

STATE OF THE ARTS IN CAIRNS REPORT FINAL 2023 (SoARTS)



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and First Peoples of the lands on which the State of the Arts in Cairns research took place. Cairns Regional Council also acknowledges all First Peoples within the region, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. We recognize and respect your languages and the unique beliefs and pride within your customs and cultures that define your continuing relationships and responsibilities to Land and Sea. We extend this respect to Elders both past, present and emerging.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FOREWORD

MESSAGE FROM CAIRNS MAYOR AMY EDEN

This report reaffirms that the creation, celebration and sharing of arts and culture is important to social cohesion, community connectivity, our economy and inspires people to visit, revisit and settle in this region.

Understanding the region's cultural make-up goes a long way to inform the health and wellbeing of the industry.

Culture, arts and the creative experience is an important driver for tourism.

While arts and culture are important for tourism, they also add a richness and depth to our liveability, with emerging and established artists choosing to call Cairns home.

The growing creative landscape has supported and diversified the visitor offer over the last decade.

First Nation led programs and activations are strengthening and will be further enhanced with the opening of the Mulgrave Gallery mid-2024.

The stories of our past are an important learning point to inform how we go forward, and it is wonderful to see the celebration of First Nation's continuing to play a role in the creative and cultural life of the region.

Mulgrave Gallery opening will be a significant milestone in moving us closer to a world class gallery precinct in the heart of our city.

There is still much work to be done and we recognise the need to take our stakeholders on the journey with us.

The opening of Screen Queensland Studios in Cairns offers a new hub for the screen sector and sends a message that the creative industries are thriving in this region.

We are becoming much more aware of the need to take an inclusive approach in all that we do.

The SoArts report is a reminder that working in partnership, collaboration and seeking co-designed approach to solving shared challenges and opportunities with strengthen organisations and the industry over the longer term.

I want to thank the authors and researchers involved in the production of this report.

Due to your hard work, we have clear evidence that Cairns region is becoming a significant destination of choice to live, visit, study and do business.

For the past five years this annual report has been an important reminder that there is much to celebrate with that constant reminder that we cannot rest on our laurels.

There is more work to be done.

Thank you to everyone committed to developing the creative and cultural life of the region.

The difference makers sit within the community who seek out new connections, the artists who share their view of the world through a creative lens, the organisations that continue to raise the bar and present quality creative programs, exhibitions, performances and so much more.

You all make such a difference, and we look forward to continuing to work across the creative ecology and beyond as we enter the next phase of our cultural planning cycle.

We want to continue to work with you in strengthening our position as a destination for culture where transformational and creative experiences are part of our everyday lives.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This final State of the Arts in Cairns (SoARTS) 2023 report is the culmination of the independent research embedded in Cairns Regional Council's (CRC's) five-year Strategy for Culture and the Arts 2022.¹ The Strategy provides Council with a framework to "prioritise, co-ordinate and manage the city's resources, and deliver ongoing programming and provision of grants and infrastructure that will stimulate and sustain the cultural and creative vitality of the region". The SoARTS reports sit alongside the Strategy and aim to understand and enhance the cultural landscape of the Cairns region. The reports examine stakeholder perspectives on the cultural ecosystem, including artists and creatives, their institutions, networks, as well as their views on the infrastructural support provided by Council. Reports also include case studies and insights into tourism in our UNESCO World Heritage-listed reef and rainforest region.

Key findings in this report highlight the diversity and resilience of the ecosystem, driven by the passion and efforts of Council plus the region's artists, cultural organizations, and community networks. Since the inception of the Strategy, and through the difficult years of COVID-19, the landscape of Cairns has transformed. The region has award-winning cultural amenities such as the Munro Martin Parklands, and the Court House Gallery, which has conserved an important building for the city. The Gallery Precinct remains an exciting possibility, the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF) continues to grow, and Bulmba-ja has brought an important Indigenous presence to the arts and culture offering. The well-established Tanks Arts Centre continues to be a hub for community and the music scene, and the new 1.5-hectare film studio will be a valuable part of the Queensland film industry. All these investments make a profound mark on the cultural vitality of the city, making the Cairns Region highly liveable.

Alongside this vibrancy, the research also identifies gaps in funding, accessibility, and infrastructure that can hinder the sector's full potential. The sector remains reliant on government

funding, and, for example, urgently requires safe storage for sensitive historical Indigenous artifacts and has regrettably lost university pathways to the creative arts. Despite Cairns being an important domestic and international tourist destination, the reports have found few tourists know much about engaging with the sector (beyond CIAF which is one of the few sector initiatives promoted by Tourism Tropical North Queensland). The sector still needs a cultural hub or "village green" to facilitate innovative collaboration and resource-sharing, and there is a voiced desire for a cross-disciplinary leadership group for sector cohesion, transparency and growth.

To address these challenges and capitalise on opportunities, the SoARTS report presents a summary of some of these positive developments/opportunities as well as suggestions to elevate Cairns' cultural profile and foster long-term sustainability. Cairns is a distinctive tropical place with unique cultural influences, networks and creative practices. The sector finds creativity and resilience in the region's isolation and remoteness and this should be embraced.

The 'Key Findings' section below highlights the main points and issues highlighted throughout the report, including stakeholder insights, tourism data, information about the Cairns Art and Culture Map and a case study for how we might 'place brand' Cairns with an arts and culture focus.

In conclusion, the SoARTS report represents a collaborative effort to evaluate the impact of the Strategy for Culture and the Arts 2022. By embracing the recommendations outlined herein, the Cairns Regional Council can continue to foster a dynamic, inclusive, and resilient arts ecosystem that enriches the lives of residents and contributes to the region's prosperity and identity.

KEY FINDINGS

INFRASTRUCTURE, RESOURCES AND SKILLS

- Most stakeholders utilise Cairns Regional Council's cultural and arts infrastructure
- There is an urgent need for a leadership group with cross-disciplinary representation for sector cohesion, transparency and growth of the sector
- The Tanks Arts Centre is essential for showcasing student, emerging, alternative, and community-based arts activity
- Stakeholders expect the 'Gallery Precinct' to incorporate Cairns Art Gallery, Mulgrave Gallery, and the Court House Gallery, along with a new purpose-built contemporary gallery, but they are uncertain about completion timelines, purpose, and duplication (an interim plan to co-ordinate activities would be beneficial)
- A policy framework for Indigenous representation at a governance level would help meet sector expectations for Cairns Art Gallery
- There is a critical need for storage, production and preparation spaces, including safe storage for sensitive historical Indigenous artifacts and climate-sensitive rehearsal and studio space
- There is an expressed desire to co-locate cultural, arts and creative industries in a precinct in the town centre
- The Botanic Gardens, Centenary Lakes and Greenslopes Street form a zone with a combined botanical and creative focus, with potential for extended festival activity or temporary public art programming
- There are growing levels of local community participation and critical engagement with the national and regional sectors
- Locally operating universities have recently disestablished pathways in the creative arts, shifting the responsibility of sector education to the regional industry



CULTURE, HERITAGE AND PLACE

- Cairns has several significant and long-standing associations and clubs catering to art lovers, recreational artists, and hobbyist practitioners
- Authentic Indigenous creative activity is of global significance and offers pathways to employment and self-determination
- The increasing membership and use of facilities recorded by these groups represent the value of the volunteer-managed arts and cultural infrastructure
- The success of funded small and medium arts organisations leads the way for the region's networking, collaboration, and touring efforts, but hurdles must be overcome to inject these into national and international circuits.

A ROBUST CULTURAL ECONOMY

- Cairns is a uniquely positioned tropical hub with potential to showcase the unique cultural influences, networks, and practices that abound in the region
- The Cairns region's culture and arts sector shows resilience and commitment to place, with isolation and remoteness as strength and weakness
- The Cairns region has great potential to contribute to Queensland's film industry, with the new 1.5 hectare studio raising awareness of filmmaking and extending to many areas of the sector
- Support for remote and regional arts practice through RASN offers potential, and the activities to support regional and remote groups and practitioners are essential
- The Cairns Regional Council has assisted sector growth by developing critical infrastructure and a strategic focus for its role and delivery within the sector, and stakeholders strongly advocate for continued investment in a cultural strategy and planning tool derived from an inclusive sector consultation and co-design process
- Although several stakeholders do not see Cairns as a city for the arts, they suggest investment in cultural and artistic experiences develops public value, well-being, and social inclusion as well as economic benefit

MAPPING CREATIVITY

- The Cairns Arts and Culture Map has continued to grow, with 39 new contributors and a total of 1,294 listings at the end of 2022. Page views steadily increased, reaching more than 45K in 2022.
- Carnival on Collins and Starry Night Cinema are consistently popular pages. The most consistently popular category is Public Art, although Festivals consistently appear in the top four.
- The Map continues to be most popular with those in the 25-34 age group.

TOURISM

- Central Queensland University conducted a survey of visitors departing Cairns from the domestic terminal of the Cairns International Airport between July and December 2022.
- The results show that over a third of domestic and two-thirds of international respondents consider the availability of cultural opportunities as an important factor in their selection of holiday destinations. However, arts and cultural motivations, such as 'experience Aboriginal culture' and 'visiting arts and cultural spaces', were not ranked as significant motivations for visiting Cairns.
- The research indicates a lack of awareness, or a perceived lack of availability, around the types of arts and cultural activities in the Cairns region. Tourists would like to see more Aboriginal cultural experiences as well as outdoor activities and performances.

CASE STUDY

The case study for this SoARTS report is a dialogue with James Cook University Master of Philosophy student researcher Yee Mun Loong. Yee Mun is researching how the image of Cairns as a 'reef and rainforest' tourist destination misses key aspects of the city's arts and culture offerings. He shares insights to his place brand co-creation study conducted with young artists in Cairns, emphasising the importance of bottom-up processes to leverage real people and experiences in place branding.



SECTOR INSIGHTS

The SoARTS 2023 research follows a series of State of the Arts in Cairns (SoARTS) reports providing sector insights in 2019, 2020 and 2021.¹ The interview group included 28 stakeholders from across the sector - representatives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous visual arts, festivals, dance, arts services, writing, recreational arts, contemporary arts, galleries, museums, art fairs, music, inclusive arts, youth arts, arts education, State government, architecture, film, circus and theatre. It should be noted that an additional 12 culture, arts and creative industry leaders were identified from the field. However, these significant contributors were either unavailable or beyond the research timeframe.

