

Regional Galleries Forum: Report

Regional Galleries Forum

"A voice for our future"

Thanks to:

Facilitator: **Ricky Arnold**
Organisers: **ART ON THE MOVE**
Investor: **Department of Culture and the Arts**
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Government of Western Australia
Department of Culture and the Arts



MANDURAH
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Regional Galleries Forum: Executive Summary

The purpose of the first Regional Galleries' Forum hosted by ART ON THE MOVE at Mandurah Performing Arts Centre was to gauge the sector's current position and development needs for the future. It was supported by the Department of Culture and the Arts as part of its Visual Arts Sector Review. The turn out and debate was exceptional (88 attendees from across WA) and evidenced the commitment for development of the sector.

Discussion highlighted the regional galleries "ecology" is broad and inclusive. Each region has different levels of infrastructure, collection significance, staffing, expertise, governance relationships and approach to its visual arts presentation. The approach of ART ON THE MOVE to gather images and vision statements from attendee galleries demonstrated new high quality spaces built in regional towns through cultural planning and strategic investment. Traditional views on availability of "A Class" facilities around the State must be reviewed.

Whilst there was recognition of the contribution of peak service organisations, it was clearly expressed that the needs of Western Australian regional galleries have fallen into a gap between constitutional/membership purpose and specialist knowledge.

Priority Key Strategies to address this were:

- Establish an independent body to represent Western Australian Regional Galleries;
- Establish strong governance training and standards for Boards, capacity building drive;
- Professional development program for Curators, Artists, Volunteers and, including intern and mentorships;
- Establish new partnerships with major metropolitan galleries and collections and peak service organisations to address actual need;
- Increase communication between regions: using technology and social media;
- Develop a program for residencies and exchange of artists, curators and exhibitions between regions;
- Collate evidence of economic, social and cultural return of the sector for the State, linked to live-ability and well-being of the regions' communities;
- To advocate to Western Australian regional Members of Parliament to raise awareness of sector's contribution to the live-ability of regional centres;
- Advocate to Local Government Councillors and staff on value of culture and visual arts collections and activities (WALGA and LGMA);

- Develop a strategic funding case to State Government through Department of Culture and the Arts and Department of Regional Development through the Royalties for Regions Program for infrastructure development;
- To develop a shared resource of best practice and research to assist all members in the Western Australian regional context;
- Develop community and education, public programs connected to cultural tourism.

KEY PRIORITY COSTS:

Activity	Cost
• Consultant to work with working party to identify formal or informal structure of new group.	\$40k
• Bi-annual conference: bringing the sector together, exploring good practice, give visibility to regional activities, monitor key issues for sector, speakers from other regional forums, networking etc.	\$120k per conference
• State wide feasibility study about the state of regional art galleries – identify capital/staffing needs, new capital projects etc.	\$200k
• Infrastructure costs – staff, building repairs, collection management...	\$10m
• Investment for partnership project activities that engage communities and regions.	\$2m
TOTAL COST	\$12+m

- All costs assume the investment will be utilised to leverage other funds i.e. Local Government, Lotterywest, Sponsors.

NEXT STEPS

- Working Group identified and meeting scheduled (page 15);
- Facebook page in place [click here](#);
- Response to DCA An Inquiry into the Visual Arts Sector WA 2016 (page 16);
- Final report completed and shared with sector;
- **Julian Bowron** attending a national Art Galleries Matter – Roundtable on behalf of the working group. Led by Museums Galleries Australia in Sydney on 25 November 2016.

Session One: Models of Good Practice

Welcome to Country was provided by **George Walley**. George, a Bindjareb Nyoongar man reminded participants of the value of telling your own stories of your place. The importance of sharing your culture with visitors, to understand each other.



Marty Cunningham, Manager Research, Policy and Evaluation from the Department of Culture and the Arts



Set the scene by sharing the research DCA was undertaking into the visual arts sector in Western Australia. He presented the discussion paper; *Present State: An Inquiry into the visual art sector in WA 2016* which outlines State and national funding to the visual arts sector for projects and key organisations, developments in public art, the changes in the commercial

gallery sector, planning and building issues. The paper also highlights that WA doesn't have a regional galleries association like other states.

