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THE ARTS IN A MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA
Successful arts and diversity initiatives – or "Talking with strangers"

Social cohesion is enhanced by the arts because the arts can provide a safe
place to explore discussions about identity and belonging. Often, witnessing
the mere expression of diversity is enough to expand our understanding of the
world and where we may fit within it. This becomes even more powerful when
we are actively engaged through art making to express ourselves.

Art projects that aim to be inclusive from the outset and work with and for
community groups are the highlights of "how best to talk with strangers."

Francois Matarasso, a researcher based in the UK, spoke recently in Australia
about community art practices. He says of the idea of active engagement:
"Shaping your own cultural identity – and having it recognised by others – is
central to human dignity and liberty. If people can't represent themselves
culturally, how can they do so politically? If people are only imagined and
portrayed by others, how can they be equal, autonomous and active members
of society?" He also said at the recent Junction2010 conference, held in
Tasmania that "art is a great tool for intervening in culture" and I will be
providing some excellent examples of these different tools.

But first a little history…The common trope of access remains in Australia. I do
not need to elaborate on that. However, the problem of distribution, not simply
access, is a key for us. The professionalization of emerging artists should go
hand in hand with the professionalization of institutions to be diverse in their
programming, governance and their staff at all levels. In 1990, Paolo Totaro
described the role of the institutional intermediary. He said:
"Intermediaries who 'connect or disconnect' people to resources from the
common purse – people who assess works of art, who select media programs,
film projects or edit news – need to be able to understand a cultural milieu of
increasing diversity and complexity. How do our institutions expand their
corporate knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity?"

There are hence two main areas that require our attention: One is improving diverse art production and dissemination and the other is improving institutional diversity at the leadership level.

The Australia Council
The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body. We support Australia's arts through funding, strengthening and developing the arts sector. We collaborate to build new audiences, foster philanthropic support and deepen our understanding of the arts through research. Each year we provide more than $158million in funding for arts organizations and individual artists across the country.

The Cultural Engagement Framework
How culturally diverse art works are developed and presented is actually an issue for all areas of policy covered by the Australia Council's Cultural Engagement Framework (CEF) designed to extend the effectiveness and impact of our strategies. The framework includes youth, regional, disability, multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Important intersections between and across policy areas of the Australia Council are explored through Council's Cultural Engagement Framework. These models activate community building, support the social dimensions of artistic engagement and elevate the artistic experience for artists and audiences alike. They draw on community arts partnerships as a main strategy to address social cohesion issues and frequently in urban settings.

We aim to ensure our programs contribute to Australia's artistic and cultural excellence with creative content that reflects our diversity. For example – responding to a range of disabilities can lead to the most creative solutions – artistically and socially – ones that can improve the making, understanding and access to an artwork.

As an overarching principle, the CEF enables us to more easily see and respond to creative and strategic intersections across our policy areas. The intersections, for example, between multicultural Australia, young people and those in remote Australia are creatively fruitful. This is often where we see diversity driving changes in contemporary art practices.

A dynamic cultural life

The Australia Council for the Arts' vision is that Australia's dynamic cultural life and practices are embraced, celebrated and created by the diversity of our cultures. Council is committed to supporting and promoting a strong arts sector that effectively reflects Australia's cultural diversity, by integrating the objectives of its Arts in a Multicultural Australia (AMA) policy through the delivery of its activities.

A fundamental principal of the Australian government's multicultural policy is that we are an integrated society without losing our cultural identities. This is a consistent principal of the Australia Council. Both can be characterized as adhering to a cultural pluralist approach to a multicultural environment. Cultural pluralism is "concerned with government recognition and support for the preservation and development of migrant groups and cultures."

The AMA policy 2000-2005 placed practicing artists – individuals, groups and community-based artists – at the centre of the strategies. The current objectives of the Australia Council's AMA policy are:

1. To increase culturally inclusive leadership by:
a) ensuring governance is a culturally inclusive process
b) integrating multicultural aims in each of the Council's activity areas
c) increasing culturally diverse representation in the arts.
2. To enable the participation in the arts for all Australians by:
a) delivering specific audience and market development strategies
b) increasing awareness of and access to the Council's programs
c) brokering and engaging in partnerships.
3. To support the development of creative content which reflects a multicultural Australia by:
a) encouraging cultural inclusiveness
b) supporting multicultural arts industry infrastructure
c) supporting content development
d) encouraging creativity which spans the spectrum of tradition and innovation.
4. To encourage creative interfaces between Indigenous and non-English speaking background artists by facilitating cultural exchanges.

