

ENGAGING ART INITIATIVE REPORT



Audiences engage with Patricia Piccinini's *Ghost*, 2012, at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, 2018. Photo: Tayla Martin.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

Overview

The *Engaging Art Initiative* supported galleries to engage more successfully with their audiences, and draw in new ones, by providing a range of resources and funding to develop more effective audience development strategies and trial new models of engagement.

Supported by the Australia Council for the Arts the *Engaging Art Initiative* launched in early 2017 wrapping up in November 2019 and focused on developing and engaging new audiences for touring exhibitions of contemporary visual art at regional galleries across Australia.

Through our own research and via direct feedback from regional galleries, M&G NSW identified a need to work closely with venues to deliver their priorities in engagement – untapped audiences, First Nations, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Australians and young people - these are essential targets for the strategic vision of galleries across the country, yet they often lack resources and experience to attract and maintain engagement with these groups.

M&G NSW understands the positive impact small to medium sized galleries have on local communities. They inspire their communities and visitors through art, stories and ideas – creating jobs, educational and volunteering opportunities for many ages as well as community excitement and pride. One way we support them in doing this is through our [touring exhibition program](#) which provides the very best contemporary art to the regions affordably. We also recognise that supporting these galleries to engage with audiences through these exhibitions is vital. *The Engaging Art Initiative* worked directly with galleries and their unique communities to grow visitation, participation and engagement, as well as visual arts awareness and opportunities for artists.

‘Our feedback from the visiting artists was also very positive. They all reported that the visit had increased their understanding of regional audiences and in some instances, they presented to a demographic for the first time (e.g. Koji Rui presenting to families and young children)’

- Caboolture Regional Art Gallery

Research and Consultation

M&G NSW worked closely with galleries to support their development of new audience engagement programs. This was informed by initial research involving surveying small to medium galleries about their current audience development and engagement strategies as well as investigating various models of audience research and engagement programs operating here and internationally.

Four regional galleries from across Australia were invited to take part in an intensive two-day workshop at M&G NSW's offices on 27 and 28 March 2017 to share ideas and develop new strategies to engage audiences through two M&G NSW touring exhibitions, *Soft Core* and *Montages: The Full Cut 1999–2015*. Ararat Regional Art Gallery (Vic), Bathurst Regional Art Gallery (NSW), Wagga Wagga Art Gallery (NSW) and Wanneroo Library and Cultural Centre (WA) worked with us in developing pilot projects aligned with these touring exhibitions.

The workshop was a great chance for regional galleries to share their experiences and have space in their very busy schedules to look more deeply at engagement with their regional communities.

The regional galleries worked with *Soft Core* Curator Micheal Do and Artspace Deputy Director Michelle Newton on program ideas for both exhibitions. This was complemented by tailored audience engagement presentations from Director of Public Engagement, Art Gallery of NSW, Jacqui Riddell, two arts publicity professionals, Gabrielle Wilson and Patrizia Di Biase-Dyson (The Press Society) and peer-led learning and youth engagement

specialist Jo Higgins, along with a half day session of conversation and idea sharing with the Museum of Contemporary Art's Audience Engagement team.

Exciting new programs for attracting audiences were developed by each gallery guided by facilitator Jackie Bailey. Each strategy featured a strong originating idea as well as specific audience targets but at the same time were very different to each other, reflecting the unique communities from which they hailed. These were rolled out over the next two years and are outlined below in this report.

In addition to this support in developing the projects each venue was funded \$5,250 towards delivering their audience engagement strategy as well as \$500 towards documenting the program for their future use.

'[It was] great to have time to look at public programs a year in advance and have access to the exhibition curators - a real luxury.'

- Stephen Payne, Manager, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery.

