

Pressure Pipe Poetics – Long Drag by Will Maguire, made from pipes from Liddell Power Station
Image courtesy the artist

arts UPPER HUNTER

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY



This is the Acknowledgment of Country from our LiddellWORKS program, written by Richie and Sue Lawton. It's included here in honour of its great sentiment, in the year of the Liddell show.

Ngiyany marrungku parrany wiyany Wanarruwa, miirumalikany parra anyi parraykupa ngaatjany ngiyany marrung wiyany Ngarrakay parranypa yurakaykal Pangaykal ngaatjany kumpakal

'We acknowledge the Wonnarua people, traditional keepers of this land, and we pay respects to their Elders past present and emerging'

Welcome to Country was always conducted by First Nations people but not as it is done today. Traditionally, if strangers came onto country to pass through or to hunt and gather, the owners would welcome them. They would gather and chat, they would hunt for food, they would gather firewood, berries, nuts & roots. Then they would have ceremony, with dancing, singing & eating from the proceeds of the land ... from what mother nature had supplied. Celebrating could go on for days, stories were shared, sacred sites were visited. By doing this people ensured that the strangers would not be considered strangers but friends who shared the spirit of the country, just like the people that lived there.

They believed that once the spirit of the land was in their hearts, then those people would never damage the land – they would love it and care for it like those whose home country it was.

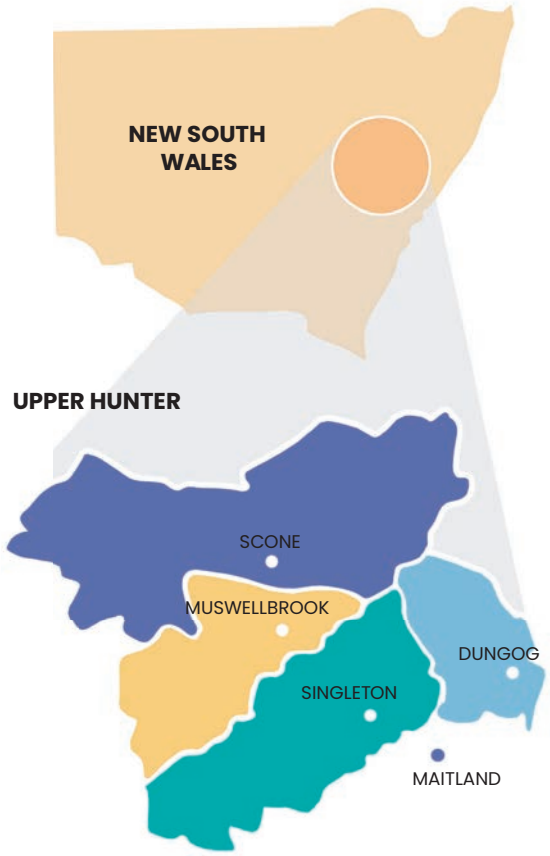
Times have changed, the landscape has morphed to cater for the masses, mines dug to power homes and businesses, progress has developed and determined our landscape. When we go, the land will continue to do as it has always done: the plants will grow, animals will flourish. In the future will the economy (supply & demand) determine the current landscape? How will the landscape look when Liddell has been laid to rest? What is the future for the area and how will it look?

Our artists have been working hard on showcasing how things were, how they are now. Their interpretation is a vibrant creative expression which encompasses generations, a collective alliance not unlike gatherings of the past, coming together as a collective, respectfully appreciating what everyone has to offer, all points of view considered, and a collaboration employed for the greater good.

Image: Uncle Richie Lawton, our Aboriginal Arts Officer, applies the final coat of varnish to the Liddell mural, created by Jakeob Watson with community collaboration. Photo John O'Brien.

US

Arts Upper Hunter (AUH) is a Regional Arts Development Organisation which supports and promotes opportunities for people and groups in the creative industries across the Council areas of Dungog, Muswellbrook, Singleton and Upper Hunter. We work with Create NSW, Local Councils, other government agencies, individuals, collectives and associations to provide connection, skills, opportunities, insights, promotions and strategic advocacy for the arts and creative industries across the region.



Our Vision

A region which embraces all arts and cultural practice as part of its social, economic and environmental development.

Our Mission

To embed art and cultural pursuits and appreciation into life in the Upper Hunter.

Our Values

Inclusive. Collaborative. Engaged. Social. Acknowledging. Creative. Resourceful. Sustainable. Local. Kind.



AUH's Suzannah Jones photographing Jeff Wolfgang in the Denman Heritage Village. Image John O'Brien.

FROM THE CHAIR

Sitting as Chair for Arts Upper Hunter is a great privilege and never felt more so than when sitting down to write for the annual report.

Again, I marvel at what our small team has delivered, because Arts Upper Hunter is a small team, with the core functions of Arts Upper Hunter delivered by just two permanent staff. Our Executive Director, John O'Brien somehow manages to oversee a multitude of projects, prepare grant submissions and funding applications, network, build relationships, nurture and support groups, organisations and individuals and last but not least, develop policies, procedures and documents that support the whole.

Supporting these functions with her calm expertise, diligence and 'gentle reminders' is Sandra Reichel, Office Manager - pulling together our financials, minutes, reports and communications via ArtSparks, our monthly newsletter.

Together with our contracted Project Officers that include Suzannah Jones, Marina Lee Warner, Grace Barnes, Uncle Richie and Sue Lawton and with the support of the board, Arts Upper Hunter delivers all these services across the areas of Dungog, Singleton, Muswellbrook, Scone and the Upper Hunter. It's a monstrous achievement, and our annual report is the right time to reflect on it and acknowledge it.

Outside of the amazing array of projects delivered, 2024 was significant for us in the changes to our funding. Whilst in the hindsight of 2025 it was a win that our funds would be guaranteed till 2028, it will also be a challenge that we didn't receive the amount hoped for. This will place additional pressure on our grant applications and other methods of securing funds including philanthropic donations. Grant applications are incredibly time consuming, so it's an ongoing balance.

I hope that you take this opportunity to read through this extensive annual report and truly appreciate the work of Arts Upper Hunter and the value it delivers to our regional councils, communities, groups and artistic individuals. For our contributing councils, I doubt there can be a stronger return on investment. For our partners, it is proof of what we can achieve when we work together. For our communities, I believe it demonstrates our values in practice - Inclusive. Collaborative. Engaged. Social. Acknowledging. Creative. Resourceful. Sustainable. Local. Kind.

We've got you.

