


# Cultural Strategy 2025– 2035

Retain. Rebuild. Reimagine.

CITY OF SYDNEY 







The City of Sydney acknowledges  
the Gadigal of the Eora Nation as the  
Traditional Custodians of our local area.  
We acknowledge their continued  
care for the lands and waters of this place  
and continued connections to Country.

We deliver our cultural strategy in the  
context of the world's oldest, continuous,  
living cultures – those of Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait Islander peoples – and we  
pay our respects to their Elders  
both past and present.



# SYDNEY'S CULTURAL LIFE IS...

**Shiny**  
Fragmented **Hidden**  
Hot **Sick of Waiting** Diverse  
**Amazing** In Pubs **Hard Fought**  
**Quiet** Super Queer **Over-Priced** Bold  
Multicultural **Talking to Itself** Over Too Early  
Obsessed with Big **Underground** An Apologist  
**Multicultural** Dominated by Big Institutions **Healing**  
Monocultural **A Mixed Bag** Afraid of Taking Risks  
**Brash Beautiful** Both World Scale and Fine Grain  
**Fun** Hard to Find **Exhausted** Corporate **Glitzy**  
Clustered in Certain Areas **Commodification** Kinship  
**Overwhelming Aspirational** Founded in Activism  
Competing to be Heard **Resilient** Losing Character  
**Welcoming of Everyone** Under-valued **Sparse**  
**Exclusive** Eruptive **Teetering Always On**  
**Always a Discovery** A Work in Progress  
Under-Nurtured **Over-Regulated**  
The Best Thing We've Got  
**Evolving**

What our creative sector said  
about Sydney's cultural life



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# Lord Mayor's Message

Sydney is the powerhouse of culture for the nation with the largest portion of Australia's cultural institutions and cultural workers.



The City of Sydney has long supported the artists, musicians, writers, performers and institutions under the Creative City Cultural Policy And Action Plan 2014–2024.

Over the past decade, this policy has guided our funding, our policies and our actions. Each year we have invested an average of \$34 million on art and culture ranging from our New Year's Eve fireworks, to art commissions, to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events, and to grants for local cultural celebrations.

They help to support our economy and close to 1,700 creative business in the City, as well as the thousands more that rely on them. They have provided Sydney's artists with paid work, and the

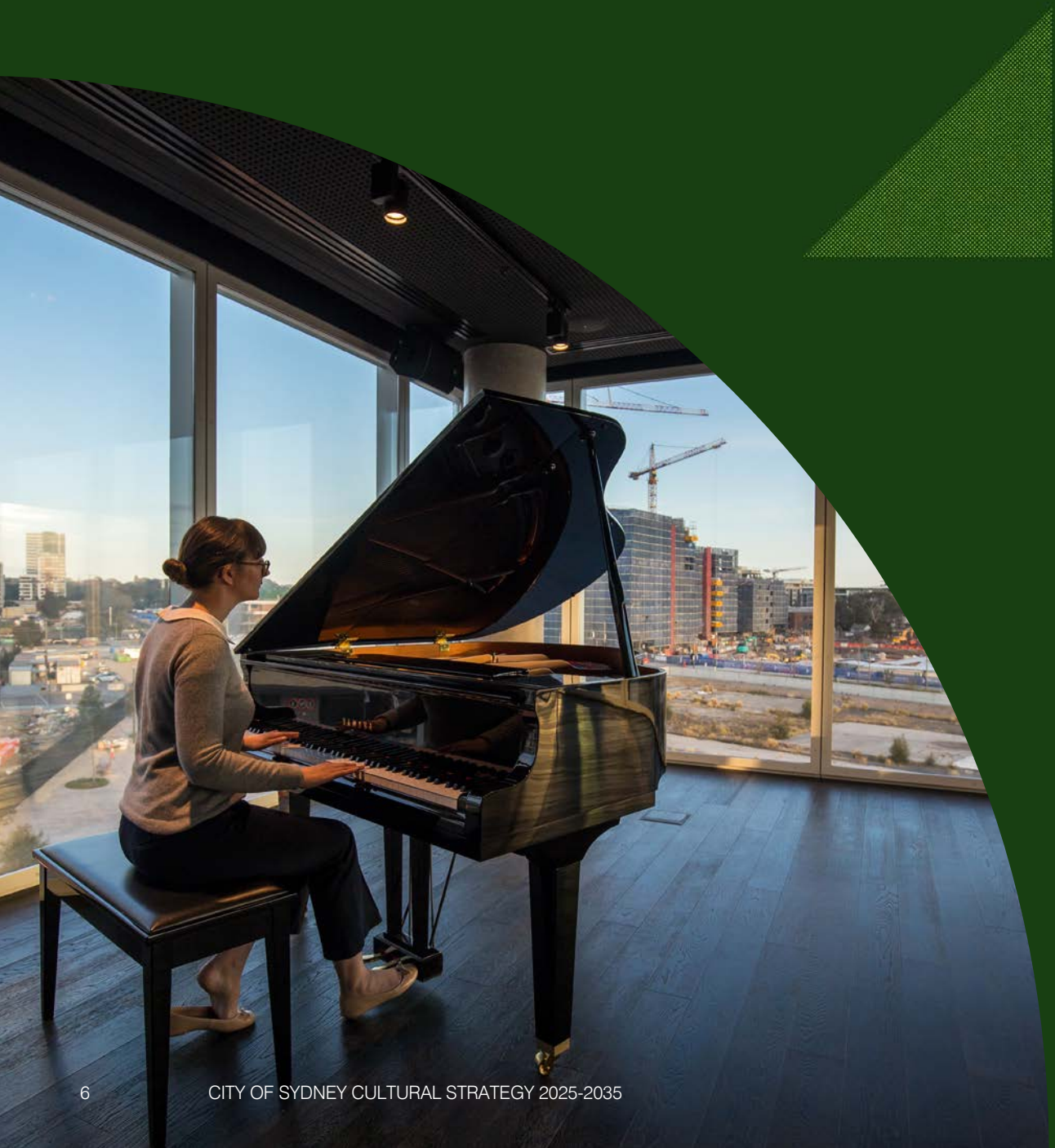
broader community with a window to our unique character, ideas and stories.

We are committed to continuing our support and inspiration for Sydney's creative communities with this draft Cultural Strategy 2025–2035. It responds to the evolving needs of creative workers and institutions including the delivery of affordable, creative workspaces. The strategy involves an increase in investment and bold initiatives to help retain what we have, rebuild what we've lost and reimagine an even more inspiring, diverse and thriving cultural life.

A stylized, handwritten signature of Clover Moore AO in white ink.

**Clover Moore AO**  
Lord Mayor of Sydney





# Introduction

Culture underpins all that is meaningful in our lives and our communities, it is what makes a city more than the sum of its parts. It gives Sydney its character and a sense of belonging for all of us who love this place. Without our culture, there is nothing to define us and bind us.





The people who work in the arts, culture and creative industries are central to this – those who make-manifest the intangible and give diverse, distinct voice to our stories, ideas and imaginings. These creative workers are embedded throughout so much of our economy and their work supports technology and innovation, tourism, retail and hospitality sectors, and a vibrant 24-hour global city. They also have a significant role to play in education, climate adaptation, social cohesion, health and wellbeing.

When we developed Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision we asked our community to tell us what they most value in our city. They were emphatic about the importance of maintaining a thriving cultural life in Sydney. We know, to achieve this, we need the people who make culture and the places where they work.

The City of Sydney makes a significant, ongoing contribution. We safeguard vital local venues for making and presenting culture. In 2024, our

cultural property portfolio provides 8,300m<sup>2</sup> to 41 cultural tenants, facilitating thousands of opportunities for creative participation each year. We have built new infrastructure for rehearsals, music production, visual arts, and screen-based media. We produce free and accessible events and creative programs, and we dedicate more than \$5 million in grant funding to cultural purposes every year.

