

# 2021



arts UPPER HUNTER





## acknowledgement of country

Arts Upper Hunter acknowledges the First Nations people who are the traditional custodians of the lands and waters on which we live and work.

We recognise their deep connection to country and their ongoing cultural and creative practices.

We pay our respects to the members of those communities and to Elders, and traditions, past, present and emerging.

Arts Upper Hunter is committed to supporting and celebrating Aboriginal-led arts and cultural development in our region, undertaking meaningful consultation with Aboriginal people and seeking collaborative participation by Aboriginal people in our programs.

# artsUPPER HUNTER

## us

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

## our vision

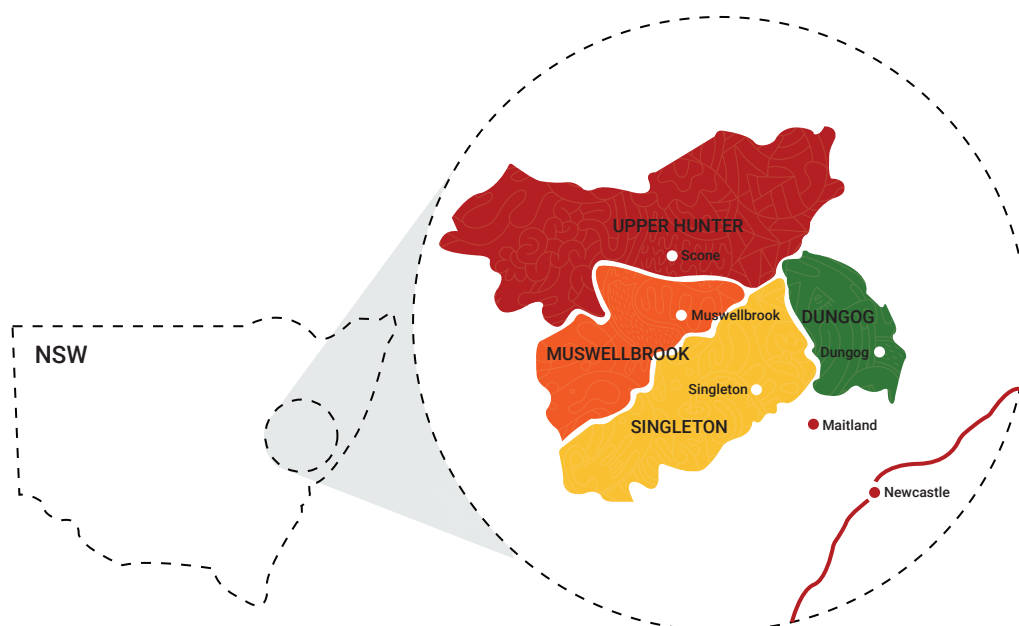
A region which embraces all arts and cultural practice as part of its social, economic and environmental development.

## our mission

To provide, support and promote arts and cultural opportunities for all people in the Upper Hunter Region.

## our values

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





## From the Chair:

Like 2020, 2021 was a difficult year for our creative communities. The pandemic impacted on so many in our region and curtailed so many creative events. We know that COVID-19 will continue to have an impact on the sector -- in the meantime we look forward to contributing to the sector's recovery right here, in our region.



## Highlights of 2021 include:

- delivery of the Rescue and Restart program, an excellent program across the region that managed to take place before the lockdowns in the second half of the year
- employment of John O'Brien as the new Arts Upper Hunter Executive Director, following the sad loss of Mark Reedman
- finalisation of an ambitious Arts Upper Hunter 2022-24 Strategic Plan that will see AUH working "from villages to townships to Shires, from small groups of weavers to cultural groups and First Nations people, from like-minded music-lovers and performers to health and education providers, community centres and land managers."

**Arts Upper Hunter gratefully acknowledges the support of Create NSW. We continue to align our work with the six Priority Service Areas which have come from Create NSW's Review of NSW Arts & Cultural Sector Service Needs with particular emphasis on:**

- increasing the capacity of artists to manage, produce and market their work
- better engagement with First Nations artists, arts organisations and communities
- more targeted support for and engagement with artists, arts organisations and communities from the NSW Government's other priority populations including Regional NSW, people with disability, people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, and young people.