Indigenous artsⁱⁱ

festivalsⁱ

Danceⁱ

Indigenous and non-Indigenous arts servicesⁱⁱⁱⁱ

Writingⁱⁱ

Recreational artsⁱⁱ

Contemporary artsⁱ

Galleryⁱ

Museumⁱ

Art fairⁱ

Musicⁱ

Inclusive artsⁱ

Youth artsⁱ

Arts Educationⁱⁱⁱ

State Governmentⁱ

Architectureⁱ

Filmⁱⁱ

Circusⁱ

Theatreⁱ

A series of 18 questions were uniformly asked to elicit the stakeholder's current state as an overall impression of the sector. The interview questions were divided into a series of three interest areas:

- **Infrastructure, resources, and skills**
- **Culture, heritage, and place**
- **A robust cultural economy**

For the research and to help elucidate the overall cultural and arts services sector more effectively, we use three generalist categories: cultural activity, arts organisations, and creative enterprises and industries.

Broadly, it is understood that cultural activities are those engaged in defining a place and its people. Therefore, cultural services and enterprises include heritage practices, regional museums, historical societies, and groups identifying through ethnicity or location-based values.

Arts organisations and enterprises represent cultural activity within the visual, performing, crafts, music, cinema, and literary arts associated with developing and presenting imaginative, aesthetic, or intellectual content. These entities might be government departments, government-funded, non-profit, independent, or community-based entities.

Creative enterprises and industries are operators and producers who trade on intellectual property or service cultural and arts activity, including architects, publishers, graphic designers, filmmakers, galleries, and independent micro businesses. We acknowledge a variety of cross-overs between the types of activity within the field.

The participating stakeholder group for this research consists of arts and creative industry leaders from many disciplines; their insights, understanding, and specialisations provide an invaluable account of community participation and engagement in the sector. Through their operational and enterprise structures, they represent sub-sectors as communities of practice. Consequently, the research does not include responses representing individual artists directly.

The participants have responded to future-focused questions, such as their ideal vision for culture and arts in the Cairns region and how they fit into the sector's existing structures, disciplines, and networks. The interview responses show that the culture and arts activity field is diverse and thriving, with established practices operating in determined priority and protocol settings. Besides the apparent distinctions based along the lines of creative disciplines, some of the more pronounced edges in the Cairns region include:

- the many long-serving and well-established voluntary administered recreational arts, museum and heritage groups and associations,
- the numerous nationally recognised non-profit small to medium arts organisations,
- the growing impact and success of Indigenous visual and performing arts organisations and producers,
- the successful Cairns-based creative industry businesses,
- the strong presence of Local and State government sector representation and infrastructure,
- in decline, locally provided face-to-face university-based creative arts education.

These tiers represent the critical edges in the Cairns region's pathways and ecology of culture and arts activity. Every area of culture and arts has both positive and negative trends. The field enjoys growing levels of local community participation and critical engagement with the national and broader regional sectors. However, locally operating universities that have recently disestablished Creative Arts and Urban Planning degrees have abandoned many disciplines. The non-profit small to medium arts organisations have grown to new levels of success and exposure with renewed public investment. Still, **insufficient** fit-for-purpose spaces as well as barriers to infrastructure access continue to bottleneck the full potential of production and expression. The recreational arts groups provide a social and creative space for a growing number of hobbyists. However, intergenerational succession is becoming difficult because of the changing nature of volunteerism. While the field grows, and its impact and benefit to society are deeply appreciated and acknowledged, challenges to adequately resource, house, showcase and move forward with culture and arts activity in the Cairns region remain critical. The area has few deep pockets, and the provision for resourcing culture and arts falls mainly to the three tiers of Government. Stakeholders in the field recognise the Cairns Regional Council as a critical enabler and partner in delivering cultural and artistic expression to its constituents.

INFRASTRUCTURE, RESOURCES AND SKILLS

The sector's specialised physical infrastructure requirements include storage, preparation, production/office, and presentation spaces. Participant stakeholders can be service-, production-, or presentation-oriented - 15% are accommodated in Cairns Regional Council buildings, and 11% access exclusive purpose-built infrastructure on council easements - 15% are accommodated in the Queensland State Government's Bulmba-ja Arts Centre - 11% access resources associated with educational institutions. The remaining 48% are scattered in office rentals or private facilities across the city and region. There is an expressed desire to co-locate cultural, arts and creative industries within a precinct in the town, while individual autonomy is also considered essential. Participants suggest the "village green" approach facilitates innovative collaboration, networking, and resource-sharing, leading to a more robust and sustainable future. However, State and local governments provide significant cultural and arts infrastructure within a 4km radius of Cairns CBD, suggesting a solid sector presence within this zone.

Each discipline area has unique infrastructure requirements. Some common areas of critical need include storage, production, and preparation spaces. The requirements range from safe storage of sensitive historical Indigenous artefacts to accessible climate-aware and conducive rehearsal and studio spaces to develop new work.



Cairns Regional Council's cultural and arts infrastructure continues to be accessed and utilised by most stakeholders. The Tanks Arts Centre fulfils the significant requirement of showcasing student, emerging, alternative, and community-based engagements. Long-term partnerships with special interest groups who use Tanks 3 and 4 at the Tanks Arts Centre have contributed significantly to the quality of experience and creative expression for critical areas of community, inclusivity, youth, and emerging arts. The annual *Energy Exhibition* in Tank 4 combines visual artworks from the region's high schools. It is augmented by several follow-on opportunities for young people, such as those offered through the council's Flame program. Extending services through participatory programs for young people creates tactile touch points for emerging practitioners. Additional sector partnerships along the lines of the Flame program will be an essential catalyst and pathway for young people entering the arts, cultural and creative industries. Tank 3 has hosted Tropical Art's annual *Shakespeare at the Tanks*,² an inclusive theatre program with a positive impact on disabled and diverse artists. The Cairns Regional Council has facilitated access to Tank 5 (the only climate-controlled space available for rehearsals across the Collins Avenue venue), for the artists from ARC Disability Services Inc.³ However, as a music venue by night, Tank 5 is perceived to operate under a different value proposition, catering to musical acts, primarily bands and popular music styles, with ticket sales driving a need for revenue and cost recovery. Stakeholders representing the music industry see Cairns Regional Council as having the most capacity for leadership in developing a thriving music ecosystem. However, it is suggested that it should not be a one-solution model. Engagement with QMusic⁴ extends potential and industry awareness within a broader context. Cairns Regional Council needs to continue developing sector relationships that assist local musicians and producers to have a seat at the table and have their voices heard. The Tanks Arts Centre brings art forms together in one zone within a botanical precinct. Consequently, it is highly valued by the sector and exemplifies the symbolic placemaking character of the wet tropics geographic region.⁵

The Creative Life division of Cairns Regional Council⁶ manages the Tank 4 Gallery, Court House Gallery, and Mulgrave Gallery, all owned and operated by the council with senior positions of director, curator and Indigenous curator, program co-ordinators and technical staff. However, there is no board or sector reference group in place. The emphasis for these gallery spaces is community access and inclusive representation. Exhibitors can be required to cover the costs of their exhibitions and the costs of gallery staff for installation and de-install. The perception of a cost recovery model when considering the Court House Gallery for staging exhibitions is reported by stakeholders as prohibitive. However, the Creative Life division provides vibrant marketing and promotion, and clients can apply for an In-kind Assistance Grant to cover some of the exhibition overheads incurred by the Council. The Court House Gallery is used as a hub during

the Cairns Festival, and the footprint and configuration of festival activities on the site will increase with the opening of the Mulgrave Gallery in 2024.

Stakeholders view the Court House Gallery and the Gallery Precinct⁷ proposal with positive interest, yet they need clarification about predicted completion timelines, purpose, and potential duplication. There remains an expectation that the 'Gallery Precinct' will incorporate the Cairns Art Gallery, Mulgrave Gallery, and Court House Gallery, along with a purpose-built contemporary gallery on the site. However, there is no clarity around the ongoing vision for this development. In addition, the cohesion of the existing buildings and programs within a precinct is under-informed. An interim plan to coordinate activities and programs would benefit this precinct's overall amenity and user experience.

The stakeholder group is divided regarding the duplication associated with the visual arts infrastructure in Cairns. Some identify clear distinctions in activities and programs in the visual arts. Others perceive that there is more visual art gallery infrastructure than resources for other creative disciplines, suggesting an inequity. The visual art representatives in the stakeholder group consider a hierarchy associated with the publicly funded visual arts infrastructure a common standard.

Cairns Art Gallery⁸ provides national and international research-based curatorial programs and direct commissioning support for established and high-calibre artists. The overall program is supported by a director, curator, and retail and gallery staff. They also present the recurring exhibitions of the long-standing Cairns Arts Society and the Cairns Potters Club. The Cairns Art Gallery does not seek to recover operational costs from exhibitors but may limit the duration of their exhibitions. The Cairns Art Gallery has removed entry fees, making visitation more accessible. This gallery receives a substantial allocation for operating costs from the Cairns Regional Council in the form of financial contribution, peppercorn premises lease and covering electricity costs, allowing a level of operation far exceeding that of other galleries in the city or region. The parent entity is Cairns Regional Council. As such, the board of directors includes several councillors; however, a policy framework for Indigenous representation at a governance level would bring it in line with national sector expectations.²

The small to medium organisation, NorthSite Contemporary Arts,⁹ operates galleries at Bulmba-ja, an Arts Centre managed by the State Government's Arts Queensland¹⁰. There are dedicated exhibition spaces that directly support the presentation of emerging and established artists. NorthSite engages in off-site exhibition opportunities, professional development and other professional services directed towards artists and industry groups. Some of this activity is facilitated through NorthSite Studios in the Greenslopes Street Cultural Precinct. A chief executive officer, artistic director, first-nations curator, and retail and program staff support its research-

based curatorial work. The program includes developing, presenting, and selling new contemporary work. NorthSite has an independent Board of Directors, including policy for at least three professional artists and Indigenous representation.

There are no university art galleries or museums in the region. This means significant resources for curatorial projects are limited to the will and capacity of government-funded small to medium organisations. Still, the Technical and Further Education Cairns Campus (TAFE)¹¹ has the Banggu Minjaany and Gallery Y exhibition space, which complements the Diploma of Cultural Arts and Diploma of Visual Arts courses.