He also outlined the recently released [Strategic Directions 2016-31](#) document, and how this may be relevant to the regional galleries sector. He informed the group that DCA would re-open the period of comment on the *Present State* discussion paper post this forum.

Robert Heather, Director of the New England Regional Art Museum in Armidale, NSW.

Offered a national perspective.

He highlighted:

- People, Governance, Programs, Collections, Facilities, Resourcing, Sustainability, Quality of Staff - are the key areas for successful regional gallery management;
- Regional Galleries generally have a significant relationship with local government. In Queensland and NSW, amalgamations of councils has caused problems - Fostering a strong healthy amicable relationship with your local council is essential, community champions and respected spokespeople are crucial;
- A regional gallery should be looked at as a 100 year project;
- Governance and structure of an organisation is important;
- Harnessing and engaging your community: Knowing your foundation story and retelling this for new generations;
- Essential to bring in young people and families;
- Environmental sustainability, creating a sustainability strategy for lighting etc;
- Building maintenance can be an issue when not attached to a local council;
- How do you create a community around your gallery?
- Valuing volunteers, can be important sources of donations, both of collections and artworks, and financial;



Guy Boyce is General Manager of the Mandurah Performing Arts Centre and Chair of CircuitWest performing arts network.

Guy discussed the growth of CircuitWest, and the role it plays in the delivery of the Creative Regions, Royalties for Regions funding program. He highlighted:

- 85% of the population lives in Perth, 15% are regional;
- Community engagement, developing audience is key to their work;
- Need to reinforce the role of the arts and how this improves liveability of our communities?
- Regional local governments often don't have any cultural planning in place, and little expertise in staff and Councils – opportunity to encourage cultural strategies/planning in local government.



Session Two: Artist's Perspective

Indra Geidans, Visual Artist, now based in Albany, Visual Arts Officer for City of Albany and Board member of ART ON THE MOVE:

- A “hierarchy”? There is a preconception that those that come from the city are better than regional artists and this maybe true but not always it's the inference that is rude and divisive;
- How do you define a regional artist? Someone who lives regionally, grew up regionally now living metro and making work about the region, or an artist who grew up in the city works in the city then travels regionally to research to make work about the environment?
- Transitioning from emerging artist to established artist regionally is harder for artists;
- Mobility and Time: increased investment issues in these for regional artists, whether travelling to participate, or sending works for exhibition;
- Importance of residencies and exchange between regions;
- Finding a balance between what the gallery wants to show and what the regional audience wants to see;
- How do we develop cultural tourism in Regional WA?



Dr Miik Green, Visual artist, and researcher, Chair of Artsource, peak visual arts body in Western Australia.

Miik compared the regional gallery discussion to his approach to practice through “*resistance as a transformative force*”. He outlined the value of conflict; that the best collaborations come from the least likely partnerships, not the like-minded. He discussed strategic partnerships glimpse other world’s and opportunities, through the exploration of common goals, distilling of ideas and depth of engagement.

The examples of good practice and artist perspectives were followed by panel and audience Q & A. Comments following the speakers included:

- We are not developing enough exhibitions out of our WA based collections;
- Diversify our understanding and/or definition of a regional art gallery, it could be an art centre or places of community interest that houses a gallery;
- Place where community can be engaged in many ways;
- Art can exist in so many manifestations;
- Different regions have different realities creating rich and dynamic scenarios;
- Cost of maintaining exhibitions;
- Create a collective of smaller gallery spaces to exchange exhibitions;
- Issue about individual artists - passionate about art and sometimes feel unwelcome, inferior and not included;
- Need to be more inclusive;
- Diversity of the group - attendees did not represent the cultural diversity of each region;
- Aboriginal voice needs to be front and centre of the discussions;
- Professional isolation;
- Don't reinvent the wheel;
- Need access to professional infrastructure;
- As an artist in the region you have to be extremely driven to overcome the many obstacles in the way;
- If you are not in the City you are not as regarded in your role as artist;
- Arts as a vehicle of well-being;
- Positive outlook, meet more often;
- We should be thinking of the state as a state - collective power of working together;
- This is a good start.