Jacqui Bakewell
Arts Upper Hunter Chair



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Results and Recalibration
Like a game of football, 2024 had two distinct halves for Arts Upper Hunter (AUH). We launched our Creative Valleys website early in the year, and looked forward to programs for youth, female creatives, Aboriginal visual artists and grassroots organisations. The huge LiddellWORKS program reached its climax in a brilliant and provocative exhibition in two venues, with public projects along the way. By early August, everything was different: a dramatic change to our funding model created a high-stakes operation to plan the next four years.

Liddell closes and Creative Valleys open
Developed around the closure of the Liddell Power Station in April 2023, LiddellWORKS wove its way into the fabric of the region – there were panel sessions, workshops, a digital program for youth, First Nations work, some fine publications and website, and impressive sales figures. With funding from both AGL itself and the state government's Stronger Country Communities Fund, LiddellWORKS took a lot of our time but for big gains, with mentions at the top of the ABC news and local papers along the way. It was led by Project Officer Marina Lee Warner, who brought her warmth and community experience to a crowded schedule of activity. Above all LiddellWORKS will stand as a beacon for how to engage with the transition from fossil fuels with respect and honesty. There will be more programs like it.

Meanwhile … our new Creative Valleys website was soft-launched in April alongside a screening of The Twins Of Pioneer Cottage Murrurundi. Creative Valleys has the potential to play a game-changing role in our towns, as cultural tourism grows in both size and relevance. Project Officer Suzannah Jones led a mission to capture public art, get local venues and events to list, and gauge the responses of our region-wide Cultural Tourism Advisory group.

Strategy with a straight edge
The gear change in the second half of the year followed the announcement by our chief funding body, Create NSW, that we would need to compete for our multi-year funding. This retired the old "negotiated funding" model, where every Regional Arts Development Organisation in NSW received the same preordained amount.

So July to December was dominated by our next strategic plan. We toured the region, consulting in towns from Murrurundi to Dungog. We spoke to Councils, ran a survey and crunched budgetary numbers. AUH's strategic plan 2025-28 is built around five programs and a budget that means we won't burn out. And it's built around partnerships … the last few years have taught us that partnerships are the secret ingredient for a small group like us. At time of writing, we have learned that we were successful – but for a smaller amount than we'd hoped. Thence, more work will be needed!

Buzzing new programs
Three museums put their hands up to join the This Here Then Now journey of art activation based on their collections and spaces – two of them, in Dungog and Scone, were launched late in 2024. THTN is funded by the Regional Arts Fund.

A touring theatre event (Life Drawing With A Comedian) drew in good crowds wanting a laugh and a sketch-up. Even I drew a masterpiece!

As for local First Nations opportunities…

First Nations on the rise
First Stories, another project leaping out of a successful grant application, saw videographer Jono Burroughs and Project Officer Suzannah Jones at a cultural burn in Muswellbrook. Stay tuned for final cuts of two tales of First Nations culture in 2025.

Following the success of 2023's Travelling Mural, the Travelling Totems program enabled Singleton Aboriginal artist Stuart Berends to engage with the public to co-create a set of totem poles with traditional designs at



ED John O'Brien experiencing Braddon Snape's Nothin' But Sky sculpture in Dungog as part of our cataloguing of public art. Image Suzannah Jones.

events in the middle of 2024, co-sponsored by Wanaruah LALC and Mach Energy.

The biggest news, though, is our success in obtaining funding through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support scheme from the Australian government for a broad program. The Blak Arts program is slowly building and will mostly happen through 2025-26, delivered in a fresh partnership with the Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Funding in and out
Grants from Create NSW, the Department of Regional NSW, Creative Australia, the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal and others joined contributions from AGL, Mach Energy, and all four of our very engaged Councils to power up our 2024 program. The years 2023 and 2024 saw our highest income ever. Our grant applications have developed in quality in a highly competitive field.

AUH gave out over $25,000 worth of grants to organisations and individuals. The Country Arts Support Program has been around for donkeys' years, while our Micro Grant program began during COVID. Applications were very good for both grants, including quite a few newbies. We also supported a swathe of funding applications by groups across the region through Letters Of Support, and advice on programs, budgets and outcomes. And we're much involved in events and plans, consultation groups and community-building sessions.

Professional Development and statewide programs
AUH participates in opportunities garnered through all 15 Regional Arts Development Organisations (and our peak body Regional Arts NSW) working together. Two major professional development programs – Horizons for youth, and Work Of Art for women – gave nine creatives some serious skill-building and pathway-making. Music NSW held a series of webinars on Regional Touring. We also promoted numerous online opportunities all across the year.

Promotions
The community we work for, especially the creative people of Dungog, Muswellbrook, Singleton and Upper Hunter LGAs, probably best knows Arts Upper Hunter for our lively and broad promotions: monthly emails and stop presses, our three websites, social media pages, media releases, interviews, meetings down the shops. To maximise outcomes for LiddellWORKS, we engaged local media gurus LivMedia to enhance promotions in the lead-up to the exhibition opening.

Staff, Board, Contractors, Creatives and Power Workers...
Suzannah, Marina, Richie, Sue, Grace, Sandra and I buzzed about the district and the internet working with many groups and individuals involved in the creative industries. The work was intense but fulfilling. Every grant comes with its own budget, which Sandra and I developed new systems to stay on top of – and there were numerous contracts and contractors, as well as ad hoc partnerships. Oversight was provided by our diverse and impressively skilled Board. Overall, our program reached across many groups from power station workers to art teachers, for a very rich fruitcake in 2024 and plenty more to come.

John O'Brien
Executive Director



John O'Brien, Marina Lee Warner, Faye Neilson and Elissa Emerson after divvying up the LiddellWORKS artists between the two galleries. Courtesy AUH.



CREATIVE VALLEYS

Cultural tourism has emerged as a powerful force shaping both national and NSW tourism strategies, driving economic growth, enriching visitor experiences, and fostering community engagement. It represents a cornerstone of the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy, with regional NSW demonstrating particularly robust growth in this sector.

With that in mind, AUH launched our cultural tourism website, platform, inspiration and resource in April 2024. Led by Project Officer Suzannah Jones, the site collates and showcases arts and cultural activities, places and spaces across four shires. Suzannah worked with web developer Mark Carpenter and designer Grace Barnes on what everyone agrees is a gorgeous landing page. Our continuing task and challenge is to encourage community members to list with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW), which supplies much of Creative Valleys' content. This free listing service ensures businesses gain exposure across numerous tourism websites including Visit NSW, Australia.com, and many others. Suzannah spent many hours journeying around the region cataloguing public art, meeting tourism officers, building the possibilities and asking questions like: How can we get more people to post their events, and how can we start building a presence for the quieter localities?