Arts Upper Hunter also has a number of local priorities. We continue to work with the four Councils in the region, namely Dungog, Muswellbrook, Singleton and Upper Hunter – they are key partners in infrastructure, programs and opportunities, and are a vital part of our funding mix. We are also working to increase and diversify our income. And we are building on existing partnerships and projects ... and developing new ones.

I would like to thank members of the Arts Upper Hunter Board who contributed their energy, talents and time to assist in the governance of AUH throughout 2021. The Board would also like to acknowledge the diverse skills and significant contribution of the staff during this particularly difficult year, namely Sandra Reichel, John O'Brien, Carolyn O'Brien, Anna Rankmore and the late Mark Reedman.

Thanks as well to Regional Arts NSW, to the contractors and helpers who have supported Arts Upper Hunter and all those individuals, community groups and other organisations that have contributed to the success of the creative energy of the Upper Hunter Region during 2021.

**Ivan Skaines, Chair, Arts Upper Hunter**

# 2021... and beyond

## From the Executive Director:

The year 2021, the second year of the Covid pandemic, was a bittersweet one both for the creative communities of our region and for Arts Upper Hunter itself. The lows were very hard; the highs amazing.

In February AUH's Executive Director Mark Reedman passed away unexpectedly. This larger than life man, with a big heart and booming voice, will be sadly missed.

Into his shoes stepped Carolyn O'Brien as Acting ED. At the time, we were looking to oversee one of our largest ever programs, a cache of events and gigs spread across the region as part of the NSW Government's Rescue & Restart program. Carolyn, accompanied by photographer Anna Rankmore, ranged around the Upper Hunter LGAs, supporting events. Rescue and Restart funded music, ceramics, visual arts, dance, theatre, photography, a museum assessment and more.

Anna Rankmore became a valuable member of the team. She created videos introducing our board members (with her own original music), and began photographing cultural and heritage destinations across the region. These will be the core of a longer-term project, a rack of cultural trails traversing the region.

The recent struggles of the arts and creative industries are well documented. In the first half of 2021, events were still going ahead, under the burdens of social distancing, masks, attendance limits and late cancellations. More than once the government stepped in financially, though not everyone could access the grants or assistance on offer. The arts communities supported each other, when they could.

Then in July, Covid returned in its Delta and later Omicron form and lockdowns brought most everything to a halt. Once again creative locals did their best. Sometimes they went digital. Some continued to produce work, making, doing, expressing, while waiting for things to "finally" reopen.

In September AUH got its third Executive Director of the year, myself. I was warmly welcomed by a very active Board Of Management and by our inestimable Office Manager, Comms, Bookkeeper and Repository of Arts Upper Hunter lore, Sandra Reichel. Sandra has had a roller coaster of a year like the organisation itself and still maintains her joie de vivre amidst it all. She is quite the rock.





Building on Carolyn's work, and unable to get out and about in the region, AUH spent the last three months of 2021 putting together our strategy for 2022-24. In coming years we will be focusing on more engagement, more digital, more accessibility, more collaboration, more First Nations opportunities, more revenue so we can make some big-picture dreams come true ... And, of course, more of the things Arts Upper Hunter has always done well, connecting artists, advising grant applicants, putting events together, advocating for the creative industries, promoting opportunities and happenings, and ensuring this region doesn't miss out.

Our biggest partner and funding body, Create NSW, seems to have taken to heart the message of its Rescue & Restart program: if the money's there, the arts can thrive. In October we learnt that our core funding was going up, giving us a little more breathing space. Initially we used the extra dollars to fund a new Aboriginal Arts Officer position.

Our four Local Councils were also brilliant partners not only in terms of funding but assistance wherever it was needed. Many stepped up and helped us through this tough year, from job interviewers to land councillors to gallery managers.

Every village and town in the region is unique. Each one is already a Brilliant Place in its own way - but what are the strengths, what's missing, who's struggling in the New Normal, who can help take a lead, and how can the creative industries grow and integrate even more into the societies they enrich so much? And how can Arts Upper Hunter help?

That, as ever, is the mission.