A limited number of alternative exhibition spaces operate in the Cairns region. Crate59 has been operating in the Cairns CBD since 2009. It is an artist-run initiative (ARI) managed by a volunteer collective which plans partnerships with the Cairns Regional Council's Cairns Festival and an ephemera archive project with the Cairns Museum. Along with a regular exhibition program, Crate59 hosts a series of artist studios and works with emerging and visiting artists.¹²



Of significance is the Indigenous arts organisation UMI Arts, approaching its twentieth anniversary. UMI Arts is an Indigenous Art Centre supporting artists across artistic disciplines. It assists Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to participate in maintaining, preserving and protecting cultural identity through artistic and creative practices. The Board of Directors are all Indigenous. The organisation operates outside the CBD zone in a shopfront gallery premises in the Cairns suburb of Manoora. Umi Arts also creates partnerships with Cairns Regional Council venues to present its major First Nations festival (Big Talk One Fire) at Munro Martin Parklands, as well as important exhibitions at the Court House Gallery.¹³

Arts Queensland manages the Bulmba-ja Arts Centre in Abbott St. Cairns. It is a space that has evolved from a Centre of Contemporary Arts to a First Nations-branded building with the addition of an Indigenous performing arts profile. The centre's rebranding adds Indigenous infrastructure as a façade to a State Government controlled resource. Tenant Miriki Performing Arts¹⁴ appreciates the infrastructure provided for their youth dance activities, particularly the

'safe dance' sprung flooring utilised for regular movement training classes. However, the Centre cannot cater to the scale of production that the group often presents. Larger rehearsal spaces and an adequate food catering option are critical to successful creative development. Rehearsals for their Indigenous dance productions with thirty or more participants are conducted elsewhere.

For more extensive group work, Miriki accesses the Nintiringanyi Cultural Training Centre,¹⁵ of which this group is a subsidiary. Miriki are working towards accredited training provision for young Indigenous participants.

Other Indigenous enterprises provided with tenancy at Bulmb-ja are The Pryce Centre for Culture and Arts¹⁶ and Minjil. Both are active contributors to the sector at local and national levels. Minjil is a Traditional Owners (TO) group that provides cultural performances for events and tourism packages. They represent TOs at cultural, tourism, and civic events through acknowledgement, Welcome to Country and traditional dance gatherings and ceremonies.¹⁷

The centre has non-Indigenous tenants as allies to First Nations values. Tenants NorthSite Contemporary Arts and JUTE Theatre Company collaborated to jointly establish the previously badged Centre of Contemporary Arts through a 2.7 million Millennium Arts Infrastructure grant awarded to them in 2001 by the State Government.¹⁸ The resilience of these two established small to medium arts organisations to embrace Indigenous values and reconcile cultural sensitivities to celebrate a shared contemporary culture is a hallmark of their continuous excellence over more than three decades in Cairns. JUTE's Dare to Dream program employs an Indigenous Producer and aims to bring contemporary theatre with an Indigenous voice to regional communities.¹⁹

NorthSite Contemporary Arts has been intrinsically involved in the rise and success of Indigenous visual arts in the State. The rebranding of the building and the introduction of Indigenous-led tenants to share the achievements is a testament to contemporary and professional arts practice in the region. However, the tenancies report that they are hampered by internal barriers to access and information, suggesting a more transparent operating structure would benefit the efficient use of shared infrastructure in the building.

The Bulmba-ja Arts Centre's apparent integrity may be undermined by the State Government's assigning valuable floor space for non-art sector use. Access for non-tenanted Indigenous arts and cultural groups is limited to ad hoc arrangements. A more appropriate vision of space delegation for dedicated cultural and arts use may be worth advocating for the centre.

The Cairns Regional Council owns the heritage-listed 'School of Arts', which houses the Cairns Museum,²⁰ retail shopfronts, commercial lease spaces, and office spaces occupied by the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF). The building is a significant asset to the sector in the heart of the Cairns CBD, facilitating the continued curatorial

growth of the Cairns Museum and subsidised production offices for CIAF operations. The building was extensively refurbished and extended in 2017. Stakeholders appreciate the amenities of the building and its current contribution to the sector. Some recalled the previous gallery space, c.1907, that occupied a small corner of the site and its role as an intimate, accessible space for emerging and community artists. However, the Cell Art Space, a street-front window space sponsored by Ergon Energy and only a few metres away from the School of Arts on Lake Street, is accessible and currently underutilised.²¹

A Museum Development Officer (MDO) located in the Cairns region is a position associated with the Brisbane-based Queensland Museum²² and supported by the Cairns Regional Council. The position assists the region's museums subsector and the many outlying heritage groups with collections, including those at Gordonvale and Babinda. Regardless, the catchment for this position includes communities in Cape York, Torres Strait, and inland to Etheridge, well beyond the Cairns local government area and hinterland. Artefact storage and conservation are key challenges, along with the appropriate care and maintenance of sensitive Indigenous material and the repatriation requirements of sensitive material from museum holdings worldwide.

The critical need for 'keeping houses' is an ongoing discussion. An important consideration for the Cairns community is the proposed housing of the significant Lit Sung Goong museum collection under the Cairns and District Chinese Association Inc.²³ custodianship. The group is fundraising with plans to begin constructing the Cairns Chinese Culture & Heritage Centre on the Cairns Regional Council Cultural Precinct easement on Greenslopes Street in 2024.

Several stakeholders use the Greenslopes Street Cultural Precinct. This Council easement runs along Saltwater Creek and fringes the botanical parklands in Edge Hill. The Centenary Lakes and Rainforest Boardwalk connect the Cultural Precinct strip to the Tanks Arts Centre and Botanic Gardens. Although the area has some infrastructure challenges due to its wetland setting, it provides subsidised land and facilities to clubs, associations, and organisations that operate in the non-profit, charity, and volunteer spheres.

There are expectations of further building work and tenant additions to the cluster, including the relocation of the Cairns Municipal Band and Cairns and District Chinese Association. The Cairns Cultural Precinct Association umbrellas several groups and clubs that operate buildings and infrastructure on the easement, but not all of them.

Also located on Greenslopes Street is Cominos House²⁴, an historic vernacular high-set Queenslander accessed by the sector for small meetings. It provides minimal storage for non-profit arts groups, including the inclusive theatre group Tropical Arts. However, the building's upstairs meeting rooms do not accommodate disability access.

The Botanic Gardens, Centenary Lakes and Greenslopes Street form a zone with a combined botanical and creative focus. There is potential for extended festival activity or temporary public art curation across this area. Stakeholders have cited an eco-critical art & science biennale or an extension of the Sculpture Botanica²⁵ event, an ongoing project supported by the Friends of Cairns Botanic Gardens²⁶, as essential contributions to consider in this zone. It is also vital to investigate the Federal Government's cultural policy intention to "establish artist residencies to visit Australian World Heritage Sites to produce artworks and tell stories of place and heritage".²⁷

Munro Martin Parklands and the Cairns Performing Arts Centre combine to create a flagship performing arts precinct and 'green stage' parkland at one of the major road intersections in Cairns CBD. It is divided by Florence Street, which some stakeholders have argued should be permanently closed to add further amenity to the cohesive precinct. Road closure can be achieved for significant large-scale civic events, though. The focus of these venues is mainstage touring shows, primarily live music, music tribute, and comedy with a sprinkle of theatre, dance, and circus. However, these stages have been available to stakeholders through resource and access agreements that reduce the venue usage costs and reduce financial risk when presenting locally produced or less mainstream presentations.

UMI Art's annual First Nations arts festival, Big Talk One Fire, has transitioned from Fogarty Park to Munro Martin Parklands. This partnership with Cairns Regional Council has expanded the reach and impact of both the UMI Arts event and the artists and cultural practitioners involved. Cairns Regional Council should foster and extend its partnerships and resource agreements with local producers to maintain, grow, and develop regional performing arts in all its forms.

Circa Cairns is a First Nations-led contemporary circus ensemble developed as an initiative of Brisbane-based Circa.²⁸ It has been critical for the company to adopt an agile attitude when accessing Cairns' arts infrastructure. They operate without a dedicated, suitable rehearsal space under their control and have limited private circus facilities. They have brokered usage agreements with the Cairns Regional Council for office space at the Tanks Arts Centre's pump house and have accessed the rehearsal space at Arts Queensland's Bulmba-ja studio through ad hoc arrangements.

Recognising that access can be a barrier to resources for creative development and production, knowing people in high places has assisted in unlocking infrastructure for the group. When considering the value proposition of Circa Cairns presenting a new work at Cairns Performing Arts Centre, attracting audience numbers to cover costs is not viable. However, the Circa Cairns ensemble is determined to access and provide experiences of contemporary circus to Indigenous communities in Cape York, along with national and international touring engagements.

Several stakeholders access the Shield Street pedestrian mall and Esplanade event lawns to present major arts initiatives. Along with the Cairns Regional Council Reef Lights Festival event, these programs add vibrance and creative interest to the CBD's high-foot-traffic areas. The Indigenous-led *Blaktivation*²⁹ by CIAF and the *Shine on Gimuy* festival by Shine on Productions³⁰ and Queensland Music Festival³¹ indicate a growing investment in large-scale First Nations-led productions and representation. The ability of Cairns Regional Council to facilitate the highly original nature of the events and their scale, builds confidence and capability in the sector. These events attract significant resources to the region and create a memorable cultural, artistic, creative, and interactive experience for residents and visitors to the city.

The representation of First Nations voices and the elevation of Indigenous cultural identity in the region is significant, adding authenticity through what might be considered temporary public art events. These events draw strongly on collaboration and partnerships; for example, CIAF worked with Renew Cairns to place Indigenous art projections into empty shopfronts along Shields Street for its 2023 *Blaktivation* event.

Shine on Gimuy producers worked with Ports North³² and the Salt House³³ restaurant to extend its activity into a festival hub. Cairns Regional Council should consider a significant and dedicated fund to support and nurture the scale and ambition of these activities. More investment is needed through the Cairns Regional Council for partnerships with significant independent placemaking events within their jurisdiction. Philanthropic, corporate, state, and federal funding is limited and incommensurate with the artistic and community benefits these activities promote.