More than a website...
Creative Valleys also serves as a catalyst for locally owned and developed projects that encourage creative interpretation, research, collection, and digital documentation of places, things, and people.

The Twins at Pioneer Cottage
This gorgeous film, shot in May 2023 with a CASP grant by filmmaker Jonathan Burrows was premiered 2024 at the launch of Creative Valleys by state member Dave Layzell. A packed Murrurundi CWA, a red carpet and two feisty twins in their 90s made for a poignant, hilarious launch.

"The importance of The Twins goes way past the entertainment value and the historics of the persons which superficially has its merit."

— Jenny Loasby



Jenny Loasby, John O'Brien, Jonathan Burrows, Suzannah Jones, Des Dugan and the terrible twins Carmel and Gwen Courtesy AUH.

THTN

This Here Then Now (THTN) was a region-wide project that brought together artists and small museums across the Upper Hunter to creatively reawaken local history. Delivered by Arts Upper Hunter with funding from the Regional Arts Fund, the project paired three contemporary artists with three community museums—Dungog Museum, Scone Museum, and Tocal Homestead. It was led by Project Officer Suzannah Jones.

A public call-out saw 23 artist applications. The artists were selected by a curatorial panel: Elissa Emerson, Director, Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre; Trevor Weekes, Practising Artist; Suzannah Jones, Project Officer, AUH. The museums also gave their initial thoughts on selection.
Artists Helene Leane, Sophie Cox, and Todd Fuller all responded to significant objects or stories from the museums' collections, creating new site-responsive works that illuminated the past in unexpected ways. From a vintage National cash register ("Bing Bang Ring, Cash Is King") to a carved school desk ("Desks of Fabric"), to a 19th-century barn, each artwork offered a fresh lens on the region's heritage—provoking memory, storytelling, and community dialogue.

Sophie and Helene engaged with local students, volunteers, and hundreds of visitors. Whether through bold Pop Art or collaborative textile work, the artists created work that was moving, thought-provoking, and deeply connected to place. The results demonstrated the powerful role that contemporary art can play in reconnecting communities with their own histories.

"Desks Of Fabric" launched in mid October 2024 – with schoolkids from the Grammar School who'd participated, teachers, and members of the public on hand. Margaret McDougal, Upper Hunter Historical Society Curator, used the experience to discover rich stories of the desk.





Postcards from This Here Then Now's Scone and Dungog projects: Bex image by Helene Leane. Courtesy AUH.

"Working with Sophie and the members of the Museum gave students not only new skills in textiles but also an insight to professional options for artists if they pursued this career. Our students have continued to talk about their experiences from the workshop and asked for further opportunities to use their new textile skills."

— Anna Towse, Scone Grammar teacher

"Bing Bang Ring, Cash Is King!" launched during the 2024 Dungog Christmas Street Party in late November, with 109 at the opening and steady numbers afterwards. The exhibition runs till November 2025. The pop art sensibility perfectly suited the commercial focus of Helene's transformations, which involved much interaction with today's local high street businesses as well as historical material.

Young Muswellbrook filmmaker Thomas Ryan has been commissioned to make three short docos about THTN. Like Todd's work, they will see the light of day in 2025.

Check out the lovely website for yourself.
SCAN HERE



Sophie introducing her work and process at the launch of Desks Of Fabric. Photo John O'Brien.



Thomas Ryan commenced three videos of This Here Then Now – here his team is filming Sophie Cox at work making rubbings from the desk. Photo Suzannah Jones.



Helene Leane with Mayor Digby Rayward and others at the Bing Bang Ring launch. Photo Suzannah Jones.

LiddellWORKS

For many in the region, Liddell power station was that iconic pair of smokestacks on the road between Singleton and Muswellbrook – it was the power station that didn't "make clouds"! For others it was a career … and a workplace filled with cantankerous old machines.

The closure of Liddell in 2023 was a significant opportunity for AUH and the whole valley to commemorate, explore, mark and be inspired by a moment of change as we move to a less carbon-hungry world.

Our program was not only powerful: it was ambitious, with large projects and small all requiring care and attention. Above all it set a high bar as a model for looking at the past with clear vision and respect – and a view to the future. This may be why AGL, owners of the power station, and the Department of Regional NSW through their Stronger Country Communities Fund, came on board.

The first year of the program, 2023, involved 16 artist "in residence" visiting the site, collecting ideas, images, sounds and even pieces of Liddell, to make into artworks. We took initial footage for videos and built a website for online engagement, plus Insta and Facebook pages. Janno McLaughlin's Wishing Tree appearing at Liddell's Family Farewell Day on site. We held Create By The Lake, a day of workshops at GJ's by Lake Liddell, for the whole community. Other workshops – a "travelling mural", blacksmithing, mosaics and Aboriginal weavings – led to new artworks. In 2024 the program reached its zenith.

Exhibition x 2

At last, the artists in residence were able to reveal their creations to the public, spread across our two partner galleries, Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre and Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre. The long lead time meant that some artists had finished almost a year earlier, while others dipped in and out, and a couple did "extra" work! In the lead-up to opening, we worked with the team at Muswellbrook PR agency LivMedia, to better promote the shows. Two separate launches were held, Muswellbrook's on Saturday 8 June, attended by 11 of the artists and 125 people, Singleton's on Friday 14 June with 7 artists and 95 attendees.

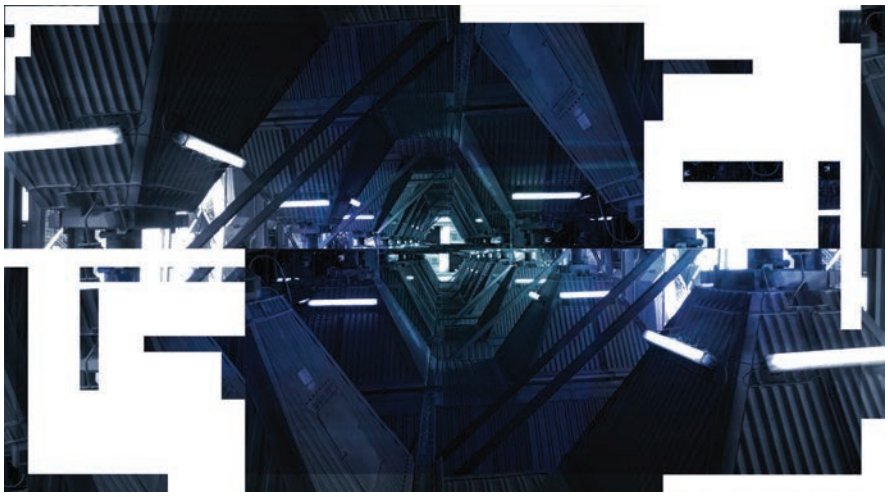
Visitor numbers were excellent – over 5,000 all up. Even better were the on-the-floor responses. Retired Liddell workers spent ages in front of some works, reminiscing or pointing items out to their families. The works were beautifully hung in both exhibitions. It's worth noting the respectful approach the artists took, acknowledging the workforce for their "essential service" (at times in the early 1970s Liddell provided up to half the state's electricity). Across most artworks a sense of the toxicity of the place was also very clear, with hazardous materials and hi-vis a ubiquitous motif.