Despite our sustained investment, the global economic circumstances, long-tail impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, inflationary pressures and the affordability crisis are pushing Sydney's creative spaces and workers to the brink. We have had to remain responsive to these disruptions and refocus our support to meet emerging needs. That is why we've refreshed our 10 year cultural strategy to focus on the immediate challenge of retaining our cultural infrastructure and workforce, as well as set an aspirational path towards our community's vision for a thriving cultural life and creative city.

This strategy sets our intentions and a framework for how we will pursue our 8 strategic ambitions for culture. It is particularly focused on our strengths as a local government and the areas in which we have most influence. It is an invitation to neighbouring councils, other levels of government and the private sector to work with us in partnerships for greater impact. We know that Sydney's creative sector is borderless and that people who live in other government areas deliver great value to our cultural life. That is why, where appropriate, we will provide opportunities to artists and organisations from Greater Sydney and initiate actions that will benefit the whole metropolitan region.

We know there are no simple solutions to the challenges facing Sydney and other global cities like ours, but we will manage these challenges better together. This strategy outlines an approach to this evolving work – to retain what we have, rebuild what we have lost, and reimagine our cultural life as sustainable, equitable, inspiring and thriving.





# CULTURE AND THE CITY OF SYDNEY

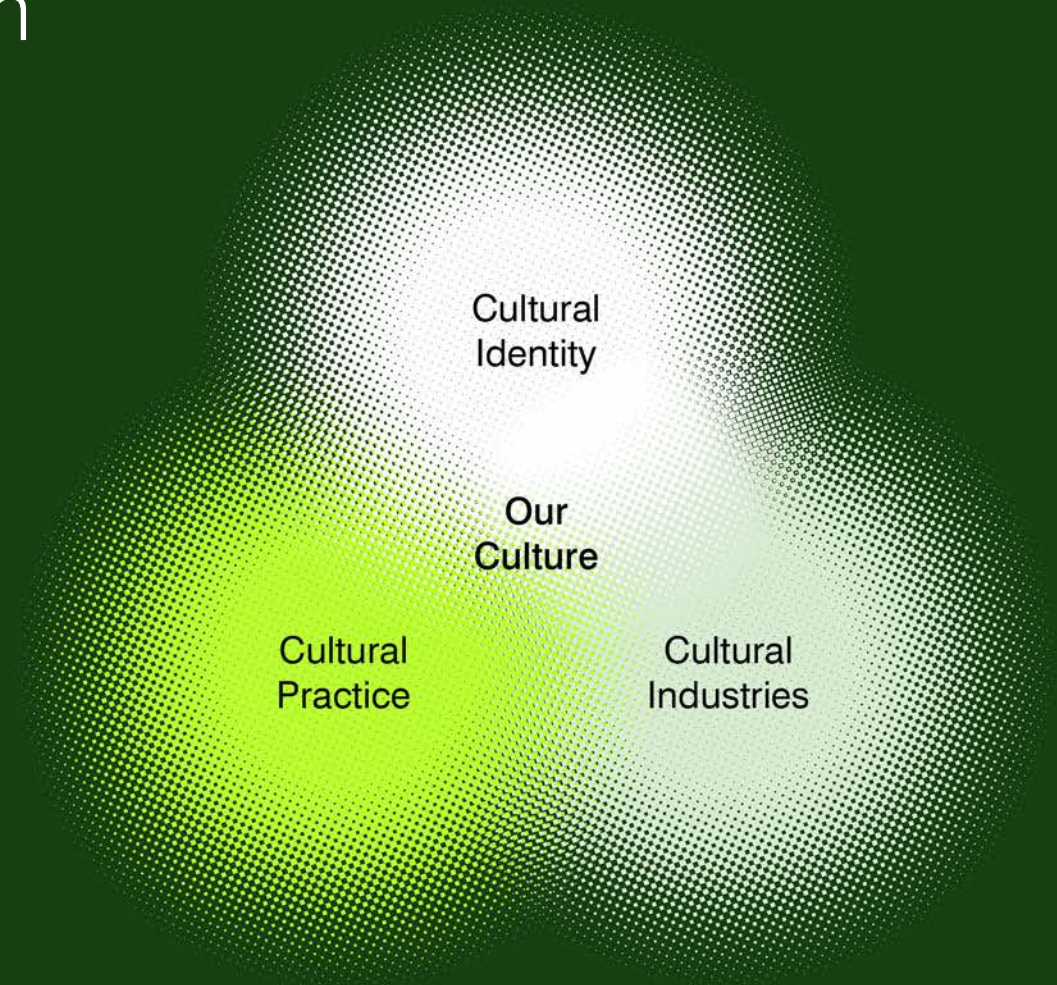




# At the City of Sydney, when we say “culture” we mean:

- the arts, cultural and creative industries
- the heritage, knowledge and cultural practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- the expressions of identity, and shared experience and aspirations of our diverse and multicultural communities.

This strategy includes a vision and ambitions for all these aspects of our cultural life.







# A thriving cultural life

We are proud of our city.

Everyone can participate in, contribute to and benefit from the cultural life of our city.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultural practices are visible and respected.
- We value our cultural life and champion our creative industries.
- An increasing number of creative workers live or work in our city.
- Sydney's cultural life reflects the diversity of our communities.
- There is an increasing supply of accessible creative spaces.
- Creativity and culture is embedded in the fabric of our city.
- Creativity and great experiences fuel the vitality of our city.
- There is equitable access to education and learning opportunities, everyone can participate in a creative practice.

*Sustainable Sydney 2030–2050: Continuing the Vision* is our community strategic plan. It is the result of extensive consultation with people who live, work and visit in our city. This is their vision for 'a thriving cultural life' that is central to the future of our city.







# Our support for culture

We support a thriving cultural life in our city in 4 strategic areas – these are our cultural pillars.



## Right to culture

We respect and support First Nations people's connections to Country and Culture.

We celebrate the many cultures of our diverse, multicultural and inclusive city

We acknowledge culture as vital to liveability and wellbeing.



## Creative workforce

We champion our creative workforce and build opportunities for creative employment, talent retention, cultural exports and a sustainable local sector.



## Cultural infrastructure

We provide, protect, advocate and plan for the infrastructure needed to support our creative industries and a thriving cultural life.



## Creative participation

We ensure there are pathways for everyone to engage in a creative practice and participate in the cultural life of Sydney.





# How we support culture

Our support for a thriving cultural life is embedded across every department and service we provide.

While we maintain cultural programs, events and creative spaces, we also consider how all our activities can play a role in supporting the cultural life of the city. This includes our planning and regulatory functions, our design and management of public spaces, our property and archive assets, and our customer service and communications channels.

We support culture through:

## Production

We produce programs and events that provide audiences with equitable access to culture.

## Employment

We employ creative production staff, performers, curators and arts educators, and we commission new work and acquire art.

## Investment

We provide cash and in-kind grants and a program of direct sector support.

## Space

We supply a diverse portfolio of creative spaces and facilities, and influence future supply with our planning policy. We design public spaces to enable and enrich our cultural life.

## Inspiration

We record and share the stories of our city, we provide access to knowledge and skills, and make connections – between audiences and cultural offerings, collaborators and new partners, and artists with ideas.

## Leadership

We advocate for a strong and secure cultural sector. We carry out research to guide and empower the sector. We demonstrate best practice in engaging creative workers, respecting intellectual property and producing inclusive and accessible events.

Through our relationships with local councils and state and federal government agencies we advocate on behalf of the cultural sector and our communities.









# OUR COMMUNITIES, CULTURE, AND THE CREATIVE SECTOR





# Our communities

When we talk about our city's culture, we need to first reflect on who we are as a city.

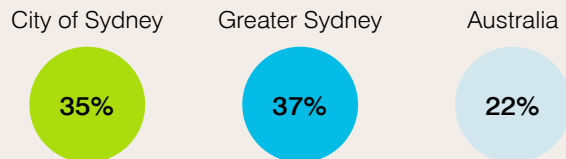
Our communities are young and culturally diverse. Half of us were born overseas and a third of us speak another language at home. And 56% of us are aged between 25 and 50, compared to 34% nationally.

Most people in our communities rent, 61% of us – double the national average. This means housing market pressures create a disproportionate impact on our communities and cultural life.

