

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

Well, good morning, everyone. Thank you for making the big effort to be here on time for our third keynote of Artstate Bathurst. It is the second day of the conversation. I hope you enjoyed the conversation last night, despite the urgent change of venue. I would like to applaud the superhuman efforts of the Artstate team in getting all the outdoor gear down and secured safely, and getting the message out to everyone, so that nobody suffered any damage. They have all made a substantial contribution to the safe running of Artstate Bathurst, reacting speedily to ensure that nobody was harmed.

I would like to acknowledge we are meeting on Wiradjuri country and pay my respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

Today's theme – 'Robust regions, exploring the contribution of the arts to regional communities'. We started to touch on this yesterday in the final plenary panel. The new NSW Government pathway sets out a path to ensure that it will be part of our continuing growing economy. A plan for growth for regions was launched in this venue a few months ago. Against all the rhetoric about liveability, vibrancy and social cohesion, there is not one sentence about how it will be delivered.

Mighty ambitions about infrastructure, transport, skills development, advocacy and promotion aimed at tourism and international student recruitment and encouraging business investment are stated. There is a point 10 under 'business investment' – "to grow vibrant places to live and work, to encourage growth in population." There are calls for infrastructure development and housing. Not one word about investment in arts and cultural development.

Why? We just don't have the hard economic data and evidence to convince all levels of government that investment in the arts is an essential element to assist to achieve these goals. We have masses of stories and anecdotal evidence, but this is not enough.

We heard from my colleagues yesterday, and through a number of breakout sessions, the constant challenge for arts and cultural workers to make their case to their own communities and councils, and it is considerably harder to make a case to state and federal governments. Yet we know that investment in the arts will actually save you money, in spiralling health costs, maintaining community connectedness, creating vibrant cities that will attract the new populations that they are aiming for.

So, what are we doing wrong? How can we make the case for the value of investment in the arts in a language that economists get? I asked Jack Archer this question. I thought as the CEO of the Regional Australia Institute, which is a think tank devoted to issues concerning regional Australia, that gathers and analyses the best information they can find on regions and makes it readily accessible to people around the country, he might have some suggestions.

The Regional Australia Institute works with regional leaders around the nation to understand their challenges and help them identify opportunities for future development that they can then implement. They also talk to governments at all levels and provide independent, evidence-based advice about the options they have to make regions even greater. Is it possible for the arts sector to be included in the research that delivers better evidence for policy makers, and informs debate about the regional contribution to Australia's future economy?

Jack generously agreed to come to Bathurst this morning to deliver the opening keynote, addressing today's theme. He has been with the Regional Australia Institute since its inception in 2012 and developed their policy and research program, including major products such as [In]Sight – Australia's Regional Competitive Index, and [In]Form, Australia's Online Library of Regional Research. He took up the role as chief executive officer on 1 July, 2015. In previous roles as a consultant in public service he contributed to major regional reforms in water, climate change and Indigenous issues and industry. He holds a Bachelor of Natural Resource Management from the University of New England and is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. He is originally from Paterson in the lower Hunter Valley of NSW and now lives in the hills west of Canberra. Please welcome Jack to deliver the keynote.

**JACK ARCHER:**

Good morning. It is wonderful to have the opportunity to be here. What I wanted in the half hour we've got together is to share some of the work that my team have done. It is really important for me to acknowledge that I am involved deeply in a lot of the work I do, but Hayley from my team has done a lot of work putting this data together.

There is a lot of discussion around creativity in regions and how it helps drive economies. There is a real need, I think, to understand this much more. On the one hand, this is complex, putting a hard economic framework over the arts, because surely that is not what it is about. However, I work with a lot of policymakers and this is the language that they speak. So we are going to do better in getting the kind of investment we need in our arts, particularly in regional areas, when we can connect it to the language that makes sense to policymakers.

My talk is about creative hotspots in regional Australia. I wanted to share some of the information we've got. The point, I think, is to start a more nuanced discussion about how creativity, the economic side of that, and the social and cultural sides of that, is shaped in different regions, places which are genuinely hotspots where creativity is a core part of the economy, and places where it is playing a different role. So just a few insights into that, why we think it is important.

And for me, the opportunity to work with yourselves and this organisation is to have a more nuanced discussion about the role the arts plays in different places, so that we can get better policy and more investment over time.

In Australia, creative industries are metro-centric. There are some reasons for that, but a lot of it is about where we choose to invest. Obviously, there are things that particularly on the professional services side tend to cluster in our cities. But we've got a range of hotspots around the country, which are places where people want to live. This plays an enormous role in attracting people to places and feeling like it is a place that offers the broad range of things that they want. People who want to move to a region talk about the need for good health services and at the same time the need for cultural activities and other things which bring richness to life when you live in a small place.

We've got these push or pull factors in terms of creative professionals living in regions, which are important to understand, particularly when policymakers are wanting their investments to have an impact on what is happening in different places.

For us overall, creative industries play an essential role in regional areas. We don't think there is any argument about that. And the challenge is to do a better job of filling out the picture of how that happens and getting some really good thinking going about what we would like the future to look like.

We need to acknowledge that creative activities are metro-centric. The data I've got today looks at the definition of creative industries, which includes broadly two types. There are the makers, the producers of content, the people involved in art production, all of the things we traditionally look at in the arts. Then there is creative services, which are becoming more and more essential to the way our economy works. Graphic design and people who provide services to a whole range of industries. In particular, the services side is clustered in major cities. In Sydney, Ultimo is a global hub for marketing and creative professionals.

In our largest cities we're getting up to 7.5-8%, which is significant, given that some of the industries like health that we talk about are 13-14%. In regional cities it is more like 4% and then into areas that rely on primary industries, down to 1%. But clearly it is in all these places to a reasonably significant extent. It is also growing, just as it is growing across the economy. It can give the sector some confidence in making those cases.

One of the things we try and do with discussion about regional is to move beyond bland generalisations. We have been talking recently about some of the workforce shortages around the country and one of the biggest challenges is, people are really quick to assert there are no jobs in regional Australia, which is ridiculous. Talking about regional Australia as one thing is ridiculous, but the idea that there is no jobs out there... So in that conversation, we talk about places which are incredibly short of workforce, really struggling to succeed because of workforce challenges, and then there are other places which are experiencing unemployment and lack of jobs. So we try to bring some nuance to this conversation.

This is a map of creative hotspots around Australia. You can see the dark blue are areas in regions which are really strong in those creative industries, creative services and production. We see a few kinds of things. One of the things we can never forget is how important the arts are as a source of non-government industry and activity in Indigenous communities. In Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands in South Australia there is a large proportion of jobs that is important. There is not a lot of other industries, and it is a way for people to express their culture and to have some independent income away from the government and welfare that we talk so much about.

Then we see two types of places that are doing well. The largest regional cities, like the Gold Coast and Hobart. My colleague Kim Horton is from Hobart and is amazed to think of his hometown as a cultural hub. I think he grew up in the suburbs around the smelter, which wasn't a cultural hub. But in the intervening period, Hobart has blossomed as a creative hub. We think of MONA, but it was a reflection of a bigger creative trend in that part of the country. That stands out. The Gold Coast as well is a place that has had an increase in creative services, getting to a size where it can attract not only people who need to be on the production side of the arts, but also people who work in business services. And other places are really built up by attracting different types of people over a long time, places like the Byron Shire and the Surf Coast.

Of the things the creative hotspot tells us is that it takes a long time. If you want to be a genuine space for creative energy, things can happen quickly, but you have to sustain it. It takes 20-40 years. These places that have emerged over that time and now have enormous strength. I guess the question we need to ask ourselves, what other places are emerging?

The other thing is important is to look at the large areas that are white. They have limited creative presence. This doesn't measure creative activity very well, only those who do it for their employment. So in all of these communities there is a whole range of creative activity happening which isn't part of the economy. But certainly in lots of parts of Australia, I think, the presence of creative industries is lower than it could be. And that's something that challenges a place as much as health services in terms of long-term health of the community.

We know that metros are a magnet for creative people, so why do some mad buggers go out and live in regions? Is it a form of madness, or is there logic behind the decision to move and pursue creative endeavours in regions?

We think about it in terms of push and pull factors. The pull factor – cost of living, cost of services. It is expensive in inner Sydney. Cost of accommodation, pursuing an artistic career particularly, if you're not one of the people who are blessed to have great returns from it, in a regional area you can pursue things at a much lower cost. Particularly in a community with a good community of other creatives around you. So cost of living and services, it's pushing everybody out of the cities at the moment and creative people are part of that, too.

One of the interesting things that the team started to pull up is the ways in which communities can take advantage of these push factors and be a place that is a natural destination. This is a space in Queenstown in Tasmania which is available. It is basically an artists' space. A set-up place where someone can come and be an artist. Queenstown is a very old mining town. And it has gone from its glory days of 3000-5000 people to a small community. One of their most beautiful assets are these spare spaces. This has been turned into a space for someone to come and pursue artistic endeavours. Just to give you a sense of what they are offering, you've got a studio, a gallery, a place to display your work and a place to live. Just a great example of the way in which regions which are wanting to provide a destination for creative people who want to get out of the city can remake some spaces and potentially turn into a natural place for people to come.

It is not all about the city pushing out – we have been inspired by Lindy Hume's work about the misunderstanding of the creative talent in regions and the reason why it is so important to support creative communities and why people choose to be in these places. The creative inspiration, the quiet working environment, the ability to do what you want to do is significant when you find the right regional place. Then places emerge when you get a great peer group around you. Candelo in NSW is a great example of that and it is a beautiful place. Armidale, NSW – places with universities that have support of education as well as local communities that have deep interest in the arts is another pull. Sometimes it is about the customer base, but it's also about the regional lifestyle.

So there are elements but also some specific factors in places that makes some parts in Australia just right as well. Here are top spots, Byron is off the chart and then the Indigenous communities. You can see a lot of those larger places, Gold Coast, Newcastle, Sunshine Coast,

once our regional cities get a couple of hundred thousand people they start to attract not only a nice core of creative people in the community but also some of those creative services. And as those places continue to grow, we will see the importance of creative people in those places.

We don't think about the argument for creative people being important in regions. The NSW government, thinking about its 20-year economic vision and places that are magnets for people to live, this is a natural area think about how we develop and attract people and how to foster them. As Elizabeth pointed out, it is in there, but I don't think it is in it to the point where they will have the confidence to invest and also, the industry and people involved understand how to connect into this broader vision. So I think we have some work to do.

And we need a nuanced approach. We get fads in regional development, and creative has been one of those. We get towns that need to build the foundations of creative industries and population, deciding they want to be creative hubs, as if they can flick a switch overnight and the artists will flock and rivers of gold will follow. This is something we build over time.

When you nurture the creative people that are already in the community, we are building networks of people that can attract other people interested in being part of those industries or taking their practice to the next level. Or for those creative services, if you have a bedrock of people who can participate in design businesses or other businesses and enable it to be more successful. We think there is a really clear argument for creative industries playing a role in attracting people to regional areas.

We can't put perfect data around this, but people talk like they can't leave the city because there is no opera house or city theatre company. There is not going to be those world-class national institutions in regional areas, but some of the experience we think people find... I have stepped on a landmine! Let me back off that. I have time for questions. So if you want to be involved in that, let me know.

What people find is if you live in a regional area and you become connected to the community, we have an opportunity to participate in creative areas in different ways, which are different to rocking up to the Sydney Opera House to see a show that is in town from New York. People have quite a simplistic view of what it means to have a creative and cultural environment that attracts and retains people. You don't need an opera house to achieve that. People have the opportunity to participate in the local arts scene and small productions people are putting on.