**John O'Brien, Executive Director, Arts Upper Hunter**



*"WE ARE SOMETIMES A PIPELINE,  
SOMETIMES A TOOLBOX"*

# “oh yes”

It was a year of lockdowns, masks and closures, social distancing, cancellations and serial reschedulings. So the windows where things *could* go ahead were all the more important. And there were plenty of artists keen to say “oh yes” and grasp those rare opportunities. One enormous help was the Rescue & Restart funding from the NSW Government, which funded between eight and a dozen events, depending on how you counted! And there were other “oh yes” activities along the way...

This one-off program funded by the NSW Government through Create NSW gave a number of creative community groups across the region a job in the arm when it was needed. Motown burst from venues in every LGA, raku pottery was fired, a weather-worn museum was assessed for a path forward, and much more. The Restart program happened quickly but the results were clear.

What "Restart" funding has revealed is how much can be done when money and Local Knowledge are given the chance to work together.

**Motown with the Groovehunters** concert tour of the region. Four Shires, four venues, four Sundays in May and over 440 people enjoying the sounds of the Groovehunter Band from the Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music, plus supporting acts Singleton Town Band in Singleton and Rory Ellis in Dungog.



Scone Arts & Crafts **Photographic Portrait Workshop** with Peter Eastway, David Oliver and John Wallace - and some excellent skill-raising for over 20 people - in March. Watch Anna Rankmore's YouTube video to see how the experience went [see inside back cover].

AWKWARD, **Contemporary Dance Work** by Catapult Dance, directed by Cadi McCarthy & Craig Bary and reaching 92 attendees. In March in Merriwa, Muswellbrook, Singleton and Clarence Town, dormant spaces were reactivated and audiences given new experiences. In Claro an influx of out-of-towners filled the venue.

**Family Raku Firing Day** in June for the Muswellbrook Ceramic Group and over 60 participants. The event included a Members' Exhibition and Sale. The drifting smoke and hands-on decoration and glazing were further enhanced by Linda Camac's graphite technique demonstrations and Katrina Grabham's mellow harp.

Murrurundi Arts & Crafts Council organised two workshops, **Indigenous Weaving** led by Speaking In Colours and a **Sculpture Workshop** from the inspirational Trevor Weekes. Delightful works and meditative process for the 20 participants.







**Significant Assessment** of the Rural Life Museum at Lake Glenbawn. Closed since the mid 1980s, this important collection's survival received a boost in May from a professional review of its many items by Roslyn Russell Museum Services.

**Lift-Off: The PAD@The Royal** March to May in Dungog. New community group, new performance space. Four gigs christened the space: Funk soul with the Sneaky Freakers; Jazz with Another World Duo + Craig Scott; Folk with Joe McNulty, Michael Kelly, Hugh Merrell, Russ Redford & Tracy Dundon; and Eclecticology with The De Factos, Lenny Burgess & Martyn Robinson. 20 musos, 322 in the audience.

**A Fresh Start**, six music and art workshops with 50 taking part over the New Year at Dashville near Belford, Singleton LGA. A great addition to this family friendly music venue's year-flipping event.

**Seven Art Workshops** presented by seven presenters for the Dungog Art Society. Some 60 workshopppers enjoyed Charcoal Life Drawing, Expressive Abstracts, 3D Colour Model, LinoCut, Landscapes in Oils and Using Spirit Medium with Pastel.

**Tantrum Outpost** at Dungog High School, where presenter Amy Morris from Tantrum Youth Arts engaged in conversations and a couple of "taster" workshops in theatre and performance that garnered raves from staff and 20+ students. COVID prevented the second part of the program, an intensive theatre production process over two terms, from happening - but that's OK as it will happen in 2022.

EVENT	EVENTS/SHOWS	PERFORMERS/ FACILITATORS	AUDIENCE
Tour of AWKWARD	4	8	92
Tour of Motown and support acts	4	38	440
Performing Artists Dungog concerts	4	20	322
Raku Firing Day	1	4	60
MDI Arts & Crafts Council	2	2	20
Scone Arts & Crafts	1	3	20
Dungog Art Society Workshops	6	7	64
Dashville Workshops	6	6	50
Tantrum Youth Arts	2	2	20
Significant Assessment of Museum of Rural Life	a 5-day assessment process	2	0







A cornerstone of regional arts for donkey's years, 2021's CASP applications closed in August 2020. Arts Upper Hunter managed the promotion and assessment process and all six projects ran despite the many, many obstacles! The aim with CASP is to bring creative community activity via small but strong projects. Crucially, the money is primarily spent on paying artists and presenters. This grant is funded by the NSW Government through Create NSW.

