

Guest presentation – Jennifer Bott AO

Launch of Creative Industries Sector & Practitioner Report and Directory – 18 August 2022

Good evening everyone! So glad that so many of you could be here for this important launch on this balmy Southern Highlands night.

I would also like to acknowledge we are on the land of the Gundungurra and Tharawal people and pay my respect to their culture, care for country, legacy and to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Firstly, I would like to commend all those who have worked on this project to enable this research and strategic development to happen. What we have learnt is that we have, in the Southern Highlands, a vibrant creative practitioners' population - who range from arts therapists to writers, from graphic designers to puppeteers!

The largest sub-group are visual artists: painters, printmakers, new media artists. The smallest group? Make-up artists and tattooists!

The data shows - to give you a few headlines - that 33% of responders are established full time artists; that 31% are established part-time artists; 20% are self-described as 'emerging' and 11% are hobbyists. 33% are registered for GST (and so earn more than \$75,000 p.a.) and support themselves entirely through their art. For the rest, who supplement their income from other sources, I am reminded of launching a research report on income for artists and the actor, Hilary Bell, who also spoke, told of her experience of people asking her what she did and she would answer 'I'm an actor' to which the reply was: 'Oh what cafe do you work in?'

The survey we are launching tonight has outlined the five key challenges facing our creative workers here in the Southern Highlands:

- Small local market
- NBN and internet access quality
- Accessing local, national and international markets
- Lack of local mentoring and support
- Venue and space challenges

However, ultimately the biggest challenge for all of us is the way that society values the arts. I hope the labels around the arts are loosening - it's time for the language of elitism to go!!

Education and technology mean that we can all have opportunities to experience creative life from digital concert platforms to interactive museum experiences, to e-marketing our performances and creations, to carrying around this little thing (holds up mobile 'phone) so we are all potential film-makers and photographers. All these things have democratised the arts and our creative life.

The size of the creative industries in Australia is \$15Billion with a massive ripple effect in hospitality, accommodation and travel. 194,000 people are directly employed - more than four times the number the coal industry employs.

My friend and colleague, Dave Sherley is the General Manager of Bathurst Regional Council and speaks proudly of the cultural strategy in their region. He states:

"Cultural facilities create lifestyle opportunities and facilitate growth in social capital and a sense of place. This cultural capital makes people and the community feel good about themselves and serves as a point of difference when they are talking about our community.

Also, when attracting people to live in your community, the days of 'coming for the job' are past. People come looking for a whole of life and experience package which includes access to shops, schools, jobs and sport. They also want to enrich their lives through creative pursuits, either actively or passively."

Back to the Highlands, the establishment of the Directory under the umbrella of The Fold is a spectacular development. It should enable the sharing of skills, the growth of the database and collaboration amongst other spin-offs.

The other two areas which I believe need further investment are:

- A venues audit - which will enable better utilisation of spaces, the identification of gaps and better co-ordination and
- A Cultural Tourism Strategy (one of Susan Conroy's original recommendations). We are in a sweet spot! On the Sydney - Canberra Axis and one hour from the Illawarra and the Shoalhaven...and of course, one hour from the magnificent Bundanon and its new Gallery Cafe and accommodation.

Cultural tourists (domestic and international) travel further, stay longer (an average of 5 nights as opposed to 3.5 nights overall) and spend more (an average of \$1068 per day, \$400 more than the overall average).

So where/how I hope we go from here:

- with a commitment to...
- clear goals, based on...
- good data and research...
- and an unstoppable momentum

And finally, back to 'Does all this really matter?'

Firstly, when people imply that the arts and creative industries are 'nice to have' and a bit of a fluffy add-on, I think calmly (not really) of the following things:

Firstly, human beings of all cultures use music and dance and costumes and body painting to celebrate and memorialise the major events in their lives individually and as a community.

Secondly, we also commemorate through the arts. For example, in 2018/9 the anniversaries of the end of World War 1 and the beginning of WW 11 there were many activities to reflect and honour the events but what are the main things that we are left with which gave us real insight into the effect on lives long ago of these monumental events...it is the books, the movies and the sculptures and paintings.

Thirdly, our stories matter, they validate lives, and help us to learn about others who are different, whose life experiences are different. In a world in which we increasingly live in our self-curated bubble communicating with people who agree with us, this insight into others who we do not know is so important.

So, when the smoke has gone and the water recedes and the pandemic is over, our artists will help us recover and reconnect, remember and try to make sense of it all.

Thank you. Jennifer Bott AO

Thursday, August 18, 2022. Mental Gallery, Mittagong

Jennifer Bott AO –is a professional mentor, board member, manager and consultant in the arts and philanthropy. Jennifer is a Trustee of the Australian Museum, Director of the Australian National Academy of Music, the Southern Highlands Foundation and Sydney Orthopaedic Research Institute. Recently she stepped down after 5 years as Chairman of Bundanon Trust. She has served as CEO and Chair of the National Institute of Dramatic Arts and was founding director of Canberra Writers Festival. In 2018 she undertook the feasibility study for the Gallery at Redford Park which is now known as Ngununggula Gallery.