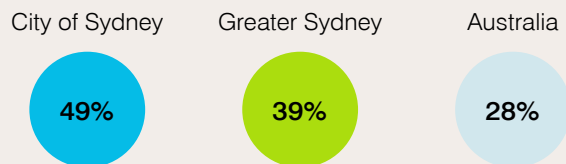
In our area 97% of people live in medium or high-density housing. We know the density of our communities presents social challenges, but it also offers opportunities to capitalise on our closeness.

Language

Speak a language other than English

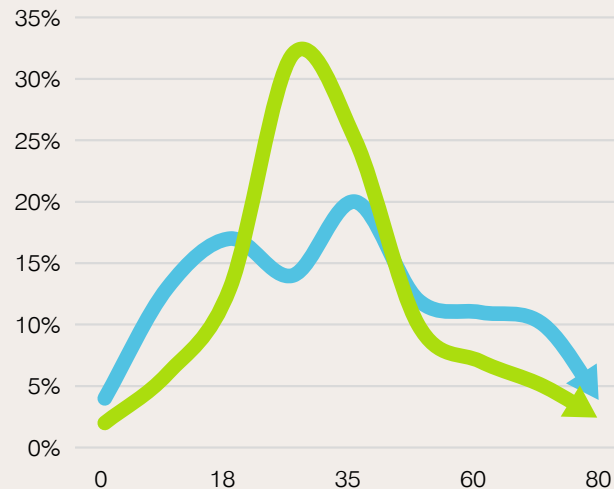


Born overseas



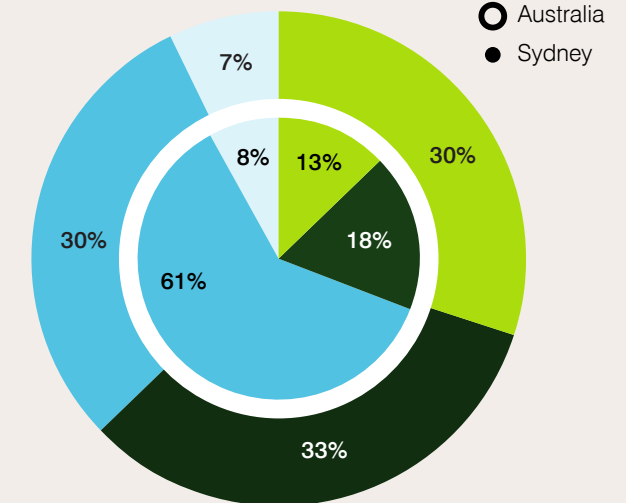
Age, by % of population

→ Sydney → Australia



Housing type

Own outright Mortgage Renting Other  
○ Australia ● Sydney



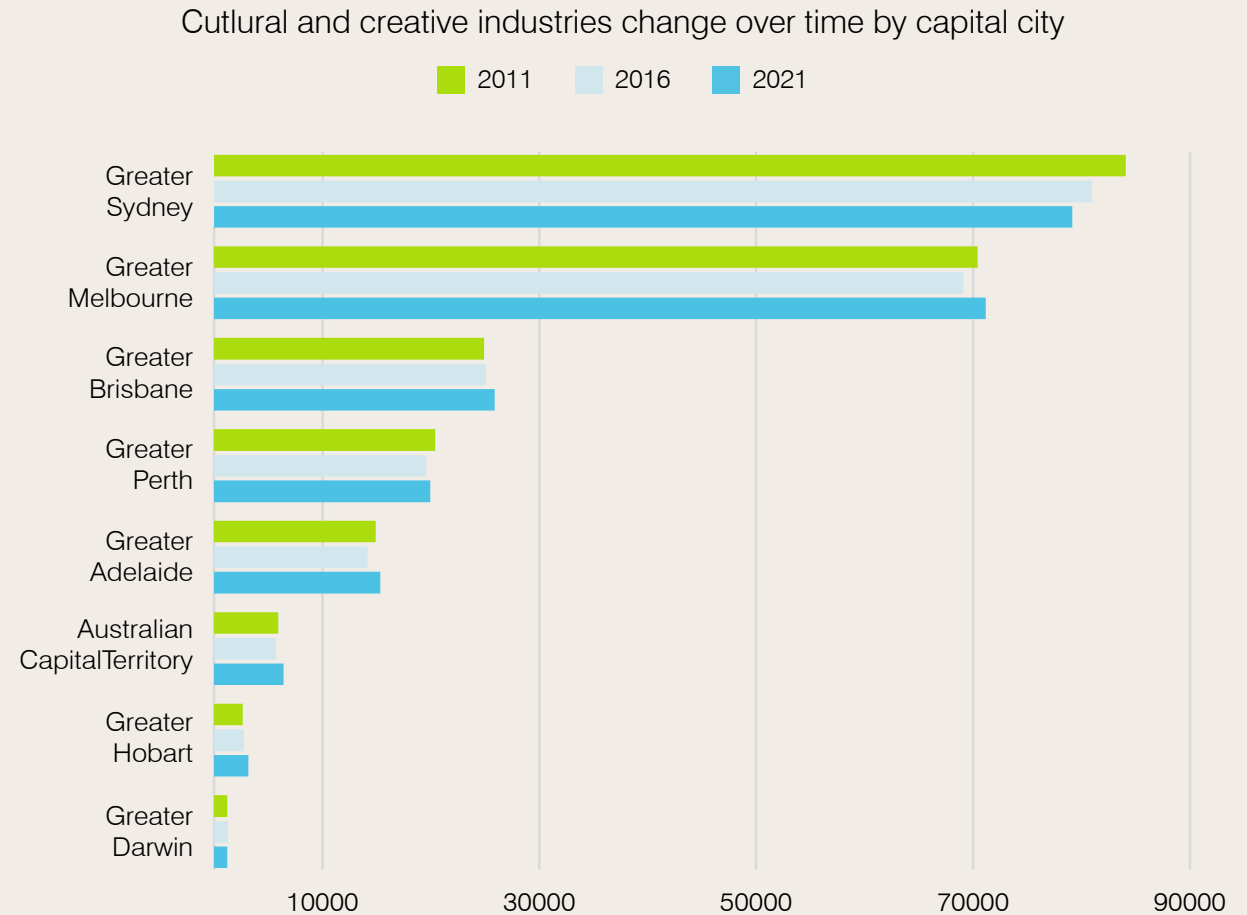
Data source: Australian Bureau of Statistics





# Our creative workforce

There are more creative workers in Sydney than anywhere else in Australia, they are essential to our economy and way of life, but they are at risk.



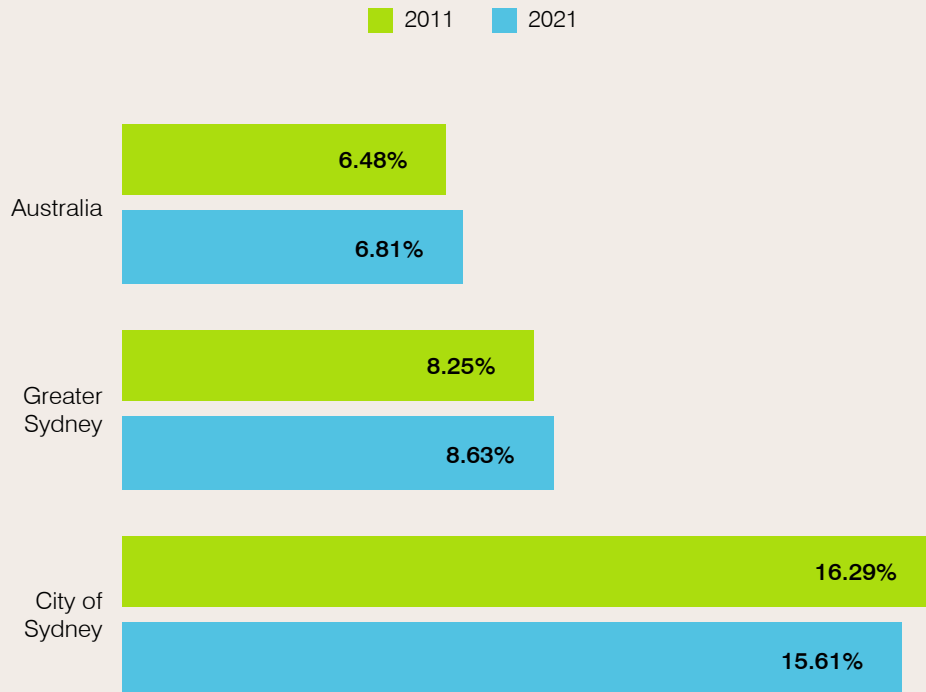
Greater Sydney still has the largest creative workforce in the country, but it is retracting.