Comments directed towards AGWA:

- Communication needs improvement;
- Collection and support is inaccessible;
- A Class? Restrictions? Too many to ever borrow works? (It should be noted participants reported correct conditions to receive works);
- A new role in AGWA, **James Davis** joining in January 2016 to represent AGWA in regions.

Session Three: Vision for the Sector

Individuals were asked to outline their vision for the sector. This was achieved through a series of post-it notes as they continued the afternoon activities.

Perspectives varied from individual to individual but the overriding vision was that of fostering creativity through artistic practices and representation of artists work through exhibitions, programs and community activities. With very broad range of outcomes:



- Creating unique regional identity that created cluster visitor destinations for all visitors and residents;
- Developing capacity of artists, art workers, volunteers and participants to develop their creative practices, engagement in and advocacy of cultural development;
- Celebrate regional galleries and their role as a place makers, creative incubators, destination and community engagers;
- Contribute to the image and identity of WA regions;
- Appropriate spaces to present art exhibitions presenting, community, regional, state, national and international artists;
- Inter-regional activities;
- Celebrating the uniqueness and similarities of regional WA.

Group discussions

Four groups: rotating discussions, and prioritisation.

Presentation of groups in this order, the highest priority comments up front:

1. Collective Action/Leadership
2. Excellence
3. Engagement
4. Governance

* = PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS

1. What can be achieved through collective action?

Advocacy

- *****Influence WALGA: How do you get Councillors' to understand the value of culture?
- *****Lobbying local MLA members: provide speaking points on cultural value and tourism?
- *****ASKING FOR THE SAME THING! Industry common agenda? Royalties for Regions Bid? NB Uniqueness of each regions offer is important. Shared story/benchmarks?
- *Strengthen artistic communities;
- *Keep standards! Visibility. Impact, Value. Promote best practice;
- *Local government Managers Association. Wage and Employment Standards? New Strategic Community Planning requirements are sidelining Cultural Plans. Advocate for the value of arts and culture;
- Clear needs and objectives?
- Culture Counts: DCA data collection: could we all use this to collate data?
- A place at a Ministers table?
- Regular network meetings strengthen advocacy, link regions and strengthen partnerships;
- Constant change in Local Government cycles mean continuous action;
- Encourage Regional local champions and relationships to Regional Local Government Councils;
- Artist's voices? Ensure representation? Aboriginal voice?



Network/IP

- ****Partnerships: Universities, Libraries, economic value?
- ***A Knowledge Bank? Sharing resources, distribution, and communication at grass roots level;
- ***Sharing facilities, resources;
- ***Busselton/Art Geo, relationships with other regions/sharing works and exhibitions?
- *Relationship between Bunbury/Southern Forest? Tree top Gallery and exchange of exhibitions? No charge loans? Are there other key Gallery reach areas to be considered?
- Local Government: State Library System: move artworks around the State, Promote regions as arts destination;
- Collecting the same data? Can there be an agreement? Culture Counts?

Action

- ****Facebook page for connectivity? Technology: low level ([achieved](#));
- *Collective sourcing of regional works for shared WA touring exhibitions;
- An up to date audit of the gallery classifications across the State. For example, it has long been thought [Bunbury](#) and [Geraldton](#) were only A Class Galleries but new buildings in [Collie](#) and [Shark Bay](#) have been built to meet these standards. This is important in devising exhibitions and loan agreements;
- What are the community outcomes?
- Cross art-form projects, sharing and learning?

2. Excellence

Advocacy

Challenges:

- Awards process?
- Peer review, accreditation;
- How do we maximize new technologies for furthering of WA artists work?
- Partnerships with tertiary institutions for artists on residence? Shared?
- Standards of training? Business operations? Independent artist?

Networking

- ****Regional exchange of exhibitions, improving community relationships with exhibitions;
- Local Governments have Sister City International Relationships. Who are the Indian Ocean Rim ones?
- Can we share residencies? Inter-regional network?