The AUH team on LiddellWORKS were John O'Brien (project manager), Marina Lee Warner (lead project officer), Grace Barnes (comms and design), Richie and Sue Lawton (First Nations engagement), Sandra Reichel (admin and budget) and Suzannah Jones (artist engagement in the early months).



Rachel Milne on site in 2023. Image Jothan Burrows.

THE RESIDENCY ARTWORKS



Mark Brown HOPPER SKEW #2

Mark Brown's glitching piece made great play of sound, vision and materiality.

Penny Dunstan's bowls of fly ash and coal dust coated in resin were beautifully presented by the Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre.



Penny Dunstan



Rebecca Rath Mother iii

Rebecca Rath created giant drawings in charcoal that dominated a wall in Singleton.

Tim Black's VR tour gave visitors a real taste of a fast-vanishing place.



Tim Black SACC



Will Maguire PPP Chats on grass

Will Maguire, artist blacksmith, produced wry critters made out of Liddell's own pipes, but also works burnt onto board.



Todd Fuller

Todd Fuller interviewed over 20 former employees (including his dad) and painted them – the result a precious collection of memories and portraits.

Hear some of Todd Fuller's evocative interviews with his worker subjects

Kara Wood collected impressions from the floor of Liddell and formed a ceramic installation that lit up alternately and marked the passing years.



Kara Wood Illuminating Memory



Fiona Lee LD359-623

Fiona Lee used patterns from the Liddell workshop to create fresh intriguing "machines".

Suellyn Connolly's complex collage was popular with workers recalling the shapes and textures of their workplace.



Suellyn Connolly Liddell – Beyond The Surface



Huw Jones

Huw Jones created a Liddell symphony from sound he made on site after the shutdown.

Listen and watch Huw Jones performance of his Liddell Symphony.



Kirry Toose Where To Now? Photo Janet Tavener.

Kirry Toose's three black outfits included material collected on site and printed fabric and took hundreds of hours to make.



Rachel Milne Power Station

Rachel Milne was a great fit for the Liddell project – empty industrial spaces are a subject matter she has long been painting to great acclaim.

Lisa Wiseman crocheted over a dozen hats, with some of the later models getting pretty wild.



Lisa Wiseman Thinking Caps for Lady Liddell



Fran Wachtel Power Station

Fran Wachtel's Three Phases of Liddell combined pieces collected from the site with pieces extracted from toasters and other bric-a-brac to collage a popular metal wall picture.

Anna Rankmore used recorded sounds and interviews to compose a new musical work.

Enjoy Anna Rankmore's Echoes of Liddell composition, produced by Andrew French-Northam



Photo Anna Rankmore

Ideas & provocations

One of LiddellWORKS' goals was to provoke critical thought about our valley's future. The program was able to:

- print a fine full-colour exhibition catalogue, with statements by the artists, designed by Aleisha Knight, published by Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre and printed by Hunter Valley Printing
- commission Dr Glenn Albrecht, environmental thinker and a key philosophical touchstone for several of the artists, to write a piece called "Liddell: Layers of Language in Landscape", included in the catalogue and website
- lead a panel discussion in collaboration with Scone Literary Festival of author & environmentalist Patrice Newell, AGL's Rob Cooper, LiddellWORKS artist Penny Dunstan and artist/therapist Catherine Hickson
- produce a taut speculative fiction by Penny Dunstan, "Read Before Operating", designed by Chris Dewar and published by Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre, with photos by the author
- present a panel discussion for ABC Radio National's Big Ideas program at the Muswellbrook Arts Centre, hosted by Natasha Mitchell and featuring Dr Glenn Albrecht, academic Dr Hedda Askland, artist Fiona Lee and AGL's Rob Cooper
- commission a singular suite of videos about some of the residency artists, produced by The Pretty Amazing Jono.

Liddell Big Ideas panel in front of Jakeob Watson's work



Liddell Big Ideas panel in front of Will M's work





Will Maguire's unusual sculptural bench.

Artist Fiona Lee with ArtLink editor Una Rey, Faye Neilson from SACC and Elissa Emerson from MRAC. Image AUH.



The panel at Scone's off-year Literary Festival in the lovely Scone Arts & Crafts setting





Rob Cooper from AGL joined Marina and John to give the final approval to Will Maguire's unusual sculptural bench, to be installed in 2025. Image AUH.

Everything else and the future

Several of the residency artists sold work – to members of the public, to portrait subjects and to AGL. Sales of about $30,000 were recorded. Two artists received commissions directly out of the program. Jakeob Watson's remarkable mural, which was painted in collaboration with Cassilis and Merriwa School students, as well as NAIDOC-goers in Singleton and Muswellbrook, has been gifted to Muswellbrook Shire Council. Leanne Ward's mosaic workshop partly using tiles salvaged from Liddell led to a box with mosaic and découpage. A series of weaving workshops led by Michelle Earl, Kate Wood-Pahuru and Sue Lawton was reworked into a power-station landscape by Michelle Earl. Leading arts publication ArtLink featured LiddellWORKS and the Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre in its regional issue and was launched at SACC, with a work by Fiona Lee on the cover. Muswellbrook had a cool lo-fi interactive where visitors could add to a wall hanging with torn high-vis fragments.

Meanwhile, NEXT // Studios was a path to the future, digital arts workshops for youth led by Grace Barnes (visual art, animation, AR) and Huw Jones (music and beatmaking) at the SACC. NEXT will happen again in 2025.



Kerri-Ann Taggart, Richie Lawton and Kemer Edwards met up at Worn Out Wares in Singleton. Image John O'Brien.