Networked creative communities

The Australia Council for the Arts has invested in several long term initiatives through its arts in a multicultural Australia policy. A feature of which is support to networks of culturally diverse arts organizations as an innovative way to

create and distribute arts by diverse artists and groups. While these creative partnerships span all artforms, I would like to suggest that they also provide useful ways of engaging with a wide range of community groups through:
– inter-cultural exchange
– project-based learning
– sustainable relationship-building and/or institution-building

I would like to present four strategies with an arts focus as worthwhile contributors to the on-going project of social cohesion. They are different in approach, but all have common strategies of network and partnership building to develop and present creative content that enables participation in the arts for all Australians.

      Kultour (www.kultour.net.au)
       Frontline (www.darwincommunityarts.org.au)
      Spaced (http://iaskaprojects.wordpress.com/)
      Edge of Elsewhere (http://www.campbelltown.nsw.gov.au)

kultour

Isolation is a serious issue that faces migrants. Artists from non-English speaking backgrounds often find themselves particularly isolated in Australia. The need for peer support and artistic opportunities coupled with a lack of contact between the fragile overworked multicultural arts organizations, led to the formation of kultour, a network to exchange artworks as a way of supporting each other and expanding their experience through a working relationship based on artistic exchange (as distinct from previous politically driven associations, that had had a very limited life).

Kultour presents an annual touring program of high-quality contemporary multicultural arts from around Australia. This program provides CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) artists with professional development via touring and opportunities for their work to reach new audiences regionally, interstate and internationally. Audiences have been provided with insight into multicultural arts practices and issues through a professional quality program. The network has been functional since 2001, and became a Company Limited by Guarantee in 2007. The membership has been significantly stable and dedicated so that the network has grown and evolved. It remains the only

national multicultural organization in Australia and strives to keep pace with changes in the arts environment while delivering to its members needs.

The next stage of its development will be to consolidate its role as partnership brokers between the artists, major presenters and the appropriate multicultural organization. The organization will broaden the skills on its board of directors to include touring expertise and presenter influence. The challenge will be to balance the choices of who is selected to tour, to where and with whom, with sensitivity to the needs of frequently marginalized artists. The benefit of this approach will be to increase the scope of influence and awareness about many multicultural artists.

The concept that led to the formation of kultour is one which brings quality artists who perform, exhibit and develop community based workshops to audiences and community groups. This is achieved via a structure that provides the cross–cultural brokerage to facilitate successful outcomes.

We are confident to produce art within our local context – but what are the next steps to amplify that impact on a wider stage?

I would like to propose the benefits of this model to an international diaspora. The member countries of the Commonwealth are an ideal coalition to bring the exchange of culturally diverse artists into a relationship with each other that will inevitably increase their creative and social influence.

Frontline
 Darwin Community Arts (DCA) is facilitating a locative media project in the Malak area of Darwin from 2009 to 2011. Frontline, builds on previous work by DCA dealing with the relationship of Indigenous, African, and other communities in Malak and the northern suburbs of Darwin, enhancing its "community arts intervention" in Malak through locative media.

This project is supported by Community Partnerships, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and Northern Territory Government's Office of Multicultural Affairs.

Malak is considered a frontline suburb for confronting social, economic, and cultural issues facing Darwin today. It is also the frontline for exploring positive changes, including cultural changes, at a local level. This is why DCA is based in Malak; they seek to make a difference at the frontline.

Frontline builds on DCA's work in Malak since mid 2007, which has included running a Telecentro (community based Internet access facility), facilitating workshops on digital media, and hosting Darwin Fringe events. The project engages with all communities in Malak, including but not limited to Indigenous and African youth, with whom DCA has worked since 2007. Special attention is given to engaging young people, particularly Indigenous and African young people who make up a significant proportion of the population, and who have featured prominently in tensions in the area.

Community participants have already begun experimenting with open-source Laser Tagging and LED Throwies during the Darwin Fringe, and at Malak Shopping Centre and car park.
Other projects include:

> Amazing Malak: A version of the Amazing Race, which has proved popular with young people in Darwin, organised through vacation care programs. This game/race is held across Malak's parks and other places, with on- the-ground racers working with virtual, online participants in spaces such as Second Life.
>
> Computer Kiosks: Computers placed around Malak to accept video blogs and other contributions that annotate and trace people who come through these spaces.
>
> Interactive Spaces: Multimedia presentations are made about the spaces themselves (e.g. film or video clips) and triggered by movements of visitors to them.
>
> Online Social Mapping: Residents are encouraged and assisted to post information about places in Malak and surrounding areas on Google Earth/Maps.

Frontline is a great example of how art can intervene in culture and is using the kinds of activities the young people are interested in. It aims to move them from breaking into the shops in the mall and acting out in the streets, to making art in one of the shops in the mall and taking that to the streets.

Spaced
Spaced is a Global/Local Community Exchange Through Art and Technology.

IASKA (formerly International Art Space Kellerberrin Australia) has a long history of fostering innovative art projects in regional areas and is widely regarded as

one of the most interesting art organisations to have emerged in Australia in the past decade.

