



2023

ANNUAL
REPORT

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.

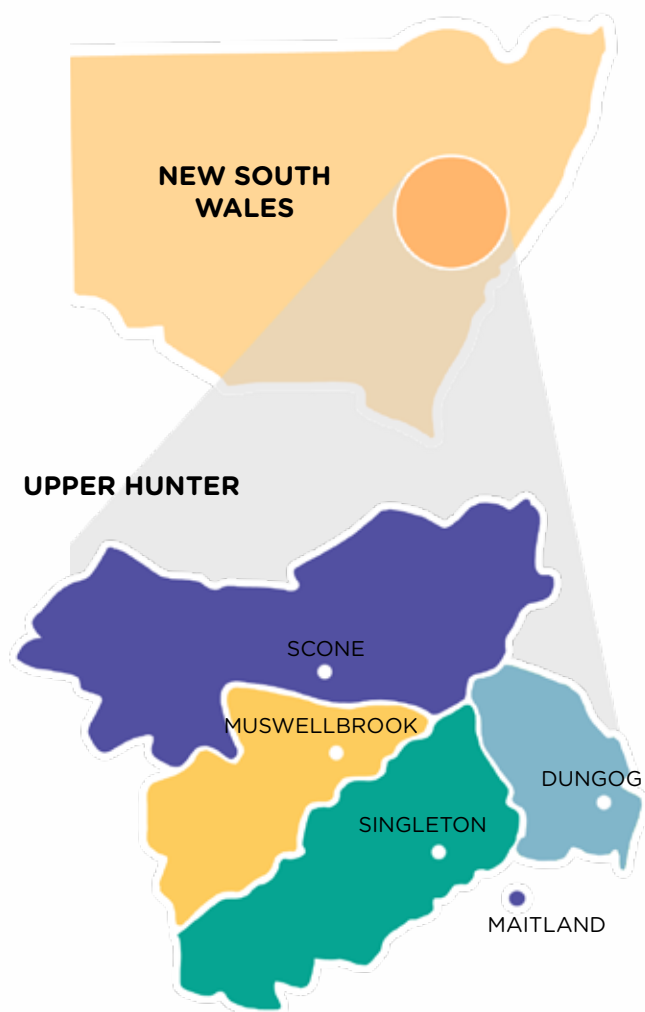
We pay our respects to the members of those communities and to Elders, past, present and emerging.

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.

arts UPPER 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, other government agencies, individuals, collectives and associations to provide connection, skills, opportunities, insights, promotions and strategic advocacy for the arts and creative industries across the region.



Our Vision

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

Our Mission

To collaborate, promote, support and provide opportunities for individuals and groups in the Upper Hunter Region to embrace all arts and cultural practice.

Our Values

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

FROM THE CHAIR



Dancing On The Shifting Carpet. 2023 has been an amazing year at Arts Upper Hunter, and I am honoured to have served as Chair during this time. In many ways the pandemic is a distant memory, yet it still seems wonderful to me that we have achieved everything we have whilst still in recovery mode. This is the first year I feel that we fully realised our potential, with the projects coming in quick succession.

What I am particularly proud of is the absolute diversity of projects that Arts Upper Hunter fostered. The LiddellWORKS program is set to showcase an extraordinary array of talent whilst celebrating the history of Liddell Power Station and its role in the Upper Hunter. The juxtaposition of such an 'industrial' world colliding and meshing with the arts will be fascinating to watch unfold.

'Create by the Lake' was a great success, and wonderful to see the local community engage in a wide range of creative activities and workshops beside Lake Liddell. Through our CASP and Micro Grants we were able to support local creatives in a dazzling array of art forms including bookbinding, drama, film making, photography, pottery, mural painting, writing, mosaic creation, eco-dying and sculpture.

Our support for First Nations culture and resilience was embedded throughout our organisation, from the Board adopting our Equity Action Plan through to the engagement of Aboriginal Arts Officers. The Here Now & Always project enabled local Aboriginal creatives to showcase their works with several sold in the market.

A less well-known role of AUH is advocacy. We don't do it loudly, but we do it well. Whilst our larger projects were attracting deserved fanfare, other projects bubbling on the side were quietly protecting the rights of artists, artefacts and history. These impacts have lasting effects in an industry that can be harsh, particularly for vulnerable or underrepresented people. I'm extremely grateful to the AUH team for this work.

I would like to acknowledge Regional Arts NSW for their ongoing support and Create NSW for our critical funding. I'd also like to acknowledge our four Councils – Dungog Shire Council, Muswellbrook Shire Council, Singleton Council and Upper Hunter Shire Council. Their support allows us to keep making a lasting impact on the communities we serve. I would also acknowledge the time and commitment of our outgoing President, Robert Booth, who watched AUH over a period of exponential growth, handing over the reins at the end of 2023 to revel in his very deserved retirement.

For those who work in the creative fields, flexibility and innovation are keys to success. It reminds me of one of my favourite sayings "Instead of having the rug pulled from under you – learn to dance on a shifting carpet".

Thanks to the fantastic team at Arts Upper Hunter, there is a lot of dancing on the carpet. I look forward to sharing the year ahead and all of the exciting possibilities before us.

Jacqui Bakewell

Chair and
Upper Hunter Shire Council's delegate

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The jugglesome year.

We spent the year 2023 juggling big projects while still working at the grassroots level. Our Board brought wise governance to the year in which AUH turned 20. Our amazing new staff members started rolling out major programs with long lead-times, including Arts Upper Hunter's largest ever single program, developed around the closure of the Liddell Power Station in April 2023.



Power off. The core of LiddellWORKS is a series of artist residencies with an exhibition coming in 2024. But it was so much more. Well ahead of the exhibition came a broader program of public art and workshops paralleling the power station closure throughout 2023. With funding and support from the Department of Regional NSW and AGL, LiddellWORKS signals our intention to be the Regional Arts Development Organisation at the centre of the transition from fossil fuels. Our program was led by Marina Lee Warner – though at one stage all staff were working on the program, the time was so tight.

Partnerships. Increasingly our work is built on partnerships and joining in pre-existing programs. LiddellWORKS is a partnership with the Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre and Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre. In concert with the Regional Arts Network, we support state-wide programs with local results:

- **The Work Of Art** | creative women
- **Horizons** | youth considering creative careers
- **Artists In Volatile Landscapes** | creative thinkers developing work for the future
- **Cultural Tourism** | collecting data on the regional visitor economy
- **Sister Cities tour** | original musos on short shared tours
- **Aboriginal Regional Arts Alliance's Here Now & Always Festival** | an online marketplace for First Nations makers

These programs have all had stirring representation from our region.