Engaging Art Resources

Early in the research phase of the initiative a need for written guides and resources on different aspects of audience engagement was identified. A suite of online resources and 'how-to' guides were developed to complement the targeted support for galleries and could be used by venues in thinking about and developing sustainable audience engagement. These were:

[How to develop a public program](#)

This guide is based on the process which M&G NSW and BYP Group designed and trialled at the *Engaging Art* Initiative workshop (outlined above) as part of the development of their public programs. The four galleries were overwhelmingly positive about the process, leading M&G NSW to develop this resource to share the steps with the wider sector.

[How to promote an upcoming exhibition](#)

This resource was developed with Arts PR consultant Patrizia Di Biase-Dyson and gives a step by step guide to building a positive profile, raising awareness and – with regards to the museums and galleries sector – attracting visitors.

[How to engage with young people](#)

Galleries often find it challenging to reach and engage with young adult and teenage audiences. Youth engagement specialist Amy Bambach uses guidelines and case studies to show how you can attract young people to your organization and retain them.

[How to conduct Audience Research](#)

Finding out who your existing visitors and program participants are and why they come is essential in developing new audiences and deepening engagement with current ones. This guide written by Jackie Bailey provides the tools and template survey questions to do this.

[Using Social Media to Engage Audiences](#)

Responding to the Australia Council's National Arts Participation Survey which revealed that '8 in 10 people engage with the arts online' this resource explains the differences between social media platforms and offers practical tips on creating content, engaging with your audience and helpful do's and don'ts.

[Design Approaches to Digital Projects - A Beginners Guide](#)

This resource was written by Ségolène Valençot, International Projects Manager for Wezit, France and was based on a workshop delivered in partnership with Ortelia Interactive Services and Museum & Galleries of NSW for understanding and using digital engagement tools in the museum, gallery and collections sector.

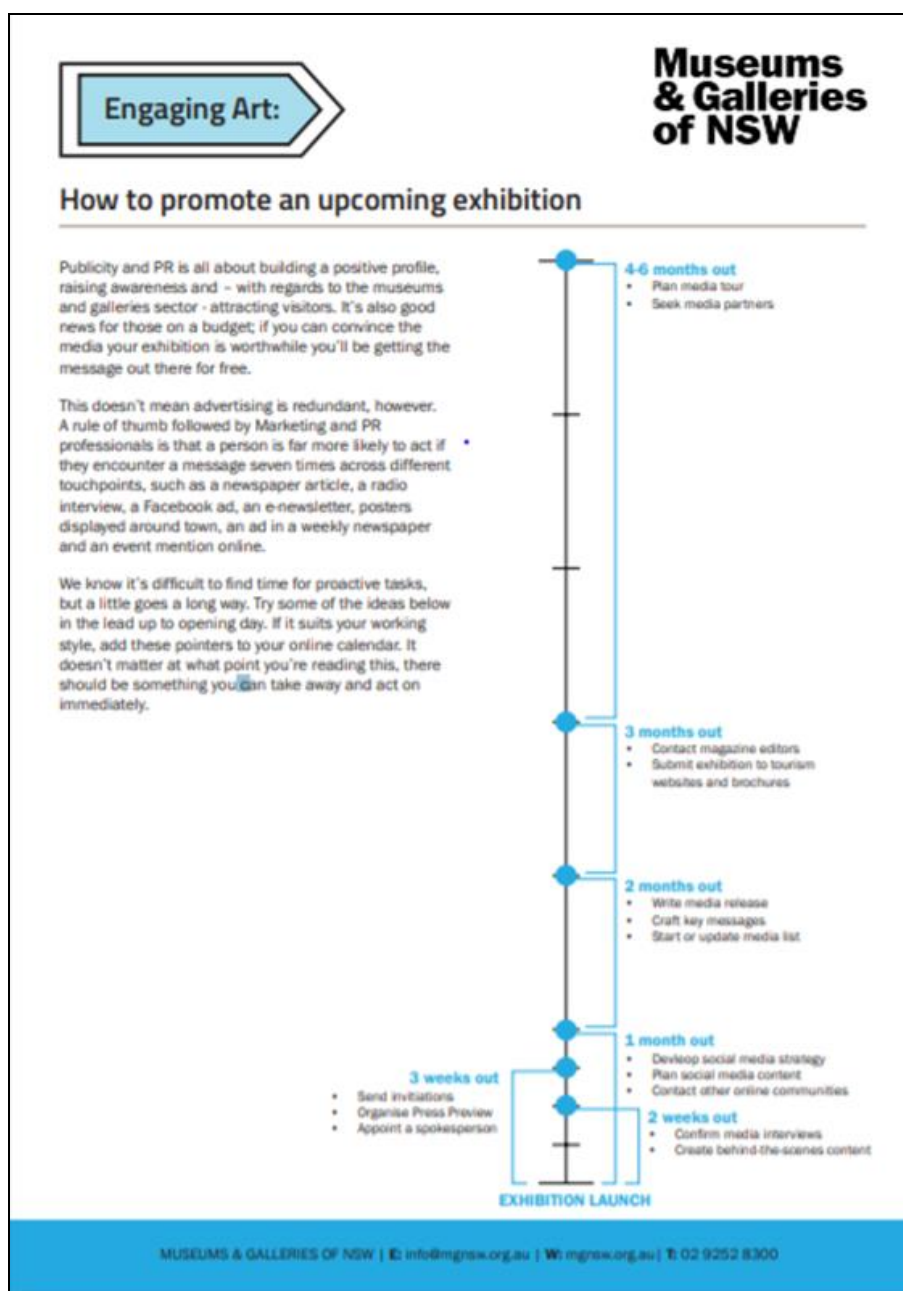
Digital Engagement: Connecting with your audience