BLAK ARTS & OTHER FIRST NATIONS ACTIVITY

Our evolving First Nations program supports the current revival of Wanaruah/Wonnarua and Gringai/Worimi nations and other Aboriginal people to more deeply access culture, Country, language, creativity, celebration and leadership.

Unique Identities, a state-wide program from the Aboriginal Regional Arts Alliance, gave three local creatives access to skill-building, webinars and mentoring. Kerri-Ann Taggart, Richie Lawton and Stuart Berends all participated in the program in varied ways, with Kerri-Ann attending an eye-opening get-together in Sydney in June.

Travelling Totems. Out of the Unique Identities program, we commissioned Stuart Berends from Singleton to create totem poles with the community at a series of events: NAIDOC in Singleton, NAIDOC in Muswellbrook and the Cultural Spectacular. With added funding from Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council and Mach Energy, the totems are due to be completed in 2025 and will feature at the LALC in Muswellbrook.

Aboriginal Arts Officer Uncle Richie Lawton and Project Officer Sue Lawton worked together providing advice and connections, organising workshops and representing AUH to our First Nations locals. They also seeded many of the ideas that became the Blak Arts program. Despite Richie reducing hours and Sue leaving halfway through 2024, their work has continued to provide dividends.

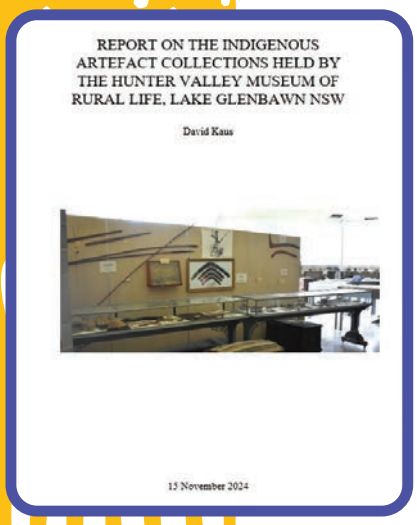
Not least was the significant funding we've received for a two-year visual arts program, **Blak Arts Collective.** Substantially devised and led by local First Nations people, Blak Arts will be growing its program through 2025 and 26. Inspirational talks in high schools, an On Country youth leadership event, yarning with Elders, and a Pop-Up Gallery are all on the horizon. The program is being delivered in partnership with Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council, with Kemer Edwards and Vanessa Kelman from the LALC doing much of the day-to-day work. Kerri-Ann Taggart was commissioned to produce a dynamic logo for the program – watch out for it at events!

Australian Government
Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support

MACHEnergy
Mount Pleasant Operation



Let the cultural creativity begin – at a weaving workshop. Photo Sue Lawton.


REPORT ON THE INDIGENOUS ARTEFACT COLLECTIONS HELD BY THE HUNTER VALLEY MUSEUM OF RURAL LIFE, LAKE GLENBAWN NSW

David Kaus

15 November 2024

David Kaus's thorough and informative report is deep reading. Courtesy Reflections Holiday Park.

First Stories is funded by a grant from the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal and will tell two stories about places, from Aboriginal nations in our region. First Stories video work is from regular collaborator Jonathan Burrows, and the project is led by Suzannah Jones in close consultation with several local Aboriginal people. The filming of one story – based around the soon-to-be-renamed Muswellbrook Common – captured a cultural burn in June. The second story will be filmed in 2025. The final videos will appear on Creative Valleys and be accessible to tourists and locals.

We commissioned a **Report on Aboriginal Artefacts at Lake Glenbawn Museum of Rural Life**, funded by Reflections Holiday Park Management. As recommended by a broader report commissioned by AUH in 2019, David Kaus, a retired curator from the National Museum of Australia, produced a mighty overview with many specific recommendations on the objects, including the secret/sacred artefacts in the collection.

Other programs. Aboriginal engagement also happened through:

- a weaving project and the travelling mural for LiddellWORKS
- appearances by Uncle Richie and his proud didj work at openings and events
- Acknowledgments of Country
- CASP and Micro Grant applications and
- the continuing focus on Aboriginal presence in cultural strategies, both our own and across the region.


UNIQUE IDENTITIES

ABORIGINAL REGIONAL ARTS ALLIANCE

Cultural Mapping Workshop

Facilitator

Lorrayne Fishenden
0467668977
ceo@araansw.com

489 Peel Street
(P O Box 533)
TAMWORTH NSW 2340
www.araansw.com
facebook.com/araansw

ARAA ran several intriguing workshops aimed at locally invested First Nations creatives. Courtesy ARAA.





Stuart's work will be completed in 2025

GRANTS FROM AUH TO YOU



Country Arts Support Program
Arts Upper Hunter funded ten local organisations to share in $20,000 for art projects. From salsa dancing to weaving, bag-making to hat-making, poetry to opera, these projects have a sharp community focus. Funding came from a devolved grant from Create NSW and our core funding. In October 2024, we assessed more projects to run through 2025 – nine were chosen, all with a community-oriented practice.

Broke Public School Community Art Mural for Broke P&C.
Jeff Taylor from Joffa's Toon School engaged students in resilience-focused art workshops and painting of a whole school mural in May 2024. The initial art workshops were brilliant … students were taught that anyone can be an artist … It was amazing to see how motivated students were throughout the project …



Traditional Aboriginal Weaving Workshops for Kirkton Public School P&C Association. Working with local Aboriginal Artist and Basket Weaver Michelle Napanangka Earl from Kilipiynpiyn Workshops, created woven bracelets, baskets and artworks throughout term 1 and into term 2.

In the Bag for Murrurundi & District Historical Society. A 2-day workshop in Murrurundi to showcase new techniques and innovative designs for fabric bag making.



MSPS Musica Viva for Muswellbrook South Public School P & C. The entire school participated in the Musica Viva show Colours of Home, exploring the connection between colour, emotion and sound. The oboist's own synaesthetic experiences enhanced the wonder for students.

Visiting Artist Workshops for Scone Public School P&C. Two local artists offered a grand variety of workshops over two terms, with opportunities for Kindergarten to Year 6.

Finding Your Poetic Voice for Singleton Library. This immersive exploration into the art and craft of poetry gave participants the chance to delve into the essence of what poetry is and what it can achieve and practise their wordsmithing along the way.



images top to bottom:
- A duck dines on something, courtesy Singleton Potters.
- Chris Pike's black cockatoo adorns Gresford's new gallery. Image courtesy Gresford Community Gallery.
- Jenny Vaughan proud of her splendid blue hat at one of Timor Tennis Club's millinery workshops. Photo by Catherine Watt.
- Salsa instructor Johan and the overjoyed Murrurundi class. Image Heather Ranclaud courtesy Upper Hunter Shire Council.