**Warriors Hip Hop Workshop** for Upper Hunter Community Services. A blast of an engagement for people with disability - the results speak for themselves [see inside back cover].

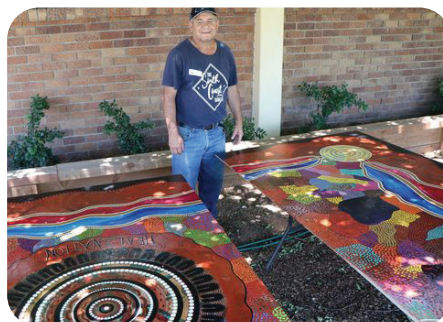
**Indigenous Music Workshop** for Upper Hunter Shire Council. Esteemed didgeridoo player and painter Richie Lawton led this crafting, painting and didge-playing activity for young Upper Hunter Shire people.

**Mural Project** for Muswellbrook South Public School P&C Association. Richie and Sue Lawton led a project at the school that resulted in a vibrant mural with the theme of "Heal Country" for the school grounds.

**Ephemeral Sculpture.** A six-day immersion in the Dungog Common by Newcastle Earth Artist, Gavin Vitullo, resulted in an imposing work that can be found on the Dungog Common ... for a while at least!

**Bringing Aboriginal Language and Culture to Life** for Denman Public School P&C Association after many delays resulted in a collection of new artworks for the school.

**Combating COVID with Creative Workshops** for Murrurundi Arts & Crafts Council. A series of well-received workshops designed to lift community spirits through engagement in the arts. Two sculpture workshops and a leadlight workshop were held and there was keen interest in more.





# auh microgrants

These rolled out in 2020 during the first blast of lockdowns - small grants designed to help individuals and groups affected by Covid. Precisely focused on real needs and “next-step” career moves, they look set to become part of Arts Upper Hunter’s arsenal into the future. Two were postponed till 2021.

**Acoustic Music** at Callicoma Hills, Singleton LGA. First Covid, and then poor weather, forced this small eco-tourism business to “pivot” their plan for a series of high-quality outdoor acoustic gigs into one well-received indoor event. Five musicians entertained over 70 people (following Covid-safe rules) in one of Singleton’s only live gigs for a year.

**Artwork** for Can Assist Merriwa, Upper Hunter Shire. With fundraising activities hard to come by, this local charity that provides financial assistance to people diagnosed with cancer in their district, commissioned a piece for auction by local artist Sarah Bishop.



# gallery auh



At short notice, Arts Upper Hunter had to shift to new temporary premises round the corner in Brook St Muswellbrook. To christen the new space we held a show of two artists - ceramicist Scott Douglas Cooper and painter Carol Scarmuzzi - in the “temporary” office.





# mental health & the arts

It's not only in the creative industries that the effects of masks, isolation, lockdowns, closed borders and cancelled public events were felt through 2021 - every industry was impacted. But the arts faced its own special challenges, and creatives are among the lowest paid people in the economy. In music and theatre especially, closed venues and social distancing rules cast a shadow over performers' ability to earn a living. Grants and government support did help; social kindness ditto.

But for all the positivity of an annual report, and for all the joy felt by the Opening Up we are now experiencing, it will be a long haul for many to recover, to say nothing of those who've lost loved ones or suffered physically. Not everyone was in the right place to "take up a challenge". Which is why attending a gig or a show is a two-way gift, a kindness not only to the creative people offering up their own powers of beauty and craft, but to the audience and attendees themselves. Recovery is a multi-year process we can all be a part of.



There's **PRO**fessional Development for artists through mentoring, workshops, business and creative training, skill enhancement, and connection. In 2021 face-to-face opportunities to grow skills were sharply curtailed, with two workshops in grant-writing and business skills running. To artists still hungry for Professional Development, and there were many, we sourced and advised on scores of online classes, seminars and happenings through our ArtSparks eBulletin and social media posts.