Data source: Australian Census 2011, 2016 and 2021

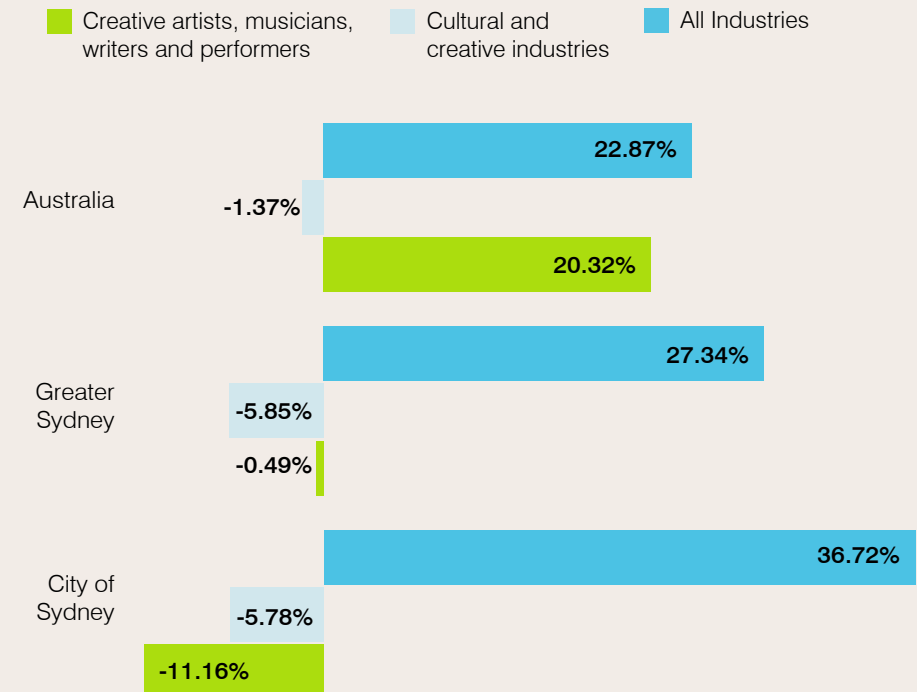




Cultural and creative occupations as a % of the whole workforce



% Change 2011 to 2021 employment by industry



The proportion of cultural workers relative to the overall workforce is particularly high in Sydney. This is why the cultural industries are so important to our local area, and our productivity.

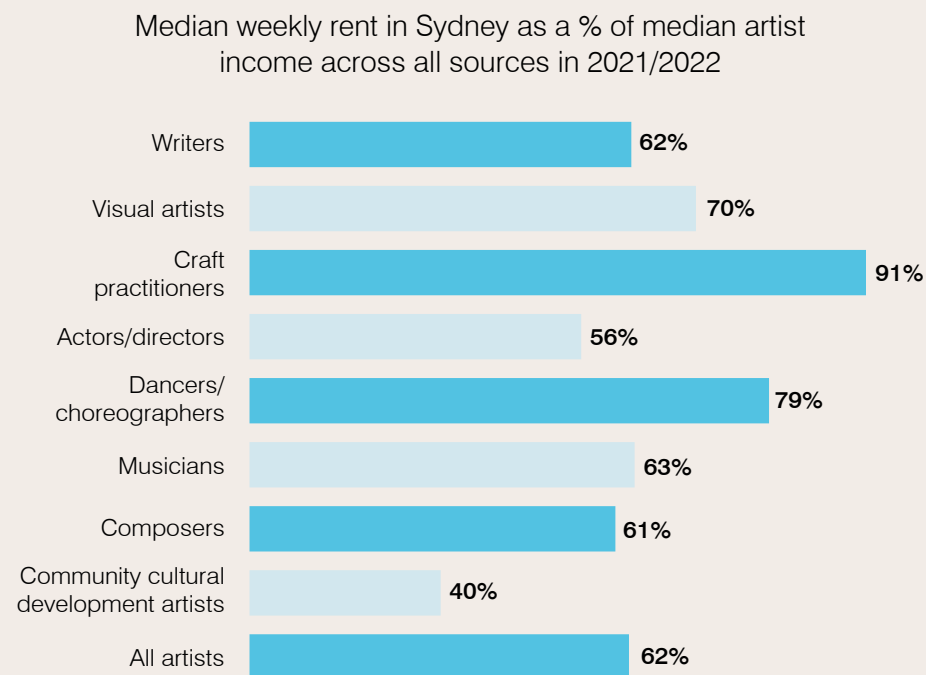
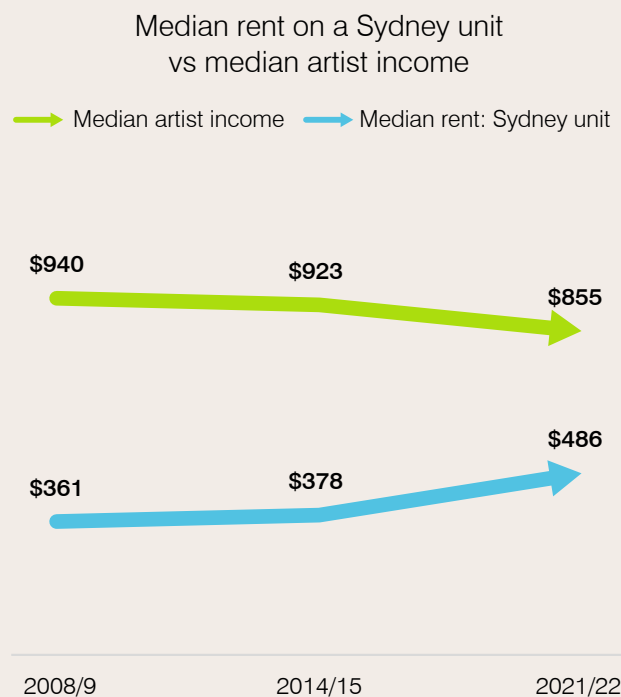
Data source: Australian Census 2011 and 2021 (by place of work)

Our overall workforce has grown, but the core cultural professions (artists, writers, musicians and performers) have declined significantly. Sydney is the only capital city in Australia to experience a decline in its artist population in the past 5 years.





We know that the cost of renting in Sydney is having an impact on sustaining creative careers here. The average weekly rent in Sydney is equivalent to 62% of the average income of artists.



