and to build the profile of the company as paramount: 'Marketing has been a huge growth in the company. We now have an identified marketing position. It cannot be underestimated how important marketing is to our ongoing community and stakeholder engagement'. Rachael further explains the importance of social and online media alongside more traditional marketing methods, which are all utilised by ILBIJERRI. She views long-term approaches to marketing as significant, particularly for shows with short seasons. The more established the profile of the company, the less uncertainty audiences may have with engaging.

Maintaining ongoing communication with audiences has contributed to ILBIJERRI's relationship with its audiences. One example Rachael provides is when ILBIJERRI undertook a crowdsourcing initiative to raise funds for a production:

*It is more than just about fundraising, it is about engaging with your audiences in a meaningful way...I realised that they had become actively engaged. The relationship [with audiences] becomes very real in that moment as opposed to "I'm just a passive audience member". It's like "You're actually a partner now".*

Rachael explains that this became a strong audience-building initiative both allowing contributors to feel actively engaged with the company and also providing the company with an expansion of their mailing list, which enabled the company to maintain an ongoing relationship with these audiences.

Another recent initiative was working with the regional organisations that presented the recent *Jack Charles V the Crown* national tour to develop both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous audiences for the production. The initiatives 'were about empowering them to build their own audiences'. These initiatives involved encouraging presenting organisations to make strong and ongoing connections with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and having presenting organisations consider 'how they open up their spaces to the communities'. The provision of Question and Answer sessions, the opportunity to meet with Jack Charles following shows and providing updates about the tour to past audiences were other initiatives that complemented the show. In addition, Rachael explains that the tour was well reviewed from earlier shows, meaning the presenting organisations were confident in the quality of the show. Rachael explains that the strength of the production coupled with the initiatives 'Definitely minimized audience uncertainty'. In a similar way to the crowdsourcing initiative, these initiatives all provide the opportunity to have a deeper and

stronger sense of engagement and belonging with both the company and the presenting organisations.

Rachael notes that as ILBIJERRI are still developing their audiences, partnering or collaborating with other companies that have established audiences is an important approach to reaching audiences:

*What works well is when we partner with presenters so we can grow our audiences through other peoples audiences. So say if we program with the Melbourne Festival we automatically get Melbourne Festival audiences....That's been a very strong and effective strategy!*

ILBIJERRI has worked in partnership with the Melbourne Festival for *Tanderrum* and Belvoir St Theatre for *Coranderrk* and *Beautiful One Day*. Rachael explains that 'Getting the right partnership makes the world of difference' to audience development.

The success of ILBIJERRI in addressing audience uncertainties can be found in their development of and support for high quality theatre presenting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories and the company's use of initiatives to reach audiences and foster deeper audience engagement. Rachael notes that there has been a positive 'shift in the demand for our work' and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theatre is a 'growing industry. It's at the cusp of a very exciting new chapter'.

## DEBORAH BONAR

Deborah Bonar is a leading Indigenous artist in Western Australia. She has established Scribblebark Design as an art studio business run from her home studio in Ballajura, WA<sup>ccx</sup>. Deborah was born in Perth and is of Gija and Yamatji heritage<sup>ccxi</sup>. Deborah is accomplished in various art forms including painting, drawing, digital design, photography, printmaking, textiles, sand painting and glasswork<sup>ccxii</sup>. Her most recent solo exhibition, *Prismatic*, showcased her contemporary abstract landscapes and skyscapes at Moores Building Contemporary Art Gallery in 2014<sup>ccxiii</sup>. In the same year she exhibited art works at Yey *Susurrus*, a group exhibition at the Joondalup Art Gallery. Deborah also conducts conference and forum presentations, including her 2014 presentation at the Colour Society of Australia: National Conference, titled *Scribblebark: Aboriginal Art Practice in the 21st Century*<sup>ccxiv</sup>.

Deborah is sought after to run community art workshops at community and corporate events. For her workshops, Deborah designs a large canvas and invites spectators to contribute to the artwork. In 2014 she held a workshop outside of the Art Gallery of WA as a part of *Nomad Two Worlds: Celebrate WA Day: Come Out & Play*<sup>ccxv</sup>. In the same year, Deborah held one of her workshops at the *Sorry Day Celebrations* at Wellington Square in Perth<sup>ccxvi</sup>. She has also run workshops at corporate events with Chevron Australia and the Australian Institute of Management.<sup>ccxvii</sup> Deborah's workshops encourage non-Indigenous audiences to interact with Indigenous artists and learn about Indigenous culture.