First Nations energy. Indigenous people were a continuing focus for AUH. Natasha Kellett, Richie Lawton and Sue Lawton made numerous connections with Wanaruah/Wonnarua and others, meeting with artists and providing advice. They developed their own ideas for projects and programs from Blak Arts Collective to Dare To Be Deadly, and helped develop the Kintay Games project. All staff took on work that engaged specifically with local Aboriginal people. AUH is trusted by local groups as we evolve and the Wanaruah and Gringai revivals gather pace.

Journeys. Our brand-new Cultural Trails project ran through the year, powered by Project Officer Suzannah Jones, working with Mark Carpenter, Grace Barnes and key tourism groups to build a website that literally “puts creatives on the map”. Due to be soft-launched in early 2024 as Creative Valleys, we have big dreams to make the site an essential treasure chest of events, sites, sights and extra material.

Continue...



Dollars and sense. Our funding was enhanced by several grants, including our first from the Department of Regional NSW. Servicing the grants truly stretched us; luckily, we're stretchy! As ever our core funding came from our four supportive LGAs and from Create NSW – two additional Rescue & Restart grants also came from Create. All staff dove into grant-writing, especially Suzannah Jones and Sue Lawton. When not doing Comms, Office Manager Sandra Reichel kept the books accurate and the paperwork sharp. The AUH Board, under the stewardship of Robert Booth and Jacqui Bakewell, maintained a weather eye on the figures and our ambitions. Among other policies, the Board approved a bold Equity Action Plan for the next three years.

Our relationship with Dungog, Muswellbrook, Singleton and Upper Hunter Shire Councils was more than financial. As well as reporting on the Return on Investment, AUH was involved in Dungog and Singleton cultural planning and advisory groups, managed a video project for Muswellbrook Shire and was involved with several projects within the Upper Hunter Shire.

Those small vital opportunities.

Our own grants programs funded 18 projects and manifold participation. Community connection is the lifeblood of a Regional Arts Development Organisation like ours – the Country Arts Support Program gets on-the-ground activity for groups; Micro Grants are little blasts of much-needed cash for artists, orgs and businesses; Professional Development enhances the creative community's professionalism ...

And wherever we go, whether advising on cultural tourism, guiding locals into sand art, running a Diwali celebration, hunting up news and promotions for our websites or our ArtSparks email, we are building connections across the region. Why? So the creative industries can thrive. Why? Because that's what makes communities really vibrant. Why? Because this is where we live.

John O'Brien
Executive Director





TRANSITION NOT

BEING A DIRTY WORD

The Hunter Valley is literally at the coalface of change as the fossil fuel economy winds down. What will replace it? Can the Upper Hunter region be a leader in the transition?

While some ask, “what transition?” we are asking, “how transition?” and are attempting to put the creative industries front and centre in the debate. Creative original thinking, the skewiff lens of artists, and the vast depths of connection that First Nations people have with Country, these can not only nurture conversations but grow economies.

That’s the reasoning behind the LiddellWORKS program and some of our other activities, such as our involvement in the Regional Futures program, where artists from across NSW confronted the question “What Does The Future Look Like For Your Regions?”.

“ The future will only be properly made if we look back at the past with respect and truth, from the dedication of workers to keeping the lights on ... to the many byproducts and consequences. ”

Grace Barnes was one of two Regional Futures artists. As well as her Augmented Reality artworks (see back cover) she taught a digital illustration and animation class for youth in Parramatta and Maitland for the Powerhouse Museum.

Creative Studio

w/ Illustrator Grace Barnes

Date: 7-10 July

Location: Maitland Tafe

Create an AR-animated portrait using Procreate and Eyejack Creator. Aimed at grades 7-12.



FREE
Workshop



LiddellWORKS

The LiddellWORKS program marks the closure of the iconic power station in Muswellbrook Shire after 52 years. The centrepiece of the program is sixteen artist residencies – artists visited the site, met with workers, collected pieces and ideas, made sketches and recordings, even created artworks on site. The residencies will culminate in an exhibition in mid-2024 at Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre and Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre, who are also our curatorial collaborators in the program. As well as these partners, the program is funded by a grant from AGL (owner of Liddell since 2014) and by the Department of Regional NSW’s Stronger Country Communities Fund. It’s the biggest single program Arts Upper Hunter has ever managed.



There is so much more to the program, from workshops to websites to videos to talkfests. LiddellWORKS is designed to both honour the legacy with clear vision of the positives and negatives, and to look to the future in a way that is inclusive of creative communities.

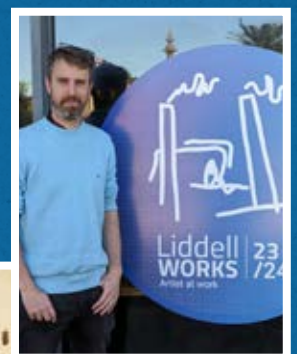
In 2023 we organised the visits to Liddell, created a dynamic website and produced the first of some sharp video documentation, held a workshop for Liddell workers in blacksmithing using “pieces” off

the power station, a mosaic workshop for the wider community, and mural and weaving workshops with Upper Hunter schools, and funded a Wishing Tree at the Liddell Family Day. The website features a thought-provoking Acknowledgment To Country, written by Richie and Sue Lawton. Our big event, Create By The Lake, was on the shores of Lake Liddell itself in October.

The team at AUH putting this together has been John O’Brien Program Manager, Marina Lee-Warner Lead Project Officer, Grace Barnes Comms and Design, Richie and Sue Lawton Aboriginal Arts and Project Officers, with additional support from Suzannah Jones Project Officer and Sandra Reichel Office Manager.

SITE VISITS

Most residency artists visited the site in the weeks before closure in April. Artists did research, sketched, recorded sound, took photos and videos, painted and observed the transition. Afterwards access and safety made visits nearly impossible, though three artists did manage to gain entry to the silent empty plant. Responses were huge. Todd Fuller, whose dad had worked at the power station, embarked on a series of paintings of Liddell workers and ex-workers, and interviewed them as he worked. Others collected fly ash for sculptures, or took copious images, or drew and painted on site. Videographer Jonathan Burrows (the Pretty Amazing Jono) was on hand to capture the visits.