Data source: Creative Australia and Core Logic





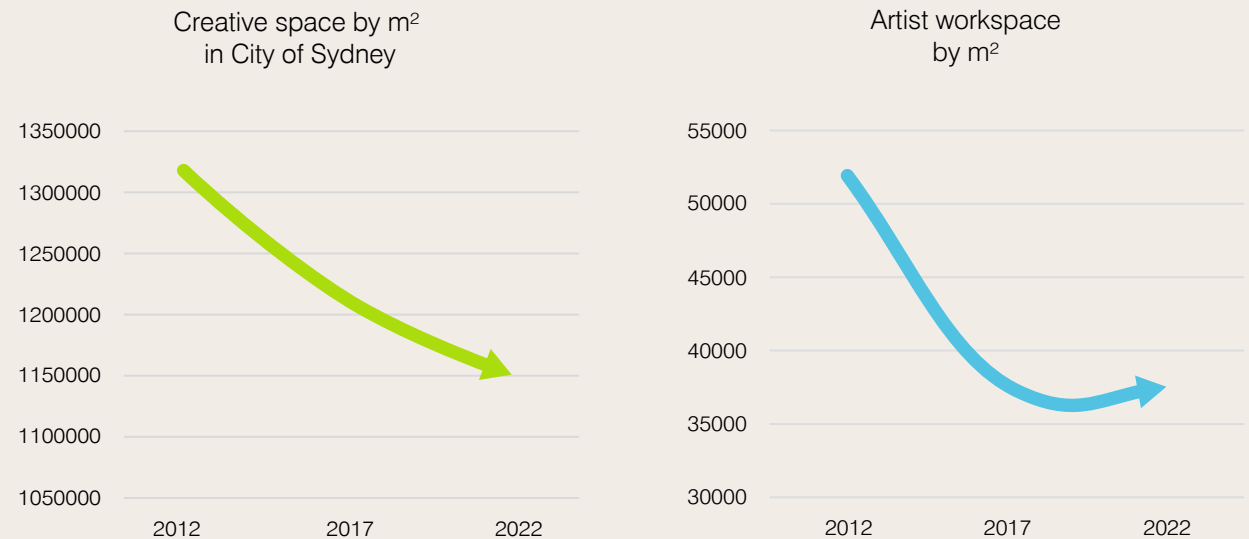
# Our cultural infrastructure

The right infrastructure is essential to creating culture.

The creative industries have very specific spatial needs and they occupy the kinds of spaces that are becoming less common in urbanised global cities. Spaces like warehouses, studios and rehearsal rooms, where there is space to make mess and noise.

Our city has seen a dramatic reduction in creative workspace as much of the building stock previously occupied by light industry has been rezoned and redeveloped for housing.

In 2012 creative industries occupied nearly 8.5% of all the commercial floor space in the City of Sydney area. In 2022 creative industries made up less than 7% of our floor space. In real terms, that is a decline of 172,970m<sup>2</sup>. Of that lost space, the studios and workspaces occupied by core creatives (artists, writers, musicians and performers) has reduced by more than 14,300m<sup>2</sup>.



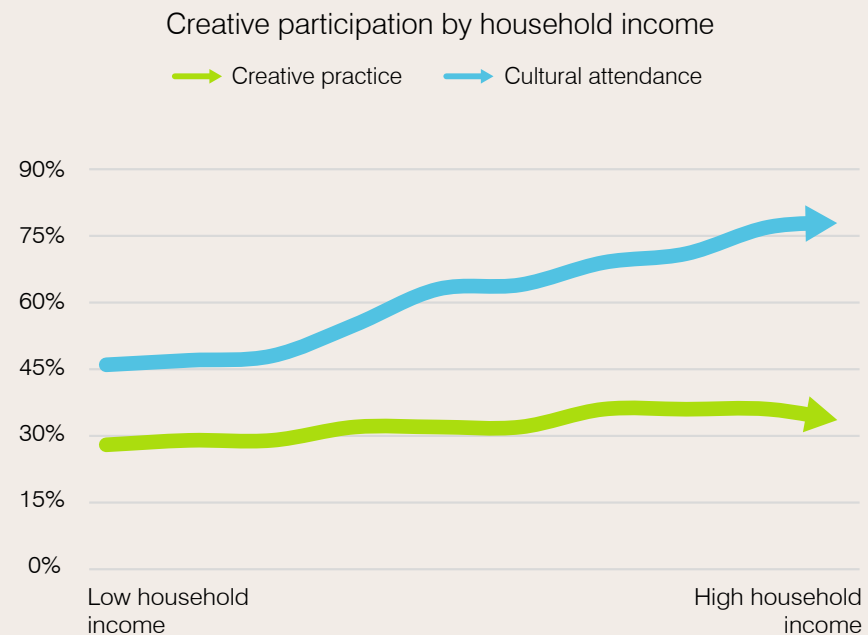
Data source: Floorspace and Employment Survey, City of Sydney



# Our cultural participation

Sydney's cultural life is fast becoming a story of 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

Our research shows that roughly one third of us participate in a creative practice, regardless of our income bracket. But if we have a higher household income we are far more likely to attend cultural activities. It seems the increasing cost of producing events and cultural activities, that in turn increases ticket prices, is shaping our city's audiences along socio-economic lines.



Data source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (cultural activities)

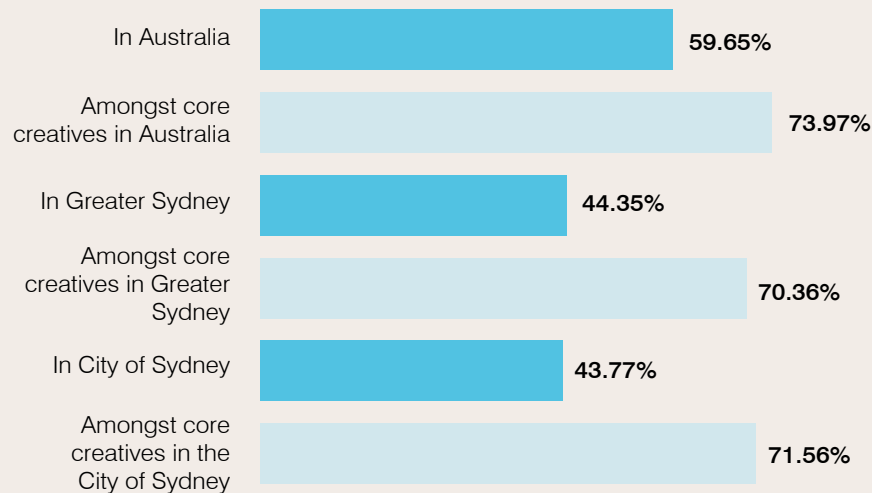




When we look at who is making our city's cultural products, we can see that cultural professions favour a narrow demographic. While people who identify with 'British, Irish or Australian' ancestry make up 44% of our population, they represent 70% of the people working in the core creative industries. It is

not surprising then, when we ask our communities if they're satisfied with opportunities to engage with arts and cultural events, non-English speakers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples register much lower rates of satisfaction with Sydney's cultural offerings.

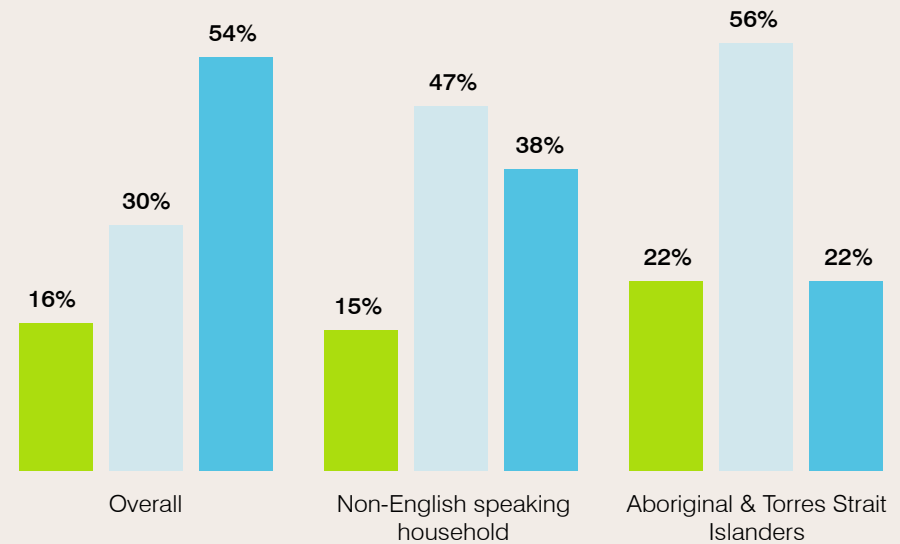
% Identifying as Anglo-Australian and Irish by area and core creative industry



Data source: Australian Census 2021

Satisfaction with arts and cultural events by demographic

Unsatisfied Neutral Satisfied or Very Satisfied



Data source: Residential Wellbeing Survey, City of Sydney 2023





# CHALLENGES AND INSIGHTS





## What we're learning from other cities

As Australia's global city, there's a lot we can learn from the experience of other global cities. We're connected to global insights through our membership of the World Cities Culture Forum, Music Cities Network and Resilient Cities Network. These global trends we've noted are relevant to the cultural life of our city.





