

# The Participating Audience

Lisa Walsh, Director Research and Knowledge Management

Urban Theatre Projects, Home Country. Credit Kate Blackmore

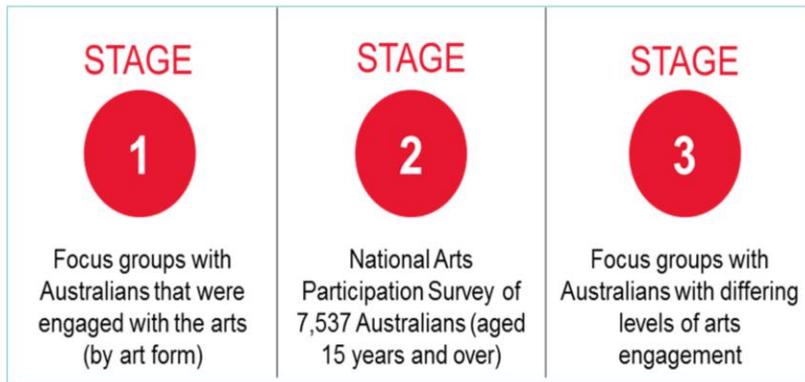
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## Agenda

- The big numbers
- Our conundrum
- Case study – First Nations research program

## National Arts Participation Survey



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- Previous surveys: 2009 & 2013 n = 3k by phone
- Research approach 2016: (apx 6,500 online plus 1000 by random digit dial landlines and mobiles)



National Arts Participation survey

Why we do it:

- Advocacy tool for the sector – evidence of the ubiquity of the arts in Australian life and the value of the arts to individuals and society.
- To identify and track trends, paints an evolving picture of the arts in Australians' lives.
- Broad scope – commercial and not-for-profit; amateur and professional; in person and online experiences – it helps the sector to understand a range of aspects of arts audiences and markets.
- Cross-portfolio insights – wellbeing, innovation, social impact etc.

Report and data available on website incl. – factsheets, data tables in excel, interactive dashboards

## Arts engagement



attend in person (=)



creatively participate (=)



engage online (▲ 73%, 49%)



Bridie Hooper and the Circa ensemble in *Horizon with Angels*. Image by Nikon Australia, courtesy of Bleach Festival.

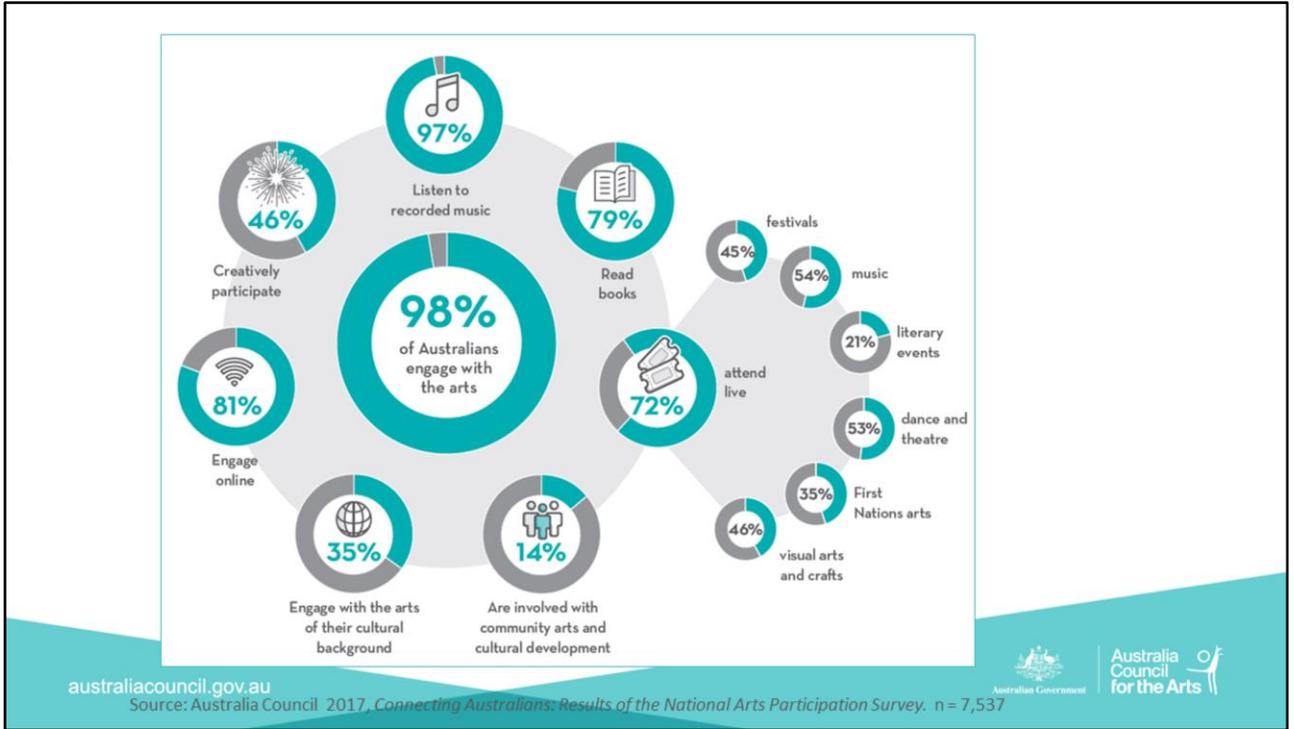
Source: Australia Council 2017, *Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*. n = 7,537