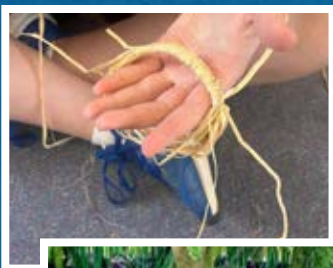
WORKSHOPS, CREATE BY THE LAKE

Most of the wider program included workshops. Artist blacksmith Will Maguire led a thrilling couple of days for Liddell employees, as they transformed metal pieces of Liddell into everyday objects that they could keep. Leanne Ward used tiles collected by a former employee of the power station in a weekend mosaic workshop. Create By The Lake was a grand event where over 100 members of the community enjoyed a windy day of workshops and fun right beside Lake Liddell, at the GJ's By The Lake caravan park. The day opened with a dance by the Waagan Galga dance group. Other activities included a VR experience by residency artist Tim Black, ceramics led by residency artist Kara Wood, another Will Maguire blacksmithing workshop, cartooning with esteemed cartoonist Peter Lewis, laser tag from GJ's, finishing touches to Jakeob Watson's mural, and entertainment by stunt clown the Pretty Amazing Jono.



MURAL, WEAVINGS, WISHING TREE

Artist Jakeob Watson worked with young people in Merriwa and Cassilis to paint the background, had a presence at Muswellbrook NAIDOC and finished the work at Create By The Lake. Three inspired panels mix First Nations and graffiti styles into a vivid work to go up in '24. Wonnarua weaver Michelle Earl worked with AUH's Richie and Sue Lawton and three cohorts (students, elders and homeless people) to create weavings that will be transformed by Michelle into a framed work for exhibition.



Scone artist Janno McLaughlin restyled her Wishing Tree sculpture for an appearance at AGL's own Family Day at the power station a week after the final turbine was shut down - workers decorated it with their own wishes and thoughts.

Coming in 2024: Thinkpieces on the website, led by environmental neologist Dr Glenn Albrecht, the exhibition, a catalogue, panel events, a monumental work for Muswellbrook (in collab with Muswellbrook Shire Council), and the expansion of the debate around Liddell's legacy towards the future of the site and the Hunter Valley.

www.liddell.works

ARTS UPPER HUNTER FUNDED SEVEN LOCAL ORGANISATIONS TO SHARE IN \$21,000 FOR ART PROJECTS.

The vitality that springs from the small Country Arts Support Program (CASP) grants in communities can't be overestimated. The 2023 successes ranged across artforms, and across the whole region. We also ran the assessment for the 2024 CASP program at the end of the year.



Women's Secret Notebook for Dungog & District Chamber of Commerce. Who doesn't like a Secret!! Visitors to the Woman-Kind Festival in May used their creativity to make a notebook with pockets (or artist's book) that they could take home, use and enjoy. There were nine free workshops over the three days.



Drama Workshops & Community Performance for Kirkton Public School P&C. Upstage Youth Theatre ran a series of drama workshops in which the students devised and created a theatrical performance that they performed for the school community and beyond. All students got the opportunity to participate.

The Twins at Pioneer Cottage for Murrurundi & District Historical Society. In May, filmmaker Jonathan Burrows, working with Jenny and Des at the Historical Society and AUH's own Suzannah Jones, documented the famous twins Carmel and Gwen as they told the story of the Pioneer Cottage and of their lives for release in 2024. More next year!

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



"Who I am" for On Track Hunter. Young people worked on portraying themselves and exploring photography in this series of workshops.

Art Trail in the Garden at Scone Neighbourhood Resource Centre. In September Artist Dan Bianco ran a workshop providing young people with insight into the business of street art. Participants got the chance to draw designs and get artist feedback. A final design became a new mural at the Centre. It's a blue tongue!

"Our venue is a peaceful, safe and inclusive area surrounded by art that is attracting visitors and the community, people buy a coffee and enjoy their surroundings, some just read a book. As a community group we would never be able to have created such a unique area without Country Arts Support Program funding. Thankyou"

Play with Clay for Singleton Potters. This workshop allowed members and the wider community to learn the basics of pottery at the studio at 74 George Street, including wheel turning. The project was designed to bring fresh energy to this local creative group and attract new members.

Singleton Youth Venue Indigenous Mural for Singleton Council. Daniel Ellis, a local Aboriginal artist, designed and painted an indigenous mural with the goal of making the Youth Venue a more welcoming and inclusive place for the Aboriginal youth in Singleton. A vibrant work resulted by year's end.

"By engaging a local Aboriginal artist, we have created meaningful artwork that resonates deeply with the Wonnarua people, adding significant cultural value to our space."

Craft of Writing for Singleton Library. This was held over from 2022 - writer Bernard Cohen led two workshops on creative expression, one for the Singleton Writer's Group, the other at Singleton High School, a great way to spread an expert's presence while he's here.

MICRO GRANTS

Ten grants of up to \$1000 were awarded to people and organisations across the Upper Hunter region. The fact is, Micro Grants are a very direct way of getting creative results happening! The dollars are not big, but the applicants find very focused uses for what they can get. Over \$9,100 was distributed.



The successful applicants were:

Agnes Lingane from Murrurundi for bookbinding workshops, including some skill-building for the artist herself. "I used the grant funding to undertake courses to help me develop in the area of bookbinding and take my creative practice to the next level."

Amy O'Donnell from Hunterview to upgrade the equipment she uses to teach art classes to both children and adults - she ran three workshops for 24 students across the region as a result.

Dungog Historical Society for professional labels for their back-room exhibition area.

Murrurundi Arts & Crafts Council to run two painting and one mosaic workshop for kids in school holidays.



"Feedback from parents & children was excellent - everyone had a great time & were blown away by their creativity."



Toy Box Children's Mobile Outreach Service (Upper Hunter Community Services) for paper clay for workshops that reach kids in some of the more remote villages, especially in Muswellbrook Shire.

"This project developed closer bonds between staff and children, parents and children. It encouraged talk and vocabulary extension while discussing various designs and outcomes. Depending on who the sculpture was being given to, it may be joining grandparents, Uncles, Aunties into the fold, enhancing relationships ... while also expanding and stimulating children's ever changing creative skills."

Rebecca Muscat of Singleton to produce a body of eco-dyed textile artworks, including continuing experimentation, and to hold workshops locally.

"This Micro Grant had a huge impact on my artistic practice as well as my ability to share my knowledge with others in the community."

Rebecca Rath from Singleton Region to promote an exhibition in November in Sydney, with the potential to broaden the market for her landscape paintings.