Action

- *****Professional Development: Curators, Artists, Volunteers (strongly valued);
- *****Create partnerships with arts organisations for internships, Mentorships;
- Access to services/Audience Development?
- Attraction of exciting partnerships to increase exposure of arts;
- How do we get commercial galleries to take up our artists?
- Create great local exhibitions.



3. Engagement

Advocacy

- *****Public/Community programs Friendly and conducive partnerships with Visitor and Tourism Centres and their volunteers;
- *****Keep Local government Councillors involved at all times;
- ***Educate and Stimulate: Curator/Artist Engage;
- Community involvement: Men's sheds, CWA, Schools, Camera Clubs, Community Groups;
- Partnerships between commercial and community galleries;
- Cultural tourism, eg. Pemberton Festival combines food, art and adventure.

Networking

- Marketing to postcode? Social Media? Newsfeeds, Showcase videos/sharing. *Can there be young people teaching old people to use technology? **Videos on FB;
- *Exhibitions for all tastes? Do you give curatorial to non-art people;
- Popular events connections: ArtBar. Fashion, Vintage cars, clubs, connections. Corporate guests to speak, invite a celebrity!
- Immerging technology: wider world, virtual reality? Add to space?

Action

- **Outreach: where is your audience?
- *Diverse programming;
- Break down the barriers to art, speed dating with art, combine with other community and sport groups, torch-light heritage tours at night, Makers Markets with food trucks, music events, stalls of local makers;
- Survey-style exhibitions;

4. Governance Models

Advocacy:

- *****Boards understanding, capacity building, obligations;
- *****Who already exists: Artsource, ART ON THE MOVE, Country Arts WA, WA Museum, Art Gallery of WA, Libraries, Chamber of Arts and Culture;
- *****Independent body to represent regional galleries;
- ***Need a Professional Group: outline Impact, Touring, Professional Development, Well-being;
- **Other organisations and peak bodies not representing this sector, agendas are not regionally focused, it does not have to be so metro-centric;
- *Artists have a voice;
- Is this a sub-committee of one of the above, or an alliance from the above or a new singular organization? Is there an issue spending money on all these different memberships, could there be an amalgamated fee?
- Work within and respond to key policies: connect to Regional Arts Australia, DCA Strategic future 16-31, Regional Framework.
- National Standards within GLAM sector;
- Presenting Regional Policy and future bids: Brendan Grylls, Leader Nationals, stated "I want to hear from the local people". Voices heard in regions directly calling local member to highlight needs. A co-ordinated approach so all asking for same thing.



Network

- **Large diversity of potential members, key organisations, whole spectrum;
- *Linking to understand each other better: local, regional, national;
- *Membership accountability and legality, fee paying;
- *Needs structure, linking the centres, but be wary of formalized structures, need to be nimble, responsive, strategy that changes, funding models, need to work together effectively;
- How structure when separate and joined together? Drawing from the arts sector;
- Large distances: how deal with sustainably;
- Networking is key: on-line forum, closed FB page, Rotational dinner, feature pieces, contracting advice. Perhaps a portal where people can log in to see what's happening, provides projects, advice.

Action

- *Need a Road Map: Regional Arts Program, back to basics, and audit of who is where, bring together the sector, complex issues need complex answers;
- Who is best placed to articulate issues for the sector? **THE SECTOR IS BEST PLACED.**



Conclusion

At the conclusion of the meeting, it was put to the floor that the regional gallery managers had waited for the metro based peak organisations to support them. There were mixed views from the participants about the level of support, some saying support was there and others feeling their voice was not heard.