Renew Cairns³⁴ has provided creative producers access to underutilised retail spaces in the Cairns CBD since its engagement by the Cairns Regional Council Economic Development division in 2021. Renew Cairns is a project managed by Renew Australia in its third and final year. The partnership aimed to enliven Cairns City Centre by transforming empty shopfronts into creative spaces. The program has activated ten empty spaces and engaged sixty creative practitioners. It has successfully supported the establishment and visibility of the region's creative makers and artists who have participated.

The program encourages the city's businesses and property owners to participate in the regeneration of the CBD in collaboration with creative practitioners. It provides a mechanism where creative energy can meet urban decline to help produce the required uplift and regeneration that builds towards a vibrant and creative place. It is highly recommended that the Cairns Regional Council consider continuing or instigating a similar program.

The Regional Excellence in Arts and Culture Hubs (REACH)³⁵ and Peninsula Art Educators Association (PAEAA) are local networks of primary and secondary school art teachers who develop and foster partnerships with the sector, emphasising pathways and professional development for students. In-school creative arts programs offer seminal experiences to emerging generations of students in creative arts disciplines. Study tours to capital city galleries and attendance at events like Vivid Sydney demonstrate vital national benchmarks that inspire participation.



The capacity of the REACH hub has diminished with reduced financial support from Education Queensland and support agreements with Cairns Regional Council coming to an end. However, a communications service to disseminate sector information is maintained.

PAEAA has entered into a resource and performance agreement with Cairns Regional Council to stage the Energy Exhibition each year at the Tanks Arts Centre up to 2026.

The Young Company (TYC)³⁶ is an independently run youth theatre company that provides after-school theatre training and in-school classroom packages. TYC was established in 2009 and has survived a COVID-induced downturn to continue its collaborations with Queensland Education and Cairns Regional Council festivals, including the annual Children's Festival.

Technical and Further Education Queensland, Cairns Campus (TAFE) maintains certificate and diploma courses in Visual Arts and Cultural Arts. The courses, specifically for Indigenous people in the Cultural Arts, are acknowledged as a significant precedent for the Indigenous art industry in the region. However, the number of enrolments is declining, with a move to block-mode delivery. This means students are on campus for only a few weeks, with the remaining course activities expected to be completed at home, often in remote communities. This diminishes the value and experience of enrolment and indicates a shift in providing Indigenous Cultural Arts at the facility. TAFE non-Indigenous creative arts are experiencing strong enrolments in visual arts and ceramics. The TAFE represents Cairns' only formal pillar for face-to-face accreditation-focused undergraduate visual arts education. It employs local practitioners, and its contribution to the sector is significant.

The infrastructure and resources available to the sector through local universities have drastically reduced, with James Cook University (JCU)³⁷ and Central Queensland University (CQU) discontinuing complete creative arts degrees and, in the case of JCU, reducing specialised research and teaching staff through redundancies. CQU provides on-campus Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Digital Media degrees in Cairns.³⁸ Additionally, CQU continues to support many stakeholders through community engagement and access to sound recording studios and expertise.

The decline in pathways for creative arts university education in the region is of great concern to stakeholders. The cost of university arts education is high, leaving students with Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) debts³⁹, recoverable through indexed tax repayments to the Federal Government. Secondary school students considering a career in the sector are informed by their career advisors that arts education is an unfavourable investment, citing artists' and creatives' low average incomes. Several stakeholders are investigating micro-credentialing through partnerships with CQU; others are evaluating the process and benefits of becoming Registered Training Organisations through provider accreditation options.

Success in the industry is not predicated on educational qualifications because creative arts disciplines and sector practices are largely unaccredited, and many of these areas are not accountable through unionisation. Cultural practice, industry experience and work-integrated learning placements are tangible pathways for entry into professional practice. However, reliance on internships and placements as entry points requires commensurate resources and capacity within the sector.

The closure of university places in the creative arts shifts the demand and responsibility for sector education and up-skilling onto the regional industry. Expectations shift to those organisations and enterprises within the sector that have or can attract the capacity to deliver entry pathways and professional development. The abandonment of university degree-level creative arts education in the region should be of considerable concern for the Cairns Regional Council and the whole sector. It represents the acceleration of a talent and art worker drain from the region. Cairns Regional Council's major venues and projected plans for a 'Gallery Precinct' would benefit from incorporating programs and strategies for training and professional development for regional practitioners through work-integrated placements and professional development for a broad sector engagement. In doing so, a greater capacity and potential would be developed to service, up-skill expertise, and know-how, to and from the region.

First Nations fashion has emerged from the success of programs such as the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair and the Queensland Government's Backing Indigenous Arts.⁴⁰ The charitable organisation *First Nations Fashion Design*⁴¹ is provided production space at TAFE and receives multi-year operational funding from State and Federal arts funding agencies. The community of practice around Indigenous fashion has grown significantly through dedicated entrepreneurial activity. It is a thriving regional export, with several practitioners represented and profiled in high-impact national and overseas fashion events in Europe and America.

The Cairns Convention Centre⁴² hosts the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair (CIAF)⁴³. The venue was selected due to its capacity and CIAF expansion, which includes gallery booths, art markets, performances, workshops, and gala opening event activities. Many pressures are at play for this signature arts and cultural event. CIAF stakeholders struggle with the venue's ambience, and the rise of Indigenous art fairs in capital cities around Australia all competing for the best work from Queensland Indigenous Art Centres. Participating stakeholders need to see a return on investment when comparing the outcomes of CIAF to other Indigenous art fairs that access more prominent and more affluent markets.

Consequently, CIAF has initiated programs for Queensland's independent Indigenous artists to participate and access representation in the event. The CIAF organisation has extended its capacity by engaging in presentations beyond the art fair format.

The *Blaktivation* event in Shields Street exemplifies this, and it is proposed as an urban activation of First Nations cultural and artistic expression. Additional extension activities include engagements and presentations 'off-site' in other cities.

With the potential to expand the business model further, taking CIAF to new markets might be worth investigating. For example, extending CIAF expertise to establish an annual capital city-based Indigenous-led Art Fair in Meanjin (Brisbane). The Cairns Indigenous Art Fair expresses Indigenous cultural identity and aspires to a city-wide celebration, with signature events in several locations, such as Cairns Regional Council venues and Arts Queensland's Bulmba-ja Arts Centre. Stakeholders' buy-in, including Cairns Art Gallery, UMI Arts, and NorthSite Contemporary Arts, augments the CIAF event by creating a circuit of functions and attendance over the CIAF period. The scale of the CIAF event adds to the sophistication and perception of Indigenous culture and arts offered in Cairns and requires continued and increased support and investment.

Cairns Regional Council Libraries⁴⁴ are an essential resource for the sector. They are intrinsic to the expression of literary arts and writing. They have been used as meeting and workshop spaces and have actively engaged in activities associated with the Cairns Tropical Writers Festival and Youth Week. The Cairns Tropical Writers Festival is an annual event initiated by Tropical Writers Inc. in 2008;⁴⁵ and which is now managed independently. The event

is held at an appropriately sized function centre with a corporate venue partner; for example, the 2023 event utilised the Pullman Cairns International with breakout sessions at Cairns City Library. The three-day festival features panel and conversation sessions with networking and book launches. The Cairns Tropical Writers Festival creates a visible presence for what stakeholders describe as an unseen or under-represented art form. The festival is curated and includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous representation.

Over several years, the Cairns City Library in Abbott Street has been used as a canvas for façade projection during the Cairns Festival's City Lights program. The program has consistently and successfully showcased the work of prominent local artists facilitated by producers previously associated with Sydney-based AGB Events. The high-quality façade projection program is a valuable benchmark for the sector. The façade projection program would benefit from being shifted or extended to the Court House Gallery, refreshing its delivery and reconsidering its impact on the overall festival presentation.



CULTURE, HERITAGE AND PLACE

Cairns has several significant and long-standing associations and clubs catering to art lovers, recreational artists, and hobbyist practitioners. For example, the Cairns Art Society⁴⁶ was formed in 1931 and is currently running two shop-front gallery spaces, CAS Gallery at DFO Shopping Centre, Westcourt and another, *Artist@work Studio & Gallery* in the Lake Street CBD. The volunteer-managed, non-profit association partners with the Cairns Regional Council's Tanks Arts Centre to present the annual *Artists of the North* exhibition, and with Cairns Art Gallery in presenting finalists of the *Cairns Art Society Annual Art Award*.

Other long-standing and active volunteer-managed groups include the Cairns Choral Society⁴⁷, Cairns Little Theatre⁴⁸, Cairns Potters Club⁴⁹ and Visual Arts Association⁵⁰. The Cairns Choral Society has operated for over a century. It maintains a hall in Greenslopes Street Cultural Precinct and partners with the Cairns Performing Arts Centre to present popular musical theatre standards. The Cairns Potters Club has operated for fifty years. It manages kilns, glaze rooms and ceramic production spaces at its clubhouse on a Cairns Regional Council easement in Grove Street. It seeks to expand its facilities with a building extension. The Cairns Potters Club holds a biannual exhibition, *Melting Pot*, at the Cairns Regional Gallery and will move this showcase to the Court House Gallery in 2024. Cairns Little Theatre is a volunteer-run association operating since 1954. It manages the Rondo Theatre within the Greenslopes Street Cultural Precinct.

The increasing membership and use of facilities recorded by these groups represent the value of the volunteer-managed arts and cultural infrastructure. They add a low-stakes social structure that can be measured regarding community cultural health and providing pathways into the sector through supportive community engagement. The volunteer contribution is significant, even immeasurable, considering the decades of collective service these associations and clubs demonstrate. Stakeholders from this subsector report issues with intergenerational succession due to the changing expectations of volunteerism. To offset this, some groups promote youth-oriented programs and entry points. The ongoing support and investment by Cairns Regional Council is justified as the volunteer-run subsector provides substantial value as grass-roots social structures that develop community health and belonging. They are seed beds for developing appreciative audiences and inclusive participation in the arts.