"I'm so very grateful! I'm crying! Thank you so very much for your ongoing support. It means the world to me."



Scone & Upper Hunter Historical Society for courses for volunteers in both Upper Hunter and Muswellbrook shires, to enable curatorial succession planning. Ms Margot Jolley ran a deeply informative workshop.

Sculpture On The Farm Dungog towards promotion and marketing of the 2023 festival, including their online marketplace. Sarah Crawford created dynamic social media posts that enhanced sales, attendance and enjoyment.

Singleton Amateur Theatrical Society towards an air conditioner for the costume room which will make it a more user-friendly place all year round - they have reported that it's done just this!

Janet Steele's Micro Grant from 2022 allowed her to hold an exhibition in 2023 - the major work from that show was a finalist in the 2023 Australian Fibre Art Awards.

The Muswellbrook Ceramics Group's project was held over from 2022.



FIRST NATIONS PROGRAM

The year opened with the release of the new Federal Arts Policy, of which the first pillar is First Nations First. For Arts Upper Hunter, the resilience of First Nations springs from Culture. The people of this land for thousands of years have lessons for one another and for the newer arrivals. That is why you will find Aboriginal artists and culture workers grounding and enspiriting our work wherever possible.

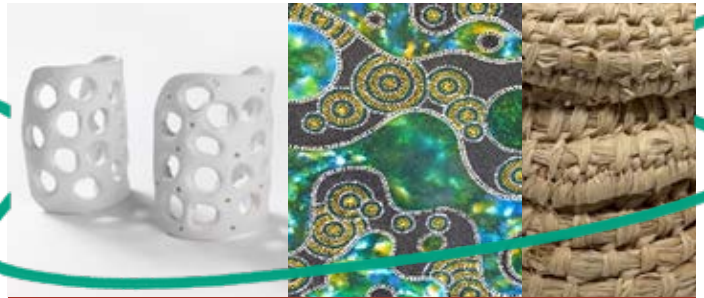
Some work came directly from our Aboriginal Arts team. Natasha Kellett for the start of the year, and later Richie Lawton in concert with partner Sue Lawton, developed ideas for projects, consulted, wrote draft policy and more. Many of the projects involving First Nations activities are scattered throughout our program.

WANARUAH / WONNARUA LANGUAGE FEEDBACK VIDEOS

Muswellbrook Shire Council and the Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council commissioned AUH to capture in a series of short films the reactions of the students in a Wanaruah Language Course.

Video footage was shot on country by Pretty Amazing Productions.

Scan QR code to check out the playlist.



HERE NOW & ALWAYS is an online festival, marketplace and professional development program designed to fill a gap in the market for NSW Aboriginal creatives.

In May the inaugural festival was held. Five artists intimately connected to our region joined in: weaver Roz Thomson, painter Debbie Becker, fashion designer Debbie Lee, didj maker Richie Lawton and painter and ceramicist Michelle Earl. Several sold work in the market. Jade Perry gave a great Welcome. HNA was developed by the Aboriginal Regional Arts Alliance, partnering with several RADOs including Arts Upper Hunter.



CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE, CULTURAL SAFETY, WISDOM, AND AN AWARENESS OF PROTOCOLS IN ASSISTING OUR FIRST NATIONS CREATIVE COMMUNITY TO ACCESS GRANTS AND OPPORTUNITIES ARE OUR OWN CENTRAL PILLAR IN THE INDIGENOUS SPACE.

UNIQUE IDENTITIES is an opportunity for local First Nations people across NSW to investigate their particular local culture and explore the assets in their region, also from the Aboriginal Regional Arts Alliance. It will run through 2024.



ABORIGINAL REGIONAL ARTS ALLIANCE
Aboriginal Corporation ICN: 9066



ARTS UPPER HUNTER INVOLVEMENTS:

- **NAIDOC** events with sand art and the **Travelling Mural** of Jakeob Watson for the Liddell program.
- provided **pricing advice** on works in the Wanaruah LALC's new exhibition area.
- school / community creative **weaving** program for LiddellWORKS.
- piloted a Facebook page of Aboriginal local creatives, **Blak Arts Collective**.
- joined with Muswellbrook's **Picnic In The Park**, with Uncle Richie Lawton providing talks and didg playing.

- organised an assessment of the Indigenous **artefacts** in the Lake Glenbawn Museum of Rural Life by respected historian David Kaus (report due 2024), in collaboration with Reflections Holiday Management. David provided details on artefacts in the Scone Historical Society collection, and identified sacred objects that may need sensitive repatriation.
- showcased **Waagan Galga** at the Create By The Lake event.
- drafted an **Aboriginal Creative Employment Policy**, out of which has come a range of ideas for future programs, including inspirational talks under the banner Dare To Be Deadly, and a pop-up gallery.
- worked with Jade Perry from Wonnarua Nation to plan a potential sports+culture festival, the **Kintay Games**.

THE NIAGARA CAFÉ MURAL IN SCONE, after a professional restoration, brought back to life a mural in a classic Greek Café from the 1950s. But with changing times and greater awareness, "Cowboys and Indians" is not a value-free theme anymore. Sue Lawton interviewed local Aboriginal people across generations to gauge responses to the mural and to our own Indigenous history of dispossession.

The background features a vibrant, abstract design with teal and yellow wavy patterns. A prominent pink circle is located in the upper right corner, containing the text 'THROUGHOUT THE REGION'.

**THROUGHOUT
THE REGION**

If you thought
Arts Upper Hunter
were everywhere during
2023, you may be right!

**Here's some of what we got
up to on the ground...**

THROUGHOUT
THE REGION



CREATIVE VALLEYS

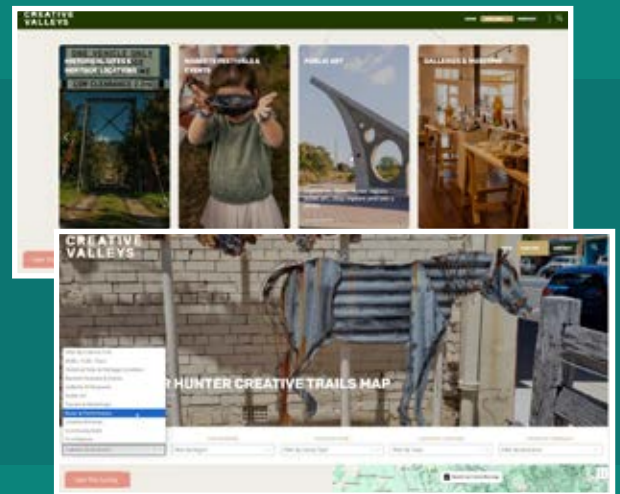
CREATIVE VALLEYS. Project Officer Suzannah Jones worked tirelessly to develop a cultural trails website that covered Dungog, Singleton, Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter Shires ... and slightly beyond, because tourists don't really care about Local Government boundaries!