And there's **PRO**motion and Advocacy for the creative industries in our region, into Councils, into the NSW and Federal Governments, and into the broader community. Arts Upper Hunter was an active member of the increasingly coherent Regional Arts Network, the network of the 14 Regional Arts Development Organisations that cover most of NSW. We also attended most of the events funded by the Rescue & Restart funding, meeting dozens of creative people and community groups.

AUH also **PRO**vides: advice, Letters of Support, connections, and partnership opportunities for groups, facilities, communities and individual artists across our four LGAs. Before the July lockdowns, opportunities for advocacy could be anything from chance meetings at the shops to Carolyn O'Brien helping judge the Scone Neighbourhood Art Competition.

*"UNDER COVID, ALMOST EVERYONE DISCOVERED FOR THEMSELVES  
THE POWER AND LIMITATIONS OF DOING THINGS DIGITALLY."*



workshops...

Curtailed by the times, AUH ran back-to-back Grant-Writing and Business Skills For Creatives workshops at two venues, in Dungog and Scone. Acting ED Carolyn O'Brien took 9 artists through the ins, outs, traps and trends in grant-writing. "Business" is a topic many creative people approach with trepidation. Jane Callinan from Red Group worked with the same participants, offering pointers on key elements and skills.

Meanwhile our ArtSparks newsletter grew fatter ... and fatter ... with the many on-line opportunities: workshops, seminars, video-based courses, performances, master classes... The rise of digital learning seemed to accelerate through Covid and will only grow. Digital meeting services like Zoom became an indispensable substitute for face-to-face gatherings - though they were far from perfect, especially in remote places where internet access is tough.

Engaging audiences and artists is above all about communicating, and communication is about having channels that are active, relevant and fun. During lockdowns online communications became an essential tool and were sometimes the only ways that artists could feel a part of their communities.



## We communicate @

<https://artsupperhunter.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/ArtsUpperHunter>

<https://twitter.com/ArtsUpperHunter>

<https://www.instagram.com/artsupperhunter>

YouTube AUH channel

The Arts Upper Hunter **website** is updated frequently and integrates with our other online channels. Though in this region Facebook has long been king, Instagram is growing steadily, thanks to its visual power, and Twitter still gets good numbers.

**ArtSparks** is Arts Upper Hunter's digital newsletter. Here we update and promote activities to over 400 ArtSparks newsletter subscribers. ArtSparks moved from monthly to semi-monthly in 2021: especially under lockdowns, news, events and opportunities in our region and beyond were vital connectors. AUH's comms are astutely managed by Office Manager Sandra Reichel.

AUH also works strategically with our **media partners** providing regular media releases, comments and linkages via ArtSparks and social media. Partners include Hunter Valley News, Scone Advocate, Muswellbrook Chronicle, Singleton Argus, Dungog Chronicle, The Hunter River Times, Outback Press, Merriwa Ringer, Gresford News, ABC Radio, 2NM radio, The Cockfighter newsletter and Destination NSW.

	FOLLOWERS	REACH
ArtSparks Subscribers	405	
Facebook	1073	56,060
Twitter	478	10,776
Instagram	962	2,474
	SESSIONS	PAGE VIEWS
Website	3727	12,733
PROMOTED ON WEBSITE	2021	2020
Grants / Prizes	184	167
Events	54	12
News items	88	65



# future photos



Acting ED Carolyn O'Brien and photographer Anna Rankmore toured the region gathering data and images for our future major focus on Cultural Tourism. The AUH region is chocka with beautiful venues, active groups, historic places, local atmosphere, industrial and agricultural production, First Nations sites and natural wonders. This early research will provide the raw material for the Culture Trails we will develop over the next couple of years.

In 2021 the data had its first outing: we provided Music In The Regions with a database of possible venues for classical music tours. (There's a fair number of halls in these here parts.) More outings will follow!