We have found that is a really rich experience and people quickly change their views about what their desires are and what they value once they're in regions. It is a more nuanced view of how the creative part of our communities can help attract people, because that means we can invest in a whole range of things with that goal in mind once you understand people's aspirations and how they enjoy the changes.

The social fabric, character of community, all that stuff has been said. The mental health and health stuff is an area that needs to be said. We've been having a massive conversation about that for 10 years. The opportunity for people to be involved in creative expression, creative enterprise in different ways surely has to be a part of our approach to mental health. We have been pumping people full of pills as an approach to that. If we get further into the conversation, there has to be a space for a more diverse range of helping people work through those issues.

These are just conversation starters. We have only had a short time to dig into this, but what we try to do is build a more nuanced picture for a space that has more depth. I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to share what we have done. My team have enjoyed coming to talk to regional arts committees in different areas of the country. It is great to do that in NSW.

I have left myself about 10 minutes, so we can get some discussion going, because as much as you love listening to me, you probably have some things to say yourselves. I'm interested to get some questions and perspectives. We have about 10 minutes before Dee drags me off the stage. Any thoughts you want to put on the table, comments, questions. Anyone want to get a conversation going? The gentleman up the back there?

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

I guess I will start. We live in Wilson's Downfall, population of about five. If you look at the Piano Mill, it has won an architecture award. It falls outside what normal people refer to as music. How do we actually promote that?

JACK ARCHER:

I don't know, to be honest. It is an difficult environment to get through. I don't have enough creative juices in me, to be honest, to cut through. It is such a challenge. People still think with online environments, you put things on and it will go viral and away you go, but it is an advertising budget for online... So I think how we get, how we build the case, it is hard for people who are not in industries and don't understand the depth and significance of particular things, in specific parts of the arts, to understand the significance sometimes people in the sector can see.

Thinking of how you can communicate and share that in different ways. I live in a space where they are always wanting hard evidence for things, so that is a part of it. The ability to get others to speak for you as well is a really important part of that. When we try to get government to change its mind on things, I can talk till I am blue in the face but if I can get four or five others who they are confident I can't run like a puppeteer to come and speak on behalf of issues, that changes the conversation. Those promotion questions, it is so crowded at the moment, but they are few things I have much that I hope will be useful.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Thank you. I will take up the moment of the great audience (inaudible) there are companies based regions in Australia who have both national and international reputations. There are arts companies that have greater global reputations than they do in Australia, with touring work and so on. Bringing it back to Elizabeth's provocations that we know, and the sector knows, but don't have those statistics and figures, how do we connect the employment outcomes?

The fact is that many organisations are creating the artistic ideas and trajectories of the future as well as employment and those connections – we talked about place-making as well as health and wellbeing. What are the ways in which your organisation can either work with regions or can look at what is the basis of things that you use, which shows some aspects and hides others, and what are the advice you give to arts?

JACK ARCHER:

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The workers present today is quite simple. It is on the Census. We do some simple and powerful thing in the organisation. The next bit that is challenging to do on our own is we can talk about the nuances in the numbers. And particularly for an industry like this, it is harder to understand what is driving that, so the knowledge that is in the industry about things that have emerged and done incredibly well overseas and caused some of these numbers to shift, we don't know that stuff and it is very hard.

There are 500 regional LGAs around the country. We had some of those things that I expect to see in a place, we can test that in the evidence we have got and knit that together as a case study for information. We can connect those things together.

The gentleman's example up the back, it is difficult to understand the nuance and what is driving some of those numbers because it is local and specific communities. The number of things hiding at the back of sheds in regional communities is enormous.

What has really worked for us as an organisation, we have been working, in the last two years, on getting some more resources for communities to welcome migrants, because we have identified 10 or 12 incredible examples where local communities have led the way in welcoming migrants. They might be refugees initially settled in the cities or people coming to work in different industries, but locals have turned that into an incredibly vibrant community. None of that is obvious when you look at statistics.

We can look at broader trends and bring out some examples. By finding 10 or 12 of them we have stitched them up into national trends. It may be some similar works for the arts discussion. If we can think of different themes or different sources of growth, if we can think of what is shaping and changing the regional arts space and how that is related to different places, we can potentially connect the two broader trends we are seeing, and broader trends around those places and future needs and we can connect those anecdotes to evidence which makes them more powerful in policy discussions.

My guys have started to drop this down into community levels, but unless we connect to the depth around what is happening in those places and what it is that is driving change... Because that is how we shape a smart investment from government – we are able to get some money available, some flexibility on how that is used by locals, understanding what has been working and how different places can find their own ways along the pathway. I take my medicine.

Lindy's argument about how there is a patronising view of regions, like the thing we need to do for regional arts is to invest in a Sydney theatre company doing a regional tour to help the heathens, we were really taken by that argument as well. A misunderstanding of what regions are creating and an often paternalistic, patronising perspective you can get from the cities is constant frustration to us. So it is like stepping on a landmine. Any other questions?

**QUESTION FROM FLOOR:**

Thanks. (Inaudible) regional cities across the country. (Inaudible) if you think about national investment decisions, most of us suspect that isn't a balance. (Inaudible) how many of these actually project a negative impact? We can't control that, we can't influence that kind of decision but we can model the difference. So my challenge is, when we do the sell for the art and culture, we should also ask, what harm does art create in the culture?

JACK ARCHER:

For my sins, I have been existing in the policy world for the last five years, professionally. And I think the level of detailed analysis that underpins decisions and the way in which decisions are made, it is easy to sit on the outside of government and think it is some all-knowing beast analysing carefully. They are not. They are just not.

If you step back and think about it, even the most well-meaning person working in a public service role in the arts part of the NSW Government, they bring their own experience and exist in whatever the internal dialogue is in that place. And they are often not allowed and given the space to get out and engage with it is happening in regions and understand it, unless they take the initiative. So it is really challenging to shed some of that groupthink.

The discussion is also so polarised now. One of the things we try and do as an organisation, as much as I land strongly on different sides of these polarised discussions, is to shift things back to the centre. Because this hysterical battle over things – migration is a great example. I have been trying to have a reasonable conversation about the opportunities for migrants to be part of regional communities. But they are petrified maybe some hard-right or hard-left person gets slotted in and stuck there for the rest of their life.

We need to resist being overly polarised while still being able to talk about the things that we experience. The arts conversation can cross all of these divides. You can make reasoned arguments to each side of polarised debate that brings them away from unhelpful decisions and make centrist arguments about the future of our communities.

I did some work with Noel Pearson and he talks about the radical centre, and I kind of like that idea. We're trying not to get stuck out on the edges – to find a nice path that brings people with us while remaining true to who we are and what we're doing. I think there is enormous opportunity for the community of regional artists to do that in your space, and we would love to be part of doing that with you.

I will be around for the next couple of hours. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you, and I'm looking forward to chatting to a few more of you while I'm here. You very much.

ELIZABETH ROGERS:

Thank you so much, Jack. I have to say, from our first meeting, putting you on the spot and asking you those questions... Here is a small piece of artwork from one of our regional artists to take back and remember Bathurst. Thank you very much for coming.

JACK ARCHER:

Thank you.

ELIZABETH ROGERS:

So, there is some food for thought and perhaps some challenging work for this sector. For we who have plenty of spare time outside our day jobs.

Our next panel is talking about country towns building economies around the arts. I spotted this story by ABC Central West journalist Micaela Hambrett through a link on a tweet, as you do. Her

report on country towns building economies around arts and culture in the article entitled 'Country Towns Preserve History and Embrace Art in Long-Term Commercial Strategy' fitted perfectly with today's theme. So I'm delighted she is here today with the creators of the three projects from her article. Unfortunately, Alison Dent from Gulargambone could not be with us today due to a family emergency, so Micaela is going to tell that story.

She is the acting features reporter for ABC Central West and initially studied production and screenwriting but has worked the bulk of her career in television. She transferred from Ultimo to the Central West this year – you know, the movement is happening! The creatives are moving west! – seizing an opening at a bureau as she wanted to transition to content-making.

She was drawn to regional stories and the viewpoint of Australians beyond city limits. One third of the audience is regionally-based and are the broadcaster's most ardent protectors and challengers. She is based in Orange and is amazed at the stories constantly surfacing in the Central West region.

She also believes regional Australia is on the front line for the next 50-100 years in terms of population management, town and resource planning and climate change. And she said it is also a terrific spot for a journalist to be located.

Please welcome Micaela and her panellists. Rich Evans has the best job title I've ever heard. The Chief Reactivation Officer for The Foundations in Portland. And Stephen Birrell, the manager of Tremain's Mill.

**MICAELA HAMBRETT:**

Thank you for that introduction, Elizabeth. I am really delighted to be here today alongside Rich and Stephen, who I first met in May when I was researching that story. Portland, Bathurst and Gulargambone are very different townships. The concept of art as a tourism device is not new, but perhaps what is undervalued is the restorative power of art for the communities themselves and its role in preservation in small towns.

Drawing people to the place is one aspect. When researching the story, I discovered these towns began their revival as an introspection. They asked, "What do we have? What are we about, and what do we want people to see as us?" They were informed by the answers to these questions and stay true to themselves.

What struck me about the towns' approaches was that they found existing things within the towns that they canvassed and they drew on the characters, people and stories as the content. Cleverly, they realised that their most unique selling points they had were the town's own stories, histories and buildings themselves. Rich Evans is leading the reactivation of Portland's Cement Works. Can you tell me about Portland? Where had it been and where was it going?

**RICH EVANS:**

I didn't grow up in Portland. I grew up in western Sydney and moved there seven years ago. It was a very quiet town, there was not a lot happening. The Cement Works is the dominant feature in the town. For the past 25 years, it has just been a fence and it was closed. When Portland was a thriving community with two grocery stores and all that, it was the beating heart of the town. The town was there because the networks were there.

The cement that was produced at Portland was used in the big building boom in Sydney where everything is made of concrete, so you can see around Sydney there are buildings formed from concrete and the majority of that came from Portland. So it really did build Sydney, essentially. It was a centre of innovation and excellent, and the site is 84 hectares, so it is immense. It was a metropolis of industry.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

And so the site was acquired, was it?

RICH EVANS:

It is the understanding I have gained in talking to people in the town. When Portland was thriving, it was the Portland Commonwealth Cement Company. It was only focused on Portland. And then it was acquired by a small conglomerate called Blue Circle, who had a number of plants, so it became one of many. And eventually became the property of Boral and I think someone in an office in Sydney went "Where is Portland? We have something there..." It became less relevant to the company that owned it. The company built the pool, which is still community-owned, to this day, because a girl drowned in one of the dams, so the cement companies went, "That is not good enough." The men donated their time to build the pool.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

It is fair to say that the town exists because of the Cement Works?

RICH EVANS:

Absolutely. And it had a very long period of slumber.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

Shall we go to the video now?

(Video plays)

TOMMY FITZGERALD:

People used to say in them times, "If ever this cement works shuts, Portland will be a ghost town." They say that Portland built Sydney. When I started here in about '57, there were 330 here then. 90% of the people had some sort of connection with the cement works.

I first started on a pick and shovel. My dad worked here, and his brother Reg worked here, their young bloke, young Reg, worked here. Me brother Bobby worked here, me brother Billy worked here. I had a son named Malcolm who done his apprenticeship here, you know. Well, that was about seven out of the one family, more or less, and there were a lot of other families that had relations worked here. A hell of a lot of 'em.

They say that the men in the early years, they used to line 'em up out the front of the gate and put their hands out like so, and they would go along to see if they had blisters, or how their hands were. And he'd say, "I'll have you, I'll have you. No, I don't want you." Looking what work they'd been doing by the look of their hands.