Conceived and organized by IASKA (International Art Space Kellerberrin Australia), Spaced is a new biennial visual arts project that links local communities throughout rural Western Australia as well as several overseas locations. Spaced "forms a multi-voice but unified project that explores the relationship between local identity and the social, cultural, environmental and economic effects of globalization". The projects draw on art and digital technology to implement cultural exchange between geographically and culturally distant communities. It features residencies, exhibitions, site specific works, educational and mentoring activities, a web-based forum and a publication.

BirndiWirndi – Worlds Apart is a video-based work depicting the hearts, minds and spirits of the Yindjibarndi who, despite the enormous forces of the mining boom, still stand strong. BirndiWirndi – Worlds Apart was created through a collaboration between IASKA artist Sohan Ariel Hayes and Michael Woodley from Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation. The work was recently projected onto the now boarded up Victoria hotel in Roebourne, which is near the coast and in the far north of Western Australia.

Sohan spent two months in Roebourne developing a collaborative project with Michael Woodley from the Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation. Sohan is an award-winning animator and visual artist who works across media, and Juluwarlu is an Indigenous organisation dedicated to the recording, preservation and maintenance of Yindjibarndi language and culture. Some say this is the most activated Roebourne has been for quite some time and the Aboriginal Corporation is looking to extend the project with this artist.
Dutch artists Wouter Osterholt and Elke Uitentuis spent two months in late 2009 developing a project in Lake Grace as part of IASKA's international artist in residence program. Their ongoing project, 'To the other end', is exploring the live sheep export industry between WA and the Middle East. The artists will travel to Bahrain later this year to undertake the second stage of the project.

Wouter Osterholt and Elke Uitentuis work collaboratively as an artist duo with a shared interest in universal ideologies of freedom and the local factors influencing people's relationship to their surroundings. Their art practice is

based on observation and engagement with communities, investigating the characteristics of particular places to understand how they function and analysing connections that link local interests and circumstances. Through their work they offer insights into the influences and power structures that define the use of space and shape people's lives. Their primary goal is to create a platform for reflection where sensitive topics and the unspoken hopes and dreams of communities can be questioned and discussed.

Edge of Elsewhere

Edge of Elsewhere is a major three-year project that brings together some of the most exciting contemporary artists from across Australia, Asia and the Pacific to develop new artworks in partnership with Sydney communities. Edge of Elsewhere is a joint program of Campbelltown Arts Centre and the Asian Australian Artists Association and will be presented over 3 consecutive years as a key project of the Sydney Festival program in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

Sydney is one of Australia's most rapidly changing cities and is now more culturally diverse than ever before. The continually changing demographics provide an imperative to examine the questions that shape and inspire us as individuals, communities and cultures.

Edge of Elsewhere reflects and engages with the diverse cultural mix of suburban Sydney in a way that people are representing themselves and engaging across cultures with each other through the vehicle of the arts. The most valuable parts of the project to date have been the creative exchanges between different community groups (such as the Tongan and the Chinese) within their local community of Campbelltown.

Innovation

The potential for innovation comes from diversity. This is one of my mantras. When a range of demographic groups are involved in cultural production we are more likely to be successful at innovating for the long term. Pluralism and diversity of arts practice have a track record of delivering solutions to entrenched and systemic barriers across industry or society. The Australia Council's response to the previous federal government's review of creativity and innovation, included the following in its introduction:

 "Although not all arts practice takes place in new, emerging or innovative spaces, a significant framework exists in and around aspects of the arts that develop attributes essential for innovative practice across Australia and the wider economy. Diversity is a key driver of innovation. Sustainable advances will

be realised when the contributors to innovation reflect Australia's cultural and generational diversity."

Recommendations
1. That this forum recommend to CHOGM that the model of kultour is adopted and adapted to assist in the exchange of artworks and community development processes between Commonwealth nations.
2. That this forum convey to CHOGM that the issue of leadership by culturally diverse artsworkers within the arts sectors require concerted attention to address the inequality.

The 6th Diversity Matters forum was held on 23-25 September 2010 at the campus of LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. The forum explored the role that the arts can play in helping to bridge gaps, build social capital and strengthen social cohesion, and featured a range of distinguished international presenters from the Commonwealth who shared their experience and expertise in the area of social cohesion and the arts. The thought-provoking presentations and discussions held during the forum produced several recommendations and practical solutions to be presented at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth, Western Australia in October 2011.

The Sixth Diversity Matters Forum was organised by the Australian Multicultural Foundation in partnership with the Commonwealth Foundation (UK), LASALLE College of the Arts, the Australian High Commission in Singapore, the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Victoria (Australia), the Monash University Institute for the Study of Global Movements (Australia), Kape Communications (Australia) and The Statesman (India).

http://www.amf.net.au/entry/6th-diversity-matters-singapore-2010-conference-proceedings