Visual Arts, Design and New Media Sectors Snapshot | 2013

Introduction

This report provides an overview of the visual arts, design and new media sectors in NSW. It outlines some of the key issues and trends impacting the sectors and provides a summary of the structure and business models it operates within.

The report is based on consultation with key sector representatives.

It has been developed to provide Arts NSW Arts Funding Program (AFP) assessment panels with an up-to-date sector overview and insights as identified by sector representatives.

Arts NSW acknowledges the invaluable contribution of all involved in the preparation of this report.

Overview – Visual Arts, Design and New Media Sectors in NSW

The NSW visual arts, design and new media sectors are a dynamic and vibrant ecosystem with high quality practitioners and an extreme diversity of activity.

The sector can be considered in terms of:

Figure 1. NSW Visual Arts, Design and New Media Sector

Note: Arts NSW acknowledges that the visual arts, design and new media sectors are distinct; however for the purposes of this short report have been included together due to existing and potential parallel connections.
The major and small to medium organisations represented in Figure 1 present the work of practitioners (generally established and mid-career), grow audiences and create demand for art and design. These organisations also play a valuable role in nurturing the careers of artists, craft practitioners, designers and professionals through exhibitions, educational and promotional activities.

Figure 1 also includes groups of individuals who organise themselves into informal structures (such as artist run initiatives and Aboriginal artist co-operatives) as required, and a significant number of artists, craft practitioners, designers and other independent practitioners (such as arts writers and curators) who engage with other artists and organisations across all parts of the sectors.

Individual practitioners are supported by both the commercial and not-for-profit parts of the sector. Important support comes from:

**Artist run initiatives (ARIs)** which provide exhibition venues, studios, workshops and resources for emerging artists and practitioners (including curators and writers). They are a key part of the sector in terms of the opportunities and support they provide, and also as locations for risk taking and innovation.

**Regional galleries** contain significant collections with local, national and/or international relevance and provide a strong network supporting the visual arts across NSW. Generally operated by local government, these galleries present Australian and international exhibitions and also work closely with local artists and communities. Many regional galleries also undertake Aboriginal arts projects and show Aboriginal-based exhibitions deriving from a local, state and national representation.

**Service organisations** such as the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) and Museums & Galleries NSW (M&G NSW) provide a range of services such as advocacy and policy advice, sector representation and professional development services, and also deliver devolved funding programs on behalf of Arts NSW.

Other organisations including **contemporary art organisations, commercial galleries and festivals**, which provide valuable opportunities in terms of exhibition, promotion and career development.

The visual arts sector in NSW, in particular, has high visibility throughout the country and internationally with key facilities such as the Art Gallery of NSW and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA). Australia’s premier visual arts event, the Biennale of Sydney, is a major tourist attraction with over 665,000 attending the 2012 event.

Arts NSW provides funding to support the not-for-profit areas of the visual arts, design and new media sectors including professional individuals, ARIs, professionally-staffed regional galleries and other organisations. Funding is provided on an annual, multiyear and project basis. Support for individuals and organisations is also provided through devolved funding programs managed by peak and service organisations such as NAVA and Regional Arts NSW.

Sources of income for organisations include fundraising, corporate partnerships and philanthropy. As many organisations do not charge entry fees, self generated income is limited to what can be secured through shops, cafes, sales of artworks and publications, and fees for membership, copyright, and events / workshops. State and local governments play a key role in providing core funding and infrastructure for galleries in NSW.

Individual practitioners earn income through sales of their work, and artist and other professional fees; however these opportunities can be limited. Practitioners often also earn income from other related sectors such as teaching, academic positions and/or working in the creative industries.
The design sector in NSW comprises designers working across many areas and increasingly in collaboration both within the sector and with non-designers. Sydney is home to the Australian Design Alliance (ADA), the alliance of peak professional organisations representing all aspects of the Australian design sector.

NSW Government support for design includes programs delivered through the Department of Trade and Investment (for example, work with small businesses and assistance with export and business development), Powerhouse Museum (with such activities as the annual Sydney Design festival), Destination NSW and Arts NSW funding for programs and projects such as those delivered by Object: Australian Design Centre.

Design is one of the sectors within the scope of the Creative Industries Taskforce which has been appointed by the NSW Government to develop comprehensive strategies to drive growth, innovation and productivity in the NSW creative industries sector. The Taskforce has recommended that the NSW Government and other relevant parties should encourage the development of a proposed national design centre to showcase the economic, social and environmental achievements of the NSW design sector.

New media art (also known as media art) can be defined as the process where new technologies are used by artists to create works that explore new modes of artistic expression. These new technologies could include computers, information and communications technology, virtual or immersive environments, or sound engineering. Artists working in these fields are used to taking risks and often make connections with partners in other sectors to realise projects.

NSW Government support for new media includes funding offered by Screen NSW and Arts NSW funding for programs and projects across a diverse range of art forms.

Key activities in NSW include the project and programs carried out by dLux MediaArts and in 2013 the 19th International Symposium of Electronic Art (ISEA) to be held in Sydney in June.

New Media is also included within the scope of the Creative Industries Taskforce.

Key issues and trends

The following issues and trends were identified during discussions with key sector representatives.

Career pathways and professional development

It is evident that career pathways are now more fluid than previously, with festivals and residencies offering additional opportunities for practitioners to establish their career.