This resource was written by Lazaros Kastanis, Director at Ortelia Interactive Services and explains how to implement a project designed to engage and audience with artworks and artists digitally.

These resources are available for free on the M&G NSW website and have been distributed to our partner NETS agencies nationally and have been promoted through their newsletters and websites. They were also distributed and promoted at the national Public Galleries Summit in 2018, as well as at other audience engagement events such as the Cultural Mediation in Practice Workshop in August 2019.

'The resources and opportunity M&G NSW's Engaging Art Initiative has impacted on the depth of engagement in terms of exhibition audience numbers [and their] connection to BRAG and its staff.'

- Bathurst Regional Art Gallery.



PR and Media Support

The initiative also provided a boosted PR and media campaign - working with Humankind PR and regional galleries, new marketing strategies and targeted media campaigns were undertaken alongside the development of media releases and contact lists. This resulted in valuable media exposure and PR professional development opportunities for regional venues as well as an overall promotion of the exhibitions and stimulation of audience numbers.



Artist Simon Yates is interviewed by ABC Radio during *Soft Core* at Wagga Wagga Regional Art Gallery, 2018. Photo: Tayla Martin

Wrap-up Roundtable

On the 21st October 2019 we convened a meeting of the venues involved in the *Engaging Art* initiative and artists and curators they worked with including; Tully Arnot (Artist, *Soft Core*), Micheal Do (Independent Curator/Assistant Curator, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art), Caroline Geraghty (Director, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery) Linda Elliot (Gallery Curator - Learning & Engagement, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery), Gary Hillberg (Artist and collaborator with Tracey Moffatt, Koji Ryui (Artist, *Soft Core*), Melissa Western (Venue Supervisor, Caboolture Regional Art Gallery) and Julian Woods (Audience Engagement Officer, Bathurst Regional Art Gallery) along with M&G NSW staff and CEO.

M&G NSW presented an overview of the program and then heard from the venues as to their experiences, challenges and successes encountered whilst delivering their pilot engagement programs as part of the initiative. We then heard from the artists and the *Soft Core* curator who reported on their experiences and observations – their perspectives and input was invaluable and also really appreciated by the venues who they had worked with.