You know, it was a good place to work, to get a living, sort of thing, 'cause there was a lot of people that didn't get a living in them times, you know. It wasn't big money, but it was constant and the company was pretty good. We built a swimming pool here with the cooperation of the cement company. They supplied a lot of the labour.

The people used to gather on the paper shop corner of a Friday evening up there. Mothers and the families waiting for Dad to bring the pay up. And they used to give 'em their pay there and they'd slip across and sink a few while Mum went and done the shopping, sort of thing.

And it was a very close-knit town. If anybody was injured or hurt, the whole town would be taking raffles or doing something to assist. The whole town felt anything that happened, you know. I lost some very good friends, and I lost a son meself. He was killed in the quarry on an accident with a dozer, you know.

The whole town was shocked when they said they were gonna get rid of 80 men. A few shops and that shut, you know. Things dwindled off a lot. Yeah, the trains used to run right down here, locos and that, them times. This old place here, mate, she brings back a whole lot of memories.

They used to say that Portland would be a ghost town, but it's far from a ghost town now. It's starting to get more people, whether it be pensioners from Sydney that are coming up, but I used to know everybody in Portland one time. If I go over the street now, I know hardly anybody.

When I look at that, I don't know what to think. I go past nearly every day, down the street, sort of thing. But it was amazing, you know. Me daughters came over and used to sit there and watch it, bit by bit. I wasn't really that game to go over, for fear of knowing he might paint me face or something and scare everybody away. But it never come to that.

He does a wonderful job, that's all I could say. Like, it's the first time I've seen that sort of thing done. I don't know how he does it so detailed, you know. One thing I always wanted to be able to be able to do that I could never do was draw. Yeah. Might have went alright drawing a six-gun or something, but I don't know about drawing there, like that.

(Applause)

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

When we were backstage, we asked a question about that. Who did the art on the silos?

RICH EVANS:

His name was Guido van Helten, and his name probably makes you think of some mad old Italian. But he is the younger fellow. When the site decided to do something to launch the activation project, they decided they want the guy who is the best at it. He has done silos... He was one of the guys that really kicked off the whole movement. He's got a really particular style. They were attracted to his practice, which was all about coming into the town, meeting the people and telling the stories of those people. So there was questions when he was in town, "Who is going to be the committee that decides what goes on the silo?" It was not about that. He meets the people and takes his own photos and paints from them. He won't paint from archival photos. His practice is about telling stories to his artworks.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

Why was using the residents' stories so important?

RICH EVANS:

We wanted to hold onto the history of the site. There was a history of the Cement Works that was put together by Tidy Towns in Portland that was all the deaths on the site and it is tragic, but there is also an amazingly rich history that also needs to be told and that is what we want to immortalise. And it gets the conversation going.

Guido took the photo at the moment that he said that he lost his son. And it is tragic – his son, Malcolm, was the last guy to die on site, he went over the edge of the quarry in the dozer. I can't watch that video without... Playing that was just a way for me to not cry. It is tragic.

So many people that are still in town have that tragic connection to the site and that is the only connection they can have, so to reactivate it in such a positive way can be quite healing. Tommy hadn't been back to the site since that happened to his son and now he comes down and comes to the market and he loves being there, so I think it has been quite cathartic for a lot of the townspeople.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

What were you setting out to achieve with this reactivation? Obviously there is a commercial arm.

RICH EVANS:

Of course, there is no money tree – we looked all over, there is none. It is about giving people a reason to come and regenerating the economy. I have young kids, we moved from Sydney to the Central West so we could have a quiet lifestyle and a better way to bring them up, but now that we live here we realise the opportunities are limited in certain respects, there is no jobs, and industry and things like that. But we are in an age that industries changes so rapidly, so you can't pin your future to something not sustainable.

I think developing an arts and cultural economy that underpins all that, it is sustainable. People still go to the Big Banana. It's not very good, but people still go. People still go when there is a reason to bring them here. If we can create the future of Portland around that sort of basis and attractions and experiences. We have all these buildings, seven different buildings within that Heritage precinct and another five on the side that have been kept and utilised for different things, and then we have gardens being built and all that sort of thing. If we can centre and arts and culture around that, then that is going to sustain for a very long time. Like the Portland market, which is in its 45th year next year.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

How has Portland changed since this started?

RICH EVANS:

It has been amazing. Throughout the period that Guido was there, I actually watched paint dry. It was really interesting. I saw the first and all in between. He was there through April and May and people were coming to the site and watching him paint. We had pop-up markets.

The first week we did that, we had 1000 people through the gates and we thought we were not set up for this. Very quickly we had to move with those things. But throughout the time he was there, we estimate around 10,000 people came to the site. In that six or seven week period. It has probably been again since he was finished. So if you are driving down the road from Bathurst and stuck behind a caravan, don't worry, because they will be tuning off to Portland. We have seen the local cafes are busy, local pubs are busier, we get tour groups in two or three days a week to the Cement Works and then they go and have lunch, so it has boosted the economy.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:  
What about the community itself?

RICH EVANS:  
It has brought them together. There has been a number of... We were talking about the silo movement and general events we had. The markets are a great one and they just keep coming up to that. Other things we do down the site. The whole community is coming out. They are all very positive and upbeat about that. In any small committee you would know. There is always the negative Nellies, but we have to take that with the rest of them.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:  
There is also the question of how you pay the artists.

RICH EVANS:  
Guido wasn't cheap! I have been a musician my whole life. I believe artists should be paid. And that is a struggle. From my point of view, something I said in my speech the other night at an event we had, Portland needs to be very grateful to the company that bought the site, for the amazing vehicle we have been given. So the fact they were prepared to invest many hundreds of thousands of dollars to do that project, then we should be very grateful to them for that.

And money has to come from somewhere, as you rightly pointed out. How do we pay the artists? Because the people that come and view the art, that stop and take the photo and have a look around the site, they can put a gold donation in, but it is a long time before the artist can... Kids don't eat love.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:  
This is Stephen Birrell's main site in Bathurst. He purchased that site. Tell us a bit about the history of the mills.

STEPHEN BIRRELL:  
Tremain's Mill was built in 1874. It is one of the mills you see on the video. That part of the CBD was a very important employer to a whole region. Tremain's Mill was a continuous employer for over 100 years. We have lived here for about 18 years, I think, we have been in and around Bathurst.

We were a little oblivious of the mill itself, because at that stage, when we came here, it was a produce merchant's, but he was using all the equipment, which was great. When the property went up for sale, there was a very strong movement called Save our Silos, and was very

important because people had designs on the area to build more houses or apartments, I believe. That would have meant the site would have been razed to the ground. That was a concern.

We had come out of the mining industry and sold a company and my wife seems to think I need a project all the time. This property came up. We probably could not have afforded to buy it for what it was probably worth, but our agent on our behalf made an offer to the owner and we made a commitment that we would preserve the streetscape and a mixture of restoration and conservation. So for those people in town, they would have seen the Victoria Stores building, which we are very close to faithfully restoring, so we are already on that path.

But it was very close to so many people's lives for so long. There were four generations of families who worked in that mill. It only closed in 1980, which meant there were people still around and alive, may be some here, who actually worked there. So we had that big open day and met all those people and it set me on this ridiculous research project to find out all about the family and the mill, and I do tend to be a little obsessive.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

That's a good thing. Shall I play the video?

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

By all means. I apologise because there is a little too much of me.

(Video plays)

STEPHEN BIRRELL VO:

This is a small part of what used to be called Milltown. There used to be five mills in this area. Tremain's is the only one left with its silos and certainly the only one left with any operating grain-handling equipment. It's an important piece of industrial architecture, the last remaining type of its kind, and we think it's worthy of preservation.

There are people who knew much more about this mill site than we did. They were people who were involved in the Save our Silos, people in historical and heritage groups in town. I thought it practical and prudent to get together with these people and first of all allay their fears that we weren't going to bulldoze the place. That was really important. And secondly, to say that we would like to preserve the streetscape of these buildings, because we feel they are very important.

The objective for the overall project is that we have a mixture of commercial, residential and art spaces, community spaces, that surround a square, we call it an Italian piazza, or a little town square in Provence.

We've engaged a group of young architects. I particularly looked for young architects because I want new ideas. My wife and I, Glenda, went to Tasmania to look at a bunch of mills and also to look at the Henry Jones Art Hotel. We just looked at that building and thought, "That's exactly what we want to do."

Robert Morris-Nunn, the architect from the Henry Jones, will be working with our young architects and coming up with what I hope are some brilliant ideas.

My background is mechanical and I'm super-impressed with looking at some of this early machinery that has a simple function to perform, but the way it's built and operates is just brilliant. It's simplicity at its best.

I was also impressed with the way they build these Oregon silos. There's that much timber in those silos that they're probably worth more than the real estate there that they're sitting on. My wife and I were in San Francisco and by coincidence visited the Maritime Museum and whilst we were there, there was a three-masted clipper called the 'Balclutha'.

We went on board and visited it and went downstairs and the hold was full of Oregon timbers and American oak. And when we then sat down and watched the video, we learnt that there were three three-masted clippers that used to do the run from San Francisco to Sydney, bringing timber, which was just ballast for them coming out of San Francisco, bringing it to Sydney and selling it to the mines and the mills.

So we are fortunate we have access to the Tremain archives and I think I'll actually be able to track down the ship and the date that it sailed from San Francisco. So it's those little things that tend to get you in. All the stories that must be there that we have yet to uncover, but we will. They're the sort of things that actually take you away, really take you away from what you're trying to achieve. But you've got to be careful you don't get too obsessed. Probably too late.

(Applause)

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

You had tenure at Tremain's Mill. Why did you choose art as the most effective vehicle to launch the site?

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

It is a good question. We have done a lot of research in family history and milling in general but we got an understanding that we were losing a lot of our heritage. Bathurst is the first inland settlement, there is a lot of history in this town and a lot of people who are absolutely passionate about trying to preserve it. We have lost a lot of heritage buildings and sites and bits and pieces and they haven't necessarily been recorded.

We thought if we gave artists an open brief and said, "You come to us, in any medium, paint, sculpture, whatever, and tell us what is important to you that you think needs to be recorded." As I said previously, I think artists can capture the soul of a building or a stream, or anything that is important, much better than a photograph or video. So we thought that was an opportunity to engage with the art community.

We then found, there is such a connection. Artists love heritage buildings and things that have a history in their own right. And whilst I know there is probably a lot of arts people in here, that it is an interesting thing when I come from an engineering background and try and deal with the arts

community. I struggled a little... I struggled a little, but we did eventually get it out. And they are different, they are all different. I don't think I will go any further with that!

(Laughter)

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

But I found there was such an interest in what we were doing. And these buildings lend themselves to that. What people came to us and said after the bazaar and the Heritage award, they said, "What's great about this, standing in this 1876 warehouse, it's got a soul." It's not... It has a life. It has had so many people through it, they've been living their lives and working in their jobs, and you actually get a sense of that.

So art, I think, is going to be an integral part of what we do here, where we want to make it available, and as much of it as possible should be free. By opening up that forecourt, which people will know is a car park – the most dangerous carpark in the world, I thought – would be to have that quiet place where people can enjoy a solo recital from somebody, maybe an artist doing some work in there. We talk about an artist in residence, we just don't know where we're going to put them yet. I'm sure we'll manage. The art is an integral part of this town. There is some great art in and around this town. And we think it fits with what we're doing.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

So in both of your sites, it is about making sure there is a sense of ownership.

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

Absolutely.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

Stephen, when we spoke back in May, you raised an interesting point that heritage and art is something that councils have recently seen as something that they can convert to money, and there are also commercial interests as well as those of the town. How important is that in projects like yours?