Given the inconclusive outcome it was agreed that a working party be set up to explore the potential for a regional galleries group. The following organisations/individuals agreed to participate:

Name	Location	Region
Barbara Douglas	Langford Islamic College	Metro
James Davies	AGWA	Metro
John Maloney	Artist	Metro
David Carson	Digital Artist/Lecturer	Metro
David Bowman-Bright	The Bank Studio and Gallery Space	Mid West
Julian Bowron	Bunbury Regional Arts Gallery	South West
Diana McGirr	ArtGeo	South West
Fiona Sinclair	Secretary: Southern Forest Arts	South West
Michelle Slarke	Artist, Heritage, Consultant	South West
Anna Czerkasow	Pemberton Arts Group	South West
CircuitWest	Chairperson Guy Boyce	State Wide
Gary Aitken	Alcoa Mandurah Art Gallery	State Wide
Laura Taylor	Aboriginal Art Centre Hub Western Australia (AACHWA)	State Wide
Janelle Cugley	Aurora Project Space	Wheatbelt

ART ON THE MOVE agreed to coordinate the first meeting of the group.

- Meeting date: **Friday January 20, 2017**
- Venue: **Bunbury Regional Art Galleries**
- Time: **11am – 12.30pm**
- Focus: **Consider outcomes identified in report from Forum**

Recommend that the group still align with Museums Australia WA (MAWA) and Chamber of Culture and the Arts to ask if they will place this item on their agendas – and talk to the established peak bodies that work in the region to consider their role, including CircuitWest.

Working Group Letter to the DCA

The working group has sent a letter to DCA, on behalf of the sector, in response to:
'An Inquiry into the Visual Arts Sector in Western Australia 2016'.

November 2016

Duncan Ord OAM
Director General
Department of Culture and the Arts
PO Box 8349
Perth Business Centre WA 6849

Dear Duncan

Present State: An enquiry into the Visual Arts Sector in WA 2016

As we are sure you are aware the recent DCA funded Regional Galleries Forum in Mandurah culminated in the forming of a working group with the primary task of establishing a WA regional galleries organisation. Without pre-empting the work we have to do achieve this task the purpose of the future organisation will broadly be to provide a 'voice' for WA regional galleries. To that end it seems essential that we respond to the current DCA *Present State* enquiry.

Regional galleries play a vital role in the ecology of the visual arts in the State by providing exhibiting and public programs opportunities for both regional and urban artists and also as the point of engagement with the visual arts for many thousands of audience members. As the custodians of the visual culture of their region, regional gallery staff hold a wealth of knowledge about artists, their work, their history and their aspirations.

Present State is very much Perth focussed and does not demonstrate strong knowledge of, or give sufficient attention to, the significance of regional visual arts. For instance the Geraldton and Bunbury Regional art galleries are referred to as AGWA satellites when in fact this is only true of Geraldton and even then, not for much longer. Significant galleries such Art Geo in Busselton and Collie Art Gallery are not mentioned indicating minimal regional knowledge or consultation. Regional galleries are given no consideration under the heading 'Art Museums and Collections' creating the distinct impression that they and their collections are considered to be secondary to those in the capital.

Sales and artists' remuneration

Artworks are sold through regional galleries to private buyers and to regional gallery collections and tourists travelling in regional WA often buy artworks as mementoes of their travels. While these sales have not been quantified they do contribute to artists' incomes and are likely to have become more significant since so many commercial galleries have closed.

When regional galleries are adequately resourced they pay artists' fees and support their exhibitions with publications and promotion. On the other hand, in some situations restricted budgets mean that regional galleries must do the reverse and charge artists to exhibit, which inevitably limits who can afford to exhibit their work. Core funding directed through local government to regional galleries for artists fees and promotional expenses would address this anomaly and open up greater opportunities for sales of work.

Education and training

Especially as training options for artists have contracted regional galleries often provide professional development opportunities for artists to assist them to maintain and develop their practice. Of particular value to regionally based artists regional galleries also often act as a conduit for contact with Perth based and other galleries, curators and visual arts organisations.

In addition to training for artists it should be noted that regional galleries often provide first time visual arts experience for regional children through school visits and schools exhibitions. These first and subsequent experiences shape the expectations and preferences of future artists, arts audiences and consumers making them vital for the future of the sector.

Infrastructure and touring

The range and variation of WA regional galleries has not been definitively mapped but perhaps the most striking characteristic at present is their great variability in size and resources. They range from galleries in regional cities with several staff and a modest budget through to galleries in small towns operated by a single volunteer with no budget at all.