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### Trends

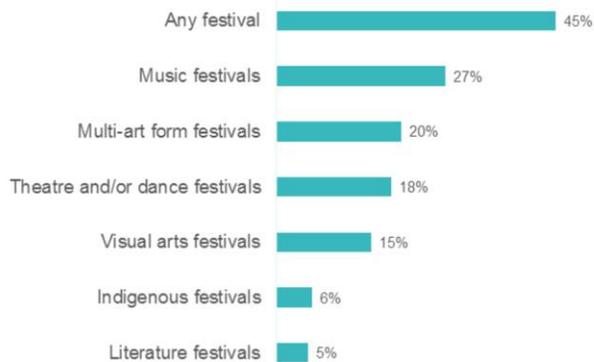
- It is no surprise that **online engagement** is booming (8 in 10), with increases in music live streaming a major contributor. However, it's interesting to note that overall Australians still highly value live arts experiences as well, with more than 14 million attending the **arts in person in 2016 (7 in 10, on par with 2013)**. We are seeing that the evolving online opportunities are not replacing live attendance, they are creating greater access with new ways of making, sharing and experiencing the arts.
- Australia remains a creative nation. Almost half of Australians creatively participate in the arts, on par with 2013, and increasingly in ways that enable them to connect with others through the arts.



- Increases in both attendance and participation in theatre and dance (participation is inherently social – connection)
- attendance at visual arts and craft
- participation in creative writing (likely to be online platforms, social media, blogs – social forms of writing)

# Festivals

## Australians' festivals attendance 2016



Byron Writers Festival 2016. Credit: Evan Malcolm

Source: Australia Council 2017, *Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*. n = 7,537

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Collected for the first time – popularity of festivals

## The arts create social cohesion



*"With music you are all dancing to the same beat."*  
- Focus group participant

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The arts have an increasingly powerful role to play in promoting social cohesion – now more important than ever.

They have a unique capacity to connect Australians from diverse backgrounds.

### **2 in 3 of us agree that the arts**

- help us shape and express Australian identity
- understand other people and cultures, and
- allow us to connect to others.

### **3 in 4 of us agree that the arts**

- are an important way to get a different perspective, and
- reflect Australia's cultural diversity – up 11% from 2014.

