


2022

Annual Report

arts UPPER HUNTER



Acknowledgment 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.

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, businesses, government partners and associations to provide connection, skills, opportunities, insights, promotions and strategic advocacy for the arts and creative industries across the region.

Our Vision

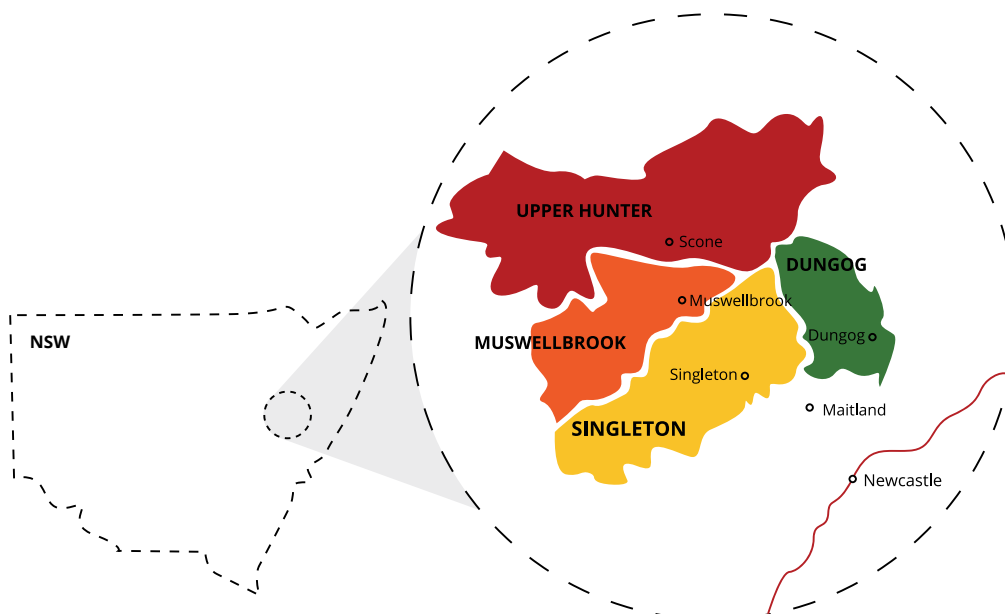
A region which embraces all arts and cultural practice as part of its social, economic and environmental development.

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.



Chair's Report

Partners in Transformation

As I reflect on the achievements of Arts Upper Hunter during 2022, it is with great pleasure that I extend my thanks to everyone who has played a role in our success. The journey we have undertaken together has been nothing short of inspiring, and I was honoured to serve as the Chair during that time.

I would like to extend our sincere thanks to the four Councils that have been instrumental in supporting Arts Upper Hunter financially and in other critical ways during 2022 – Dungog Shire Council, Muswellbrook Shire Council, Singleton Council and Upper Hunter Shire Council. Their financial support has been a cornerstone in realising our vision and empowering us to continue enriching the cultural landscape of our communities. Their belief in the transformative power of the arts has allowed us to continue making a lasting impact on the communities we serve.

I commend our dedicated Board for their tireless efforts and unwavering commitment to our mission. Our staff too, including new staff employed at the end of 2022, are the heart and soul of our organisation, and a driving force behind the successes outlined in this report.

AUH doesn't exist in a vacuum and relies on the support and encouragement of a great number of organisations in the sector and individuals across the Upper Hunter and further afield. I would like to acknowledge Regional Arts NSW and our sibling regional arts organisations for their on-going support and wise counsel, and Create NSW for our critical funding. Congratulations to individuals and organisations who benefitted from grants from Arts Upper Hunter during 2022 through the various funding rounds.

As you'll discover, this was a year of laying foundations – John and Sandra and then Natasha, Suzannah and Marina worked across projects, brainstormed ideas, evolved partnerships, workshopped protocols, gave assistance and advice, and offered friendly ears throughout our wide and diverse region. Looking ahead, I am excited about the possibilities that lie before Arts Upper Hunter. Together, we will continue to push boundaries, nurture creativity, and make the arts accessible to all. The support we have received from our four Councils, our Board and staff, and the broader community has been pivotal, and I am confident that Arts Upper Hunter will strive for even greater heights in the years to come.

- Ivan Skaines, Chair of Arts Upper Hunter Board in 2022



Future Building

From the Executive Director:

For Arts Upper Hunter, 2022 was a year of future-building, of foundation work, of completions and new beginnings, and of taking stock of a changing world.