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

I won't speak for Rich, but our local council, and it was surprising, and I was very sceptical to start with, because I have dealt with councils in NSW and Queensland and WA and it hasn't always been a pleasant experience. But there is a genuine understanding of how important heritage strategy for tourism is in this town. And I cannot tell you how much support we have had from the top, particularly, in supporting what we're doing. So it has been great for us.

RICH EVANS:

I think we have found that support from all levels of government has been fantastic for our site. We have a challenge, with a very large site, of having Crown Land areas, subject to land claims and things like that. So it is a very complex pathway. And aside from some bureaucrat hold-ups throughout the process, the government stakeholders have been fantastic to deal with and really want to see the project happen, because they believe it is the underpinning of what we've got to celebrate in this area, and the reason for people to come the 2 hours and 27 minutes from the wharf at Woolloomooloo to Portland... Somebody timed themselves on Friday night, the time

to get there. So we've got stuff that has been bulldozed in Sydney, but you can't see some of these things anywhere else unless you come out to Bathurst.

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

The state government has been very supportive as well. We've got some really good, strong support from our local member and others. That has been very good. We haven't spoken about the museum, but the NSW Government has given us a grant to establish the Australian Milling Museum. And that, again, it will be a gift to the town because that in itself will generate people coming to this site and not just enjoying what will hopefully be a lovely, quiet space for everyone, but you will also have the opportunity to see something that is unique in the world. We found out there isn't a country anywhere that has a national milling museum. There are a lot of mills that have been turned into museums, but not one that tells the story of milling families.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

And it is walking the tightrope of, at heart you are a commercial enterprise, but you have to ensure you are giving back to the community.

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

Yes, there is a commercial reality to this in that as we are developing this site – this is my wife and I, this is our superannuation that is paying for this – the outcome will be there is a mix of commercial and residential, as the video alluded to. But they all must fit with what we are trying to establish. Rich will find this as well, as you move forward, you need to be very careful and selective about who you are putting into those buildings and make sure you are weeding out conflict between businesses, and make it a comfortable place for the businesses.

RICH EVANS:

That is one of the things we have looked at, rather than going commercial space. We are looking at programs that we can find for businesses. The artist in residence program, in the bathhouse gallery, which is to be in the old bathhouse. The shower cubicles are still there. But there is also a residence at the end of that. So we have an artist who lives there and puts their works on display in the studio. So we will now turn around and look for a mix of private and government money to be able to fund that program, so the artists can come in for free, essentially. And we're breaking even, with the cost-neutral offering, and we can offer it sustainably into the future. People will have seen some branded slides pop up a few minutes ago.

The boiler house is an empty shell of a building that holds a market on the second Sunday of every month. And then we transformed that into a world-class venue last Friday night, at a ticketed event where we had an entertainment program including burlesque dancers, fire twirlers and all sorts of amazing stuff. An incredible menu. And lighting that was put together by the guy who used to work on Vivid. We put together an event that left every single person walking out of their going, "That was the best night I ever had." Our goal is not just to find the quick and easy way to get a commercial rent for a space, but to say that we have amazing spaces, it is on us to create amazing experiences, what are those?

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

When we met in May, you mentioned the long-term goal, which was converting people from visitor to resident. A long period of time (inaudible). Tell me a bit about that.

**RICH EVANS:**

With Ironfest... I'm not the founder of Ironfest, Macgregor will shoot me... But I have worked with him. That is where Ironfest comes from. The goal is to create spaces and events and things that make people get there and say, "This is what I want." I will go off on a tangent a bit, but I will come back, I promise.

I spent Tuesday night in Windsor. That is a place that at the moment is destroying their heritage. They are putting a big bridge across the river. I got married in the park that is about to go, and the restaurant we had our reception in has all the old smugglers' tunnels closed in and boarded over. I was quite devastated by that. I was only there for business, having a walk around and all these memories were coming back.

I remember I moved to Windsor originally because I couldn't find a parking spot on the weekends when I went to markets. So I got an apartment there. We want people to come to Portland on the second Sunday of every month, coming up from Katoomba, and saying, "I really like this town." And eventually they will go, "You know what, we're coming here all the time, let's just live here." We have seen it with Ironfest. It has brought people to Lithgow. People get there with an idea in their mind, and they come and see it and it's very different.

And the other thing is the Sydney property prices, creating financial refugees who can't afford to live in Sydney anymore. So they look for what they desire elsewhere. And when they find it in bucketloads in places like Bathurst... Portland doesn't have what Bathurst has, but when we came up from Penrith to live somewhere, we drove into Bathurst and said, "It looks like Penrith 20 years ago and soon it will be like Penrith." That's not what we wanted, so we found Portland.

The grey nomads... Aren't they good? A way to get rid of your parents for four months at a time and they come back in time to babysit. It's fantastic. They come through the towns and support the economy and help these places establish industries that are not reasonable for them to establish. Portland would never have gone, "We're going to be a tourist destination."

**MICAELA HAMBRETT:**

It's funny you mentioned caravans – that is a good segue into Gulargambone. I am familiar with the town, married someone from Coonamble, so I have been there a lot. Their first street fair that they held was a roaring success. Just on background, Gulargambone is a small town in the north-west of NSW, about eight hours from Sydney. Its population hovers around 500. Agriculture is the only industry, mainly broad acre farming on what can be marginal country and they are very affected by drought right now.

Increasing automation of farm work means fewer people are needed for labour. This is happening all across NSW. It has really impacted local economies. The main streets are shutting down. When I spoke to Ali back in May, she indicated some classic turning points in the town's history, indicating that it was in decline. She raised the last bank closing in 1999. The 1999 closure of the post office, as well. The hospital was downgraded to a nursing home. From a metro point of view, you shrug it off, but this is sizable for a little town. And the sawmill, which was the largest employer, closed in 2005.

What Gulargambone was interested in, when the seismic things were taking place, they installed these now-iconic iron galah sculptures that you see as you drive into the town. They are wonderful and simple sculptures by a Sydney artist and they were a shrewd move by a tiny outback town that so clearly understood the power of art to symbolise the town, and therefore lift its profile.

In 2005, the town's caravan park became the top rated in NSW. This is a town on a riverbank that has never run in the last hundred years. It continues, they have maintained it. Ali Dent is an artist herself and she saw the success of the sculptures. And then she installed the bullock train in the middle of the town. And people stopped the caravan, as opposed to keeping going to the next main town. So it seized tourism as a vibrant economic driver, that they understand that art can actually be a symbiotic relationship between local, town and tourist. I will stop talking and I will show the 'Pave the Way to Gular' video.

(Video plays)

GIRL:

I think, like, for example, the water tank, the artwork on there's going pretty good. Because, well, it's basically a picture of a kingfisher, but it's all mad, like, cool.

JENNY McCracken:

You can't quantify what it does, but it inspires people, it lifts them and it leaves something that they can enjoy and own for a long, long time, which is great.

ALISON DENT:

Paint all the buildings and all the people will come. Art changes the world. Art will bring the people and it'll engage the local population and educate the children.

MICHELLE MILLS:

It's been fabulous. Not only for our kids, who are all talking about it at school and talking about what they see after school. It's given the town really a good vibe and a buzz that I haven't seen before.

JAMES GIDDY:

With the quality of the artists they've brought, a lot of these guys have got national recognition, if not international recognition.

DNART:

It has been amazing to come here. It's just nice to be out without connection to the internet, and with a lot of free time.

SOOTY WELSH:

It's definitely what Gular needs. You know, even myself, many a time I've travelled through rather than pulling up, and I think this is just what they need to stop the people who spend a bit of money in town.

CLAIRE FOXTON:

Yeah, the whole community have seriously just put their back into this and they believe in their town, and that's really special.

JOHN MURRAY:

All the kids are coming out and they're getting a bit of a spark about them and the adults are walking around all puffed up that their town is getting tarted up and it just looks good. So it's given the community a great lift.

ALISON DENT:

Street art is the biggest, most important art movement in the world at the moment and it changes whole towns and whole populations. Businesses, and so many things.

(Applause)

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

I do think the line, "paint the buildings and people will come, it will engage the population educate the children," it is a fantastic encapsulation of art at a community level.

RICH EVANS:

I think so. Around the world, you have seen recently they painted over a whole bunch of graffiti at Fiveways. They painted white over it and the people revolted and said that has been an iconic home for street artists for generations. I think there is a case about it, but art is free. It belongs to people. Somebody has to pay the artists, but most of the time the artists are not looking to get \$20 million. Maybe some people are, just once, right? But realistically, they are doing it because they are passionate about it and they are celebrating.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

All the artists in that video just then could see what was happening when they were painting.

RICH EVANS:

You said before that artists have a way of seeing the soul of something and they are just compelled to share that, basically. Whether it be music, dance, film, writing, whatever.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

I wanted to ask you some advice on behalf of Ali. Pave the Way, I think it was the first time they held it. It was in March, April, it was a huge success. They are opening up a second cafe in the town on the back of the traffic. There is always that issue of, especially with tiny little towns like that, how do you stay fresh, how do you stay relevant? They were going to have that annually. I know there are restructuring that so it is biannually. Ali said she has to keep moving. What advice can you give them in that space?

RICH EVANS:

If I put my Ironfest hat on for a second, I think we're celebrating 20 years next year. Most festivals don't go for 10 years, let alone 20. It is a revolution, it is reinvention and particularly adding and looking for new audiences and new people. One of the great things about art is that it never dates. I mentioned to you before I'm going down to Sydney to the Modern Masters

exhibition. They didn't get painted last week. It never dates. It's like interest. So what you invest in now is still going to be relevant in 20 years. Just keep adding to it.

I think that's what we've seen with Ironfest. We just keep adding new elements, each year will bring in something else and a whole new audience will come. It was originally a blacksmith's festival and now it's wargames and cosplay and next it will also be computer gaming, because to get in the next generation, we need to drag them in by their mobile phones. Tether them in and pull them in, because they don't come otherwise.

That is probably a great segue into the other point, is that people can find out about the stuff now. I drove to a place called Grawin up that neck of the woods, but I wouldn't have known they were there, otherwise. I have only been in the role at The Foundations for six months, so I gave a report on what I achieved in that time and no wonder I am tired. The one of the biggest things has been, nobody knew. If I told people I was from Portland, people don't know where it is. But now people know that is where the silos are. Because Instagram and Facebook, everybody is posting constantly. There is 20 or 30 photos a day going up online. It's like Amway – two people know two people, all of a sudden everyone knows about it.

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

Social media is really important, about how you keep it fresh. I don't pretend to understand it. Young people know about it a lot more than I do. You have all these influences, all these new challenges that you can sell what you have. And that is going to be a really important part going forward. These towns that are taking on these new looks. Gulargambone being one. By using those channels, we will be able to bring the young people in, and they all have money. And that is what you want.

RICH EVANS:

You can tell when the Sydneysiders arrive at the markets. They pull up in their VW and they hit the coffee van. But we will take them all day.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

Country towns are not so remote anymore. Even remote communities are no longer remote. I think we have time for one more question. Gulargambone's main street has full historic buildings in various states of disrepair. Often farmers are stepping off farms and doing risk assessments for claims. Any advice on resource for communities, how they can pull off town preservation?

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

It is a difficult question. I think you need to have an active and engaged community who want to save those buildings. If they are important enough, somebody will recognise that. Adaptive reuse is quite a practical way to put business into a town. Adaptive reuse of a town means the town keeps the site or the building itself and whoever is putting that business in already now has a connection. They are not a new person coming in putting up a Colorbond shed. They have bought into the history of the town. I don't know how you attract idiots like me who buy one building and then buy the pub next door because it was there.

RICH EVANS:

Anyone have anything next door to Tremain's Mill you want to sell, Steve?