### Culture as a tool for addressing inequality and historical injustice.

Amplified by the Black Lives Matter movement and calls for truth telling, cities worldwide are contemplating how to address monuments to reveal hidden histories of genocide, slavery and racism, and to install new public artworks to acknowledge injustice.



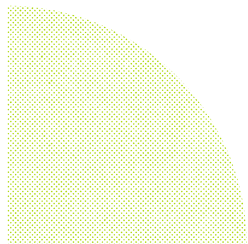
### Culture at risk: safeguarding creative spaces.

The loss of cultural infrastructure is a common theme across global cities. Policymakers are looking at how to safeguard creative and community spaces before they're lost to redevelopment. Increasingly, trusts are being established to purchase and protect music venues, artist studios and other creative spaces.



### Supporting the creative workforce: freelancers, microbusinesses and income support for artists.

Acknowledging that many creative workers operate on their own and outside of the organisations, institutions and festivals that receive public funds, many cities are looking at ways to direct subsidies to freelancers and for-profit microbusinesses. In San Francisco and Ireland they're trialling universal basic income for artists.







### Technology is expanding both the opportunities and the ethics of creativity.

New technologies and artificial intelligence offer exciting possibilities for creative industries, but also raise concerns about intellectual property theft and automation of creative jobs. While cities look to harness the potential of emerging technologies to increase access and innovation, policymakers are turning their minds to the legal and ethical frameworks needed to manage such swift progress.



### Culture leading the rise of the night-time economy.

There are now 100 'night mayors' and night ambassadors working in governments globally. Increasingly, cities are looking to culture to unlock vibrancy, business diversity and community safety at night, as the 24-hour city grows as a policy portfolio.



### Culture fosters hope, resilience, and wellbeing.

In uncertain times and in the context of conflict, climate crisis, disaster recovery and financial pressures, cities are turning to culture to foster hope, resilience and wellbeing. Extended access to cultural institutions, creative participation, and cultural programs help people connect with positive ideas and each other. In many cities, 'social prescribing' is an emerging practice where trips to museums and galleries and attending live music are prescribed by doctors and subsidised under health care plans.



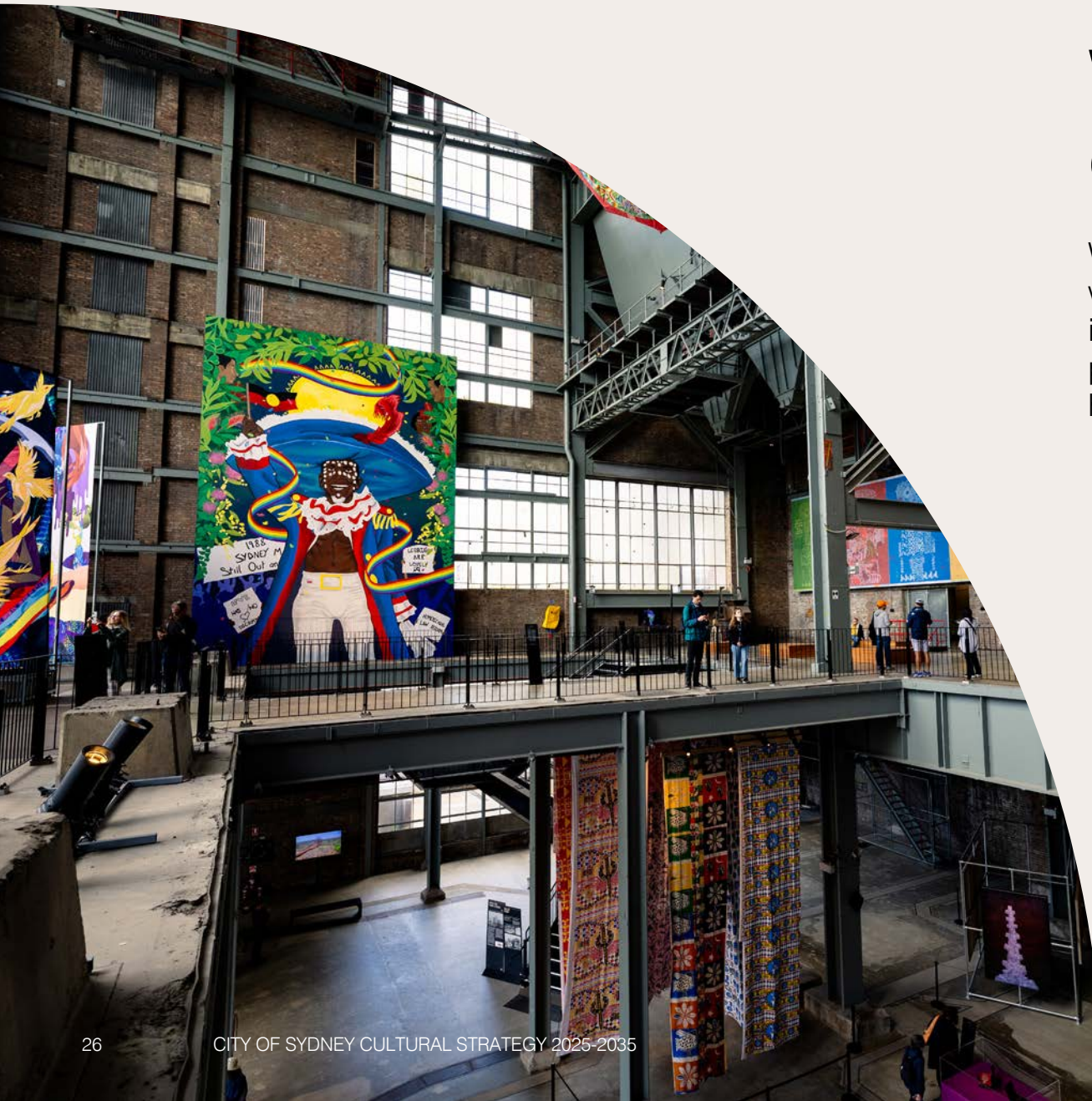
### Culture, climate change and the global development agenda.

Climate change is the greatest shared challenge of our times, making the work of artists and cultural institutions something that is dominated by explorations of human impact, adaptation and pathways towards coping with climate change. Cities are leveraging the discourse generated by culture to manage change, build resilience and pursue global climate targets and commitments. Indeed, the World Cities Culture Forum is advocating for a UN sustainable development goal for culture.



# What we heard from our creative sector

We've developed this strategy in consultation with the creative sector of Sydney and we are in a continuous conversation with our advisory panels. These are the main challenges that we heard the sector is facing.







1

## Costs of compliance continue to be a barrier to operating creative spaces and producing events.

For many years, we've worked towards getting the balance right between ensuring safety, protecting amenity and providing the right environment for culture to flourish. But compliance costs continue to make many creative endeavours unsustainable. There are still no zero-cost approval pathways for small scale pop-up events, and the costs associated with applying for approvals often outstrip the projected proceeds of smaller events and cultural activities.

We heard that across all levels of government, a culture of 'risk elimination' is not being matched with resources for risk management.

Cultural producers are expected to meet increasing user-pays police and security requirements, and safety measures like hostile vehicle mitigation, with no added funding or resources. Those operators whose business models can't absorb these costs are simply 'out of the game', further reducing our event offerings to either very big, or very small. For those looking to open a new creative space, the startup costs associated with meeting contemporary accessibility and safety standards are prohibitive, especially in the types of older and underused building stock most often on offer to creative enterprise.





2

## Unaffordable housing supply is displacing creative workers.

The data from the 2021 Census was clear, artists are leaving Sydney. Our consultation highlighted that housing costs are the main reason artists are leaving. By 2023 all of Australia was grappling with a rental market crisis with extremely low availability at record high prices. While there are efforts at a federal and state level to increase housing supply, our consultation suggests that it will be too late for Sydney's artists if we do not act urgently with cost of living and rent relief.