Deborah has achieved significant recognition for her contribution to Indigenous arts in Australia. In 2011 she was a recipient of the Cossack Art Award, the most sought after art award in regional Australia<sup>ccxviii</sup>. She was a finalist in the 23rd Annual Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award and was highly commended at the City of Belmont Art and Photography Awards<sup>ccxix</sup>.

### How Deborah Bonar addresses challenges associated with audience uncertainty

Deborah explains what she observes about non-Indigenous audiences, saying:

*There has been some concern that non-Indigenous people find it hard to talk about Aboriginal art that has sensitivity within the work. People are curious but they don't know how to word their questions appropriately to an artist or an Aboriginal person.*

Deborah also finds that:

*Sometimes Indigenous people struggle to engage with the wider community. Some Aboriginal artists tend to shy away and they don't feel culturally secure engaging with the wider community, so it works both ways.*

Deborah develops her arts practice to encourage engagement with the wider community. Her community art and workshops give her the opportunity to interact with non-Indigenous audiences. 'I've met many people who are interested in and curious about Aboriginal art and culture' says Deborah. 'I meet people who don't know anything about Aboriginal art. People start to ask some little questions and they get the sense of "this is really interesting", they start engaging and a conversation happens' she explains. Deborah's community canvas workshops also address false impressions of Aboriginal art. Deborah says: 'Many people think "anybody could do a dot painting", however once they have a go they say "this is

actually a lot of work". They then have a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal art.'

Deborah's community canvas workshops give audiences an opportunity to share the experience of creating Indigenous art through participatory engagement. 'They get to see the work in progress' says Deborah. She tells us some people will immediately participate and others will be initially passive, although once they engage with her they become enthusiastic about the experience. 'I've had people come and dot and they will stay for twenty minutes or more, they become focused and engaged. They really get into it and you can see they are enjoying themselves' says Deborah. She goes on to say: 'They make comments such as "this is good fun" or "this is therapeutic"'. Deborah talks about the wider community being 'fascinated' with her workshops. 'In most cases, if people are still around, they will come back to see the final painting. They take photos of their children or other people having a go at the dot painting. People want to capture the moment' she says.

Community art and workshops have led to larger opportunities for Deborah. 'I have the opportunity to speak to other people and widen my networks, which is really important to me' says Deborah. She further suggests: 'It gives people an opportunity to come up and chat to me as an artist and I can talk to them about other projects I'm working on and promote my exhibitions.' Deborah also connects with the wider community by presenting artist talks, opening exhibitions and presenting at conferences. 'Many Aboriginal artists don't make speeches at their exhibitions, talking in front of people is a big deal. I'm now comfortable getting up to speak and I think this makes me quite different' says Deborah. She claims: 'I'm always delivering something, whether that be a community canvas, an artist talk or engaging with people at events'. Deborah advises other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to engage with audiences and people within the art sector, saying: 'You've got to get out there to be noticed. You have to be proactive. Be reliable, keep appointments, be professional, and present yourself well. I love what I do, but I have to work hard.'

## APPENDIX B: AUDIENCE PROFILES

Profile of those who have attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts in the past 12 months

### **QA1. Age by Attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
<b>Sample</b>	<b>n=726</b>	<b>n=2278</b>
15-34	36%	33%
35-49	30%	27%
50-64	22%	20%
65+	11%	19%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

### **QA2. Gender by Attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
<i>Male</i>	45%	50%
<i>Female</i>	55%	50%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

### **State by Attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander**

## **Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
<i>New South Wales</i>	32%	32%
<i>Victoria</i>	26%	25%
<i>Queensland</i>	22%	19%
<i>South Australia</i>	5%	8%
<i>Western Australia</i>	9%	11%
<i>Tasmania</i>	2%	2%
<i>Northern Territory</i>	1%	1%
<i>ACT</i>	2%	2%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

## **Location by Attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
<i>Metro</i>	66%	74%
<i>Regional</i>	34%	26%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

## **QZ4. Country of birth by Attended Aboriginal or Torres**

***Strait Islander Arts***

<i>Column %</i>	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
<i>English Speaking Country &amp; Prefer not to say</i>	94%	91%
<i>Non English Speaking Country</i>	6%	9%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