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

I think there are other groups who are doing a lot better. But I think you need, if the community is serious about saving what history they have, somebody who has the resources will recognise that there is an opportunity there. What Gulargambone and Portland have done, and Rich, you alluded to it, you are making the town attractive. It is interesting, it has a new vibrancy it didn't have before. So people who are in business think that will be an opportunity. For all the other reasons as well. We're not too far from Sydney. We have economic... You can live here, you can afford to live in Bathurst or Portland.

RICH EVANS:

I think one of the best things about old buildings is that they are old buildings and they built them a lot better in those days. We made an observation the other day, one of our buildings on our site, the powerhouse, is a beautiful architecturally significant building that housed machinery. They would knock that down these days. The cranes are still operating, the hardwood timbers they roll on are still there from when it was built over 100 years ago, and that is one of the benefits of old buildings. And you don't have to do much. In the boiler house we replaced glass in the windows and all of a sudden it became an event space. Cockatoo Island, CarriageWorks, all of these places are examples of where the older and grittier it is, the more attractive it is to many different uses.

STEPHEN BIRRELL:

It's the old story.

RICH EVANS:

It is the fabric of the building. Don't come in and put new concrete down, just fix what you have to.

MICAELA HAMBRETT:

Rich Evans, Stephen Birrell, thank you so much for your time this morning. (Applause)

ELIZABETH ROGERS:

Thank you, Micaela, Rich and Stephen. That presentation really illustrates the anecdotal story and the evidence that we need to be able to fit in to the research and data that Jack was talking about earlier. And how important are community drivers? How important are those leaders in country towns?

This, I think, is just three examples of what happens right across NSW. I know every single region has these community leaders doing great things using the arts to improve their communities. Another round of applause, thank you.

(Applause)

ELIZABETH ROGERS:

Before you all rush off to morning tea, we have a bit of housekeeping. For those who have tickets to the dinner, we would like you to get there by about 6:30. We are serving drinks and canapés in the foyer before the dinner and we'd like to give you plenty of time to network before we start the evening's proceedings.

There is a room swap this afternoon. The 3:45 session, 'Create NSW', is in conference room 3. And 'Creating community post-disaster' is in conference room 4. If you get mixed up, just swap, they are next door. That was just a technical reason.

In your conference bags, there is some information about the national disability strategy. That is currently open to submission. So please read that information and either fill in the survey or follow the instructions on the postcards. I think it is really important that the regional voice is heard in developing this new policy. So I just wanted to alert you to that.

Surveys, please fill in our surveys and give them to a volunteer, registration desk or drop them in one of the boxes. We really want to hear your feedback, both for our reporting and also for our planning for next year. We're old school, we have gone back to paper. Two of my staff have no leave in January and they are doing data entry. We have kept it simple. So please fill them in and we would love to hear your comments – we do take notice of them. There will also be the inevitable SurveyMonkey in due course in your inbox and again, please take a few minutes to fill it in. Not only for our reporting, but for our grant applications for the next two years, that information is incredibly important.

Go and enjoy morning tea, beat the queue at the coffee cart and we will start again promptly at 11:15, really appreciate it if you can all get back you on time.

(Morning tea break)

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

Welcome back to our final session. As we know, the arts contribute in so many ways to regional communities, not just economically. Underlying the program has emerged almost organically a focus on youth. Adam and his Arts Program have engaged young artists for the museum residencies in Chiefly Home, the lovely musicians who are playing in the lunch hour, the young performers in the Opening Ceremony and the performers in The Climbing Tree that we saw last night.

If you don't have your tickets yet, I suggest you get them. It was pretty amazing. The young musicians in the regional youth Orchestra will also be performing here on Sunday. All of these young artists who live in regional New South Wales. However, the drift of young people from the country to the city's is a global issue. Young people play a critical role in creating robust regions and the arts can play a role in keeping them engaged and living in their communities.

Our second international keynote speaker is Kresanna Aigner from Findhorn Bay Arts located in a small rural community in northern Scotland. Kresanna has been continuously self-employed in the arts in a vast and varied spectrum in both Scotland and Northern Ireland from the 1990s. She is the co-founder of culture Café, acting member of the group for Ignite Moray cultural strategy group and developed Findhorn Bay Arts projects.

The five-day event attracted an audience of many and generated an economic impact estimated at £400,000. Multiply that by three to figure that one out in Australian dollars. Findhorn Bay Arts recently secured the creative place 2015 award for Forres Area and has been presented with three other awards for excellence. The sun has just delivered the biannual Findhorn Bay Arts

festival, which took place in September. We are delighted that Kresanna was willing to travel from rural Scotland to regional New South Wales to share her experiences in making creative things happen. Please join me in welcoming Kresanna.

(Applause)

**KRESANNA AIGNER:**

Thank you, thank you, Elisabeth. Good morning. I would like to acknowledge and pay my respects to the Wiradjuri elders, past present and emerging. Thank you for the very moving ceremony and for welcoming me to walk through the smoke. I draw on this now as I stand before you to share about the creative activity taking place in my community in Scotland.

Findhorn Bay Arts is a company based in the rural region of Moray on the north-east coast of Scotland. Since 2012, we have presented a number of projects across to Moray. Our core activity centres around programming, our highlight event being the Findhorn Bay Arts festival.

I'm going to present to you today the context in which we work and share some of the challenges that we have faced and the opportunities that we have embraced in developing our activities in a rural collection of communities. I am also going to reflect on our personal journey and how focus on our core purpose has energised and sustained us through development of our work. This is where I come from. We operate within the rural setting of the Forres Area, nestled on the edge of the river into which provides an inspiring backdrop of ancient woodlands, through which the river runs to meet miles of sandy beaches and opens out to the sea. We are situated in the west Moray and the area comprises of diverse communities, which is based on the edge of a historic fishing village, coastal villages of Findhorn, the military is based there, too.

We are in a region where farming, fishing and whiskey make up the main industries. That's quite a good one. There is an abundance of creativity and people living and working in the region. The immediate population of the Forres Area is just over 14,000 people and sits within a region of just 96,000 people. Our work of Findhorn Bay Arts is rooted within the immediate community is of the Forres and fit on areas and the surrounding rural villages and of our time, has grown to expand across the region. I would like to invite you to see a little bit of our area a short film.

(Video plays)

(Music plays)

**KRESANNA AIGNER:**

I couldn't stop myself from dancing along to that. Maybe I should have invited you all to have a jig. I arrived in the area at the age of 10, having spent my early years moving between three countries, several schools and countless houses. You might hear that reflected in my ever-changing accent. As a result of this, I was disengaged with education and I experienced a fragmented sense of place and a lack of community. However, I was very fortunate to move to the village of Findhorn and to be living in a very beautiful place with many creative influences around me. It was through creativity and the natural landscape that I found I could be myself. I felt inspired and I was connected, too. I had found my community in creativity and in place.

When I entered my late teens, I started to yearn for more and all that I had found rich to begin with, well, it didn't really seem so fun anymore. It was all a bit boring, nothing ever happened in that town. At 17, I hightailed it out of there and went to the bright lights of the city. It was in the cities that the next 22 years of my life unfolded. Flooring my creative potential and the role that I would eventually develop within the creative sector, both in Scotland and in Northern Ireland. I had children, twins. Please don't tell my kids I have put this picture up there of them. They will never forgive me. They are a bit older now.

When my children were approaching their teens, I started to question if the life in the city could continue to provide the quality of life and experiences that I aspired for myself and for my children. I yearned, once again, for the green hills, the open skies the sea. That grass was always greener on the other side, right?

We knew we didn't want to be completely remote and we needed connection to creativity, to community. We pondered, and without a huge amount of thought or planning, we packed up, sold up and moved back to Moray. In the 10 years preceding moving back, while visiting, I had seen, once again, how much creativity the region had to offer. I saw its beauty and natural diversity and it came back to me again. It was in the years of moving back home, the idea of producing a festival started to flourish. Once I returned, I realised that it was my time to bring back those years of skills, networks and creative development and bring those back home with me. It was time to come full circle.

I began to explore the idea of the Arts Festival for the area to share my vision and, in doing so, that vision began to grow. In 2012, together with a small board of four people, Findhorn Bay Arts was established. In order to achieve our goal of producing an arts festival, we were going to have to face some challenges. We were in a rural area during a time of economic uncertainty. Government budget cuts leading to the closure of libraries, leisure services and small schools. Services such as medical facilities were being centralised. The Royal Air Force Base was in the process of moving its operations, resulting in the loss of thousands of families to the region.

Bus links to smaller communities were cut. The train only connected to main cities to the region. Transport was a massive challenge for young people and older residents. Under these conditions, it's not surprising that the region experienced a net migration of young people. It is an international challenge. When a community is faced with economic uncertainty, it puts people in a position to reflect on what they do have and what is important to them. Moray does have a lot going for it. It has the landscape, award-winning coastline, a malt whiskey country, historic abbeys, award-winning gardens and, most importantly, an engaged community with a drive to deal with the cuts, the service divisions and to develop a tourism economy and maintain its position as a vibrant region in Scotland.

Time and time again, we see creative people galvanised by adversity, and we are also very good at spotting opportunities. Moray's creative sector had a desire to play a role, too.

Recognising the desire to come together, Findhorn Bay Arts, in partnership with another creative organisation locally, Dance North, and in collaboration with individual artist, started Culture Cafe. Culture Cafe is a place to bring people who work in the arts together. A relaxed place for supporting new collaborations. Culture Cafe always centres around good local food

with the core belief that if we nourish ourselves, we are better equipped to nourish others.

At the first Culture Cafe we created a manifesto. We felt that a grassroots approach to networking and realising creative potential was essential if we were going to grow to reach our ambitions and to meet the challenges and in 2012 we continue to consider how we could achieve an arts festival in such a climate, considering the context more closely and listening to the ambitions of the creative sector and in raising the manifesto, we agreed on a slower stepping-stone approach.

We took time - time to build partnerships, to build the trust, and to make connections that would create a foundation upon which we could develop our vision. In 2013, we launched Culture Day, a free one-day event inspired by culture nights held in other European cities and drawing on my own experience of having produced the first two Culture Nights in Belfast.

It provides a space for artists, community groups, the heritage and cultural sector to come together in a one-day mammoth celebration where they can open their doors to the public and share the work that they do throughout the year and it is done through performances, exhibitions, talks, to us, all taking place throughout the town centre, so people can wander in and out throughout the day, alleyways, bus shelters, parks, community halls.

The first event, they had more than 100 people participating and more than 3,000 people explored the culture that is available to them locally. Also, in 2013, we were the only region in Scotland to experience withdrawal of its entire arts budget. Am I allowed to swear? Fuck! That was really crap.

What does that say to people? That is a big deal. We did not just lie down and go away. We are b people. The Culture Cafe event continues to provide the forum to come together and the space to talk about our fears and how all of this impact on us personally and on our work.

It provided space and a day in which we could get our creative hats on. We broadened it to include politicians, the state sector, businesses to attend the Culture Cafe events and this overtime paid the way for meaningful cross sector events and new ways of thinking.

It opened out for the creative sector to take leadership. By definition, we are creative thinkers and with communication and an inclusive outlook and we are able to find positive ways forward. The culture day, the collaborations, the ber networks informed the development and investment of our inaugural festival in 2014. We got there!

The festival offered the first time for mass engagement with the general public in the area through volunteering, attendances at events, participating in workshops, working behind-the-scenes, performing as part of our signature event, 'Macbeth: The Remix'. It's the classic tale reworked and remixed into a stunning open-air production outside the castle with video projection, motorbikes, dramatic live action and an incredibly b community involvement as part of the performance with pipers, martial artists, and an intergenerational choir with over 100 local people taking part in the production. Most of them had never seen something like that before, let alone been part of it.