3

## Investment is mostly focused on presentation, not production.

There have been some exceptional updates and additions made to Sydney's cultural infrastructure. While feedback suggests these are well received, we're also hearing that the bulk of the investment is in major institutions and it has almost exclusively focused on places to present and consume culture, not the kinds of creative spaces where culture is made.

We know these productive spaces are most at risk in a commercial property market that is pricing-out creative operators. Likewise, cultural funding programs tend to still favour a trickle-down approach to subsidising the price-point where culture is consumed, rather than invest in its development and production. We heard that all levels of cultural funding are overly focused on outcomes and audience. Not enough attention is being given to sustaining everyday participation in a creative practice, which is not just essential for health and wellbeing, everyday practice is vital to achieving artistic innovation.





4

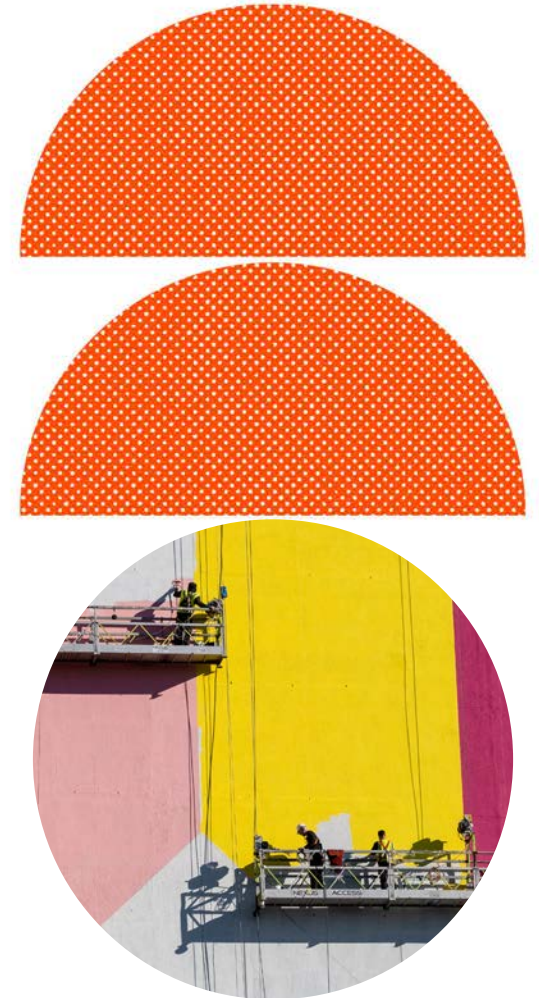
## Diversity and inclusion is improving but it is slow progress.

Efforts to increase the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with disability in our cultural life are slowly achieving results. The sector reports a maturing and authenticity in the engagement and representation of First Nations people, and that resources to support artists with disability to make and participate in culture have improved. There continues to be logistical barriers to more deeply involving linguistic diversity in our cultural offerings and a financial imperative that favours broadest possible audience appeal. However, the intention to transform our cultural identity to more accurately reflect the diversity of our communities is enthusiastically shared and more work is needed in this area.

5

## City of Sydney knowledge is a valued resource that enhances our investments.

Many recipients of our grants and tenants in City of Sydney-owned properties spoke positively of an unexpected value-add with our support – access to our knowledge. From bespoke assistance with a planning approval or one-on-one advice about managing events in public spaces, to referrals with our historians and archives, or the curatorial expertise and networks within our organisation, the sector is clear – we are a valuable partner in producing culture. They invited us to reflect on the creative capital within our organisation and consider how access to our expert staff could be improved and formalised as an additional investment.





# What we're learning about culture in Sydney

Our conversations with the local sector revealed insights about how these global trends and local challenges are playing out in Sydney. This helps us understand how we can respond in a way that is custom-made for Sydney.





1

## Ours is a city of polarities.

We strongly value our prestigious national institutions ... *but* we really love our hard-to-find, indie, underground, cool, queer, and gritty fine grain. We are particularly good at delivering large, free, family friendly events ... *or* high-priced, high-art experiences of cultural excellence. Sydney is seen as big, bold, world-class and world-leading ... *however* we're also known for being quiet, constrained and in bed by 9pm.

These are the kinds of polarities that have dominated our discussions about the state of Sydney's cultural life. When we talk about what will make our culture thrive, it's the middle-ground that people most want to see nurtured.

2

## Bridging Sydney's 'missing middle' will unlock our full potential.

Sydney's polarities are most keenly felt in our precarious mid-tier. Sydney enjoys most of the national major arts institutions and our smaller independent sector is being sustained through subsidised spaces and project funding. But there is a notable lack of mid-sized venues, mid-sized organisations and opportunities for mid-career artists.

We heard that there is a certain scale of ambition or stage in career where opportunities simply disappear for Sydney's artists. Building strength in our mid-tier will create life-long career paths for local talent, sustainable growth in creative industries, and the kinds of mid-sized and mid-priced cultural experiences our audiences are lacking.





3

## We must move from a culture of competition to one of collaboration.

The cultural sector is reliant on subsidies, and rightfully so. The work of sustaining and sharing culture is deserving of dedicated public funds. But our subsidy model through merit-based, competitive grants and tenders has for decades engendered a culture of competition in the creative industries.

After surviving a global pandemic and now facing existential threats, an empathetic, collegiate, battle-weary sector wants to collaborate, not compete. They have painted a picture of a resilient, thriving future for the sector that is integrated, with common goals, shared resources, and lateral networks of support.



4

## The investment in culture needs to be expanded – and so does our way of thinking about it.

We heard there is increasing pressure on creative industries to meet 21st century expectations around environmental measures, social inclusion standards, developing new markets and innovating their craft, but all on 20th century budgets. There is not an unwillingness to undertake the work – artists are the original innovators, and the creative sector is often at the forefront of progressive change. But meeting these responsibilities comes at an expense, and it is mostly artist wages where savings are made.

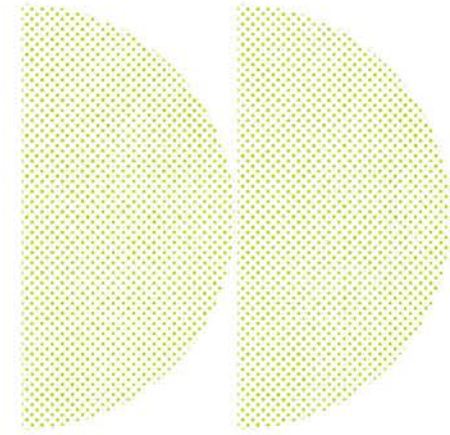
We need to challenge the notion that cultural subsidies are simply propping up not-for-profit operators whose costs of production outweigh their commercial returns. Instead, we need to embrace our investment in creativity as resourcing innovation, inclusion, adaptation, social cohesion and wellbeing. In the context of geopolitical tensions and the escalating climate crisis, an investment in creative, educated, empathetic, culturally connected communities is money well spent.