Designed and gilded by AUH's Grace Barnes and Thirty Point Four's Mark Carpenter, the Creative Valleys website will be a What's On and Where To Go for art, culture and events that have creative aspects, to be launched in early 2024.

To get local individuals and groups to develop content for the site, Suzannah has toured the region tirelessly, meeting with over 30 groups and communicating with dozens more. She has also been collating content herself - including Public Art. (And many a trip resulted in advice being offered or connections made for the artists.)

To support the work, AUH has resurrected a meet-up along the lines former Executive Director Mark Reedman pioneered: a Regional Tourism Consultative Group. The group includes Tourism Officers for the LGAs and keen individuals interested in building tourist numbers and experiences.

We want Creative Valleys to be more than a tour guide and resource. AUH has been seeking funding to create cool videos that will live on the site and be worth visiting in their own right. It's not just a website but a springboard for community-based projects designed to enhance existing cultural assets, such as the Twins film of the Pioneer Cottage Murrurundi, a museum-arts activation project called This Here Then Now (in 2024), and First Stories, two videos celebrating Gringai and Wonnarua culture, funded through the Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal. The videos will be created in 2024.



Get on Creative Valleys - via ATDW!
Creative Valleys uses content from the
Australian Tourism Data Warehouse.

Visit the website or scan
the QR code to learn more!

www.atdw.com.au



Are you on the
Australian Tourism Data Warehouse?

It's
FREE!



+ Be seen on
**Tourism Australia
& Destination
NSW**

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In June in Singleton and Scone, **Funding Fundamentals** taught arty folk how to apply for grants, how to avoid mistakes, and how to be ready when the right opportunity comes up. From Monica Davidson of Creative Plus Business.

In the later part of 2023, the state-wide **Work Of Art** program ran a chunk of Professional Development opportunities online – and when they met in person in Tamworth and Coffs Harbour – for our five local participants. It was funded by NSW Women and organised through our peak body Regional Arts NSW

In October, John O’Brien ran two workshops online to help people with their Country Arts Support Program applications.

In August and September, Music NSW held a series of online skill and knowledge-building sessions under the title **Sound Advice**, especially dedicated to Regional Touring for musicians.



Every month in **ArtSparks** we promote Professional Development opportunities, many for free, many on-line. Webinars and workshops cover pretty well everything: from governance training for community groups to Powerhouse Museum-led exhibition enhancement. We love connecting people and appropriate courses, because careers are constructed out of more than hope and energy.

DIVERSITY IN HOPE & ACTION

EQUITY ACTION PLAN. In February we finalised our 3-year Diversity & Inclusion Strategy, developed through a brilliant program of Regional Arts NSW and Diversity Arts Australia. The program seeks to address barriers to participation in the arts and cultural sector by under-represented groups. The focus was not only on increasing representation and introducing systemic change in the areas of cultural and linguistic diversity, cultural safety and intersectionality. There was also a deep focus on institutional and cultural barriers, on looking at projects from across Australia that have been very successful and others that have been less successful, on hearing about individual experiences and above all on tailoring the program to AUH’s own region and communities.

“ OUR EQUITY & INCLUSION PRIORITIES:

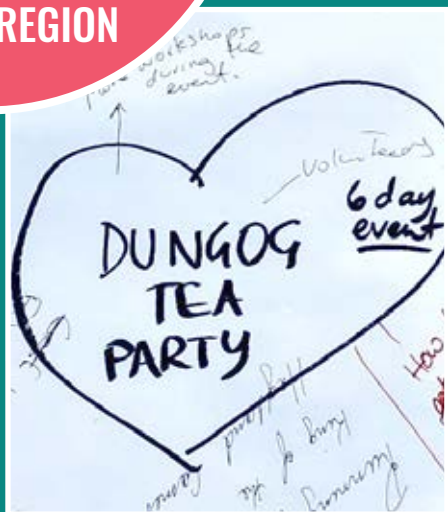
Over the next three years, Arts Upper Hunter will engage, reconnect and empower voices from the First Nations, CALD (Culturally & Linguistically Diverse) and disability communities across the Upper Hunter region through the development of inclusive projects and programs.

- **We will encourage and partner with arts community groups in the region to promote diversity and accessibility in their spaces.**
- **We will have annual targets for programming and events and work with the targeted communities, with the aim of increasing participation.**
- **We will continue to help the identified communities seek funding, grants and artists from these communities for their events.**
- **We will establish and promote an inclusive digital space on our website by launching a venue audit of the region and artist directory.**
- **We will add to the diversity on our board.**

DIWALI.

In November, Marina Lee Warner organised a buzz-worthy Diwali In The Gallery at Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre. Arti Trasi performed Indian Dances with tales behind their forms, and Sheri Court-Kriesch had the whole audience pumping to some Bollywood moves. The crowd included a number of local people from the subcontinental diaspora, some visiting the gallery for the first time.





ADVISING ACROSS THE REGION

Advising to Arts Upper Hunter means joining in with discussions in formal and casual conversation to help meet the needs of our creative communities.

Here are just a few of Arts Upper Hunter's key join-ups:

CREATIVE COMMUNITY BUILDERS. Peter Kenyon of Bank of I.D.E.A.S. ran a powerful, inspiring program of community building for Gresford and other Dungog Shire villages in June. Arts Upper Hunter keenly supported the sessions.

At our request Peter ran one devoted to creative communities, marketed by our Suzannah Jones. This workshop was aimed at informing the development of the Creative valleys Project, including a Culture Counts survey linked to the CV website. As well as the strong Dungog Shire cohort, attendees came from as far away as Murrurundi to think about building a creative identity round here. Over 50 participated, and a more focused program of Community Building is due to happen in mid 2024.

CULTURAL ADVISORY GROUPS. Local Government Authorities are the most important stakeholders in rural arts and heritage, owning venues and museums, providing grants, funding festivals, and allowing (or not) activities to happen in public spaces. The goals of Councils in community and creativity criss-cross AUH's work. AUH was a member of the Dungog Shire Cultural Plan Advisory Group (which met in the lead-up to the plan's development) and is an active observer on the Singleton Cultural Advisory Group, spreading information and helping devise strategies and aspirations. In 2023 we also attended events run by the Joint Organisation of 10 Hunter Valley Councils, including their Events 10 launch.