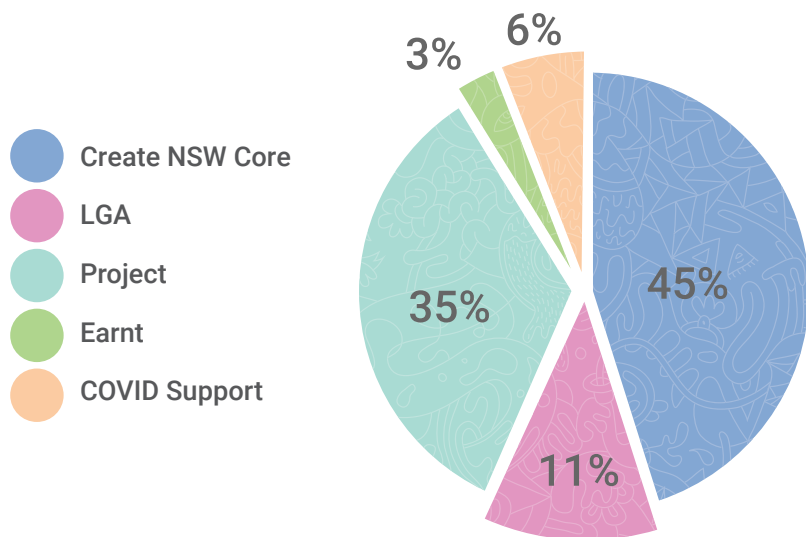




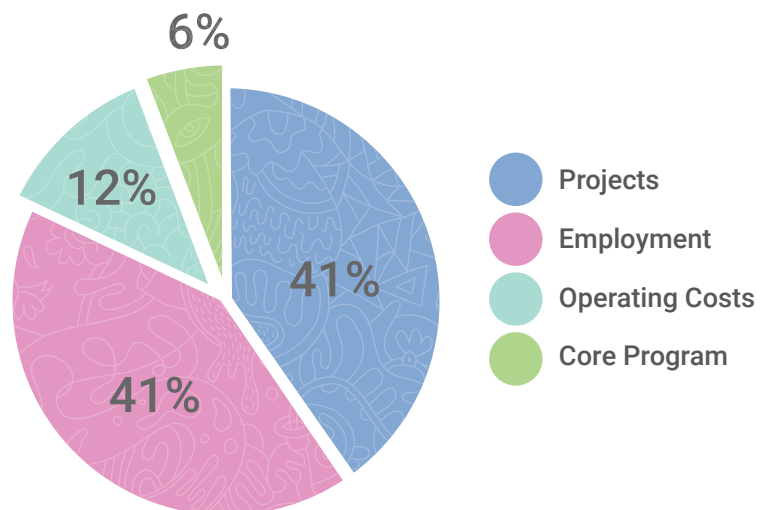
**Governance** of Arts Upper Hunter is all about transparency and engagement. Oversight is provided by our Board of Management, consisting of a member from each of the Local Councils, and a selection of Co-opted members. Co-option, in conjunction with the serious choices the Councils make of their reps, allows the board to function as a skills-based board. The Board meets 4-6 times a year (via Zoom since the pandemic began) to oversee strategies and decision-making that results in spending core funds provided by Create NSW and the four Councils, among other funding sources.

After Mark Reedman's death, the Board stepped in time and again to keep projects and financial prudence measures flowing. Acting ED Carolyn O'Brien worked with them to guide Arts Upper Hunter through the Rescue & Restart program, and committing AUH to a series of long-term projects. She and Office Manager Sandra Reichel (Officer Manager only touches on Sandra's skillset) met our regulatory targets, moved the office at very short notice, and acted as fitting ambassadors to our stakeholders and creative communities.

## income



## expenditure





# our people

## board members

<b>Ivan Skaines</b>	Co-opted member, Chair from AGM in April
<b>Cr Robert Booth</b>	Dungog Shire Council delegate, Chair & Treasurer till AGM in April
<b>Kim Manwarring</b>	Muswellbrook Shire Council delegate, Treasurer from AGM in April
<b>Cr Dan Thompson</b>	Singleton Council delegate
<b>Georgia Pascoe</b>	Co-opted member
<b>Peter Carlin</b>	Co-opted member
<b>Jacqui Bakewell</b>	Upper Hunter Shire Council delegate