This complex year began with creative folk coming back out of the woodwork, blinking and looking around, wondering what had survived the Covid years, what had thrived and what we'd lost. In a hesitant environment, sometimes simple encouragement and promotions had a great effect. Disasters remained, with floods the latest disaster, particularly affecting Singleton LGA.



One thing was clear – lockdowns and Zoom meetings meant creative people had discovered new ways of interacting with each other and with their public. New online skills had been learnt. One surprising result was that artists who'd resisted applying for grants suddenly discovered they were a way of starting new projects, or keeping the cash register clicking over when live shows were difficult.

AUH ran three grants programs through the year: that old warhorse the Country Arts Support Program, our own Micro Grants fund, and a small pilot aimed at community creative engagement for First Nations people. Hundreds were touched by the arts as a result, with a special emphasis on youth.

Youth was also the flavour in the Tantrum Outpost at Dungog High, completing a program started in 2021, where students picked up not only performance skills but life skills.

Across the region Arts Upper Hunter promoted an increasingly healthy arts ecosystem. New galleries appeared, such as Singleton's lovely new Arts & Cultural Centre, or the dynamic new Merriwa Gallery. New live venues too, like the Royal in Dungog. Established Festivals reappeared, like Dashville and Bulga Beats, and arts prizes continued to flourish in Scone, Muswellbrook and everywhere. Towns shone brilliantly again but with an asterisk – not everyone found it easy! It's a testament to the panache of a few individuals, a few energised groups, and the support of the communities around them, that events such as the 150th anniversary rail festival in Murrurundi, to take one example, did so well.

Meanwhile, the foundations were laid for major projects, most of them delayed till 2023: AUH's Cultural Trails, our Liddell WORKS Creative Program, and the Here Now & Always Aboriginal Art

Program were delayed but not forgotten. Two local artists created new work for the Regional Futures state-wide program culminating in 2023.

Much of our work in 2022 was behind the scenes. We advocated for the arts, joined Council groups and other groups, ran two Professional Development workshops, and provided advice and connection for dozens. We did most of the workshopping for a new Equity Action Plan. In November, we hired new staff. 2023 will be the pay-off for all that work in 2022.

Looking back by the year's end, there'd been plenty of music, visual arts, public art and energy, and some glittering new programs for the year head.

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



Watch ED John O'Brien introduce himself and talk about his role.

Granted...

Grants are complex beasts. They're great because they:

- allow groups and individuals to tailor their own projects to purpose.
- can be used to spread small amounts of money widely.
- often have community social benefits.
- give applicants the chance to really work out what their project is and how it could be delivered (which means a project will often happen anyway, even without the grant).

They're not perfect though, because they:

- tend to be “won” by people with experience and skills to fill in sophisticated forms.
- create a whole lot of labour with no certainty of outcome.
- they're boring – you could be painting/ drawing/ busking-as-a-living-statue.

Arts Upper Hunter stands by its grant program – the money is spent in focused, useful ways – as you'll see over the next few of pages.



Country Arts Support Program

For 40 odd years, CASP grants have been used to bring creative activity into the community via small but well-thought-through projects. The money is primarily spent on paying artists and presenters, with the grant funded by the NSW Government through Create NSW.

Arts Upper Hunter approved eight projects for 2022, with grants up to \$3,500. Six were completed by December. Several projects were aimed at young people. Projects happened across all four LGAs.

African Drumming for Muswellbrook South Public School P&C. Performer Benjie Williams from Earthen Rhythms led these engrossing, culturally rich workshops. Every student got to take part, and gained an increased understanding of African culture and music.

Create Your Own Skateboard Deck with Upper Hunter Youth Council. In the September holidays, 28 youth from across the Upper Hunter Shire came together at the Scone Youth Centre, and tapped into their inner artist and skater to create their own deck. Led by Decked Out workshops.

"Many of the young people said they couldn't draw however they surprised themselves with what they were able to achieve."

FLORA mural at Kirkton Public School. Students, staff and community members worked with an artist to create an inspiring and colourful mural reflecting the core values of Kirkton Public School in Lower Belford. FLORA = Friendship, Learning, Opportunity, Respect and Achievement.

Creative workshops for the local community through Murrurundi Arts & Crafts Council. Two workshops happened in late November – Make a Suncatcher and Butterfly Binding. The final workshop took place in January – *"silk flowers placed on a wire whimsy"* in a fun millinery workshop.