Stakeholders consider the sector to be siloed and unco-ordinated. However, collaborations and partnerships are highly valued. There is evidence of solid roots, but the industry in Cairns needs help making headway. Organisations still need an ongoing mechanism to gather information, collectively celebrate, effectively network and co-design a creative future. There is a high instance of stakeholder

organisations entering collaborations within their art form disciplines. Some of the networks for collaboration are sophisticated and highly focused. For example, JUTE Theatre engages in *Driving and Activating the Regional Theatre Sector (DARTS)*⁵¹. This program builds on collaboration and partnership networks in regional Queensland through cross-regional development, production, and touring programs. As a regional theatre company producing original new works for the stage, JUTE has contributed significantly to local capacity and independence in delivering professional theatre arts. This legacy requires additional enhancement and support to expand its national and international impact and potential.

Stakeholder representatives from NorthSite Contemporary Arts engage in an alliance of 30 Asia-Pacific and Australian festivals and platforms. Melbourne-based AsiaLink manages the Regional//Regional Alliance⁵², seeded in 2022 to support cross-cultural collaborations between Australia and the Indo-Pacific region. NorthSite currently has two staff members representing the Alliance. Miriki Performing Arts has a long-term partnership with the Australian Ballet that has evolved over several years.⁵³ It has exposed the Indigenous youth dance company to new creative forms and extended their experience of dance as an art form. The cross-cultural collaboration brings youth training in Indigenous cultural dance into contact with ballet's artistic vocabulary. This has increased self-esteem, confidence in the company, training, and employment. As part of Brisbane-based Circa Contemporary Circus (Circa), Circa Cairns operates within a framework with highly formalised engagement expectations. As part of the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework (Partnership Framework) administered by Creative Australia, Circa shares in the release of considerable touring funds to 37 national arts companies that have an average turnover of \$1.6 million.⁵⁴ The Partnership Framework benefits organisations with up to 8 years of stable funding to tour presentations of their creative work to Australian audiences. Townsville's DanceNorth 55 is based in northern Queensland and has a stake in the Federal Government's Partnership Framework.

The success of funded small and medium arts organisations leads the way for the region's networking, collaboration, and touring efforts. However, more is needed, and many hurdles must be overcome to inject Cairns' diverse works of excellence into national and international circuits. Effective relationships, networks, and partners can only overcome these obstacles. Opportunities to host national and international art conferences, alliances, markets, and networks must be actively pursued and supported by the Cairns Regional Council to build capacity and awareness of the region as uniquely creative.

The presence of national and international industry events in Cairns, such as the Australian Performing Arts Exchange (APAX) hosted by Cairns Regional Council in 2023, allows the local sector to participate in the national dialogue around culture and arts

delivery and to pitch itself into competitive markets effectively. An event in the style of a multi-venue contemporary art biennale and a curated arts festival that incorporates processes of co-design and sector-wide involvement is a future that many stakeholders would welcome. Such an event would provide a focus and step up to attract potential touring opportunities with national and international producers and presenters.

Other significant areas of collaboration in the sector include strong intra-regional networks that exist between like-minded volunteer-managed groups. For example, Cairns Potters Club and Cairns Little Theatre engage with similar groups in Innisfail and the Tablelands. The Cairns Writers Festival engages with a national network of writers' festivals. More robust regional networks are suggested to benefit groups like Tropical Arts, where shared experiences and opportunities will strengthen the field for inclusive theatre and tactile touring to enable greater regional autonomy.

The Indigenous Art Centre Alliance (IACA)⁵⁶ is a peak body for far north Queensland's regional and remote Indigenous Art Centres. It operates from rented premises in Cairns. This network subsector is affected by many issues, including empowering Indigenous communities through self-determination and Indigenous-led decision-making mechanisms. These art centres have the potential for significant social impact by providing Indigenous community members with pathways into employment and training. Authentic Indigenous art is reported as being "of global cultural significance and an important part of Australia's shared identity" (Kate Fielding, 2021).⁵⁷

IACA has an Indigenous-led board comprising Art Centre managers and Indigenous community representatives. It is concerned with advocating best practices and social enterprise models to its constituent art centres. It works with the Indigenous Art Code and Arts Law to uphold fair and ethical dealings for art centre artists, aligning it with sector standards. IACA maintains relationships with the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrade and assists art centre delegations to overseas destinations. The *Belonging: Stories from Far North Queensland* began as an IACA professional development project; however, the collection of 415 artworks by 103 artists representing 11 Art Centres is part of a significant new acquisition by the National Museum of Australia (NMA). The collection has formed a series of connected exhibitions that will feature at the NMA during 2023 and 2024.⁵⁸

A ROBUST CULTURAL ECONOMY

The Cairns region is recognised for its potential to contribute significantly to Queensland's film industry. Screen Queensland, establishing film studio infrastructure close to the CBD, expresses this potential.⁵⁹ It brings Cairns into a network of Queensland Government-owned film industry infrastructure sites, including the Brisbane and Gold Coast facilities. The Cairns studio opened in 2024. Screen Queensland seeks to leverage the region's strong history of

feature films and small media productions. Stakeholders engaged in the film industry suggest there will be a significant impact on filmmakers, and that the benefits will extend to many areas of the sector, particularly the acting and visual arts disciplines.

The Studio's 1.5-hectare site will accommodate events and tenancies under its roof. This will lift awareness of filmmaking art forms in the region and augment Cairns Regional Council's investment in growing *Understory Film Festival* and *Understory High* activities.⁶⁰ Stakeholders suggest that the Cairns Regional Council consider streamlining the application process for accessing permissions to film at Council locations and provide efficient mechanisms for the sector seeking to communicate with property and infrastructure owners. Over several years, ScreenWork's⁶¹ presence in Cairns has contributed to the success of local practitioners in both above- and below-the-line professional development, capacity building, talent identification and expertise retention in the region.

The Regional Arts Services Network (RASN),⁶² is a devolved arts funding program initiated by the Queensland Government. Proposed as an arts-led soft infrastructure, it includes a Tropical North section. Since its inception, the Tropical North chapter has struggled to provide a coherent or effective set of initiatives that stakeholders can identify. The potential flexibility and responsiveness of a RASN program for the region has appeared slow-moving and risk-averse. Under the non-arts agency of Regional Development Australia, the chapter has gained focused leadership and program development around work-ready training for formerly incarcerated people. It aligns the sector's need for skilled workers with social justice rehabilitation concerns. Support for remote and regional arts practice through RASN offers potential; and the activities to support regional and remote groups and practitioners are essential.

Many stakeholders operating in Cairns provide critical services to remote communities and organisations in the Torres Strait Islands, Cape York Peninsula and Cairns hinterland. The potential for RASN is to bring those producers and providers together to grow current networks and capacity. However, the danger is that RASN Tropical North will create another siloed network disconnected from many stakeholders operating in similar territory.

The Arts Nexus⁶³ organisation's networking and community cultural development capacity has diminished due to lower funding support. Art Nexus has been active in the Cairns region since 1995, starting from a regional economic development initiative. Many seminal programs vital to the region reside in the organisation's 25-year history. It continues to provide innovative solutions, including a podcast recording studio and arts service infrastructure. Though these network and industry development services appear in decline, programs that support and strategically develop professional capacity for the sector are still critical. The decline indicates that new directions and processes for sector development are required.

A functional leadership group convened with representatives of operational subsectors in the field will provide a network structure to advance the capacity of cultural and arts enterprise as a cohesive sector in the region. Obvious subsectors are formed through segmentation along disciplinary/artform divisions. However, subsectors can also be grouped by organisational and operational clustering. Identifying lateral operational and enterprise tiers provides a robust segmentation and cross-fertilisation of the critical interrelated concerns affecting organisations across disciplinary boundaries. The stakeholders show that communities of practice are mainly self-organising and that extended networks follow disciplinary/artform lines. The critical gap is the need for cross-disciplinary conversations forming sector cohesion, transparency, and growth. Therefore, Cairns Regional Council might consider facilitating a leadership group formed to represent practice and enterprise tiers. This network structure has the potential to fast-track the formative aspects of developing the sector.

Cairns lies at the heart of an active, creative region. It is a critical business and operational hub servicing the rich and diverse expressions of a uniquely tropical Australian culture with intrinsic regional cultural, artistic, and creative values. As a city with a strong tropical identity, it has the potential to specialise in the cultural influences, networks, and practices that abound in the region. This includes Indigenous, Melanesian, Pacifica, migrant and settler heritages. Focusing on these unique values will attract national and international attention, augmenting the reef and rainforest spectacle for which the region is currently promoted through tourism channels.

The Cairns area's regional culture and arts sector shows resilience and commitment to place. Its isolation and remoteness, put into the contemporary Australian artistic and creative context, are both strengths and weaknesses. The Cairns region is positioned to develop and express its unique identity with strong traits derived from its place in the tropical/oceanic Pacific. However, the tyranny of distance still prevails, leading to sector challenges around access,

infrastructure, impact, and financial support mechanisms. The cohort of independent artists, makers, and creative producers is an underutilised resource, and there is a need for more open programs and opportunities to engage with critical elements of the sector. After all, the strength, passion, and vision of our region's creative capital, drive our community's cultural health and well-being and its deep expression of place and the role of the arts within it.

Stakeholders identify Cairns Regional Council as leading the sector regarding arts and cultural capacity and community engagement. However, cultural, artistic and value differences must be nurtured and celebrated to develop regional uniqueness and impact. The Cairns region has enjoyed cultural and artistic growth across several creative disciplines, demonstrating tenacity and excellence. The Cairns Regional Council has assisted this growth by developing critical infrastructure and a transparent and achievable strategic focus for its role and delivery within the sector. Stakeholders strongly advocate for continued investment in a cultural strategy and planning tool derived from an inclusive sector consultation and co-design process. While several stakeholders currently perceive a flattening of both activity and freshness in the regional sector, all are optimistic about future growth.

Similarly, several stakeholders are unconvinced that Cairns has earned the title - a city for the arts - suggesting there is still some distance to cover. For example, the co-ordination of meaningful partnerships and collaborations between organisations and agencies, arts-led approaches to community wellbeing, placemaking, self-determination and belonging can be enhanced.⁶⁴ They are indicating that significant gaps remain. However, an overwhelming stakeholder sentiment exists for the continued inclusion and connectedness that arts and culture provide to the community. The sentiment suggests increasing investment in cultural and artistic experiences in the Cairns region will develop public value, well-being, and social inclusion and will also bring economic benefit to the sector.