'It was a wonderful debrief to be part of, and very excellent to have artists in the room'

- Melissa Western, Caboolture Regional Gallery

Engaging Art venues all reported positive outcomes - their involvement in the initiative as a whole, the professional development opportunities that were offered and the chance to develop and deliver a new format for audience engagement at their galleries. They enjoyed sharing their experiences and comparing notes with each other and learning how other regional galleries do what they do.

Some highlights included Wagga Wagga Art Gallery's development of a significant new relationship with the Clontarf Academy in Coonamble, an organisation that mentors young Indigenous men and boys. They also commented that the additional funding for documentation from *Engaging Art* made a huge difference to their capacity for communications and imagery coming out of the programme, and that having access to the artists in person had much more impact and meaning for educators and students than merely reading a catalogue or education kit.

Caboolture Regional Art Gallery reported that without this initiative they would not have been able to afford the artists engaged to facilitate their Professional Educators' program, and therefore trial this new model, which they are continuing to roll out into the future. They also noted that the PR support - having a well-crafted media release and a person to follow up the sending of that release - was extremely beneficial and achieved significant coverage for the gallery.

Bathurst Regional Art Gallery noted that having the artist on site and working with a local artist was a great opportunity, and that the project strengthened ties with local students who felt agency and pride in exhibiting their resulting work in the gallery.

Artists Tully Arnot, Koji Ryu and Gary Hillberg reported that their involvement in this initiative afforded opportunities to work in regional communities they would not otherwise have had. This developed their understanding of different audience and contexts for their art. As one artist commented:



Wrap-up Roundtable participants. October 2019

'[participation in the initiative] improved my confidence and I saw a glimpse of how people respond to my work, which is surprisingly rare and meaningful experience as an artist'

M&G NSW ended the roundtable by presenting our forward plan for audience engagement activities and proposed *Engaging Art* programs, inviting feedback from participants. The comments were very positive and there was enthusiastic support for further development of new audience engagement tools and professional development for venues aligned with our touring program.

Learnings and Challenges

Much has been learned throughout this initiative. The initial workshop and intensive professional development sessions that we held for the venues involved was very successful. All feedback from this part of the program was very positive, venues felt this provided a rare opportunity to make time to take a step back and think about audiences and different ways of engaging them - something that each venue was keen to implement into their forward planning in a longer-term way. However, we found that on returning to the realities and time constraints of running a regional gallery, competing priorities take over and constraints of resourcing and staffing make expanded programming difficult to implement – placing pressures on staff and budgets.

Staff change over time, which is why many of the original participants of the *Engaging Art Initiative* were not those who delivered the programming or attended the Roundtable Wrap-up. Possibly a more staged approach to supporting galleries in audience engagement, with a series of training workshops closer to the timing of an exhibition at their venue, would work better. This is something we are considering for the future through proposed Regional Cultural Mediation Workshops.

Despite these challenges it was worthwhile for galleries to have the opportunity to develop and trial new models for public programming which they could then use as a template for future implementation. For example, Caboolture Regional Art Gallery who are continuing their professional educator series trialled during *Soft Core*.

Other key benefits have been the opportunity for artists and curators to visit the regions and develop deeper relationships of mutual exchange with galleries and their audiences. This brings insights to their understanding of how different audiences across Australia interact with their practice.

Another impressive aspect observed was the capacity for venues to leverage the opportunity of artists and curators visiting their venues by upscaling public programming, media and photography opportunities - they made the most of having them there, which was often exhausting for all but achieved great outcomes.

Our observation has also been that in all public programs delivered during the initiative the most important outcomes for venues have been the quality and depth of engagement with an audience, not merely expanding audience numbers. Public programs delivered as part of *Engaging Art* have predominantly been about empowering the audience to think and be challenged and challenge the gallery in return, this is certainly something that resonates very strongly with the direction and programs we are proposing for the continuation of *Engaging Art*.