Artists, designers and arts workers require support to move beyond the emerging stage of their careers, though this can be provided in a variety of ways. There is an identified demand for more strategic and sustainable professional development opportunities including:

- Residencies (particularly international) which are linked to organisation's programs (i.e. exhibitions) and provide opportunities for support, exchange and critique.
Residencies and brokerage programs, particularly for designers and new media artists, located outside of the arts sector (for example, in the fields of business, science and industry) which bridge the gap between the arts and non-arts sectors and provide additional opportunities for skills development and income generation.

Mentoring opportunities, particularly for Aboriginal artists and curators, designers and new media artists.

Business and marketing skills for practitioners.

**Education and training**

Funding changes to TAFE have created gaps in training within the arts sector, particularly for regional artists and arts workers. There may be opportunities for other parts of the sector to take on educational and training roles.

** Collaboration and cross-discipline**

There is an increasingly collaborative and cross-discipline approach emerging across the sector. This creates opportunities for practitioners and organisations to secure funding from other areas and existing infrastructures, such as other art form areas and government departments (health, science and technology etc).

Stronger collaborations and conversations are also needed across geographical areas and between major institutions and small to medium sized organisations.

Design and new media sit across both the arts and creative industries portfolios.

**Organisational sustainability and capacity**

Some organisations are limited in their ability to secure and retain highly skilled staff; provide professional development for staff and practitioners, support other parts of the sector (for example, volunteer-run organisations); and undertake strategic and succession planning.

**Regional**

Regional organisations feel that they are generally more successful when their programming is distinctive and relevant to their region.

There is an international trend towards slowing down programming in response to limited resources; however this approach requires further audience development. Some regional organisations feel a need to maintain a high turnover of programs (particularly exhibitions) to cater to their limited audiences.

There is an opportunity for organisations to further develop regional audiences in terms of contemporary practice and new media art. Touring exhibitions (and touring programs such as the National Exhibitions Touring Support program delivered for NSW through M&G NSW) play a crucial role in regional areas, particularly high quality, well-resourced exhibitions that allow regional galleries access to high quality curated content.

**SWOT Analysis**

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as identified by key sector representatives are as follows:
**Strengths**

- A network of diverse ARIs and vibrant regional galleries.
- NSW has vibrant urban visual arts and design sector with many acclaimed contemporary Aboriginal artists originating from, or based in NSW.
- Small to medium organisations run by committed individuals.
- Metropolitan organisations, such as the MCA, working to support regional organisations
- National representative bodies and initiatives based in NSW, such as NAVA, ADA, Good Design Australia and the National Craft Initiative.
- Practitioners are working increasingly across disciplines.
- Conversations and collaborations are happening across the sector.
- Growing audiences for new media art due to new technology is making presentation easier.
- Social benefits of design such as better urban environments and feeling of social wellbeing.
- Design thinking is emerging as a valued skill set i.e. a design based approach to problem solving.

**Weaknesses**

- Level of in-depth collaboration between major cultural institutions and other areas of the sector, such as Western Sydney.
- Reliance on older, more traditional models.
- Limited available exhibition and studio spaces that are affordable and permanent.
- Limited career pathways and professional development opportunities, particularly in regional areas.
- Lack of business and marketing skills for practitioners and organisations.
- Low number of Aboriginal curators.
- Curatorial and critical discourse is restricted by limited staffing levels.
- Low income for practitioners.
- Galleries have limited capacity to pay industry standard rates of payment for practitioners.
- Whilst there is high quality exhibition touring content available and a demand for touring exhibitions, the quality of content is varied.
- Inaccessible gallery collections.
- Pressure to have a high turnover of programs such as exhibitions.
- Mainstream media representation of visual arts could be stronger.
- Lack of a national centre/hub for new media arts which results in a disjointed sector.
- Confused perception of new media art.
- Practitioners and organisations are challenged by keeping up with technological changes.
- Self-employed practitioners are challenged by the current legislative and regulatory environment, such as aspects of taxation and copyright etc, and dealing with local government regulations.

**Opportunities**

- NSW to be seen as a leader in national arts debates.
- Opportunity for other organisations (including regional galleries) to take on an educational role.
- Stronger conversations and collaborations within the sector, including organisations making connections with curators, writers and critics.
- Opportunity for small to medium organisations to further engage major cultural institutions.
- Strengthen governance of smaller organisations.
• New technology is changing the way the programs are being delivered, such as delivering content and training, and the opportunity to use new technology from other sectors i.e. gaming.
• National Broadband Network may create employment and opportunities.
• Take advantage of high international visibility of Sydney which could create economic opportunities.
• Celebrate successful models and support sustainable programs/hubs that have momentum.
• Engage regional audiences by developing distinctive, relevant and accessible programs and projects.
Opportunity for collaboration to ensure that product available for touring is relevant and accessible for NSW regional audiences.

The high number of designers in NSW creates an opportunity for NSW to become a leader in design.

Strengthen the links between design and business by demonstrating the benefits to the economy, such as creating employment and thinking creatively.

**Threats**

- Uncertainty of ongoing private and government support.
- In a rapidly changing fiscal environment, organisations need to be sustainable and have the flexibility to respond to new opportunities.
- Reduced TAFE funding results in less subsidised enrolments, cuts to some courses and less employment opportunities.
- De-professionalisation due to new technologies can create a lack of critical context.
- Existing funding models with long lead times do not support the changing nature of the creative development of new media art.
- New media artists require access to expensive equipment.
- Decline in the number of professional craft practitioners.