The festival showcased artists of local, national and international renown, performances,

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exhibitions, talks, tools and more, all taking place in local spaces with our landscape transformed the stage events. Program themes explored identity, home, language. We supported opportunities for local and visiting artists to make connections, creating space for emerging artists and a plethora of opportunities for sharing and developing skills.

The festival was immersed into the everyday of the local area and, through the festival, we engage the local community, they took part, they attended, and visitors came. Local businesses felt the immediate impact of that.

This success reflected all of our work - the cross sector partnerships, collaborations between artists and the local community. We began to invest and embrace in the opportunity in lots of ways. The renewed vibrancy and engagement of the creative sector had put a real spotlight on the positive impact of the arts and, as a result, a new cultural strategy for the region was commissioned by a local government agency. Arts was back on the table for discussion in Moray.

The strategy lays out a collection of ideas, values and opportunities for the creative sector. It sets our ambitious vision for a b creative sector that contributes to education, tourism, regeneration, health and well-being for the region. The timing of this also coincided with the new national strategy for Scotland's young people. The alignment of these two strategies along with the core aims of Findhorn Bay Arts opened up investment and funding for us to establish and ignite Moray Arts Youth Hub, one of nine hubs in Scotland to create people with creative opportunities in the region.

We developed the program and we made a film which showed their experiences.

(Video plays)

**SPEAKER:**

Arts gives me opportunities I would not have otherwise had. I did a circus workshop last week.

**SPEAKER:**

There was a radio drama and lots of music and general art things and I think it is quite cool that there are so many different things in one community.

**SPEAKER:**

I just love drawing and painting and this always been a passion of mine so the idea of taking part in an organisation that is all about encouraging people to take part in art, that was a really amazing thing that I could do. The fact I could do that and do what I wanted to do and be really expressive and not have to worry about doing it for a grade, it was just about enjoying art and being able to develop art.

**SPEAKER:**

I think it has got me a lot of contact through meeting people there and also with Findhorn Bay Arts, I got to work for a company where I learned a lot doing practical things.

**SPEAKER:**

I was involved in a company where you do a home show and we worked with Stirling University and the arts sector and spent one week together doing workshops and watching each other's shows. It was the best experience I have ever had. It has been so positive and so unlike anything I have done before.

(Music plays)

SPEAKER:

It opened my eyes about to what I can do. You can make a lot of things happen.

SPEAKER:

I think Ignite could help me a lot. This given me a lot of support. Ignite in the future will be to help me a lot.

SPEAKER:

It has been an important part of my life. I'm not sure it would have been quite a significant otherwise.

SPEAKER:

That is another thing that I really like. My boys were part of something. I did not know that before. Especially leaving school and not totally knowing what we want to do. It is really big. This is where you can have a space and have a say. It is a buzzword but it is youth empowerment.

(Music plays)

KRESANNA AIGNER:

Aren't they great? That film is actually a couple of years old and the progression of people going into work has quadrupled since. We're still mapping that journey. And that possibility for young people continues to grow. Young people, local artists and organisations, along with ourselves and our partners, are looking to find sustainable creative activities within the region.

In 2015, a local town was recognised with a national accolade. The Creative Place Awards, given in recognition of Scotland's communities where people work together to celebrate their towns and villages through arts and culture. This was a boost to the town and all those who had been working for it. Findhorn Bay Arts delivered a program that supported the 2015 and 2016 culture days, 17 public arts project that connected with local people, creativity and place and contributed towards the development of the second 2006 in Festival, which provided a budget which directly supported local artists participating. Our second festival achieved 120 events over six days, over 14,000 attendances to ticketed and free events, engaged with over 600 participants through workshops and education programs are connected 65 new partnerships, involved 190 volunteers and contributed an estimated economic impact in the region of £900,000.

It was quite the journey from inception through to 2016. After the second festival and nearing the end of the Ignite and Creative Place funding, with ongoing financial pressures, budget cuts and further economic and political uncertainty, I hit a wall. Uncertainty knocked at our door and this created fear. Where could we go from here? How could we sustain what we had developed

and how could we continue to make a creative?

To achieve all that we had in just the four years, we had pushed hard against rest of the challenges. We had galvanised support and people were taking notice of our work. With our success also came expectations about what resources we had and what we should be delivering. Does that sound familiar? People wanted more from us, and if we could not deliver for them, this began to also fuel some criticism, and that really cut, to me, to the very core of me. I had invested a lot, personally, and I risked a lot. I felt very vulnerable in the small town that I had moved to be at home again.

I felt that it was the pressure of my responsibility to fix things, and for us to be all things to people and to keep everything going for the creative sector. It was time to regroup. In the regrouping, I was reminded that it was not my soul responsibility to fix things. I had spent four years developing partners and team and it was time to bring people together and work to address the challenges again. Through conversations with our partners, we asked questions, evaluated, listened and we took the time to consider what was working, what could be improved upon and our capacity to deliver.

We considered our balance and our boundaries. We reflected on our journey, acknowledged our fears, reflected on our learning and, in doing so, we were able to find solutions. The process provided clarity on who we are and what we sought to achieve. It focused asked and we came back to stand b in our core mission.

In my experience, building connections, working in partnerships - we can overcome some of these challenges. In doing so, we learn and we grow. This does enable us to create activities and events with greater depth and quality of experience. I'm learning to acknowledge my own personal journey as it weaves its way through place, work, people, time and understand what drives me and how much I am truly met with connection, with community and with creative, collective purpose.

One month ago, we delivered the third Findhorn Bay Arts festival. We continue to develop projects for young people in Moray. We produced another original production and we continue to support network development. People often ask me, why don't we produce a festival every year? My reply is that it is not just a festival. It's about everything we are developing around this. It's about the foundations we build to enable creativity to flourish. It takes time and care, and this is a lifelong journey, and in doing this, this enables people, place and creativity to thrive in meaningful ways.

As our young people go out into the world, which they should. Mine are 19 now and they have. As a result of their experiences, connections and b place of self, the into the world better equipped in so many ways to embrace the unknown and to contribute positively in the world. Boy, oh boy, do we need that now. In music, composers talk about the space between the notes because it is the spaces between that holds the notes and that is what makes beautiful music. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to be with you here today and I would like to thank Elizabeth, the team and the fantastic production team, and for all of you for connecting with me to. Thank you.

(Applause)

**ELIZABETH ROGERS:**

That was amazing. I am overwhelmed. We all get the better feeling and I can see mine is three minutes away. An extraordinary rural event that happens in rural outcomes, but which also doesn't happen in these conferences, sharing the tough stuff. Congratulations. I will tell you what, I am a language mangler. How do I say that? Moray? Thank you again.

Kresanna will be talking to four recipients this afternoon at 2pm in conference room three you would like to continue this conversation. While we are on the theme of robust communities and for the contribution of the arts, this panel in the region is making, sorry. I have to start again. This panel in the region is making an artistic living. We have invited three artists and I think they are young. They are from very arts practices to discuss the pros and cons of making a living based in regionally supple. It will be led by Soseh Yekanians. She works at the Atlantic Theatre Company in New York.

In 2012, she was awarded an Australian postgraduate award to embark on a doctorate of philosophy at the Western Australian Academy of performing arts in Perth. She explored cultural identity and a sense of belonging and how an individual can rediscover their identity in a non-judgemental forum and how the theatre, as a space, initiates dialogue about cultural experiences.

Following her doctorate, a major career highlight for Soseh, she wrote a book about a young girl who loves her individual qualities and deals with the pressures placed on her by others. The question for her is what is the ideal knob? Please welcome Soseh and her panelists, Henry Simmons, James T. Farley.

**SOSEH YEKANIANS:**

Thank you, Elizabeth. Hi, good morning. Thank you for joining us on this exciting panel. Before we begin, we would all like to pay our respects and acknowledge the traditional Australians of this land, the Wiradjuri people, and pay our respects to Elders from the past, present and future.

We are about helping people establish want for careers in regional areas. For a very long time, artists have felt the need to leave their home towns and move to bigger capital cities in order to make a living. What does that actually mean? It means a lot of things, but to me, it means one important thing. It means regional areas begin to lose their youth and hopes of forming new and exciting opportunities, causing economic and population problems. On the other end of it, artists leave their sense of belonging only to discover that they are not necessarily guaranteed work. Research now suggests that, more than ever, artists in these areas are struggling with unemployment, depression, addiction, loneliness suicide and an overall loss of well-being. That was research done just a few years ago in collaboration with the Members Equity Foundation that you can access online. When you have a look at the results, it's scary to see how many young artists are struggling in his big cities.

As Elizabeth said, I have been in educator for a while with the Treasury sector. Whether it was witnessing students in Perth or recently in Christchurch, New Zealand, it's amazing how much of a rush they are to leave once school is over. And I thought, even if they stayed for a few more months, there are so many opportunities there for them. For them, it was this idea that unless I

go to a big city, I can never make it big. At Charles Sturt University, I'm seeing very similar situations with our graduates who have easily finished third year. They have gone to Sydney or Melbourne and those that have stayed have these amazing opportunities ahead of them.

What does this come down to? Is it initial funding, global networks being better? We will touch on these concerns by looking through the lens of these regional artists. It's important to state that all three of them, Alison, James and Henry trained elsewhere. They trained either in another state or overseas, consciously decided to come back home and to establish themselves as regional artists will stop without further ado, I am going to ask them to introduce themselves because I feel like they will do it so much better than me. We will start with Allison.

**ALISON PLEVEY:**

Thank you, Elizabeth and thank you Soseh. I am honoured and overwhelmed to be speaking at this place because I grew up here, I performed on the stage I was an eight-year-old at the time and to come here and talk about that journey is a real. I would like to talk my journey and I have some images that I would like to put up.

I did train at the Western Australia Academy of performing arts. Being in Perth and away from home and being very removed from my community and my community, everything that I knew about myself... After graduating, I really felt this b urge to come home. I wanted to say something with my artistic voice and what I had been learning. During my degree, I was coming to Bathurst to the entertainment centre here to teach workshops during the holidays during my degree. There was always that sense of what I was discovering about contemporary dance and creative dance, which I had never engaged in.

After I graduated, I came home and I was supported by Local Stages, an organisation that is extraordinary work. I was one of the first artist to be involved in the program. I was young. I graduated at 21 was still a young artist. I engaged with these beautiful ten young people and we had a workshop program and developed this work, and we had a bit of daggy marketing, but that was eight years ago. It was still that sense of coming home and sharing and tackling these bigger ideas and it was very powerful in terms of sharing that and I created my first work here on the stage with these young people in Bathurst to support this program with Kylie and Stephen.

It went forward and I continued to develop my choreographic practice and my confidence as a choreographer and artist and I was working with the young people that I had such connection with because I had been one of these young people to were seeking these opportunities. We started the cross region work with the young artist from Bathurst and we got a grant through community partnerships, I think it was back then, to create this project looking at communication and how young people sort of experience or have gaps in their communication with the rest of the world being regionally based young people. That was when social media and Skype and all that was coming out. It was great. Another development opportunity for me and those young people.

Also being here, it was fantastic to immerse myself back in my community and see, from a new perspective, other people and other artists that were working here, and I was lucky enough to be introduced to Adam Deusien, the arts program director for the festival. We developed a b collaboration and continue to work with young people in the region creating work, youth work

and professional work as well.

This is some of the work we did together. It was fundamentally a collaboration of dance and theatre, fusing those forms. Recent work includes 'Unsustainable Behaviour', which you might have seen at Artlands in Dubbo and that was about dance and theatre in the region and we wanted to produce a professional product to be out on stage and we believed that it is very possible and those projects don't necessarily have to have community and cultural benefits but they will but they are professionally produced products in their own right.