MUSEUM OF RURAL LIFE.

Lake Glenbawn has a secret – a museum built in the early 1960s that has been closed since the early 1990s. AUH in the past has supported projects towards reopening this “ghost” museum, and in 2023 took on the role of chair and secretary of a new Working Group, as well as organising the First Nations artefacts assessment.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT are vital when applying for grants ... and grants are an unavoidable part of the arts ecosystem. Arts Upper Hunter wrote over 20 Letters of Support for community groups, council entities and artists in every shire and key ones outside the region. We also received almost that number supporting our own grant applications.

EVERYONE. CONNECTED. Our region is full of venues, events, groups, businesses and individuals putting on exhibitions, shows and workshops. All year round through our e-newsletter ArtSparks, our website and social media channels we promote creative activity. Community events like the Merriwa Festival Of The Fleeces or Naidoc in many towns, music happenings like the many events at Dashville, arts groups like Dungog Arts Society or Scone Arts & Crafts, art prizes like the Mullins Conceptual Photography Prize or the Singleton Art Prize, workshops like those run by Murrurundi Arts & Crafts Council or Hive & Gobbler, exhibitions from Small Forest Wines to Gallery On Dowling, musicals by the many musical societies, museums from Murrurundi to Clarence Town and everywhere in between, these are the lifeblood of culture in the Upper Hunter. Whether we are giving advice or promoting an event, one of our founding ambitions is for their health, longevity and growth.

Best is connection: numerous groups and people partner and collaborate with one another to make art and culture happen, sometimes via connections AUH has fostered. Our own stakeholders are listed later in this report.

THE REGIONAL ARTS NETWORK. Arts Upper Hunter is 1 of 15 Regional Arts Development Organisations, who form a thriving network that spreads the creative dream/love/activity across NSW. Most are paid members of peak body Regional Arts NSW, who organise monthly digital meetings and thrice yearly IRL meetings where networking and learning cement our own programs and commitment. In 2023 we started branding ourselves the Regional Arts Network. We pass around ideas, and share advice, resources and connections, advocate for arts and culture at all levels of government, and develop our own state-wide projects.

The network calls its state-wide program **REGIONAL FUTURES.** These are funded by various NSW Government departments and initiatives.

ARTISTS IN VOLATILE LANDSCAPES. The first Regional Futures program climaxed at the Casula Powerhouse in western Sydney. Both Upper Hunter artists (Jane Richens with her lo-fi videos of sustainability leaders, Grace Barnes with her Augmented Reality works) were on exhibition, and both took part in the Volatile Landscapes Symposium in July. Grace was chosen to facilitate digital animation workshops for youth for the Powerhouse Museum - one in Paramatta and one in Maitland. Funded by Create NSW.

ARTISTS
IN VOLATILE
LANDSCAPES



HORIZONS. Pathways to creative industries careers for young people from the regions - that's the goal of this program funded by the Regional Youth Incentive Program of the Office of Regional Youth and the NSW Regional Arts Network. Five young people of the Upper Hunter were selected. They'll be part of 75 engaged in a mentoring and networking program across country NSW throughout 2024. The young people are photographer and painter Emily Smallmon, graphic artist Andy Dang, visual artist Kasey Tudor, musician and filmmaker Juniper Martin, and filmmaker Thomas Ryan. Another Regional Futures program.

HERE NOW & ALWAYS. Aboriginal art festival and market, held online by the Aboriginal Regional Arts Alliance.

THE WORK OF ART. Managed by Regional Arts NSW and funded by NSW Women, 5 creative women from all four LGAs joined this state-wide mentoring program, which will have a showcase in November 2024. Dayarne Smith, Rebecca Rath, Jane Richens, Helene Leane and Leanne Atkins are the creatives.



The Work of Art

A DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR REGIONAL NSW WOMEN IN CREATIVE BUSINESSES



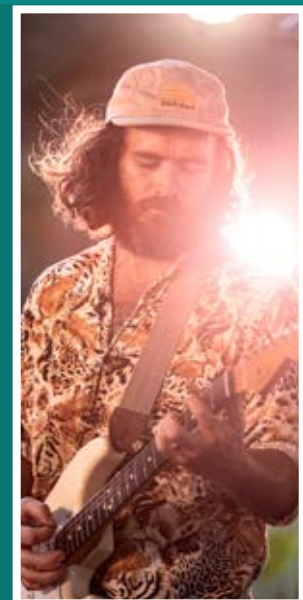
CULTURAL TOURISM. This Regional Futures program involves a year-long consultation by Patternmakers research agency, collecting data on cultural tourism activities across regional NSW. Stay tuned as they deliver their findings in 2024. Many artists underestimate the importance of tourists to their livelihoods and the well-being of their communities.

REGIONAL MUSIC
COORDINATORS AND
SISTER CITIES TOURS.

Arts Upper Hunter gained a Regional Music Coordinator, one of five covering the state on behalf of Music NSW.

Ali Buckley brought a wealth of experience and energy as she visited out region, meeting with musicians in both lively and quiet areas for original music performance. We share Ali with Orana Arts and Arts Mid North Coast and in November, two Hunter bands joined the Sister Cities Tour, hitting all three regions in a lively musical "exchange program".

Magpie Diaries from Singleton LGA and The Lucky Day Band from Muswellbrook were the bands; the Royal Dungog and Muswellbrook RSL were the venues. This program continues for another 3 years.



COMMS

Communications seem mostly to be digital these days, but we made hundreds of phone calls, answered hundreds of queries, and met with people face to face wherever we could.

IT'S AMAZING HOW WELL THAT WORKS!

But in our increasingly digital world, AUH must be a strenuous user of the web. Sandra Reichel kept our regular Comms churning, while Grace Barnes developed Comms strategies for the LiddellWORKS program and the Creative Valleys site. We take great pride in bringing together our region's disparate events, helping presenters professionalise their photos and words, and getting the message out via our ArtSparks newsletter, our social media accounts and our websites. A dozen media releases resulted in articles in many local papers. We turned up on another dozen radio interviews and are planning increased use of our YouTube channel.

Developed in collaboration with Thirty Point Four's Mark Carpenter, 2023 produced a new, temporary site, LiddellWORKS, featuring the wonders of that program, and Creative Valleys was almost ready to launch by year's end.