Catch the Salsa Facebook reel.

Opera excerpts "Carmen and Friends" for St Paul's Anglican Church Murrurundi. Live in the acoustically flawless St Paul's church, the show included arias, duets and ensembles accompanied by piano and stringed instruments, with music explained and performed to a rapt audience.

What a wonderful afternoon the performers were wonderful St Paul's was a perfect setting and a supper to die for thanks again.

Not HARD HATS - hat-making workshops for Timor Tennis Club. Milliner Jo Barr ran two hat making workshops in late autumn (felt) and late spring (raffia). Workshops were engrossing all-day affairs. We don't often get tennis clubs applying for CASP!

We learnt we were engaging the "effort -driven reward" circuit in our brains - which only occurs when using your hands to produce something. The resultant chemical change in the brain makes you feel more content, calmer and satisfied!

Harmony Week Salsa Experience for Upper Hunter Shire Council. Instructor Johan ran classes in March in Merriwa, Murrurundi and Scone with beaming smiles and better rhythm all round.



Artist Joffa had the Broke kids thinking hard about illustration – and the resulting mural is great fun. Courtesy Broke Public School.



Opera in Murrurundi at acoustically fine St Paul's, courtesy Lyn Overton

Still due for completion in 2025:
A Celebration of Colour mural for Scone Arts & Craft. Members have already made good progress on this mural, designed to coincide with SAC's 60th anniversary.
Micro Grants
Nine projects were successful with these essential smaller grants that community groups, individuals and businesses may apply for. Five happened in 2024.

A pre-schoolers' art exhibition for Singleton Heights Pre-School: the exhibition in November included work from preschools across Singleton and was such a success that it will re-run with corporate sponsorship in 2025.

A patchwork workshop for Dungog Arts Society.

Cockatoo board signage and blinds for Gresford Community Gallery, which launched in September.

Marketing and equipment for Rebecca Towers' first solo exhibition, in Clarence Town in November.

Prickly pear mulcher signage and info board for Scone Museum.

Due for completion in 2025 are a children's book launch for Muswellbrook artist Lisa Melichar, materials for a suminagashi workshop for Agnes Lingane, work towards a solo show by Muswellbrook's Dayarne Smith, and a gelli printing workshop for Murrurundi Arts & Crafts Council.

Pre-schooler artwork in Singleton. Photo Julie-Ann Stephens.








INSPO VIA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Horizons, Work Of Art, Music, CASP. NEXT!
Professional Development (PD) is central to AUH's mission; it features in our newsletter and on our website; it was highly requested during our strategic planning sessions in all sorts of areas (business skills, marketing, tourism, social media). Sometimes creative people want specific skills to do with their industry or medium, and in 2024, Arts Upper Hunter's PD program mostly involved guiding practitioners from the Upper Hunter into external opportunities, including some very competitive ones! (See Unique Identities above or read on.)

Horizons: Pathways for Creative Youth. A superb statewide program designed to give young people some experience of, and mentoring in, working towards a creative career, Horizons was managed by the Regional Arts Network, auspiced by South West Arts, and funded by the Office for Regional Youth. Horizons' emphasis on youth was pronounced and sincere – the Project Manager and First Nations Engagement Officer were both under 26, supported by solid mentoring. Four young people from our region took part, joining around 70 across the state:

- Visual artist Kasey Tudor from Lambs Valley
- Filmmaker Thomas Ryan from Muswellbrook
- Musician and filmmaker Juniper Martin from Dungog
- First Nations visual artist Emily Smallmon from out of Scone.

The program was a genuine success. AUH even gave employment to two of the four in 2024: Kasey Tudor assisted at the NEXT//Studios digital workshop, and Thomas Ryan was contracted to create films for each of our This Here Then Now museum activations.

NEXT // Studios. NEXT was the brainchild of Grace Barnes, who structured it around the idea of introducing young people to pathways into creative industries. In July Grace led the visual art, animation and Augmented Reality component. The other half was music and beatmaking, led by the dynamic Huw Jones. Using gizmos like a tablet or a phone, the pair, assisted by Kasey Tudor, supported a dozen digital artists-in-the-making. It was one of Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre's first digital workshops. NEXT will happen again in 2025.











Work Of Art: a program for regional creative women. Starting in 2023, 75 women, including 5 from the AUH region, grew their business skills and broached the numerous issues and possibilities of a creative career. Overcoming the isolation of working in the regions, friendships formed, art was made, networking happened and in November a Showcase and Symposium was held in Orange featuring work, tales, testimonials, debates, showings and an auction. Many of the participants felt profound effects and found new directions out of the program, which was managed by Regional Arts NSW and funded by a grant from Women NSW. Pictured above, the five from here were:

- Rebecca Rath from out of Singleton
- Helene Leane from Dungog
- Jane Richens from Bingleburra
- Leanne Atkins from Dungog
- Dayarne Smith from Muswellbrook



Regional Music program: Regional Music Coordinator Ali Buckley from Music NSW continued to put the hours and km into her engagement with the sonic performers of Arts Upper Hunter, Orana Arts and Arts Mid North Coast. A spinal element of the statewide program was Sound Advice, webinars where successful musicians and music industry professionals gave advice on the many sides of the polyhedron that is music. Several musicians took part in the free webinars. A live "Golden Highway" tour included Merriwa and Dashville Skyline. Other local emergent musicians are polishing up their EPKs and reworking their narratives as we speak.

Other PD we hooked into: AUH ran its own "How to apply for CASP" webinar in October, and recommended over 30 others through the year, through ArtSparks and direct communications.

Andrew Gray from South East Arts at the launch of the Cultural Tourism study.



Portia Lindsay presents Create NSW's new project funding model to the burgers of Muswellbrook at the AUH office



The Cultural Tourism study from Pattern Makers can be found on the AUH website



ACROSS THE REGION ... AND BEYOND?

More than anything, Arts Upper Hunter is about creating connections and building from them. We take part in Cultural Advisory Groups, Precinct Development consultations, Regional Tourism meetings (across all four LGAs, organised by us), attend openings, network with Tourism, Economic Development, and Arts and Culture officers on Council staff. Through the year we provided 26 Letters of Support to individuals and groups seeking funding, from across all four LGAs and a couple beyond. We know the value of support letters – in the creative industries they do get read and often help define more clearly a project for the assessors making the decisions.

Advice. There were numerous phone calls, emails and face-to-face conversations with local creative people around their dreams and needs. We helped people where they needed it with finding grants, budgeting for grants and filling in the crazy forms.