I was going out and going to Sydney and Canberra a lot and working in the youth dance centre and I worked with a dance company in Canberra, did some solo work, and a lot of that was around place and site and taking dance and theatre out of the theatre and connecting to a place and the people from that place and the stories they are and being inspired by that to create new work.

This is a recent project in collaboration with another project I have been involved with really recently and this is an image from the ballet we created and the true from interviews with 20 sheep shearers from the region and their stories to create this dance about the actions and the physicality of all of that that was into the shearing shed which is very similar to a dance and that has been produced recently in a Woolshed in the region near Wyangala.

I also work in Canberra so I recently started Australian Dance Party in Canberra and three activist political dance work in that area and we are looking at climate change action through dance and the movement has the power to enact change because it is musical and it is disembodied, ephemeral, and ever-changing form. Dance and movement has the power to communicate bly on these issues.

I work between Canberra and Bathurst. Hopefully that has given you a bit of a run down on all of that. Thank you.

(Applause)

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

What Alison said reminded me of yesterday's keynote where Fritz spoke about how the arts have such a big place in the community and people who don't understand what we do might not see that we have the power to go beyond speech and to evoke change and I think that is what is important when you look at youth and at convincing parents that they are to still matters and still has a place in society and let your children do a degree in the arts. It is more than just performing on the stage. It is about how you tell stories through the arts, how do you change society through the arts.

With the Australian Dance Party, you are very much in a position to do that and that is really exciting. We will move on to James next.

JAMES T. FARLEY:

Thanks, everyone, thank you to Elizabeth for asking me to be on this panel. My career and regional arts was as a bit of a poster boy in Wagga Wagga. I was born in Bathurst, grew up in Orange and Dubbo and chose to move to Wagga Wagga in 2010 to start my undergraduate

degree in photography. I moved to North Carolina for the second half of my undergrad degree through the CSUE exchange program that is an important step in my creative tractors and I came back to Wagga to finish that, that my honours ear, was offered a postgraduate award to pursue my PhD in post photography and the practice of ecological stewardship and I only completed that in December last year.

My practice has developed and some might say it is the safe space of the University but it also gave me a great opportunity to spend the time in Wagga Wagga, the community that I initially moved to to study and before I graduated I knew I was going to stay there. It gave me the chance to explore some of the community aspects of the creative community I would become part of the make my PhD possible.

My PhD started out as this really kind of simple idea of being interested in landscape and I think that is why I had to live in Wagga Wagga. It was the call to who I am, ready to be outside a lot. I spent a lot of time in the garden or walking. My practice started here. All of that time in the studio, I think about that the stuff I was making by myself, it was not doing what I needed to do and my work was about how photography has shipped an understanding of Australian to were the call through imported landscape aesthetics and I could not unlearn those by myself. Being a PhD student, I had the scholarship, which allowed me to practice, but not to eat.

I knew the creative community in Wagga Wagga was where I belonged. I am lucky that I have known that since I have been there. Over the course of my PhD, I was lucky to work at the art gallery they are and I was an installer for four years and the picture frame and I have worked and supported a studio for artists with disabilities as a studio supervisor and I volunteer at pretty much anything I can get my hands on.

All of those things taught me that if I got involved with my community, my understanding of my practice would change. Since 2014, when I started my PhD, I had been mounting exhibitions and I had a lot of great projects that emerged. I will talk about that more a little bit later.

Everything I do now has a community aspect. If I have an exhibition, I will do workshops and give a lecture. The work that I make has to be connected to the people you are going to be seeing it and I think that is core to how I have managed so far in the short time I've been doing it to sustain the practice that I have. We will talk more about that later.

**SOSEH YEKANIANS:**

Thank you. What I'm excited about is having a conversation about after Henry introduces himself, so far, we have heard how connected your works in the community. That is why you have stayed here as individual artists. We will throw some publications out there later about how you think your work will stand outside of the community and will it stand outside of the community or are you not even interested in that. That is what we will get to. Once the introductions are done, we hope this panel turns into a conversation and we can open it up to the audience as well and you will not have to wait till the end. As we are talking, you can put your hand up and we will hear from you.

We want to have an honest conversation about where we are at now, some of the opportunities that these panellists had that don't exist now and what that means for the future if funding keeps getting cut and if young people leave. Where are we going to be in 10-20 years' time? That will

be exciting.

HENRY SIMMONS:

Thank you. It is an honour to be here with you guys. Thank you. I also grew up a few blocks away from here and I also came here as a child. Probably a bit more forgettable than the experience Alison had. It's something I don't like to dwell on. It was weird being back in the green room. It's a lot smaller now than it was.

I think an artist is a good way to describe myself. I think I am a lot of things. Primarily, I run a small commercial video production business here in Bathurst. I also like to think of myself as a filmmaker. I have made one film! As an artist, I do a lot of workshops working with mainly local art galleries, the Bathurst Original Art Gallery and a shout out to them because they have been supportive of me. I grew up here and went to the local high school and I had a few ideas. When I finish school, I didn't have great marks. I was not interested in uni that much but I was torn between social sciences and something creative, most likely filmmaking. At high school, my first job was as a video producer as a greyhound track from when I was about 16 until I finished school, and that was the best job in Bathurst. I went out there and all my friends were working at McDonald's, Bunnings, making \$15 an hour, and I would go out there and make \$300 selling DVDs of the races to the dog owners, which was how I got taught by the guy who handed it on to me. In the picture here, you might be able to make me out in the top left. The image on the right is last year when I went back there to make my first film, 'Pocket Picking', about young men in gambling in New South Wales.

We went back there and he still goes out there sometimes. I went to uni in Wollongong and did digital media. I put the sciences on hold. My degree was half-Tafe, half-university. Tafe was all of the practical learning, learning how to edit, and the University side of it was all art theory, critical analysis. A third of us did that degree and said, "This is bullshit. Why do we have to do the stuff?" We just wanted to make videos. But you get to a point where you can't do much other than learning from others.

Then I finish. I had this degree which had set me up to go and start work in the city somewhere as a runner or production assistant or second cameraman. They really didn't appeal to me. Like these guys, I felt such a connection to home. At uni, I had a really tough time for the first six months. I was coming home every weekend. University ended up being great though and I still have a group of friends. Even during those first six months, the back, I wasn't quite sure what I was doing. I was working at a local pub, drinking all the nights I wasn't working. I realised that there weren't many opportunities to pursue film or video production working for someone else, so I decided I would have a go at starting a business.

A lot of you may have heard about the new enterprise incentive stand. That is a government run program which basically gives you what you would get on the dole for the first year of starting a business. It's not much, I think it was only \$500 a fortnight, but when you are 20 and starting your own business, that is a significant amount of money.

I know my brother has started a gardening business using the same scheme and I know graphic designers living in other regional areas have used it. I just want to give that a shout out because it is a great program. New Enterprise Incentive scheme. Give them a call or check out their website and they will help you set up a meeting. I can't really remember what images I had

here. I will just get over these quickly. I do workshops with young people. This is being shown in my own backyard exhibition. It's down at Tremain's Mill today and tomorrow until 6pm along with some other really amazing works and great exhibitions. I want to show this because Bathurst Regional Art Gallery had seen bits and pieces of my younger brother's and my work in 2013. He had just finished high school and got into Art Express. They approached us and said we want you to run a workshop with other young people. Teach them about projection art, techniques, how to use a green screen, what's happening in their lives and in their environments. Over a week, we brainstormed with them and it is based on an idea that my brother had and we developed it with these young people. We would fill them doing things they love and project those moving images onto an unused spaces around Bathurst. It was about place and space, where one starts and the other in. Can there be two things at the same time?

This images at the back of Tremain's Mill because, as you might know, Tremain's Mill is being developed into a very used creative space in the last couple of years. Back then, bands would use the space to practice.

Last week, two years ago, three years ago now, I applied for a Masters at Berlin. I got in, somehow, out of 500 applicants. There wasn't a similar course in Australia, not running anymore at least. They used to be something similar. I had a few papers published doing written research, but also doing visual research as well. These are images from the research that I did from 18 months ago when Pokemon Go just came out, and how the game was providing meaning and connecting other people in different communities. It was allowing people that typically wouldn't go outside to connect with their community. It still has 7 million daily players worldwide and they are still doing it. That's just a screenshot of... I interviewed some young women. I focuses project on young women in Bathurst. I took a 360 degree camera out and filmed some of the spaces where they were catching Pokemon. You can check that out on YouTube if you would like.

#### SOSEH YEKANIANS:

If you want to find out more, you can go online and read their bios. What's really important is that this panel is about how to make an artistic living in regional areas, so it's not asked about making a living or making art. It's about how to combine both of them because it's no secret out there that a lot of the times you do find young graduates in the bars, cafes working in order to sustain or maintain some form of a creative career. What all three of you have done brilliantly is, either by the opportunities coming to you or by seeking them out, you have somehow managed to sustain an artistic living in a regional area. Alison, I know you are passionate about the support the government gives young people when it comes to grants and opportunities that you have that don't exist anymore. We spoke about this on the outside when we were getting to know each other that will and more funding is getting cut and we know it's getting cut from the arts. It isn't just the big organisations that are losing out, it's the young people. That's what is scary. I don't think any of us up here would have had the opportunities that we received without mentorships and other opportunities.

We have counsellors and senior people back and go out and shed light on this.

#### ALISON PLEVHEY:

For me, this program here vastly contributed to the development of what I able to do to this day. That program provided producing support, mentorship. It enabled a professional development

opportunity for me and also for the community by engaging them as well. There were these fantastic parallel opportunities going along in terms of the arts. I really believe in a program like Local Stages that is built around a facility like this with people like Stephen and Kylie who have that really brought understanding of the industry and can see potential in young people, or can see potential in what might be established in a group, and can really ignite something with them and give them the competence to do that. That was the biggest thing - the competence. "Why don't you try this? Have you met this person?" They were always asking us questions and it helped. I applied for Art Start, into a 2012 when it was still a go, and that was important to because it gave me that opportunity to apply for a grant and go through the process of that to get all of your ideas together to form a career trajectory. I was successful without and also provided me with support that I still use today in my work.

There was mentorship that went alongside that. It's money, but it's more than that. It's about a process, contemplating where you want to take your career and who can be there to support you while you figure out your networks and the structures around you that will support you. I really feel that it will be dearly missed in the industry and if I was to graduate at this current time, it might simply be very difficult.

Another example of that is Jump. Adam was very successful with the Jump mentorship program. We had someone who mentors us in verbatim theatre and dance and that wisdom that we brought into the region and onto the stage to help us as young artists was extraordinary.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

What you said is so important because it is because of these opportunities that we are able to give back and passed it on to the next generation. It keeps going like that. I think you are right, Alison. It's not just financial, although it is about making artistic living. If there are people here who have an opportunity in their own lives or workspaces to set up programs to allow for this, whether it is a three month thing or a year-long thing, what would you say the three most important ingredients are to that? Is it a responsibility we have when we work in regional areas to create and sustain these opportunities?

ALISON PLEVEY:

In terms of the ingredients, it's about the contribution to community and being part of igniting and exciting new opportunities for the arts to grow and flourish. I think that is definitely one and I may not have had all the skills, but I was lucky enough to be supported through that. Fundamentally, it is the will and drive and not everybody has that to be a young leader within the community, and to see those opportunities and go for it. That's a big risk and maybe we're not doing it as much as we used to.

There are risks with social media. What if it is not quite right?

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

I hate that idea that you are only as good as your last show. I finished drama school in 2001. You are encouraged to go out and make that work. It was about failing gloriously. It did not matter if it did not work out because you would have the next one and the next one.