Engaging Art into the Future

Through detailed reporting, feedback and research much has been learnt during this pilot initiative, informing new *Engaging Art* programs such as Cultural Mediation in Practice, Regional Cultural Mediation Workshops and Engaging Art Resources. We aim to continue and build upon this work and further develop capacity and skills, whilst delivering new programs and activities alongside our touring exhibition program. We would like to thank the participating venues who worked with us to trial this initiative and look forward to continuing our partnerships into the future.

You can find out more about our recent and proposed *Engaging Art* programs [here](#).

VENUE PROJECTS

Wanneroo Library and Cultural Centre, WA

Activity

Target audience

Exhibition: *Tracey Moffatt & Gary Hillberg, Montages: The Full Cut 1999–2015*
15 July 2017 – 26 August 2017

local community and Perth art and film maker communities.

Gary Hillberg & Curtis Taylor Filmmaking Workshops for Year 10-12 school groups
18 July 2017 9.45am - 2.10pm

Aboriginal students from Girrawheen High School

Participants learnt film making techniques with Gary Hillberg and local Martu filmmaker Curtis Taylor, created their own short films using their own smart phones/devices. The completed films were later screened at the Wanneroo Library and Cultural Centre.

Gary Hillberg & Curtis Taylor Filmmaking Workshops for Year 10-12 school groups
19 July 2017 9.45am - 2.10pm

Aboriginal students from Butler Community college

Gary Hillberg & Curtis Taylor Filmmaking Workshops for Year 10-12 school groups
20 July 2017 9.45am - 2.10pm

Aboriginal students from St Mary's Anglican Girls School

Artist Talk with Gary Hillberg
22 July at 2pm – 4pm

Locals of all ages, film students, audience from Perth (City), arts audience.

Outcomes

'This program had a positive impact on a greater audience number, the general public numbers were quite low [previously] and this definitely meant a wider audience visited the Gallery, it achieved our goals in that participants reported a deeper understanding of art and differing art forms, participants developed skills and knowledge, and had a sense of confidence, pride, self-efficacy and esteem and insight into their own potential.'

There was an increased participation in the arts via visitation and attending workshops, public talks etc. And for those participants who hadn't visited a gallery before, they felt more comfortable in the space and I feel confident they will visit again.'

- Wanneroo Library and Cultural Centre



Workshop with Gary Hillberg - Girrawheen Senior High School

Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, NSW

Activity

Target audience

Exhibition: *Tracey Moffatt & Gary Hillberg, Montages: The Full Cut 1999–2015*
8 December 2017 – 28 January 2018

Local community and tourists as well as school age children and their families and teachers

BRAG invited Gary Hillberg to present a floor talk before the exhibition opening
8 December 2017 5 - 6 PM

High school students their families and teachers

Express Yourself - Year 9 & 10 students at Bathurst High School - workshop with BRAG Audience Engagement Officer Penny May, and artist mentors Gary Hillberg and Henry Denyer-Simmons.
6 December 2017 9-3pm

High school students their families and teachers

Express Yourself - Year 9 & 10 students at Bathurst High School - workshop with BRAG Audience Engagement Officer Penny May, and artist mentors Gary Hillberg and Henry Denyer-Simmons.
7 December 2017 9-3pm

High school students their families and teachers

Express Yourself - Launch of student films exhibited in BRAG alongside Montages exhibition
14 December 2017 6pm

High school students their families and teachers

Outcomes

Giving the students the opportunity to meet Gary Hillberg before the exhibition opening, allowed them to become familiar with the artworks and engage with Gary Hillberg on a more personal level.

Outcomes include:

- Increased number of young visitors to *Montages The Full Cut 1999-2015*.
- Increased repeat visitation by young visitors.
- Visitors reported a sense of welcome, belonging, connection and artistic growth/development of their understanding of art forms.
- Participants reported an increase in skills, knowledge and pride.