Venues. Folk ring us to find out whether there's a venue that would suit their event, or who the contact person is. Maintaining a register of what's where and who's who is a key service. AUH's Sandra Reichel is an especially valuable knowledge base. We also try to get round the region as best we can to stay informed...

The Regional Arts Network. The value of a statewide network is not only the statewide programs (see earlier) like Work Of Art and Horizons, it's the sharing of knowledge and resources, partnering in programs with one another (like the brilliant report into Cultural Tourism in Regional NSW), advocating up into government and getting group purchases of products like insurance.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-28

Once we'd come to terms with the need to apply for funding through the competitive rounds – and that included the possibility of missing out altogether on multi-year funding – we started the consultation process in September. We held open sessions in six towns and received 26 detailed on-line survey responses. The live consultations all had their own character. Some significant connections were made. "I suddenly realised that some of the most important people for my own project were in the room with me that day!" according to one artist. AUH spoke to Council workers, creative groups and reviewed our previous three-year plan as well.

By year's end Arts Upper Hunter had strategised a set of five Services and Programs for the next four years:

- "Advice and Desires": the day-to-day work.
- Blak Arts Collective: First Nations program.
- Creative Valleys and the Visitor Economy.
- The Bigger Picture: Advocacy and Major Projects.
- Brilliant Places for All: Equity and Inclusion

The plan was presented in November 2024 and accepted by the Board, forming the central argument in our application for 4-year funding to Create NSW – with a marked increase in the amount requested, as we were encouraged to apply for "what we needed".

The Vision is:

- An increasing focus on Cultural Tourism, aligned with our LGAs and peak bodies.
- Greater focus on partnerships and on programs tied to grants, leveraging the Creative Valleys website.
- Deeper engagement with the local Aboriginal people.
- Continuing our baseline work: our Grants, Professional Development, advice for creative people and groups, promotions through media, advocacy for the creative industries at all levels, membership of advisory groups etc.
- Continuing our emphasis on Inclusive Creative Outcomes and First Nations program (Diversity and Equity).
- Continuing to position ourselves as the RADO at the coalface of the carbon transition.
- Building our systems and governance to a more effective level.
- Staying in touch with communities and LGAs and advocating for our industries through promotions and meetings.
- Continuing focus on youth, theatre and music – areas of great need.
- Grasping opportunities from Regional Arts Network and other regional programs.
- Disaster preparedness.



The consultations were very well attended – here are some of Scone's top community and creative thinkers and doers. Photo John O'Brien.



The plan was designed by Hunter Valley Printing.

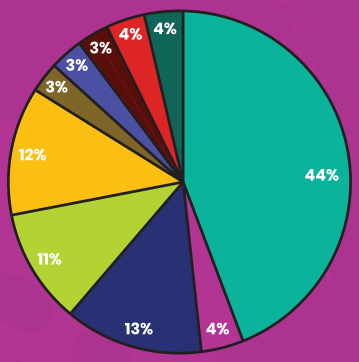


Ideas abounded at the consultations.

DOLLARS MAKE THINGS HAPPEN...

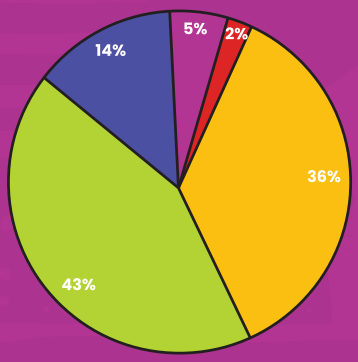
The Money
In both 2023 and 2024 AUH managed a budget higher than we'd ever previously overseen. In 2024 several grants carried over from 2023, including the Department of Regional NSW's Stronger Country Communities Fund for LiddellWORKS, on top of funds from AGL. Contracts were drawn up, financial processes maintained by Office Manager Sandra Reichel, and audited by Kelly & Partners in their Singleton office. Buy-in from all four LGAs produced outstanding results in terms of community connection, vibrancy and Return On Investment. See Our Partners on page 27 for a list of funding bodies, grants and in-kind supporters.

INCOME



- Create NSW Core
- Create NSW CASP
- Create NSW Project
- LGA
- Dept Regional NSW
- Regional Arts Fund
- AGL
- Smaller grants IVAIS, Regional Arts Network, Wanaruah LALC, Mach Energy, FRRR, Tocal Homestead
- Earnt
- Interest

EXPENSES



- Employment
- Projects
- Operating Costs
- CASP
- Core Projects

Some Deets
In 2024 AUH delivered:

- 26 projects across the year (including 8 from LiddellWORKS Programs and 3 statewide projects)
- 5 were developed by First Nations people.
- 69 artists were engaged as workshop leaders, residency artists, creatives etc.
- At least 116 new works were produced through our programs, countless more promoted through our comms.
- 690 people participated in workshops and events.
- 4815 were in the audience or attending in person, plus 4000 estimated digital audience for the Big Ideas panel. (Not counted in the above is attendance at the 135 events promoted through the year.)

... SO DO PEOPLE

Esteemed staff

- John O'Brien Executive Director –directed the organisation executively.
- Sandra Reichel Office Manager – was responsible for most of our Comms, bookkeeping and other financial records, and general office admin.
- Suzannah Jones Project Officer – covered Creative Valleys and cultural tourism, grant applications and oversaw This Here Then Now, First Stories and other projects.
- Marina Lee Warner Project Officer – was lead on LiddellWORKS and "Life Drawing with a Comedian" tour and other community programs – finishing in December 2024.
- Richie Lawton Aboriginal Arts Officer – was lead on Travelling Totems, took part in the Unique Identities programs, co-created the Dare To Be Deadly program and supported our other First Nations work.
- Sue Lawton Project Officer – worked as admin support for Uncle Richie and co-created Dare To Be Deadly – finishing in July 2024.
- Grace Barnes Comms Officer – coordinated LiddellWORKS socials and website and branding, until April 2024; and developed and facilitated the NEXT//Studios program in June-July 2024.
- Thomas Ryan Videographer – documented the This Here Then Now from December 2024.
- And staff-adjacent
- Jonathan Burrows from Pretty Amazing Pictures produced the Liddell residency videos, The Twins of Murrurundi video, and the First Stories videos.
- Huw Jones Musician – co-facilitated NEXT//Studios in June-July 2024.
- Mark Carpenter of Thirty Point Four manages our Creative Valleys and LiddellWORKS websites, and in 2025-26 will be helping us to rework the AUH site and to develop a Blak Arts Collective site.
- Kerri-Ann Taggart with her cool logo designs – and our 2023 annual report as well.
- Kasey Tudor Project Assistant – helped on NEXT//Studios in July 2024.