MAPPING CREATIVITY

THE (CAIRNS) ARTS AND CULTURE MAP

The Cairns *Arts and Culture Map* was developed by Cairns Regional Council and launched in 2018 as a one-stop-shop for information on the city's cultural assets. Council-owned art and cultural facilities are listed, including venues for hire, historic sites, information about festivals and cultural organisations and more. Creative businesses and individual artists create their own entry and can use the site to promote their practice. The map works to promote festivals and places as well as individuals and businesses. In 2020 Cairns Regional Council initiated conversations with Tablelands

Regional, Cassowary Coast Regional and Douglas Shire councils about the possibility of extending the map to cover a wider area, and the *Arts and Culture Map* now includes these jurisdictions. In 2021 these councils launched their own versions of the map connected through a shared interface.

Data collected from 1 January to 27 November 2022 appraising the use of the Cairns Arts and Culture Map show the service continued to grow during the calendar year 2022, with 39 new contributors and a total number of listings at 1,294 (Table 1). Page views have also steadily increased, reaching more than 45K in 2022. Further data on map usage is presented below.

Table 1: Comparative data, 2019 to 2022 (January to November)

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Contributors	39 new, 556 total	496	410	300
Total listings	44 new, 1294 total	1,252	1,080	1,412
Users	12,582	8,452	12,713	14,351
Page views	45,793	35,916	36,021	44,425

Table 2 highlights the importance of specific pages and categories. Although the pages fluctuate with events, Carnival on Collins and Starry Night Cinema are consistently popular pages. The most consistently popular category is Public Art, although Festivals consistently appear in the top four.

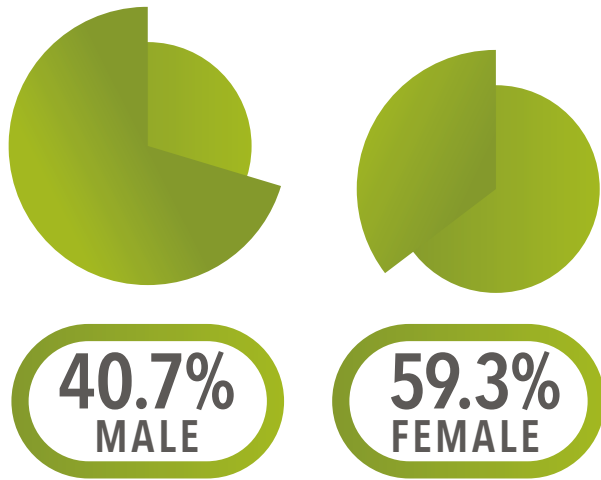
Table 2: Top pages and categories on the Map

Most popular pages in 2022	Most popular pages in 2021	Most popular pages in 2020	Most popular pages in 2019 (Jan to Nov)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yirrganydji Sea Country 2. Umi Arts 3. Carnival on Collins 4. Cairns Historic Chinatown 5. Starry Night Cinema 6. Tjapukai 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CPAC 2. Cairns U3A INC 3. Starry Night Cinema 4. Carnival on Collins 5. Court House 6. Freshwater CWA Hall 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Starry Night Cinema 2. Cairns U3A INC 3. Oktoberfest 2020 4. CPAC 5. Carnival on Collins 6. Cairns Festival 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cairns Festival 2. CPAC 3. Carnival on Collins 4. Cairns Amateurs 5. Great Pyramid Race 6. Cairns Indigenous Art Fair
Most popular categories in 2022	Most popular categories in 2021	Most popular categories in 2020	Most popular categories in 2019 (Jan to Nov)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public Art 2. Festivals 3. Facilities and Spaces 4. Individual Artists 5. Historical Places 6. Cultural Organisations 7. Creative Industries 8. City Collections 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilities and Spaces 2. Public Art 3. Artists 4. Festivals 5. Historical Places 6. City Collections 7. Industries 8. Organisations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public Art 2. Historical Places 3. Facilities and Spaces 4. Festivals 5. Artists 6. Organisations 7. City Collections 8. Industries 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public Art 2. Artists 3. Festivals 4. Facilities and Spaces 5. Historical Places 6. Organisations 7. Industries 8. City Collection

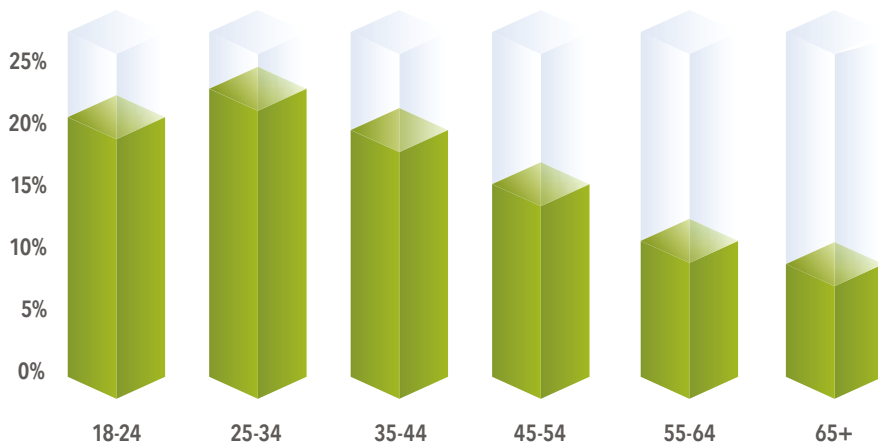
Finally, Figure 1 examines the users of the map by gender and age. Women tend to use the Map more than men, and the most popular age group is 25-34 years, particularly at the end of 2022.

Figure 1: Gender and age of map users in 2021

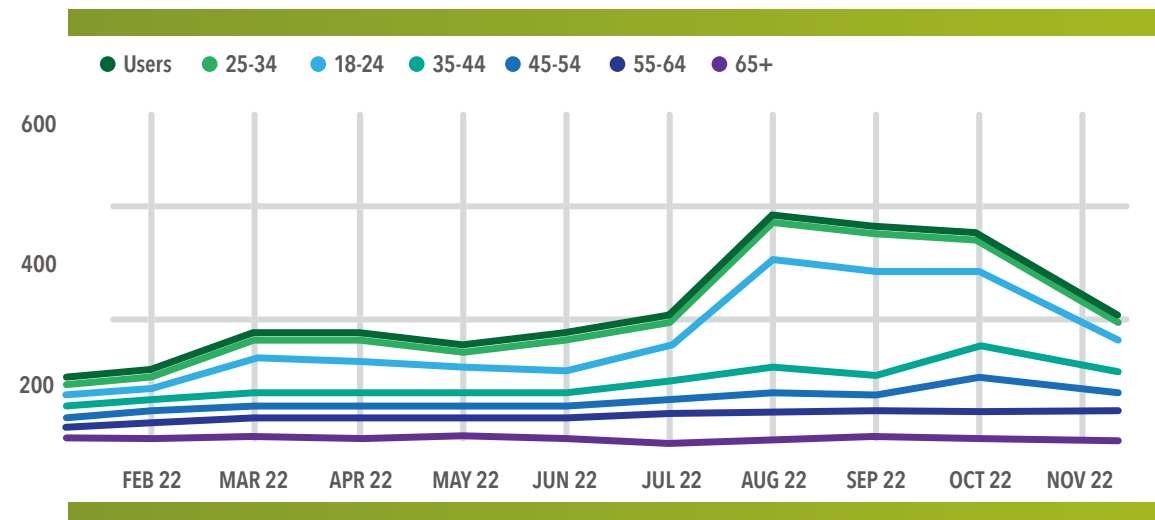
GENDER (24.84% of total users)



AGE (27.57% of total users)



USERS



ART AND CULTURE TOURISM POTENTIAL IN CAIRNS

For a number of years, Central Queensland University has conducted an exit survey of holiday tourists departing the domestic terminal of Cairns International Airport. In June 2018, several questions were added to the survey to develop a deeper understanding of the arts and cultural activities that tourists engage in. In 2022, the Airport survey was reduced to 2 pages focusing on key features of Cairns as a tourism destination. Additional questions were added to the revised survey, in consultation with Cairns Regional Council, to elicit further information about arts and cultural activities and experiences.

This report outlines the results of surveying of tourists departing Cairns from the domestic terminal of the Cairns International Airport, between July and December 2022. While State and international borders have re-opened, the slow return of international tourists to Cairns in 2022 is reflected in low representation of international responses in the findings.

A convenience sampling approach was used. Survey staff approached potential respondents and enquired if they had visited the Cairns region on holiday. If a positive response was given, they were invited to participate in the survey. A total of 329 valid responses were received from domestic and international tourists to the Cairns region.

SURVEY LIMITATIONS

As in any survey of this type, there are a number of limitations that need to be brought to the attention of the reader. The results can only be regarded as a limited snapshot of tourists over the survey period and therefore, care should be taken in generalising the findings. In some instances, survey items were general rather than specific. For example, respondents were asked to indicate the importance of 'cultural experiences' without specifying what types of cultural experiences this implied.

The survey was administered in English. Several significant market sectors, including those tourists travelling via road, rail and sea were not surveyed. The slow return of international visitors in the study period should also be noted. It is also acknowledged that there is some potential for the findings to reflect elements of social desirability bias.

FINDINGS

The results reported in this discussion are based on the responses of 329 tourists, comprised of 258 domestic and 71 international respondents. Further analysis according to first-time or repeat visitation indicates 92 first-time domestic and 166 repeat domestic respondents, while there were 58 first-time international and 13 repeat international respondents.

KEY MARKETS AND VISITATION PATTERNS

The sample comprised 78.4% domestic and 21.6% international respondents. Figure 1 shows the distribution of domestic respondents by State, highlighting the return of interstate tourists to Cairns from key domestic markets in Victoria (29.8%) and NSW (24.8%). Similarly, the slow return of international tourists to the Cairns region is evident. The main countries of origin of international respondents were the United Kingdom (n=29), the USA (n=12), New Zealand (n=6), Denmark (n=5) and Germany (n=4).