## staff

<b>Mark Reedman</b>	Executive Director until February 2021
<b>Carolyn O'Brien</b>	Acting Executive Director until August 2021
<b>John O'Brien</b>	Executive Director from September 2021
<b>Sandra Reichel</b>	Office Manager, Comms
<b>Anna Rankmore</b>	Restart Project Officer

## Vale Mark Reedman

### Executive Director 2011-2021

Mark Reedman preferred the title Regional Arts Development Officer for his work for Arts Upper Hunter. Through his long tenure he oversaw forums, tours, grants programs, connections, networks, openings, promotions ... He was proud of his Pecha Kucha artist talks and had a particular interest in engaging with young people, especially through theatre and performance. He advised numerous creative folk and community groups on bringing the arts into their lives. His drole humour, larger-than-life presence and wonderful voice will be greatly missed.



## our partners



## stakeholders

Regional Arts NSW (RANSW), our peak body, whose changing role was ably expressed after Mark Reedman's death with great assistance.

Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council

Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music

Tantrum Youth Arts

Catapult Theatre Company

Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre

The numerous active creative community groups from across our region, including the ecosystem of:

- Art Societies, Craft Groups
- Art Galleries
- Museums and Historical Societies
- Musical and Theatrical Societies
- Performance Groups, Bands & Co-ops
- First Nations Corporations, local Aboriginal Reconciliation Groups
- Libraries, Writing Groups
- Event-Based Groups from street parties to sculpture exhibitions & more
- Visitor Centres and Tourism Committees
- CWA, Rotary, Lions, Community Centres, PCYC, Chambers of Commerce, Show Committees, Social Services and many other locally active groups
- Youth Venues, High Schools, Primary Schools and their parent support groups
- Venue Management Associations including s355 committees
- and numerous businesses (from galleries to shops to theatrical groups to Aboriginal Cultural Businesses) with energetic local engagement.



**Cover and page 12:** Painting Up A Storm by Teresa Byrne from AUH 2020 Covid Project.

**Page 2 and last two on page 15:** Reconciliation Mural, Muswellbrook, designed by George Anderson. George was lead artist with Les Elvin, Brad Franks and John Neville assisting artists. Photo Anna Rankmore.

**Page 4:** Ivan Skaines, photo Anna Rankmore.

**Page 5:** John O'Brien and the Strategic Plan, photo Anna Rankmore.

**Page 6:** Sandra Reichel hard at work, photo Anna Rankmore.

**Page 8:** The Groovehunters; instruments: photos Anna Rankmore.

**Page 9:** AWKWARD dancers, photo taken by Ashley de Prazer and supplied by Catapult Dance. Joanne Van Hees at the Scone Photographic Workshop, photo Anna Rankmore. Kids at the RAKU Firing Day, photos Anna Rankmore.

**Page 10:** Indigenous Music Workshop, photo courtesy Upper Hunter Shire Council. Gavin Vitullo shows us where the ephemeral art project goes, photo Sculpture On The Farm. Richie Lawton creating a mural, photo Muswellbrook South Public School P&C. Warriors Hip-Hop recording session, photo Upper Hunter Community Services. Workshop in Murrurundi, photo MACC.

**Page 11:** Vivaldi and Friends in Singleton, photo courtesy Jan Fallding. Work by Scott Douglas Cooper and Carol Scarmuzzi, photo Anna Rankmore.

**Page 13:** Business Skills facilitator Jane Callinan, courtesy Red Group.

**Page 14:** Carolyn O'Brien getting interviewed, photo Anna Rankmore.

**Page 15:** Images from Singleton, Dungog, Upper Hunter Shire and Muswellbrook, photos Anna Rankmore.

**Page 16:** Carolyn O'Brien, John O'Brien (no relation), Sandra Reichel & Anna Rankmore, photos Anna Rankmore. Mark Reedman starting work in 2011, photo Sandra Reichel.

**Back cover:** Raku Firing Day Muswellbrook, photo Anna Rankmore.

## watch a...



**Video** about the experience of attending the Scone Photography Workshop, partly funded by a Rescue & Restart grant, video by Anna Rankmore

**Music Video** produced for Upper Hunter Community Services, funded by a CASP grant, with some funky participation





**arts** UPPER HUNTER

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