**The image is of a Malak Community Dinner**, which bring people together once a month to share arts and food from across the globe. Organised by Darwin Community Arts, the dinners feature local artists and groups. They have been held since 2008 to improve racial relations and connect and strengthen the local community in the northern Darwin suburb of Malak.

**A quote from the focus groups about music as a leveller and connector:**

'Music can cut through all barriers. So it doesn't matter what social level you are at, you go to see a band and you can have blokes there who are doctors, lawyers, white collar, and they are all standing and chilling out next to blue-collar workers, could be unemployed. Outside of that band and place these guys aren't going to interact because they are totally different social groups, but you don't care because you're there to see the band... For X amount of time that's all that matters. You don't care about social status or money. You are just a bunch of people watching a band... With music you are all dancing to the same beat.'

## The arts support wellbeing



*"A good story can really lift my spirits or just take me to a different place if I'm having a bad day."*  
- Focus group participant

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### More Australians now believe the arts have a 'big' or 'very big' impact on :

- their sense of wellbeing and happiness
- their ability to express themselves
- their ability to think creatively and develop new ideas

Great image of Jacob Boehme connecting with the audience in Blood on the Dance Floor.

### A quote from the focus groups about the power of music to make you feel good:

'Music touches your soul... It really can lift you. It can take you to another place... Music is my drug of choice. I'm a music addict.'

**And reading:** 'A good story can really lift my spirits or just take me to a different place if I'm having a bad day.'

## Agenda

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## Our Conundrum

Contrasting with the positive findings about Australians' increasing recognition of the impact of the arts, there are some concerning trends in Australians' attitudes to the arts.

## 'Society is broken'\* – What role the arts?

- 1 in 3 feel like a stranger in their own country\*
- 2 in 3 would vote for someone who 'stands up for the common people against the elite.'\*
- Growing ambivalence towards the arts:
  - not really for people like me (up from 13% to 22%)
  - attract people who are elitist and pretentious (up from 30% to 43%)
  - too expensive (up from 36% to 43%)
- Support for public funding of the arts has fallen from 85% to 66% since 2009 – rise in ambivalence not negativity

\*Ipsos Global 2017, Global @visor: Power to the people?  
Australia Council 2017, Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey. n = 7,537

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Wellbeing and social cohesion more important than ever, but increased ambivalence/ decreased support for the arts

Society has changed since the 2013 survey, and we're seeing that reflected in the results as increased ambivalence, a corresponding decline in the strength of public agreement with positive attitude statements about the arts

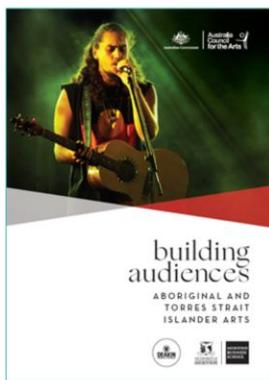
Why?

- Anxiety in the national mood
  - More pressing concerns – cost of living, education, healthcare
  - Narrow views of 'the arts'
- The National Arts Participation Survey results evidence the potential for the arts to be a powerful balm to this wound – through their ability to build social cohesion through empathy, understanding and connection. It is these social conditions that make the role of the arts more important than ever.
  - The qualitative research also showed that some people just have more

- pressing concerns at this point in time – cost of living, health and education; and that some Australians have a narrow view of what the arts include – thinking of them as ‘opera and ballet’ and often dismissing the things they enjoy most frequently such as listening to music, reading or going to a festival.
- As a result they are underestimating the vital role the arts play in the quality of their everyday experience, and thinking the arts are ‘not really for people like me’ despite their own engagement.
  - Some are not attributing public value because of the gap between what they think the arts are and the ways they personally engage and benefit. They are also missing the link between public funding and free subsidised art – the role of public funding in making the arts less expensive and accessible to all Australians.
  - Contrasting with the positive findings about Australians’ increasing recognition of the impact of the arts, there are some concerning trends in Australians’ attitudes to the arts.

