



# Artists share their creative journeys and challenges in the face of COVID-19

November 2020

**Local artists in Central Queensland respond to the pandemic, creating new work in challenging times**

## What

Across the broader Central Queensland region, the *Tough and Tender* artist at-home residency project provided a catalyst for local artists from diverse art forms to document and respond to the pandemic, generate new work, and contribute to a suite of virtual and physical outcomes.

*Tough and Tender*, delivered by Central Queensland University as the [Central Queensland Regional Arts Services Network](#) provider, supported over 20 regional artists in a signature project which commenced at the onset of COVID-19.

The four rounds of month-long residencies over May, June, July and August 2020 provided artists with an income and included weekly zoom sessions and personal development sessions presented by [Crossroad Arts](#) and Rockhampton Art Gallery amongst others.

Artists shared their creative journeys through regular blogging on a custom designed website for the project as they explored social and environmental challenges through their artworks in the 'at home' residencies.

*Tough and Tender* profiles the diversity of the region, and the important role of the arts for creative response, resilience, recovery, memorialising and celebration. The project looked at ways in which the arts can be used to respond, reimagine and rebuild.



Work by artist Anna Nicholsen. Image courtesy Central Queensland University as the Central Queensland Regional Arts Services Network provider

## Key stats [to September 2020]



Support from Gladstone, Livingstone Shire, Bundaberg, Mackay, Isaac, Banana Shire and Central Highlands councils and independent arts organisation Keppel Coast Arts



29 artists (6 in May 2020, 8 in June 2020, 7 in July 2020, 8 artists in August 2020)



4 volunteer arts sector professional presenters delivered a series of professional development workshops for the participating artists in areas such as exhibition opportunities and curatorial practice and social media and marketing.

## When and where

From May 2020 to August 2020

## Arts Queensland Investment

\$20,000 from the Central Queensland [Regional Arts Services Network \(RASN\)](#). RASN empowers local communities, drives regional development priorities, builds capacity, supports collaboration and leverages the value of the arts to achieve social and economic outcomes with Queensland Government investment of \$6.5 million over four years (2018–2021).

Additional support through the [Regional Arts Development Fund](#), a partnership between the Queensland Government and Banana Shire Council to support local arts and culture in regional Queensland.



*Work by Shelley Engwirda (Left) and Maree Purnell (Right). Images courtesy Central Queensland University as the Central Queensland Regional Arts Services Network provider*

## Outcomes

- Capacity building and cross-regional spread of artists
- Increased profile for local artists within and beyond Central Qld
- New collaboration between artists
- Support for creative practice during COVID-19 period of isolation and beyond
- Production of new work for artists
- Skills development
- Economic and health benefits: employment of artists during a period when many projects were canceled due to COVID-19
- Ongoing networks and online groups developed through the residency program for artists
- Upskilling of artists through regular Professional Development sessions



Work by artist Noel Brady. Image courtesy Central Queensland University as the Central Queensland Regional Arts Services Network provider

## Learnings and reflections

Taroom contemporary embroidery and textiles artist Hilary Coulter said the theme of tough and tender beauty evoked notions of vulnerability.

“ *It's not only feeling exposed and defenceless, but about the way we deal with challenges and how they force us to grow and adapt, hopefully for the better.* ”

“ *In my residency, I am going to explore where community life has and has not changed, as well as methods of illustrating this through embroidery genre paintings or paintings of everyday life.* ”

All of the regional artists involved spoke about the benefits to wellbeing by being a part of a supportive networks of artists at a time when isolation meant loss of work and exhibitions etc. Many of the artists who work in isolation as a result of living remotely spoke about the benefits of receiving regular feedback on their work through the weekly zoom meetings and by sharing their works in progress.

## Tips for others

“ *This project was a great way to offer our artists living remotely with the opportunity to broaden their artist networks across the region and to create a culture of friendship and collaboration across our diverse regions.* ”

“ *A key aspect of this project that added to its success was the diversity of artists in each round. If rolling our similar projects choosing a mix of artists that are at different stages in their career and from different areas and different genres really adds to the support programs like this can provide.* ”

“ *Many of the project participants voiced how beneficial it was having the weekly zoom catch up sessions factored into the program. As well as inviting guest speakers to the sessions we would recommend allowing ample time for participants to each share their weekly learnings and provide time for participants to receive peer feedback.* ”



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The blog site we used for the project was based on a free open source wordpress platform. The benefit of this was it was that it required no budget and was quick and easy. However the limitations were that it did not have the capacity to store unlimited images ect, so at the end of each residency we had to remove all information prior to the next round of artists. Ideally have a site in place from the beginning that can archive the previous artists.

“

Promoting the participating artists through weekly Instagram and FB posts was really beneficially, but very time consuming. We would recommend doing this, but making sure you acknowledge the time this requires and factor it into your management plan.

## What next

Central Queensland Regional Arts Services Network will continue to work with regions and artists to develop curated content that will culminate and be shared on a proposed common weekend in June 2021 as a part of the signature project for CQ RASN in 2021, 'Shine Bright cross regional Arts Festival'. Content will also be shared at various festivals and events throughout the year.

## Participating Artists:

### May 2020

- Noel Brady
- Karen Andersen
- Shelley Engwirda
- Tracey Hewitt
- Rachel Koster
- Melissa Peacock

### June 2020

- Keemon Williams
- Jodie Van der Wetering
- Katina Olsen
- Peta LLOYD
- Nicole Jakins
- Olivia Everitt
- Nanette Balchin
- Will Andersen

### July 2020

- Kristel Kelly
- Kara Day
- Felicity Chapman
- Anna Nicholson
- Maree Purnell
- Janelle Evans
- Matthew Barker

### August 2020

- Sarah Larsen
- Lisa Roebig - Holmes
- Ruby Come Back - Jayne and Pablo Centurion
- Raelene Bock
- Michelle Grey
- Rebecca Collis
- Hilary Coulter

More information about the August residency artists' background and a blog that follows their work is available at:

<https://toughandtenderbeauty.wordpress.com/>



Olivia Everitt (left) and Hilary Coulter (Right). Images courtesy Central Queensland University as the Central Queensland Regional Arts Services Network provider

## Find out more

[Lumen video produced by Central Queensland University on the project](#)

[Central Queensland University news article - Important role for the arts in regions during tough times](#)

[www.arts.qld.gov.au/rasn](http://www.arts.qld.gov.au/rasn)

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