Figure 1: Distribution of respondents by state of origin (n=258)

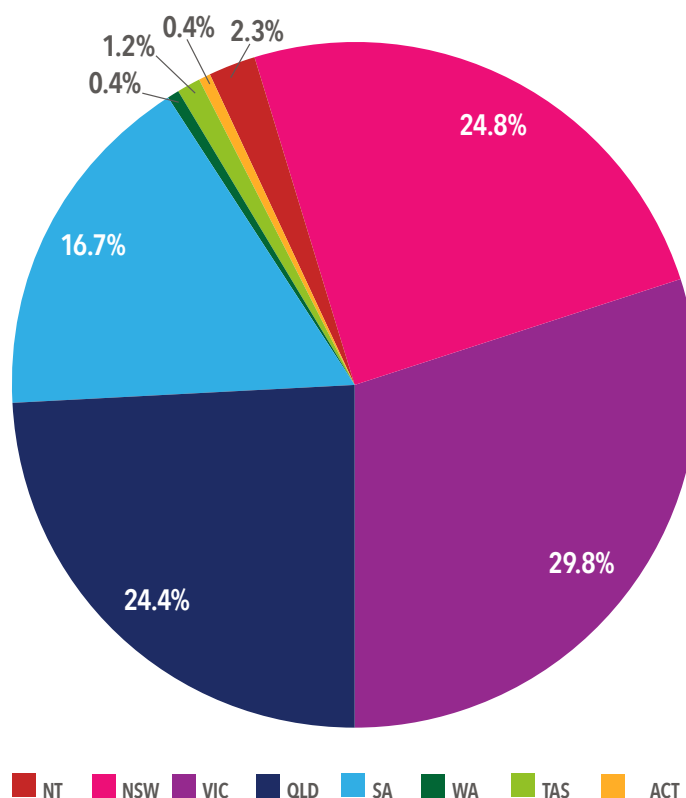


Table 1 shows the breakdown of the sample by gender, origin (domestic and international), and visitation (first-time and repeat). The majority of both first-time and repeat domestic and international respondents was female. The majority of domestic respondents had visited Cairns previously, while international respondents were more likely to be visiting for the first time.

Table 1: Respondents by gender, origin and visitation (n=326)*

	Male	Female	Total
Domestic visitors			
First-time	20 (23%)	71 (42%)	91
Repeat	67 (77%)	97 (58%)	164
International visitors			
First-time	21 (78%)	37 (84%)	58
Repeat	6 (22%)	7 (16%)	13
Total respondents	114	212	326

*3 domestic respondents did not indicate gender

The average length of stay in Cairns by first-time domestic respondents was six nights while the average length of stay of repeat domestic respondents was seven nights. The average length of stay of international respondents was slightly higher at 8 nights.

HOLIDAY DESTINATION SELECTION

Respondents were asked to indicate the experiences they regarded as important when selecting a holiday destination. Results are reported in **Table 2**. Nature-based experiences and national parks were the two most important experiences for first-time domestic and international respondents. While nature-based experiences were important for repeat domestic respondents, dining experiences were more highly sought after than visits to national parks. The results also indicate that a significant percentage of respondents looked for destinations that offer cultural experiences, which was highest amongst internationals (63.4%), and slightly more important for first-time domestic (44.6%) respondents than repeat domestic respondents (39.2%). Museums/galleries and festivals were of greater interest to repeat domestic respondents than the other two segments. The Arts, defined as performing and/or visual, were not a major factor in destination selection but were more important to international (14.1%) and repeat domestic (12%) respondents.

Table 2: Importance of experiences when selecting a holiday destination

Activities	Domestic First-time n=91	Domestic Repeat n=166	Internationals n=71
Nature-based experiences	78.3%	63.9%	83.1%
Visit national parks	65.2%	52.4%	71.8%
Local food	57.6%	56.6%	50.7%
Dining experiences	47.8%	62.7%	40.8%
Cultural experiences	44.6%	39.2%	63.4%
Activities for children	30.4%	19.9%	8.5%
Special events	20.7%	22.9%	15.5%
Coffee culture	15.2%	21.1%	19.7%
Museums/galleries	15.2%	18.7%	15.5%
Nightlife experiences	14.1%	18.1%	25.9%
Festivals	7.6%	15.1%	11.3%
Arts (performing/visual)	6.5%	12.0%	14.1%

MOTIVATIONS TO TRAVEL TO CAIRNS

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of a range of motivations to visit the Cairns region, using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = least important and 5 = most important. The following tables show the breakdown of the top motivations to travel to Cairns by first-time domestic, repeat domestic and international respondents. The results indicate that although arts and cultural activities were not highly motivating factors for travelling to Cairns, these were important considerations in selecting a holiday destination (see *Holiday destination selection*) and that some respondents participated in arts and cultural activities whilst in the Cairns region (see *Participation in arts and cultural activities*).

Table 3 ranks the importance of motivations to visit the Cairns region for first-time domestic respondents. 'Rest and relaxation' was the highest ranked motive, followed by 'to have fun', and 'visit the Great Barrier Reef'. To 'experience Aboriginal culture', 'visit heritage and historical sites', 'local community markets', 'visit arts and cultural spaces' and 'the event that I attended' were ranked 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 respectively.

Table 3: Motives to visit the Cairns region for first-time domestic respondents (n=91)

Rank	Motivation	Mean
1	Rest and relaxation	4.52
2	To have fun	4.50
3	Visit the Great Barrier Reef	4.34
4	Enjoy the tropical lifestyle	4.30
5	Experience the natural environment	4.29
6	Spend time with my family	4.19
7	See Australian wildlife	4.11
8	Climate	4.08
9	Visit National Parks	4.00
10	The price matched my budget	3.98
11	Visit the Wet Tropics Rainforest	3.97
12	Snorkelling or diving	3.71
13	Experience Aboriginal culture	3.52
14	Visit heritage and historical sites	3.48
15	Local community markets	3.28
16	Visit arts and cultural spaces	3.07
17	The event that I attended	2.62

Table 4 shows the top motivation for repeat domestic respondents was 'to have fun', followed by 'rest and relaxation' and the 'to enjoy the tropical lifestyle'. Domestic respondents ranked to 'visit heritage and historical sites', 'experience Aboriginal culture', 'local community markets', 'visit arts and cultural spaces' and 'the event I attended' as 12, 13, 15, 16 and 17 respectively.

Table 4. Motives to visit the Cairns region for repeat domestic respondents (n=166)

Rank	Motivation	Mean
1	To have fun	4.49
2	Rest and relaxation	4.46
3	Enjoy the tropical lifestyle	4.20
4	Experience the natural environment	4.13
5	Climate	4.10
6	Spend time with my family	4.09
7	The price matched my budget	3.80
8	Visit National Parks	3.65
9	Visit the Great Barrier Reef	3.49
10	Visit the Wet Tropics Rainforest	3.48
11	See Australian wildlife	3.45
12	Visit heritage and historical sites	3.26
13	Experience Aboriginal culture	3.15
14	Snorkelling or diving	3.14
15	Local community markets	3.08
16	Visit arts & cultural spaces	2.87
17	The event that I attended	2.71



Table 5 shows the top motivation for international respondents was 'to have fun', followed by 'experience the natural environment', and 'visit the Great Barrier Reef'. The main motivations for this segment align with the iconic attractions and experiences that Cairns is known for internationally. International respondents ranked to 'experience Aboriginal culture', 'visit heritage and historical sites', 'local community markets', 'visit arts and cultural spaces' and 'the event I attended' as 12, 14, 15, 16 and 17 respectively.

Table 5. Motives to visit the Cairns region for international respondents (n=71)

Rank	Motivation	Mean
1	To have fun	4.66
2	Experience the natural environment	4.41
3	Visit the Great Barrier Reef	4.39
4	See Australian wildlife	4.36
5	Snorkelling or diving	4.11
6	Rest and relaxation	4.07
7	Enjoy the tropical lifestyle	4.05
8	Visit the Wet Tropics Rainforest	4.02
9	Visit National Parks	3.95
10	Climate	3.88
11	Spend time with my family	3.48
12	Experience Aboriginal culture	3.46
13	The price matched my budget	3.45
14	Visit heritage and historical sites	3.39
15	Local community markets	3.20
16	Visit arts & cultural spaces	2.89
17	The event that I attended	2.54



DISPERSAL AND VISITATION AROUND THE CAIRNS REGION

Respondents were asked to indicate the locations, including specific sites, they visited whilst in the Cairns region. Results are shown in **Table 6**. Kuranda and Port Douglas were frequented by at least two-thirds of first-time domestic respondents, while repeat domestic and international respondents preferred the Cairns Esplanade and Cairns Central Shopping Centre.

While visitation was low to several arts and cultural venues, there were preferences between segments. The Cairns Art Gallery was visited by approximately 10% of domestic respondents, regardless of visit, but only half as many international respondents. The Court House was more popular among domestic respondents rather than internationals, while the Tanks Art Centre was more highly frequented by repeat domestic respondents.

Table 6. Locations visited by domestic and international respondents (n=326)

Place visited	Domestic First-time n=92	Domestic Repeat n=166	International n=71
Kuranda	69.6%	42.2%	56.3%
Port Douglas	67.4%	53.6%	56.3%
Cairns Central Shopping Centre	59.8%	59.0%	64.8%
Cairns Esplanade	58.7%	65.1%	63.4%
Skyrail	58.7%	26.5%	45.1%
Kuranda Scenic Railway	55.4%	21.7%	38.0%
The Daintree	50.0%	29.5%	45.1%
Palm Cove	48.9%	47.6%	36.6%
The Night Markets	44.6%	33.1%	31.0%
Mossman Gorge	43.5%	31.9%	35.2%
The Lagoon	23.9%	22.3%	25.4%
Rusty's Market	23.9%	21.1%	22.5%
The Aquarium	21.7%	19.3%	11.3%
The Botanic Gardens	16.3%	19.9%	18.3%
Atherton Tablelands	13.0%	24.1%	12.7%
Cairns Art Gallery	9.8%	10.8%	5.6%
Court House	6.5%	7.2%	1.4%
Mission Beach	5.4%	7.2%	15.5%
Cairns Museum	5.4%	3.6%	2.8%
Performing Arts Precinct (CPAC, Munro Martin Park)	4.3%	3.0%	2.8%
Tanks Arts Centre	3.3%	6.0%	1.4%
Cairns Library	3.3%	2.4%	5.6%
Tjapukai*	0.0%	1.2%	2.8%

PARTICIPATION IN ARTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Respondents were asked about their participation in arts and cultural activities during their visit to the Cairns region. Results are reported in **Table 7**. Of the sample, 14% indicated participating in an arts and cultural activities, with higher participation by repeat domestic respondents. This participation is slightly higher than pre-COVID rates (11%) and during COVID (6%).