<http://ipsos.com.au/ipsos-global-study-shows-majority-around-the-world-think-society-is-broken/>

## Case study: First Nations research program



## Australians' attitudes 2013



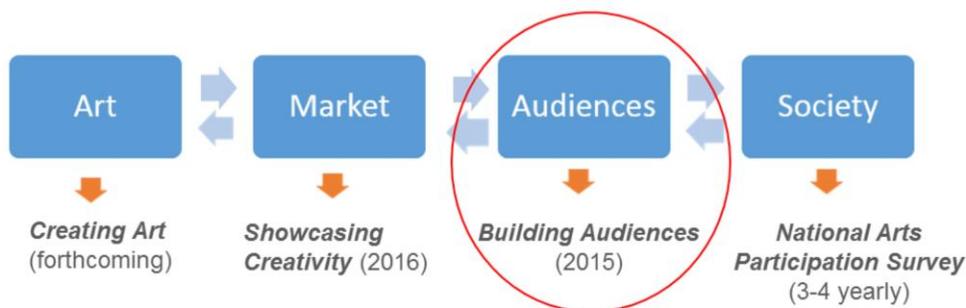
Source: Australia Council 2014, *Arts in Daily Life*, National Arts Participation Survey results. n=3,004

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- Australia Council's 2013 National Arts Participation Survey found that
  - 92% of Australians agree that Indigenous arts are an important part of Australia's culture
  - Two thirds of Australians have a strong or growing interest in Indigenous arts
  - But less than half of Australians agree that Indigenous arts are well represented in Australia, and
  - Only a quarter had attended Indigenous arts in the past year.
- **The gap between interest and attendance highlighted an opportunity to build audiences for First Nations arts.**

## Performing arts supply chain and Australia Council research



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- *Building Audiences* explored this opportunity from the perspective of audiences, both existing and potential.
- *Showcasing Creativity* explored it from the perspective of those who facilitate works being made public and promoting works to audiences - producers and presenters.
- These were used for advocacy and a provocation to the sector, as well as driving Council's strategic development work.
- We are currently undertaking a study exploring challenges and opportunities to do with the creation of First Nations artistic works.
- The *National Arts Participation Survey* enables tracking over time of Australians' interests, attitudes and attendance.

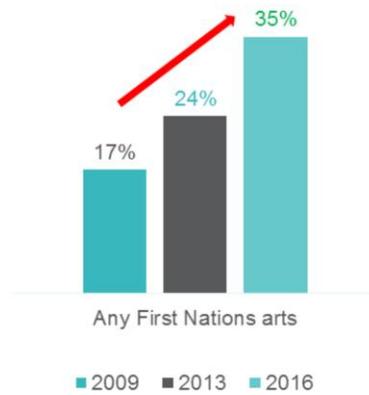
### Evidence-based capacity building

- The Council has a strong commitment to capacity development for First Nations organisations and artists. This includes mentoring and leadership programs, support for increased First Nations representation at showcases such as the Australian Performing Arts Market and BIGSOUND, and capacity building for First Nations artists to be market ready and leverage opportunities.

- In March 2017 the Council sent a delegation of mainstream presenters and programmers to Yirramboi First Nations Arts Festival, where they experienced and discussed First Nations work, and developed curatorial capacity in First Nations arts. (aim of increasing their confidence to program)

## First Nations arts

- Attendance has doubled
- Across all art forms
- The gap between interest and attendance appears to be closing



Source: Australia Council 2017, *Connecting Australians: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey*.  
n=3,006 in 2009; n=3,004 in 2013; n= 7,537 in 2016.

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The 2016 results show an increase in attendance from 24% to 35%, suggesting the gap is closing.

(If asked, interest can't be directly compared due to changes in the question)

54% now feel that First Nations arts were well represented, up from 46% in 2013.



[www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research)

[I.walsh@australiacouncil.gov.au](mailto:I.walsh@australiacouncil.gov.au)

[australiacouncil.gov.au](http://australiacouncil.gov.au)