"Wonderful weekend of fun friendship and copper foiling at Christmas suncatcher workshop in this gorgeous shed."

Creative Healthy Eating for Dungog Clarence Town CWA. Healthy eating with a difference! In Dungog, young people used creative skills, puppet-creation and lamp-making to learn about good eating choices. In Clarence Town, puppeteers Curious Legends performed to young locals at a major community event.

Tin Wall Art Project for Scone Neighbourhood Resource Centre. Popular mural artist Dan Bianco worked with 20 young people to turn an unsightly tin wall into an attractive surface, at the Scone Neighbourhood Centre. The younglings discovered new skills and inspirations.

Yarning Circle mural for St Joseph's Primary School Denman P&F. The mural was created in November to January using the combined artworks of the school community and installed around the school's yarning circle to enhance the space and provide privacy. The process included a digital transformation of the students' own artworks into a memorable collage.

Craft of Writing Workshops for Singleton Library were delayed till 2023.

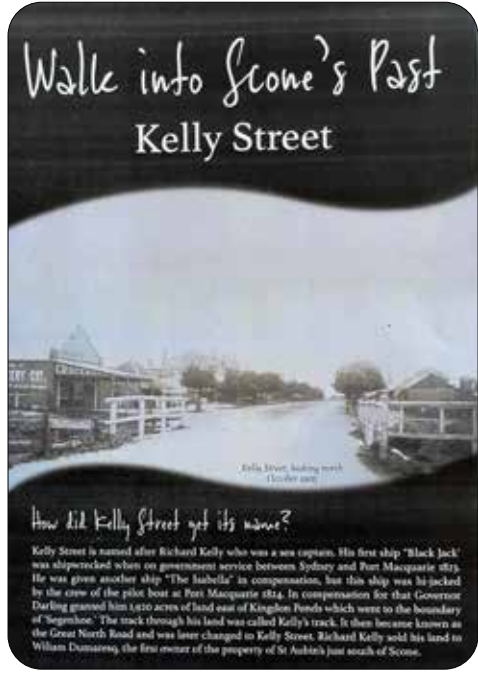


Watch FLORA Mural artist Suellyen create her artwork at Kirkton.



Watch mural artist Dan add life to the Scone Neighbourhood Centre.

10 Micro Grants & First Nations Creative Grants



AUH Micro Grants

The 2022 Micro Grants, our second ever, were designed as small but very useful cash injections to help people and groups “to get back on track or to take a small but crucial step forward in their creative pursuits”. Ten applicants were successful.

Scone & Upper Hunter Historical Society for brochures, “A Walk Into Scone’s Past”, encouraging a deeper visit to the historic town.

Lisa Wiseman for a one-week window exhibition of her quirky crocheted wearable artworks, at Dungog’s Gallery On Dowling, “aiming to bring a smile to people’s faces”.

Rebecca Rath of Singleton District for promotions for a new exhibition of an exotic landscape - including an oils workshop for local artists and a catalogue.

Active new **Merriwa Gallery** for street signage and promotions of their dynamic range of workshops.

Upper Hunter businesswoman **Debbie Lee** for product testing, mentoring and brand-building of her Koori Threads range of clothing inspired by family and Black history.

Hanna Kay, established artist from Blandford, for assistance with costs for a journey to Broken Hill and the Flinders Ranges ahead of a new exhibition in Muswellbrook in 2023.

Paterson textile artist **Janet Steele** for work for a new exhibition speaking to environmental change and incorporating ceramic work.

Dungog Historical Society for portable banners to encourage visitation of their museum and of any off-campus shows they might hold.

PCYC Muswellbrook for art supplies that will allow them to continue to offer free art classes to people with a disability through 2022 and 2023.

The **Muswellbrook Ceramics Group** event was held over until 2023.

Filmmaker **Jenny Hicks** received support in 2020 but thanks to lockdowns was only able to deliver this year. She held two community screenings of short film, “The Stranger” at the Denman Town Hall. The event also raised money for the mental well-being charity Where There’s A Will.

First Nations Creative Engagement Community Grant

One Arts Upper Hunter First Nations Creative Grant was successful for a mural at a school in Scone, but held over until 2023.