***QZ6. Language spoken at home by Attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts***

<i>Column %</i>	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
<i>English</i>	97%	94%
<i>Other</i>	3%	6%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

***QZ1. Employment by Attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts***

<i>Column %</i>	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
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<i>Employed</i>	58%	48%
<i>Unemployed or retired</i>	32%	42%
<i>School Student</i>	9%	8%
<i>Don't know &amp; Refused</i>	1%	1%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

**QZ3. Education by Attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
<i>Completed primary or secondary school</i>	28%	39%
<i>Certificate level, diploma or technical qualification</i>	27%	27%
<i>University degree or post graduate degree or diploma</i>	44%	32%
<i>Refused</i>	1%	1%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

**QZ7. Identify as having a disability by Attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
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## Islander Artists

Yes	12%	16%
No	88%	84%
NET	100%	100%

### **QZ8. Household income by Attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

Column %	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
Less than 39,999	24%	32%
40,000 - 79,999	28%	26%
80,000 - 119,999	25%	20%
120,000+	16%	13%
Refused	7%	9%
NET	100%	100%

### **QZ9. Household by Attended Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

Column %	Attended art performed or created by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Artists	Not attended
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<i>Live alone</i>	14%	16%
<i>Share accommodation</i>	8%	7%
<i>Couple without children</i>	24%	27%
<i>Family with children</i>	49%	47%
<i>Other</i>	4%	2%
<i>Refused</i>	1%	1%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

**Profile of those who have a strong or growing interest Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts but have not attended in the past 12 months**

***QA1. Age by Strong or growing interest but not attending Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts***

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
<b><i>Sample</i></b>	<b>n=1253</b>	<b>n=1751</b>
<i>15-34</i>	33%	34%
<i>35-49</i>	28%	28%
<i>50-64</i>	20%	21%
<i>65+</i>	19%	16%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

***QA2. Gender by Strong or growing interest but not attending Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts***

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
<i>Male</i>	44%	52%
<i>Female</i>	56%	48%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

***State by Strong or growing interest but not attending  
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts***

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
<i>New South Wales</i>	33%	31%
<i>Victoria</i>	25%	25%
<i>Queensland</i>	20%	20%
<i>South Australia</i>	8%	7%
<i>Western Australia</i>	9%	11%
<i>Tasmania</i>	3%	2%
<i>Northern Territory</i>	1%	1%
<i>ACT</i>	1%	2%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

***Location by Strong or growing interest but not attending  
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts***

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
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<i>Metro</i>	73%	71%
<i>Regional</i>	27%	29%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

**QZ4. Country of birth by Strong or growing interest but not attending Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
<i>English Speaking Country &amp; Prefer not to say</i>	91%	92%
<i>Non English Speaking Country</i>	9%	8%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

**QZ6. Language spoken at home by Strong or growing interest but not attending Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
<i>English</i>	95%	95%
<i>Other</i>	5%	5%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

**QZ1. Employment by Strong or growing interest but not attending Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
<i>Employed</i>	48%	53%
<i>Unemployed or retired</i>	43%	37%
<i>School Student</i>	8%	9%
<i>Don't know &amp; Refused</i>	1%	1%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

**QZ3. Education by Strong or growing interest but not attending Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
<i>Completed primary or secondary school</i>	38%	35%
<i>Certificate level, diploma or technical qualification</i>	28%	27%
<i>University degree or post graduate degree or diploma</i>	33%	37%
<i>Refused</i>	1%	2%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

**QZ7. Identify as having a disability by Strong or growing interest but not attending Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
Yes	17%	14%
No	83%	86%
NET	100%	100%

**QZ8. Household income by Strong or growing interest but not attending Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
Less than 39,999	31%	29%
40,000 - 79,999	26%	27%
80,000 - 119,999	21%	21%
120,000+	13%	15%
Refused	9%	8%
NET	100%	100%

**QZ9. Household by Strong or growing interest but not attending Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Arts**

<i>Column %</i>	Strong or growing interest but not attending	Other
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attending

<i>Live alone</i>	17%	15%
<i>Share accommodation</i>	6%	8%
<i>Couple without children</i>	26%	26%
<i>Family with children</i>	48%	47%
<i>Other</i>	2%	3%
<i>Refused</i>	1%	1%
<i>NET</i>	100%	100%

The authors take no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for websites referred to in this report for the continued relevance of website content.



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