'The tour of Tracey Moffatt and Gary Hillberg's Montages: The Full Cut was fantastically timed given Tracey Moffatt's participation in the 2017 Venice Biennale, giving BRAG audiences access to work by one of Australia's pre-eminent artists. The focus on developing and strengthening new audiences through the Engaging Art Program also allowed BRAG to continue to develop relationships with local schools with a focus on creating meaningful engagement and tangible outcomes for students.'

- Bathurst Regional Art Gallery



Express Yourself launch Facebook post - Year 9 & 10 students from Bathurst High School, December 2017

Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, NSW

Activity

Exhibition: *Soft Core*

11 August – 28 October 2018

4 x school workshops with Tully Arnot and Simon Yates

12-14 September 2018

Artist Q&A Session with Soft Core Artist Simon Yates, and Curator-Learning and Engagement Linda Elliott

Saturday 15 September 2018, 10am – 12pm

Pizza with the Artists

Thursday 13 September 2018, 5 – 7pm

Target audience

Wider community of the Riverina Region

Riverina schools

Children and families of children and the wider community of the Riverina Region. With a specific focus on youth; aged 12 to 18 years of age

As above

Outcomes

'The uptake from children and their families was successful the focus of youth was smaller, but an important connection was made with the Clontarf academy in Coonamble with future visits and engagement to take place. The youth audience has always been a difficult audience to develop and maintain.'

'[Engaging Art] also provided an opportunity for two significant artists to collaborate not just on the workshops but to develop their own practices.'

- Wagga Wagga Art Gallery

- Primary Schools took up the workshop program
- Assistance with marketing meant local media outlets engaged.
- Flow on effect means higher new visitation.



Humula Public School students, Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, Pic: Tayla Martin.

Caboolture Regional Art Gallery, QLD

Activity

Target audience

Exhibition: *Soft Core*

15 February - 20 April 2019.

Professional Educator Series: Soft Core

A series of events and activities aimed at professional educators. Educators could engage in one of, or a whole series of workshops during the exhibition run of *Soft Core*.

Educators in the Moreton Bay Region from early childhood up to tertiary level.

Event #1: Friday 15 February, 4.00 - 7.00pm - Tour, talk and networking.

Join an exclusive exhibition preview with curator Micheal Do as he discusses the ideas, processes and challenges of curating *Soft Core*.

As above

Event #2: Thursday 7 March, 4.00 - 6.00pm - Artist meet & greet + workshop.

Meet Sydney-based artists Tully Arnot and Simon Yates whose works feature in *Soft Core*. Learn workshop techniques to apply soft sculpture concepts in the classroom.

As above

Event #3: Tuesday 9 April 10.30am - 12.30pm - Artist meet & greet + workshop.

Meet Koji Ryui whose work *Have a nice day* features in *Soft Core*. Using plastic bags and clay Koji creates new life from found objects. Learn about his processes and the concepts behind the work.

As above

Event #4: Wednesday 10 April 9.00am - 12.00noon - Visual art masterclass.

Brisbane-based artist Simone Eisler will tutor you through a transformative doll workshop, creating the animal from the human.

As above

Outcomes

'The Professional Educator program enabled us to develop quality connections with key local educators and artists. Being able to offer such a quality program assisted in raising our profile in the educator community.'

- 'Connections with teachers attending the sessions developed rapidly. We were able to arrange an in-class visit to Caboolture SHS with touring artist Simon Yates and we confirmed a student exhibition in our Hub Gallery space (in September 2019) [...] Both these connections happened as a direct result of inviting and welcoming teachers in to our space via the Professional Educator series.'
- The *Engaging Art* program enabled us to test a market we have been hoping to attract at CRAG.
- We were able to leverage the visiting artists for the *Engaging Art* program to present other family focused public programs while they visited the gallery.'

- Caboolture Regional Art Gallery



Koji Ryui Professional Development workshop and Soft Play workshops, April 2019