We carefully track how our posts and emails are doing as we go. Facebook and Instagram are cornerstones, whether we're posting our own original content or re-posting from other users, and our ArtSparks email list is getting close to 500.



Arts Upper Hunter
1,496 Followers
31,700 Reach

LiddellWORKS
70 Followers
15,200 Reach

Blak Arts Collective
Facebook Group
94 Members



ArtSparks subscribers
476 Followers



Instagram

Arts Upper Hunter
1,254 Followers
4,000 Reach

LiddellWORKS
167Follows
3,300 Reach



YouTube

Arts Upper Hunter
(AUH Channel)
6 Followers
59 Reach

arts
UPPER
HUNTER

Arts Upper Hunter
6,735 Sessions
15,760 Page Views



Arts Upper Hunter
@ArtsUpperHunter
472 Followers



Promoted on website
110 Grants/Prizes **135 Events**
66 News Items

THE NUMBERS

THE MONEY.

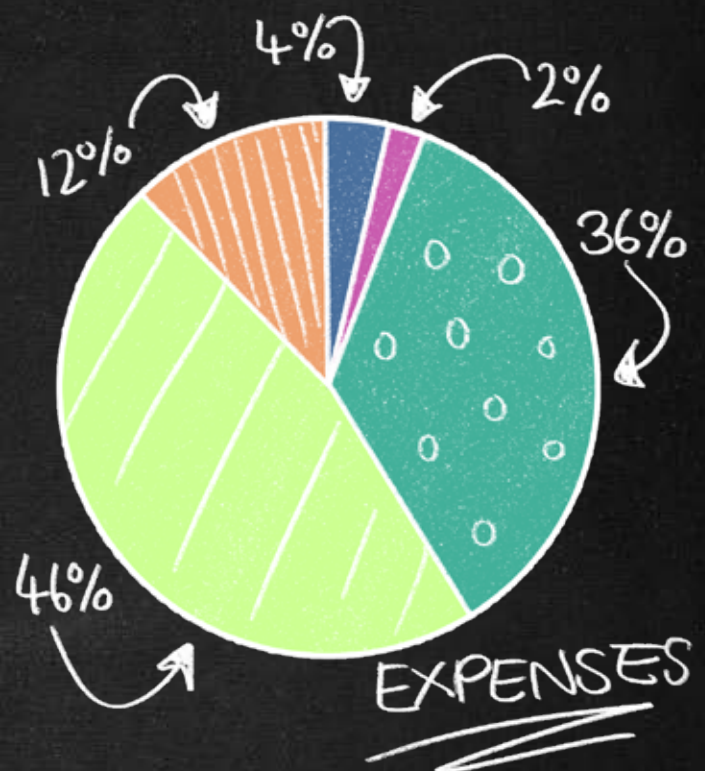
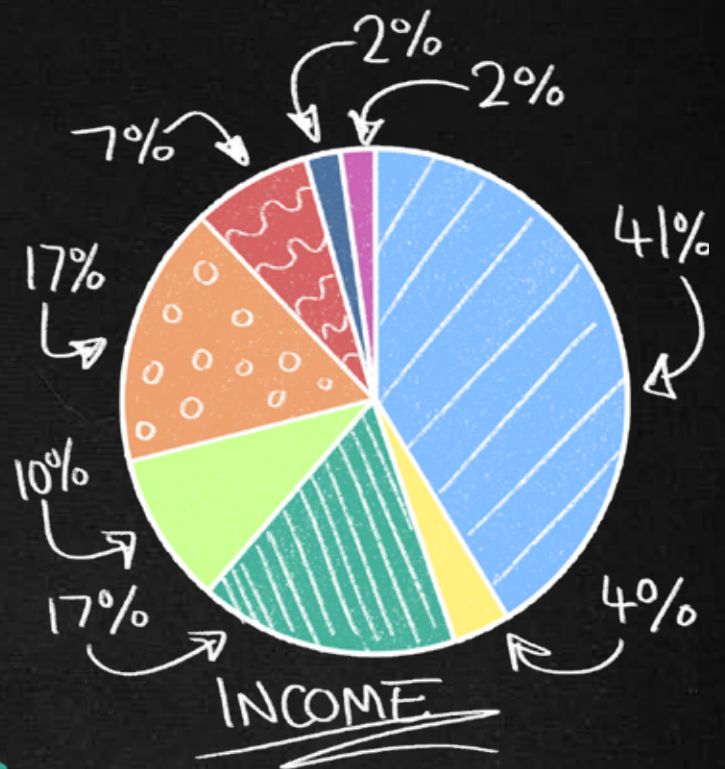
Arts Upper Hunter managed its largest ever budget for a single year with the most employees and program, thanks to a couple of key grants, one from Create NSW for audience building and CPI mitigation, and one from the Stronger Country Communities Fund for LiddellWORKS (on top of funds from AGL). The greater program meant more intense oversight and management by the Board, the ED and Office Manager Sandra Reichel who manages our financial records. Our books are audited annually by Kelly & Partners. These funds came on top of our negotiated funding from Create NSW and annual contributions from our local Councils.

At times it was a struggle; and we frequently tested our capacity. The pay-offs were considerable: more projects and activities, bold new ideas from all staff, and Arts Upper Hunter's own rising reputation.

LET'S TALK SOME DEETS.

In 2023 AUH delivered:

- 27 projects across 2023 (including 8 from LiddellWORKS Programs and 4 statewide projects)
- 5 were developed by First Nations individuals.
- 138 artists were engaged as workshop leaders, residency artists, creatives etc.
- 85+ new works were produced through our programs, more promoted through our comms.
- 548 people participated in workshops and events.
- 860 were in the audience or attending.
- Not counted in the above is attendance at the 135 events promoted through the year.