Throughout the Region

Tantrum Outpost

Tantrum Youth Arts is a key player in young people's performance opportunities in the Hunter Valley. Based in Newcastle, Tantrum ran an Outpost in Dungog in 2021-22, substantially funded by AUH, holding workshops that provided an inclusive, accessible, creative space for young regional people of Dungog Shire who would otherwise not have access to these experiences. They were so well received that they decided to run an Outpost in Singleton in 2023.

"High performing? 100% of participants said that they would continue the workshops if given the chance, and 100% agreed that as a result of the workshops, they felt better able to express themselves creatively."



AUH Out & Aboutpost

Arts Upper Hunter roamed the region both in person and via electrical communication devices. There were openings to attend, lectures to listen to and, naturally, creative people and groups to meet. We joined in on Cultural Advisory Panels in Singleton and Dungog, talked murals in Gresford and Scone, mentored, visited museums and galleries, joined the Hunter Valley Museum Of Rural Life's revivalist Working Group, discussed the key issues over tea and coffee, and advocated for the arts wherever we found ourselves.



...and Beyond

Regional Futures

Spanning NSW is the Regional Arts Network, which consists of all 15 RADOs (Regional Arts Development Organisations), including the newest, South Coast Arts. Our first state-wide project was Regional Futures: 29 artists answering the question "What Does The Future Look Like For Your Region?" For the Upper Hunter, Grace Barnes and Jane Richens were the Upper Hunter's chosen artists, producing "draft" works in 2022 and participating in online ideas exchanges with the other artists – an exhibition and symposium will happen in mid-2023. John O'Brien was a part of the Working Group, and that provided a wealth of skills-building for him.

Jane's work will be short performative videos concentrating on sustainability practitioners, from hemp builders to brush turkeys. Grace's work will be an Augmented Reality response to issues of solastalgia and future choices.



"The Regional Futures project over the last 18 months has been a catalyst to expand my art practice using new tools and working methods. It's been an opportunity to think broadly about future possibilities and concerns, both personally, in the larger social context, and everything in between."
- Jane Richens



"As an emerging artist Regional Futures has enabled me to see myself as a professional within the creative industries space. As well as connect me with the local community, hone my skills and gain additional opportunities like workshops and industry mentoring. It was a privilege to be commissioned to create a work that talks about the future of my region, liaising with the people that live, work and breathe here. Having difficult discussions about the relationship we have with the mining industry, and providing hope through imagination."
- Grace Barnes

Future Projects

Groundworks

Laying the reo and pouring the concrete on big new programs can take time. Here are some foundations we laid in 2022.

Marking the Liddell Closure. After 50 years the Liddell Power Station was due to close in April 2023. AUH proposed a series of artist residencies, events and an exhibition across the period of closure, decommissioning and transformation. In June a small group of artists and others visited – the project finally coming to fruition in 2023, led by new Project Officer Marina Lee-Warner.

Here Now & Always. An enthusiastic participant in the work of the NSW Aboriginal Regional Arts Alliance, AUH committed to supporting their online exhibition – which shifted from December to 2023 late in the year, engaging our new Aboriginal Arts Officer Natasha Kellett.

Cultural Trails. Photography continued, information gathering continued, and new Project Officer Suzannah Jones joined at the end of the year, with a view to having our on-line resource roll out in 2023 or early 2024. AUH has long promoted events and venues across the region – the Cultural Trails will be a focus point for those. But we are planning a richer resource than that!

Equity Action Plan. Working with Diversity Arts Australia, AUH completed the lion's share of a plan to improve and focus our diversity and inclusion over the next three years. The program was funded by Create NSW and will be added to our future planning in 2024.

Professional Development Workshops & Advice


Nothing “lays the foundations” better than well-managed Professional Development opportunities.

Creative + Business ran two free workshops on 8 October: Pricing For Creatives and Diversify Your Creative Income, led by the redoubtable Monica Davidson. They ran at the Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre, with 10 participants in the morning and 9 in the afternoon.

Arts Upper Hunter also advised literally dozens of individuals and groups across the region on grant applications, career development, promotions, events. An often overlooked form of assistance is building connections – a new gallery owner talking to an established owner from another Shire, or a community group providing a screen for a short film show.




Communications



15 April 2022

Featured:
[What's On](#)
[Conferences, Webinars and Workshops](#)
[Grants and Opportunities](#)

Vote cReaTivELY?



The daggiest thing I could say before a federal election is: "vote creatively". Much more hinges on the results than simply the future and role of creative communities.

But it's all connected.