Nowadays, because of social media, young people are scared that everything will be captured and they will be judged on that. Maybe it is about allowing these people to do exhibitions or put

on work that might not necessarily be perfect or great, but allowing them to give it a go and working from there.

HENRY SIMMONS:

A lot of people get funding under the premise that you will produce something that is great and excellent and as a final finished product but I think we will all agree that getting funding is all about, if you learn something with that, get the time to do research, practice, if that enriches your community or practice, that should be the goal. Have this end product that sells tickets.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

James, would you like to add something?

JAMES T. FARLEY:

That has been something, and not downgraded asking for help. It is often framed as asking for a handout. That is seen as a bad thing in regional Australia. That is not what it is at all. If we frame it around investment and understand that we are investing, not on something that will be measured at the end, but the process of growth, my very first...I mean, my big grant was the young artist scholarship. There will be more about that this afternoon. That allowed me to go out to Broken Hill and do a self-funded residency and I ran eight community workshops in one week and I was doing really well but I'm still...I met the team at the gallery and the connections I made from that, I could go down somewhere and create archives in NSW, but my practice is riding on the waves of those connections.

The only reason that I knew that it was an investment and not hinder was Scott Howie, the executive director, he told me that it was an investment and if I invest in myself now but will pay off later on.

(applause)

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

That is beautiful. Listening to Henry and James, it's about shifting the language that we use when we talk to young people and the responsibility that we have that it is not a handout, it's an investment, and is not about the final product, and as corny as it is, it's about the journey, making mistakes, learning along the way.

I think we all made big mistakes in our lives. If we were being judged, no one would be here. That is the thing about learning. Now I want to talk about something controversial. More and more, the more I stay here in Bathurst, I hear it a lot, but people say that you cannot stay regionally and yet think globally and be competitive globally because you are just within your own community and you are not willing to step outside their comfort zone and see what else is going on in the world.

It's controversial and I think that is something that I would like each of you to talk about if you can, that idea that if you are original artist then you are limited by that and you do not have a chance anywhere else. James, you start.

JAMES T. FARLEY:

I think that is crap, not true at all. The idea that all those metropolitan areas, they draw from the

regions more than anywhere. We draw from all of them. That idea of the places that you do not see, the shadow places where the work it's done, that is really interesting. At the most basic level, I do not define myself as what I am not. I've never worked in Sydney. My work is not relevant to the metropolitan area. It is about understanding the world and understanding places and people and that is a global theme. It does not matter if the audience receives it, the audience in Broken Hill, Dubbo, is the same story.

I do not put any value in the idea that you cannot work at a global level from original setting.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

That if the limitation is that people put on you and on regional artists. You can talk to anyone here is working in these areas and they would never live with themselves by the standards.

JAMES T. FARLEY:

I had an interesting experience this year. The only original artist shortlist for the National Photography Prize was in Albury and I got interviewed, requests for interviews from local media, and a lot of the questions were framed about how lucky I was to be showing alongside Sydney artist and resolve framed along the idea of "Maybe now you will get yourself some work," and the artist I was shown without doing important work but they were saying I was lucky to be shortlisted.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

Maybe it was back to that idea that we are too scared to put ourselves out there and stand by the work that we do. Whether it is the fear of failure, we are scared that once we are out there and doing what we are doing them someone will catch us out. It's important that you see that, James, because having conversations with a lot of students here in Bathurst, that is the biggest fear. That is their biggest fear, if they do not leave the region and do something elsewhere then they will never make it and their work will not be valid enough. I was told if I did not have an overseas institution in my CV I would never work in Australia, moving into academia, no one would be interested.

I think that has changed. It's a mentality that has remained in some places. What is your advice then, James, and then I will go to Henry, but what is your advice to those people? What was your response of people said that to you?

JAMES T. FARLEY:

Well, I think it's a question of what you value your own practice. I am lucky to have a supportive community of artists and academics around me when I was studying and I learned to really value...I saw the value in my practice because I had seen people attend my workshops and my own understanding of who I am as an artist has changed so much so I value the contribution that I can make and that is what I take into my job as a lecturer, that what we do as artists is valuable and you can quantified using money, a number of ways, but, the core of it, it is adding true value to our communities and if we can work like that, it does not have anything to do with work because you're making a valuable contribution.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

You can still think globally and not move. That is why we have the Internet and we read and all that stuff and we have conversations with people that we do not know. Do you want to add

anything, Henry?

HENRY SIMMONS:

I agree 100%. I felt that stigma a little bit but I also want to say as an artist, with the commercial stuff I do, as a 20-year-old, at University, being approached by a gallery, we have some institutions and regional areas and I know that I have friends who have finished a course and are staying in Bathurst and we grew up and went to the same schools and they have had job offers to go to Sydney but they have turned them down because there is support here and there needs to be a lot more of that. There are places like Bathurst Regional Art Gallery that are not just taking applications but seeking out young people who are passionate and want to contribute and enrich their local communities.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

That is a primal need we have as human beings, to belong, to be connected to a community. If you take someone in their 20s and remove them from that and throw them in a foreign area without support, that is dangerous. That is what we are finding. That is why the rate of suicide and depression has gone up. There is so much discussion about the well-being of artists and actors because we are noticing that is the pressure to leave these communities, these safe havens, go and make it big. I don't even know what that means. When do you know you have made it big? I don't know. It's these pressures. Is there anyone out there that has something they want to ask?

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

I have a question. I have a friend who has moved to the Netherlands and (inaudible)

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

That's a perfect segue to what we will discuss - what happens when you go overseas and have these amazing opportunities. When you come back home, if it seen as a failure or an opportunity to give. That is a really important question and everyone, I think, who's had that experience can talk about it. He wants to pick that up? Alison, go ahead.

ALISON PLEVEY:

Yes.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

We will start with you, Alison. I know what it's like for students to get into WOPA, and the questions that they have to be told they can have this amazing career and you have decided to go back home.

ALISON PLEVEY:

It is a personal choice. It was like an identity, a personal bit of trauma, and I needed to be home and this was where I felt safe. I wanted to feel I could develop my artistic voice in the community that I could understand and feel part of and understand myself and calibrate all the skills that I had gathered and see how that might relatively the ecosystem.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

Did it take a while to find that desire?

ALISON PLEVEY:

It was a trickle of things it started to happen. I was seeking out opportunities and doing teaching and workshop giving myself active. Along that path, it started to seem possible and exciting and like I was contributing and that was powerful and arts has this ability to communicate and connect in extraordinary ways we know about and transform people, including the facilitator, and when you're doing it, you're being transformed as well. You are learning from each other. I started to feel the power of that and now it was valued and valuable to not just be like that.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

It's not about the product. You always ask what you are going to do next, but maybe it is about reminding your daughter that it's not about the destination, but enjoying where she is and figuring out what she wants to do.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

(inaudible)

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

Yeah. One of the best pieces of advice I was given was by a voice teacher who said when you meet people in the street who ask you what you are doing now or are doing now, lie. They don't know.

(Laughter)

It is so true. You just lie. I graduated drama school and everyone asked what I had done, evident commercials, music? And I said yes, I have gone to all these casting. I have just done a commercial that you can't see here in Australia, you can only see it in China. I would walk away from that conversation feeling good about myself and they wouldn't know any better. Would you guys agree that it's about cancelling out the noise and staying in your lane? It's your journey and not anyone else's.

If she did want to go back to Sydney and that was important for her, it's about, first of all, asking that question and then what can I do who can help me and how can I get back?

ALISON PLEVEY:

Getting new influences, that was absolutely core for me. I was here and back and I still am. I am based between Canberra and batters. It's important to have a regional base, but also to go out and collaborate, to feel connected to industry and what else is going on. That's very possible.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

To each of you want to add something to that or a point that you are passionate about when it comes to making an artistic living in the series?

JAMES T. FARLEY:

Doing a degree in visual and apology means you have zero job prospects. It's not about the end goal, but the skills, that I'm so glad I did it. You brought up your daughter's experience of living overseas. She will probably get to reflect on that and think about what it means to be a person and to live over there.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:  
James?

JAMES T. FARLEY:

I would hope that the University can do a good job of preparing people. We all need to be working together to be working the culture for the next generation. It is OK to fail, it's OK to try these weird projects that may not go anywhere straight away. Through the funding, we need a community where... If we don't make the next thing right away, it's not a fairly. We need to support it over the long term.

SOSEH YEKANIANS:

These conversations can go on forever and they are really important conversations to have, and I hope that people out there that have the opportunities to change the language that is floating around or to allow the young emerging artists coming to fail and create a safe space where they can do that is really important.

We have run out of time, so if you have anything else you want to talk to the panellists about, please move it into afternoon tea or lunch. We haven't eaten yet. Lunch! Thank you so much, and if you would like to give them a round of applause.

ELIZABETH ROGERS:

I think you are all amazing and your commitment to making artwork in your hometowns is an amazing example to the people behind us that it can be done. Please give a round of applause to Soseh, Alison, James, Henry and Kresanna.

You can see these at Tremain's Mill at 3:15 if you haven't caught it before. I do encourage you to pop down there if you have time. Soseh is also leading another panel, on art and community, making it b, this afternoon at 3:45 in Conference Room 2.

We still have five minutes and this is the last time we will be in the same room. We would like to thank you, our delegates. Thank you for taking the time is out of your busy lives and having travelled, in many cases, great distances to join the conversation. We all know, no matter how great the show is, without an audience, we can't tell a story. Thank you to Jonathan and Kresanna, you have all been inspirational. And thank you to all the moderators. Thank you for adding to our knowledge bank. Thank you to all of the artists who have contributed to the programs who have resoundingly demonstrated the excellence in arts in regional use of us. And for Adam who pulled it all together. A huge personal thank you to the Artstate team full stop Belinda King for event management, Peter and his good crew for production. Belinda Dyer and Lexi, Prue, Jane, you're all amazing in your commitment to this event.

I would also like to thank all of the staff who have patiently and cheerfully put up with our invasion of their space. During production week of The Climbing Tree, the seasonal launch of the 2019 program and the preparation for the Inland Sea at sound at the end of the month.

Without the support of the local department, stating this would have been impossible. You have all been brilliant. A thank you to my colleagues and the network. Without your support, we could not have done this. Also a thank you to Stephen Champion. A final thank you to our principal

finding partner, the New South Wales government through create New South Wales and destination New South Wales and the arts minister who has been here in the Opening Ceremony and will be here to the end. I hope many of you have had an opportunity to meet him, he is keen to talk to as many people as possible. Our local government partner, and not just for the money, for the way they have been able to facilitate us in delivering this event, including things like road closures, building things like parks. And there are a myriad of departments to work through. As I'm sure you are all aware of, the local governments have been amazing. Again, finally, our strategic partner, Charles Sturt University. From the contribution to the panellists, the interns the rapid was, regional universities has just been invaluable.

Just a little diary date. Artstate 2019 will be held on October 31 and November 3. The Arts Minister will announce the next host city this evening at the Artstate dinner. For those of you who are coming, don't forget to get there at 6:30 PM. For those of you who are not, you will find out at the Festival club afterwards. On Sunday morning at 10:30 AM, there will be a farewell ceremony from the Bathurst Wiradyjuri elders. Please use the day, as you're travelling, to explore some of the French and regional programs that were inserted in your conference program. Finally, if you enjoyed visiting Bathurst for Artstate, come back for the inland sea of sound at the end of November on Mount panorama.

Thank you all, enjoy your afternoon in whatever session you are heading off to. Tonight, there are still tickets available if you haven't seen it. Performances will be down at Tremain's Mill and the art exhibitions go right through till 4pm. Thank you and enjoy your afternoon.