Board Members

Providing expertise in their fields ... and deep local knowledge, the AUH Board acts as a skill-based Board, whether they are delegates selected by their Councils or co-opted members of the public. The Arts Upper Hunter Board for 2023:

Ivan Skaines
Robert Booth

Co-opted member & Chair until April
Co-opted member & Chair from April until September

Jacqui Bakewell

Upper Hunter Council delegate & Acting Chair from September

Cr Jennifer Lecky
Cr Michael Tobin
Cr Dan Thompson
Martha Moderitz
Annie Rodgers
Kim Lundy

Muswellbrook Council delegate & Treasurer
Dungog Council delegate
Singleton Council delegate
Co-opted member from 27 April 2023
Co-opted member from 27 April 2023
Co-opted member from 14 September 2023

Staff

John O'Brien
Sandra Reichel
Suzannah Jones
Marina Lee Warner
Natasha Kellett
Richie Lawton
Sue Lawton
Grace Barnes

Executive Director
Office Manager & Communications
Project Officer
Project Officer
Aboriginal Arts Officer until April
Aboriginal Arts Officer from May
Project Officer from May
Comms Officer from April

Our Project Partners

- The Regional Arts Network for Statewide projects (aka the RADO Network)
- Regional Arts NSW, our peak body
- Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre and Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre
- Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music
- Each of our LGAs for various projects including Creative Valleys, LiddellWORKS, the Wanaruah Language Feedback Video, Dungog Cultural Advisory Group, Singleton Cultural Advisory Group, the Lake Glenbawn Museum Of Rural Life Working Group
- AGL for LiddellWORKS
- The Department of Regional NSW through the Stronger Country Communities Fund for LiddellWORKS
- Foundation For Rural and Regional Renewal for First Stories (2024 project)
- Creative Australia for the Regional Arts Fund grant for This Here Then Now (2024-25 project)
- Creative Plus Business
- NSW Aboriginal Regional Arts Alliance
- Diversity Arts Australia

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

LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS. We acknowledge the numerous active creative community groups from across our region including all those local: Arts Societies, Craft Groups, Art Galleries, Museums and Historical Societies, Science Hubs, Musical and Theatrical Societies, Performance Groups, Bands & Co-ops, First Nations Corporations, 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 Association and s355 committees, and numerous businesses (from galleries to shops to theatrical groups to Aboriginal Cultural Businesses) with energetic local engagement.

Our Principal Partners



Arts Upper Hunter is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW.



SINGLETON
COUNCIL



muswellbrook
shire council



Images

COVER | Grace Barnes, Where Is All Our Water (detail), courtesy the artist.

PAGE 2 | Kids' weaving from the LiddellWORKS weaving workshop, photo by facilitator Michelle Earl.

PAGE 4 | Jacqui Bakewell; Chair and Upper Hunter Shire Council's delegate, courtesy Ms Bakewell.

PAGE 5 | ED John O'Brien on TV. John got to both ask and answer a question on ABC TV's Q&A in 2023 about the effect of decarbonisation on the communities of the Hunter.

PAGE 6 | LiddellWORKS grant announcement by Arts Minister Ben Franklin. Rob Cooper AGL, Dave Layzell State MP, Faye Neilson from Singleton Arts + Cultural Centre, Marina Lee-Warner AUH, Polly Yuille AGL, John O'Brien AUH, Ben Franklin, Len McLachlan Liddell GM, Steve Reynolds Muswellbrook Shire Mayor, Seth Pathiyil AGL, Elissa Emerson Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre. Courtesy Dave Layzell.

PAGE 7 | Artist in Liddell Power Station, photo Suzannah Jones. | Signs, photo Suzannah Jones.

PAGE 8 | Mural artist Jakeob Watson working with Cassilis and Merriwa kids, photo Sue Lawton. | Penny Jones working on site, photo Suzannah Jones. | Artist Suellyn Connolly at Liddell, photo courtesy AGL. | Todd Fuller worked out of a space at the Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre to create many of his portraits, photo Suzannah Jones. | Videographer Jono and artist Huw Jones at Liddell, photo Suzannah Jones.

PAGE 9 | Create By The Lake flyer by Grace Barnes. | Jakeob Watson - mural near completion, photo J O'Brien. | Proud of their weaving, photo by Sue Lawton. | Worker Wish on Janno McLaughlin's Wishing Tree, photo Marina Lee-Warner. | Artwork: Where is all our water by Grace Barnes.

PAGE 10 | Women's Secret Notebook workshop all set up, photo J Harrison. | Twins of Murrurundi's Pioneer Cottage community screening promo. | Dan Bianco and the blue tongue, courtesy Scone Neighbourhood Resource Centre.

PAGE 11 | Book-binding discoveries, courtesy Agnes Lingane. | Leaves & Fishes produced at an Amy O'Donnell workshop, courtesy the artist. | Murrurundi workshop at MACC, courtesy Agnes Lingane.

PAGE 12 | Bec Rath at her Art2Muse opening, courtesy the artist. | Ms Jolley and the Scone & Upper Hunter Historical Society, image by Lynn Rolls. | Sarah Crawford going social, courtesy Sculpture On The Farm.

PAGE 13 | Page Artwork from a mural design by Dan Ellis for Singleton Youth Venue, image courtesy the artist. | Artworks exhibited at Here Now & Always. Michelle Earl Coral Lichen - image Edwina Richards. Debbie Becker Wet On Country - image courtesy D Becker. Rosslyn Thomson Dhuyul (Hill) Basket - image courtesy R Thomson. | Jade Perry appeared in the video Welcoming Here Now Always participants to Wonnarua Country, image by John O'Brien.

PAGE 14 | David Kaus investigates the Museum Of Rural Life's First Nations pieces at Scone Museum, photo John O'Brien. | Richie Lawton AUH Aboriginal Arts Officer entertaining the folk at Muswellbrook's Picnic In The Park, image by Marina Lee-Warner.

PAGE 16 | Creative Valleys is led by Suzannah Jones, who brings a painter's eye to her work, image courtesy A Slack.

PAGE 17 | Monica Davidson contemplates a slide, image John O'Brien. | Arti Trasi performing at Diwali, image Grace Barnes.

PAGE 18 | Brainstormed tablecloth from Peter Kenyon workshop. | What next for this Museum? Picture John O'Brien

PAGE 19 | Grace Barnes (R) speaking at the Artists In Volatile Landscapes symposium at Casula Powerhouse. | The Work of Art promo image. | Matt from Magpie Diaries, courtesy the artist.

BACK COVER | Two Grace Barnes Augmented Reality works from Artists In Volatile Landscapes: Why Do We Other Ourselves & Where Is All Our Water, courtesy the artist.

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PRINTING | Hunter Valley Printing



liddell.works



creativevalleys.com.au



**WHERE IS
ALL OUR
WATER**
Grace
Barnes



**WHY DO
WE OTHER
OURSELVES**
Grace
Barnes

arts UPPER HUNTER



PO Box 114 Muswellbrook NSW 2333
0409 382 509
rado@artsupperhunter.com.au
@artsupperhunter
artsupperhunter.com

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