One example. The region engulfed by Arts Upper Hunter is a complex one. Here, as everywhere, climate change is a defining issue (though of


One of Arts Upper Hunter's core tasks is working to promote the art scene hereabouts. The year 2022 will be known as the year lockdowns ended and things got on the road again. We were all about building audiences, getting the news out, taking the sting of rural isolation out of events and creating connections to the rest of the region and the rest of NSW.

We do that through our newsletter ... website ... socials ... media releases ... radio interviews ... shares ... YouTube channel ... and in-person attendance.

ArtSparks is Arts Upper Hunter's digital newsletter. Here we update and promote activities to nearly 450 subscribers. We went back to monthly distribution in 2022 as Covid lifting made digital slightly less necessary. There were occasional Stop Press editions when required. The content of the ArtSparks has grown considerable since pre covid times, with a notable increase in events and opportunities in 2022. Instagram particularly (and perhaps unsurprisingly) continues to grow in influence.

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 and Destination NSW.

What's On



Performing Artists of Dungog & The Royal Hotel proudly presents
Sunset Sessions in November
 Grab a drink or a meal and join them for live and loungey performance!
 It's free but there might be a hat.

Friday 11 November: Song Club - For writers of song

Friday 18 November: Hugh Merrell and Russ Redford

Friday 25 November: TBA
 5.30 pm to 6.30pm ish
 Royal Hotel, Dungog
 Visit [Facebook](#)
 Image: courtesy of PAD

Screening of "Moonage Daydream"
 Brett Morgen's film about David Bowie is less a biography than a cinematic fantasia. Instead of plodding through the chronology of Bowie's life and career, Morgen conjures the singer's presence through an artful collage of concert footage and other archival material, including feature films and music videos. And afterwards around 9pm, they are pulling up the screen and there will be dancing. Film rated M.

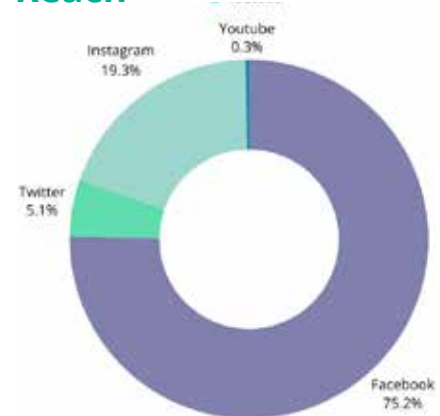
Saturday 5 November, 7pm.
 James Theatre, 6 Brown St, Dungog.
 Visit their [website](#) for details.

Website	Sessions	Page Views
www.artsupperhunter.com	5,849	15,828
Promoted on website	2022	2021
Grants/ Prizes	200	184
Events	169	54
News Items	85	88

Art Sparks

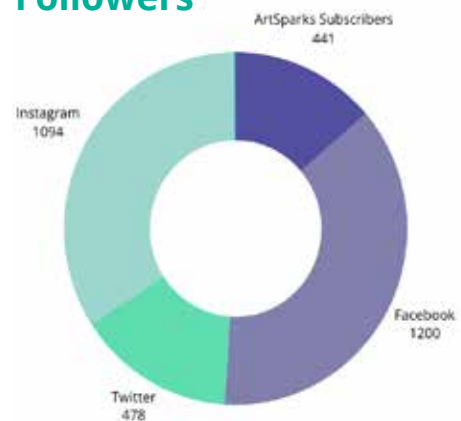


Reach



- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Youtube

Followers

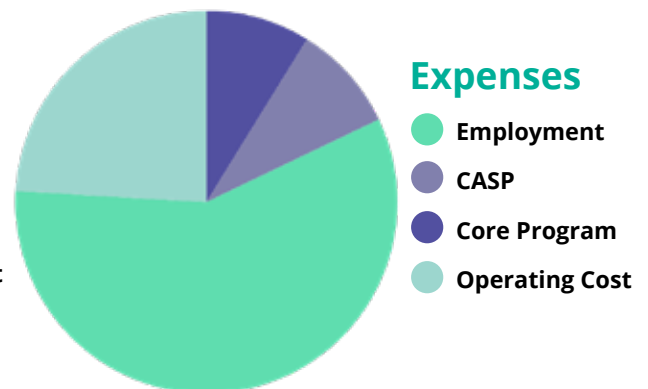
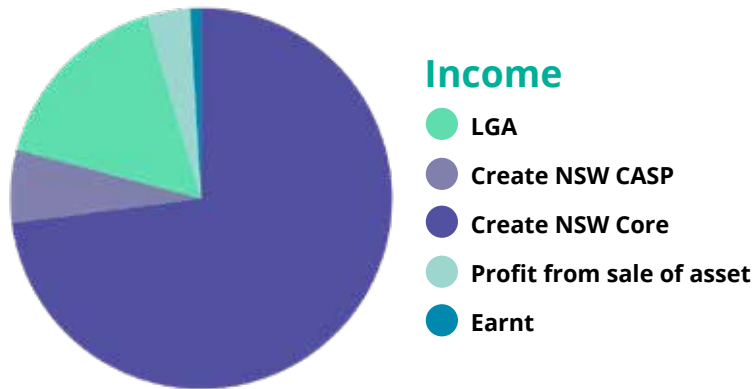