Table 7. Participation in arts and cultural activities (n=326)

Respondents	Count %
First-time domestic	12 (4%)
Repeat domestic	22 (7%)
International	11 (3%)
Total	45 (14%)

Respondents were asked to name the arts or cultural activities they participated in. **Table 8** shows the range of activities reported by respondents, with Aboriginal arts and cultural experiences the most popular. This corresponds with previous findings that demonstrated the popularity of Indigenous arts and culture activities and experiences. Several local events and experiences (Festival Parade and Art Gallery, and Carols in the Park) were also identified with arts and culture, as well as examples where the link to arts and culture is less clear (Lagoon at Cairns and laser light reef experience). These responses are included in the report to indicate the types of activities some respondents appear to regard as arts or culture related.

Overall, the results indicate that Indigenous arts and cultural activities were more popular than other arts and cultural events. This may reflect the commercial nature of the Indigenous arts and cultural activities. Several of the other arts and cultural activities mentioned by respondents are either free, do not appear on commercial tourism booking web platforms or respondents did not recall the exact name of the activity such as galleries and markets.



Table 8. Arts and cultural activities participated in

Activity	Domestic First-time n=91	Domestic Repeat n=166	International n=71
Festival Parade (festival not specified)	1	0	0
Art Gallery (location not specified)	1	2	3
Cairns Art Gallery	0	0	1
Aboriginal cultural activities	5	1	0
Japanese Festival	0	1	0
Skyrail - Pamagirri Tour	1	1	0
Cairns Festival	0	3	0
Torres Strait Islander Tombstone Ceremony	0	2	0
Daintree Aboriginal Tour	1	1	0
Daintree River Cruise	0	1	0
Port Douglas Food Festival	0	1	0
Green Island	0	1	0
Laser light reef experience	1	0	0
Lights in centre (not specified)	0	1	0
Mossman Gorge Nature Walk	1	0	0
Smoking ceremony	0	1	0
Walkabout Adventure Tour	0	1	1
Carols in the Park	0	0	1
Down Under Tour	0	0	1
Great Barrier Reef	0	0	1
The Lagoon at Cairns	0	0	1

SATISFACTION WITH ARTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Respondents who participated in an arts and cultural activity were asked to indicate how satisfied they were on a scale of 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied. There was an overwhelmingly positive response, with 43.5% very satisfied and 41% satisfied with their experience. A small percentage (4%) indicated being dissatisfied with their arts and cultural experience. Comparison of satisfaction by segments showed overall high satisfaction rates, which tended to be slightly higher for first-time domestic and international respondents.

ADDITIONAL ARTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Respondents were asked about the types of arts and culture they would like to see offered in the Cairns region. Open ended responses were analysed and grouped by main themes, shown in **Table 9**. Most responses indicated demand for more Aboriginal cultural experiences, of various forms, as well as performance art experiences, local and accessible city experiences. A few responses also referred to outdoor recreation experiences as well as performing arts.

Table 9: Additional arts and cultural activities

Activity	First-time visitor
Aboriginal cultral experiences	Aboriginal culture
	Indigenous dancing
	Indigenous activities
	More Aboriginal experiences, food, bushtucjers, dance, smoking ceremonies
	More Aboriginal run activities
	More Indigenous tours under 4 hours long
	Non-gammin blak tours, it's hard to know what's good for the community and what's not
	We'd have loved a local/Cairns based easy access Aboriginal history tour
Performances	Classical Music
	Theatre
	Dancing
	Performing Arts
Outdoor recreation	Camping activities in the region
	Ocean knowledge
	Reef tour snorkelling
	More theme parks for the youth to prevent crime
Music 'In the city'	Live music
	Street music
Local arts/culture	Expension of local arts/artist walks
Visual arts (free)	Free light art like Van Gogh
Culinary	Cooking classes

PROMOTION OF CAIRNS' ARTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Respondents were also asked their opinion on if Cairns was actively promoting arts and culture activities. While 44% indicated 'Yes', Cairns was promoting arts and culture, another 44% were not sure. No differences were identified when comparing responses from domestic and international respondent segments.

RATING OF CAIRNS AS AN ARTS AND CULTURE DESTINATIONS

All respondents were asked to rate Cairns as an arts and culture destination. While 23% indicated 'no opinion', 35% indicated it was 'very good', while another 31% indicated it was 'good'. There were no differences across domestic and international respondent segments.

DISCUSSION

Results outlined in **Table 2** show that over a third of domestic and two-thirds of international respondents considered the availability of cultural opportunities as an important factor in their selection of holiday destinations. However, **Tables 4, 5** and **6** indicate that arts and cultural motivations, such as 'experience Aboriginal culture' and 'visiting arts and cultural spaces', were not ranked as significant motivations for visiting Cairns. This may explain why there is a much lower level of reported participation in these activities, as outlined in **Table 7**. Interestingly, when asked what types of additional arts and cultural activities they would like to see in Cairns, respondents indicated more Aboriginal cultural experiences as well as outdoor activities and performances.

The results indicate an apparent gap between the importance of the availability of cultural activities as a motivation for selecting a destination and participation in events and activities of this type in Cairns. This may be explained by the finding that highlighted how almost half of the sample thought that Cairns was promoting arts and culture, while an equal percentage of respondents were 'not sure'. These findings in this report indicate a lack of awareness, or a perceived lack of availability, around the types of arts and cultural activities in the Cairns region. Further research is required to provide insights into this problem.



CASE STUDY

CAIRNS' IMAGE AS AN ARTS AND CULTURAL DESTINATION OF NORTHERN AUSTRALIA: A PLACE BRAND CO-CREATION STUDY WITH YOUNG ARTISTS

SoARTS spoke with Yee Mun Loong, a James Cook University Master of Philosophy (2024) research student, who in this interview shares insights into his study of place brand co-creation with young artists. Yee Mun elaborates the background and objectives of his research, as well as the methods he used to co-create an arts and culture image of Cairns. Yee Mun can be contacted at yemun.loong@my.jcu.edu.au.

Can you share with us what prompted you to conduct the study?

I remember a few pivotal experiences demonstrating how place branding can be highly relevant for cities and regions. Over the years, I have found that embracing and weaving the concept of arts and culture into the fabric of cities can result in a more liveable and enjoyable place. There has also been an escalating recognition of, and reliance upon, arts and culture as a means for cities to

differentiate and brand themselves from other places. This is of the view that a place can distinguish itself through the unique culture, values, and characteristics of local peoples. Aiming to become the Arts and Cultural Capital of Northern Australia (ACCNA), Cairns is an internationally renowned destination endowed with images of natural beauty and an attractive lifestyle. From a place branding perspective, the image of Cairns as a popular and well-known holiday destination is more than the current impressions and perceptions of 'reef and rainforest' as it is commonly communicated and perceived. However, it could be argued that Cairns has progressed immensely in the last 20 years and change is noticeable, and such transformation is evidenced at the street level. These multi-dimensional qualities of the evolving image and identity of Cairns require further deliberation, as cities by nature are constantly in a state of change. As such, the study argues that to capture the attention and raise the awareness of different audiences in destination branding, Cairns should foster and even solicit a multitude of images and identities reflecting and capturing the plurality of the existing residents' place experiences, meanings and articulations.



What are the main objectives of the study?

This study investigates how the image of a city can be enhanced and re-imagined through co-creation with its residents via the perspectives of young artists. The research unpacks the evolving arts and culture images of Cairns in a *hypothetical* place brand co-creation process with artists through meaning-making dialogues as expressed and manifested via place experiences in interviews and focus groups. The concept of place brand co-creation elaborated here explores the relations between people, meanings, and the physical characteristics of places as an ongoing, open-ended awareness creation process. In this sense, artists as residents play an essential role in place brand co-creation as they live and interact with the city. This highlights the significance of internal stakeholders such as the residents and stresses that place brands are not established through conventional communications but are co-created by people through actions and interactions collectively.

What research method you employed?

The study is structured as a multi-method exploratory, visual analysis to understand the meanings and experiences young artists ascribe to Cairns' arts and culture places. Specifically, the research uses photo-elicitation, semi-structured interviews and a focus-group co-creation workshop with ten (10) young artists. This process of dialogue and knowledge creation with young artists shaped collective, co-created concepts and meanings of Cairns as the Arts and Cultural Destination of Northern Australia.

What are your key research findings?

The voices of local artists are crucial in the bottom-up place brand co-creation. By understanding their mental and photographic images provided for this research, the findings revealed that the collective imagery of Cairns' arts and culture characters coalesce under the three themes of *people, environment, and way of life*. These co-created collective imagery and narratives of *people,*

environment, and way of life constitute the backbone of artists' place stories with place experiences and meanings. As such, it is the stories that originate from the people living in the destination that could be most crucial in influencing visitor perceptions and impacting travel decisions. Hence, the research suggests that these *place stories* shared by the artists could potentially contribute to the foundation of a wider enhanced place brand narrative and place brand image of the Cairns region beyond the current image of 'reef and rainforest'. Place branding should place tourism destinations within socio-cultural contexts and put the residents' place meanings and experiences into the production of place. The findings also support the current trend towards leveraging real people and experiences in place branding communications, moving away from overly fabricated or polished narratives.

How relevant is your study to future place branding in Cairns?

It is apparent that building and maintaining a successful place brand image or identity is not an easy task as genuine place branding takes time to attain. This study has great potential to fill a gap in the understanding of the arts and culture image of Cairns growing from the community, ground-up grassroots level. In particular, it contributes to the foundational place branding framework for a future city's re-imagining initiatives with the potential to profile real people as citizen/resident brand ambassadors. Having outlined the young artists' arts and culture image of Cairns, perhaps future research could incorporate wider stakeholder participation so that broader perspectives are voiced and represented. Only by understanding how these images are experienced and shared can we gather a more rigorous picture of the arts and culture scene of Cairns. This is in line with the idea that place brands should be developed by multiple stakeholders, including residents, is becoming more and more prevalent in academia and practice. The diversity of place and people was considered an asset that contributes to the development of unique and strong place brand.



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