A core network of regional galleries ("robust cultural infrastructure") located in key regional centres to facilitate optimum audience access should be a fundamental objective for future infrastructure investment. While local government may willingly own and operate these galleries they are unlikely to prioritise the capital investment required to establish or upgrade them.

As in capital cities, successful and popular 21st Century regional galleries must provide more than exhibition spaces. Visitors expect a gallery experience to include retail and hospitality as well as access to public programs including 'hand on' art making in appropriate studio spaces. Regional galleries, especially those shoe-horned into heritage buildings, are

also notoriously short of sufficient back-of-house space for loading, packing, storage, administration and preparation.

Artist in residence facilities – accommodation and studio - within or nearby regional galleries is arguably one of the single most important item of infrastructure in terms of offering artists opportunities to work in regional situations and offering audiences and arts community's opportunities for exchange and exposure to new ideas and practices.

Present State places considerable emphasis on the need for regional galleries to be able to accommodate touring exhibitions from State collections. While this objective is one that is shared by regional gallery people and audiences, the reality is that the cost of establishing and maintaining appropriate facilities with exacting climate control, security, surveillance and staffing standards will be major. In reality such touring exhibitions will be very expensive to prepare for touring and unlikely to take place very often.

While not arguing against this desirable outcome a workable and affordable network of regional galleries able to take most major conventional touring exhibitions and flexible enough in design and amenity to present new approaches to creative practice including electronic media, immersive and performance based projects is a greater priority.

Touring opportunities

Availability of varied touring exhibitions is vital for regional galleries if they are to show work from beyond their own immediate region. ART ON THE MOVE puts 2 – 3 exhibitions on tour each year currently and works hard to provide a diverse offering. However opportunities for artists to tour their work are extremely competitive and it is most often those who have established profiles and are well known that are successful. Regional artists and those with community based practices, who don't have the same strong art world networks and promotional opportunities as urban artists, struggle to be able to tour their work even though they often offer strong opportunities for audience engagement.

It should also be recognised that over 30 years ART ON THE MOVE has delivered more than 350 touring exhibitions attended by 3 million visitors (100,000 per year). More than 4,300 artists have been involved and have benefitted.

Local government engagement

The working group endorses the objective identified in *Strategic Directions 2016-2013* to "Establish a process that ensures on-going dialogue between DCA, local government, the sector and the public for the purpose of advocating monitoring and reviewing 'Strategic Directions' ". As the owners and managers of most regional gallery facilities LG's carry the greatest share

of the cost but at the same time often struggle to reconcile their priorities and operational requirements with those of the arts professionals who they employ. Recognition and appropriate remuneration for regional arts professionals is a significant issue if regional galleries are to attract the best people and realise their full potential within an LG organisation. Creating better understanding and identifying shared objectives promises greater alignment and productivity.

The current work being carried out on Regional Centres Development Plans promises opportunities to assert the larger role of the arts and cultural industries, including regional galleries, as key drivers of regional economies, which should create a positive atmosphere for a new approach to collaboration with Local Government.

Supporting Aboriginal artists

Recognition and acknowledgement of the depth and strength of Aboriginal culture is fundamental for all regional galleries and as a result Aboriginal artists should, and often do, have opportunities to access to services at their regional galleries. Maintaining remote Aboriginal arts centres is an important government priority but recognition should also be given to the role of regional galleries in supporting artists and selling work. In areas of the State where European settlement has largely been swept away by intensive settlement and land use evidence of Aboriginal culture regional galleries play a particularly important role for artists who don't have access to an arts centre and don't work in a recognisable regional style favoured by the market. More can be done in this regard through measures such as encouraging employment of Indigenous Arts Officers in regions where no arts centre exists.

Leadership

The impending establishment of a WA regional galleries organisation will, for the first time, enable the sector to have a unified voice and to be able to work strategically with DCA and other partners to ensure a sustainable creative future for regional galleries, their audiences and regional visual artists.

Yours sincerely

WA Regional Galleries Working Group