- ArtSparks Subscribers
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram

AUH Website

Clarity

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 to oversee strategies and decision-making that results in spending core funds provided by Create NSW and the four Councils, among other funding sources.



Our People



Board Members

Ivan Skaines – Chair, co-opted member

Robert Booth – co-opted member

Cr Dan Thompson – Singleton Council delegate

Cr Michael Tobin – Dungog Shire delegate

Jacqui Bakewell – Upper Hunter Shire delegate

Kim Manwarring – until Feb 2022

Cr Jennifer Lecky – Muswellbrook Shire delegate and Treasurer

Aunty Jean Hands – First Nations representative

Staff

John O'Brien - Executive Director

Sandra Reichel - Officer Manager and Communications

Dale Collier - Aboriginal Arts Officer - January

Anna Rankmore - Project Officer Casual

Suzannah Jones - Project Officer from November

Natasha Kellet - Aboriginal Arts Officer from November

Marina Lee Warner - Project Officer from December

Our Partners



**muswellbrook
shire council**



**SINGLETON
COUNCIL**

Stakeholders

Regional Arts NSW

Create NSW

Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council

Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music

Tantrum Youth Arts

Diversity Arts Australia

Creative Plus Business

NSW Aboriginal Regional Arts Alliance

The numerous active creative community groups from across our region including the ecosystems 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, Chamber 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 and s355 Committees
- And numerous businesses (from galleries to shops to theatrical groups to Aboriginal Cultural Businesses) with energetic local engagement.

Images

Cover: Hanna Kay, Flurry #7. Photo: Leslie Wand. Travel associated with the production of the Flurries exhibition was partly funded by Arts Upper Hunter 2022 Micro Grant.

Page 2: Detail of 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, photo Anna Rankmore.

Page 6: Selfies by John O'Brien, spiral from top left: Lake Glenbawn Museum of Rural Life, Liddell Power Station tour, Annie Rodgers and Robert Thurgood judging Farmers Short Story Competition, ADFAS Presenter Adelaide Bragg, Gresford Mural Group.

Page 7: CASP social tile image by Anna Rankmore

Page 9: Benjie Williams from Earthen Rhythms held African Drumming Workshops for all students at Muswellbrook South Public School. The project was supported by a CASP 2022 grant. Photo courtesy MSPS. Skateboard Painting. Photo courtesy Upper Hunter Shire Council.

Page 10: Scone and Upper Hunter Historical Society - Walk Brochure courtesy SUHHS. Shopfront Display of crochet creations and Go Anna Dragon by Lisa Wiseman, both photos courtesy Lisa Wiseman. Rebecca Rath sketching, courtesy Rebecca Rath. 'Is to be a 3D fish - grouper' courtesy Janet Steele (work in progress). Dungog Historical Museum Show Event with banners.

Page 12: Tantrum Outpost Dungog, photo by John O'Brien. John joined Upper Hunter Shire Mayor Maurice Collison, GM Greg McDonald and Reflections Holiday Park's Leoni and Mal Walsh to view the Museum of Rural Life at Lake Glenbawn.

Page 13: Jane Richens and Grace Barnes, photos by Jane and Grace.

Page 14: Liddell 10-story stack, photo by John O'Brien.

Page 17: AUH staff from left Sandra, John, Marina, and Suzannah - photo by Natasha Kellett.



Watch Jacqui Bakewell's board member introduction.



Watch the commemorative video of the late Mark Reedman

Design by Grace Barnes, inspired by Laura Wickham's 2021 design.



arts UPPER HUNTER

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