COMMS

Communications – not only digital. Sometimes it's the phone calls we make, the sit-down chats we have, the committees we sit on, the brainstorms we storm in, the openings we attend, all the F2Fs IRL, that can create the strongest connections and the best outcomes. One example: our Strategic Planning sessions were eye-opening and will feed our program for years. But meanwhile, we also do an awful lot in the digital space.

Promotions 2024
Through 2024 we had
- three websites (AUH, Creative Valleys, LiddellWORKS),
- two FB pages (LiddellWORKS, AUH) and one FB group (Blak Arts Collective) plus
- three Instagram pages (AUH, Creative Valleys, Liddell Creative).

ArtSparks continued to provide broad information to the region.
In 2025-26 the LiddellWORKS site is likely to move to AGL after final tidy-ups and the Blak Arts Collective may get its own site. Creative Valleys is an evolving opportunity in this space.



ArtSparks Subscribers
502

Number of ArtSparks (including 4 Stop Presses)
15

Number of newsletters opened
3,681

Arts Upper Hunter
followers: 1,651
reach: 43,985

LiddellWORKS
followers: 97
reach: 6048

Blak Arts Collective Facebook Group (members)
followers: 101

Arts Upper Hunter
followers: 1,414
reach: 4,848

Liddell Creative
followers: 241
reach: 847

Creative Valleys
followers: 35
reach: 191

Promoted on website
56,103

Grants/Prizes
126

Events
136

News Items
63

Our Projects
22

Arts Upper Hunter (AUH channel)
followers: 6
reach: 4

Liddell WORKS Creative Program
followers: 12
reach: 180

Arts Upper Hunter Website
sessions: 9,028
page views: 19,590

Liddell Website
sessions: 1,831
page views: 6,229

Creative Valleys Website
sessions: 1,312
page views: 4,189

Total social media reach
56,103

Total social media followers
4,949

Arts Upper Hunter
followers: 464

PARTNERSHIPS & OVERSIGHT

Board members
Providing expertise in their fields and deep local knowledge, the AUH Board acts as a skill-based Board, whether they are delegates selected by their Councils or co-opted members of the public. They form a strong and diverse collaborative entity. Council elections at the end of the year meant a big change of personnel.

The Arts Upper Hunter Board for 2024:
- Jacqui Bakewell – Upper Hunter Shire delegate until Nov 24, then co-opted member; Chair throughout the year
- Cr Peter McGill – Upper Hunter Shire delegate from November 2024
- Cr Dan Thompson – Singleton LGA delegate
- Cr Jennifer Lecky – Muswellbrook Shire delegate and Treasurer until November 24
- Cr Louise Dunn – Muswellbrook Shire delegate from November 24
- Cr Michael Tobin – Dungog Shire delegate until November 24
- Cr Alexandria Carruthers – Dungog Shire delegate from November 24
- Martha Moderitz - co-opted member, Treasurer from November 24
- Annie Rodgers - co-opted member
- Kim Lundy - co-opted member
- Ivan Skaines - co-opted member from March 2024
- Rosslyn Thomson – co-opted member from June 2024


Jacqui Bakewell


Cr Peter McGill


Cr Dan Thompson


Cr Jennifer Lecky


Cr Louise Dunn


Cr Michael Tobin


Cr Alexandria Carruthers


Martha Moderitz


Annie Rodgers


Kim Lundy


Ivan Skaines


Rosslyn Thomson

Our principal partners
The NSW Government through Create NSW, Upper Hunter Shire Council, Singleton Council, Muswellbrook Shire Council, Dungog Shire Council.

Project partners

- Each of our LGAs for various projects including Creative Valleys and the Regional Tourism Group, LiddellWORKS, the Wanaruah Language Feedback Video, Dungog Cultural Advisory Group, Singleton Cultural Advisory Group, the Lake Glenbawn Museum Of Rural Life Working Group.
- The NSW Government through Create NSW is a partner throughout our program, as our principal funding body.
- The Regional Arts Network (aka the RADO Network) for Statewide projects, funded by the Office for Regional Youth, Women NSW and other sources.
- Regional Arts NSW, our peak body.
- AGL for LiddellWORKS.
- Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council on Blak Arts Collective and Travelling Totems.
- NSW Aboriginal Regional Arts Alliance for Unique Identities and other programs.
- The Department of Regional NSW through the Stronger Country Communities Fund for LiddellWORKS.
- Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre and Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre for LiddellWORKS and other programs.
- LivMedia for LiddellWORKS and Travelling Totems.
- Mach Energy for Travelling Totems.
- Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music in various projects.
- Foundation For Rural and Regional Renewal for First Stories (2024 project).
- Creative Australia for the Regional Arts Fund grant for This Here Then Now (2024-25 project); and for the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support fund for Blak Arts Collective (2024-26 project).
- Creative Plus Business.
- The three museums who participated in This Here Then Now: Scone Museum and Research Centre; Dungog Museum; Tocal Homestead.

Local stakeholders

We acknowledge the numerous active creative community groups from across our region including all those local Arts Societies, Craft Groups, Art Galleries, Museums and Historical Societies, Science Hubs, Musical and Theatrical Societies, Performance Groups, Bands & Co-ops, First Nations Corporations, Aboriginal Reconciliation Groups, Libraries, Writing Groups, Event-Based Groups from street parties to sculpture exhibitions & more, Visitor Centres and Tourism Committees, CWA, Rotary, Lions, Community Centres, PCYC, Chambers of Commerce, Show Committees, Social Services and other active service groups, Youth Venues, High Schools, Primary Schools and their parent support groups, Venue Management Association and s355 committees, and numerous community-engaged businesses (from galleries to shops to theatrical groups to Aboriginal Cultural Businesses).

Services

AUH uses these fine services to manage various aspects of administration: A Corp for our IT, Thirty Point Four for our websites (thanks Mark), Culture Counts for our audience research, the National Association for the Visual Arts for creative industry standards and pay rates, Finsura for our insurances (through Regional Arts NSW), Arts Law for contract templates, Kelly+Partners for our audit, HRCentral for our Human Resources management, Hey Mate! for our Employee Assistance Program (through Regional Arts NSW).



Life Drawing With A Comedian was a one-man show that toured Merriwa, Muswellbrook and Dungog in March and garnered a great response from appreciative audiences. Photo by Suzannah Jones.

arts UPPER HUNTER

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