5

## The sector is suffering from burn out – recovery will take time.

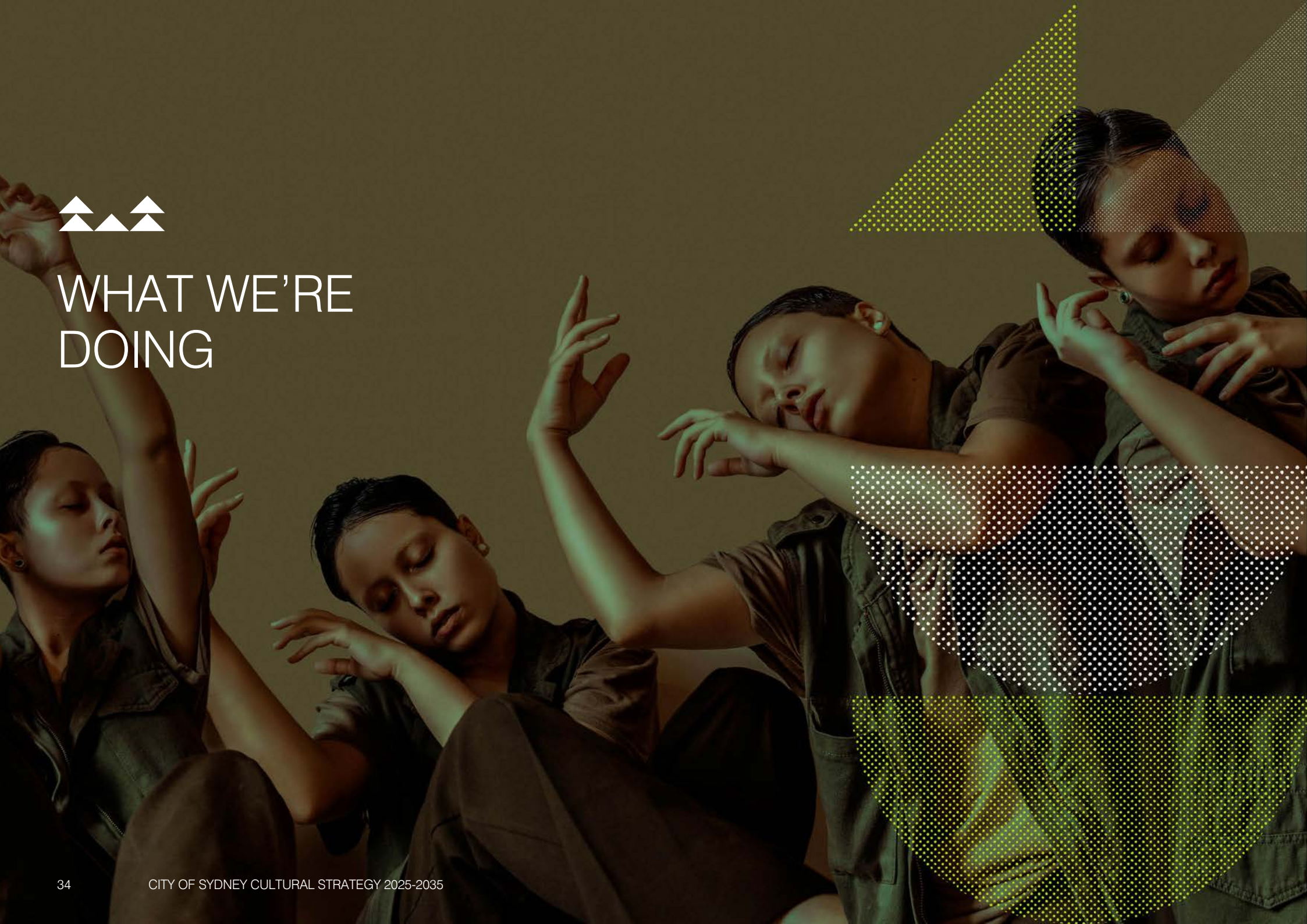
For the cultural sector, the deepest, most far-reaching impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are not economic, they're personal. We already knew that Sydney's cultural life was reliant on a relatively small group of exceptional creative leaders. We now realise just how much they've been pushed to the brink.

Burn out is the new normal and it is openly discussed in cultural organisations across our city. We need to acknowledge it and work together to address it. There is no quick cash infusion or 'silver bullet' that will fix this; we need a steady, measured approach akin to nursing a patient through recovery. As we look to transform and build our city's cultural life, we must concurrently, consistently firm up the foundations.





# WHAT WE'RE DOING







# Retain. Rebuild. Reimagine.

This is a ten-year strategy to set a path toward our vision for a thriving cultural life in Sydney. But it begins at a time when the cultural sector and our creative workforce face unprecedented challenges.

The long tail effects of the Covid-19 pandemic continue to destabilise the foundations of our cultural sector, which was already diminished under liquor licensing lock-out laws. Inflationary pressures are driving up the costs of making and participating in culture, and an extremely unaffordable housing market poses an existential threat to local culture – driving artists out of our city and audiences away from cultural venues to save money.

We need to act urgently to retain the people and places that give our city's culture its authentic, diverse, inclusive, eclectic and electric feel. We need to keep our grassroots deeply planted in place.

At the same time, we need to invest in strategic initiatives that will accelerate the growth of our cultural sector, especially in the mid-tier, and begin working towards the systemic change that will see our cultural life and industries better reflect the diversity of our communities. We need to break down barriers that exclude people from participating in culture. We need to rethink our city as a place where creativity thrives in every corner, at every hour, and in unexpected and inspiring ways.

That is why this strategy is organised by these 3 strategic responses.



## Retain

**Urgent** actions to retain Sydney's creative workforce and cultural infrastructure. This includes considered, place-based approaches to retain local character and community culture, despite urban renewal and property market pressures.



## Rebuild

**Strategic** interventions to rebuild strength in Sydney's creative sector following years of unprecedented challenge. This includes restoring the cultural infrastructure required for sector growth, but also the resilience of our local artists, organisations and cultural leaders who sustained a personal toll through the struggles of recent years.



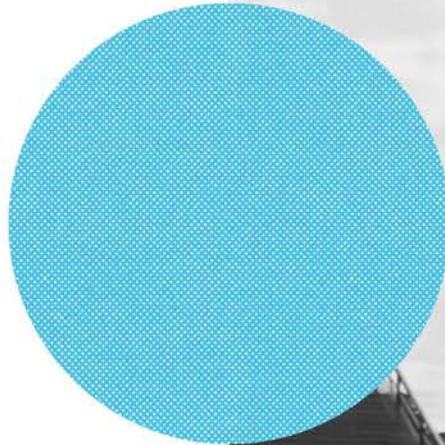
## Reimagine

**Systemic** change to guide Sydney's cultural sector towards a more diverse, inclusive, green and equitable future with innovative approaches to unlocking the potential of Sydney as a haven for creative industries, artists and cultural tourism.



## Vision

Aboriginal and  
Torres Strait  
Islander peoples  
and their cultural  
practices are visible  
and respected







This is Gadigal Country. Gadigal people have cared for and nurtured this place for thousands of generations. The establishment of a British outpost on these lands had profound impacts on Gadigal people and their culture.

Sydney is now home to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples descended from nations all over this country, as well as a rich diversity of cultures that live here as a result of migration. We acknowledge the extraordinary resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures, despite the ongoing impacts of colonisation. While we celebrate what has survived, we must speak plainly of what has been harmed.

While we embrace the contribution of First Nations cultures to contemporary Australian identity, we understand that First Nations cultures need to be supported to heal and revitalise. As a first principle, we need to ensure we do no further harm.



### Retain

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain cultural practice and knowledge and retain the right to self-determine how First Nations cultures are acknowledged and celebrated.



### Rebuild

Trust is rebuilt through truth telling, representation and consultation. Our memorials, history programs and public art projects will recognise and reflect First Nations people's experience. We'll help resource the appropriate cultural authorities so they can carry out the important work of reviewing and guiding storytelling and truth telling, and we'll invest in the cultural competence of our city. We will support creative businesses to review their programs and services through a 'First Nations lens'.



### Reimagine

We will prioritise Aboriginal led enterprise and community organisations in our industry support programs, urban renewal projects and grant funding, and develop a strategic framework to articulate and achieve community aspirations.

## Proposed actions

- Develop a comprehensive **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategic framework** to articulate the vision, themes and objectives for the work we do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Ensure First Nations artists and cultural practice are prioritised in **our grants programs** and provide resources to help increase the number of applications from First Nations peoples.
- Further develop **Calling Country** to provide more opportunities for First Nations artists and cultures to take centre stage at New Year's Eve celebrations.
- Continue to develop and produce **The Eora Journey Recognition in the Public Domain program** including **Yananurala – Walking on Country**, in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Undertake a **truth-telling** process through our libraries, monuments and civic collections.
- Invest in local cultural organisations and venues to participate in **cultural awareness training** to build the cultural competency of Sydney's creative sector, and better partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists.



## Vision

We value our  
cultural life and  
champion our  
creative industries







Culture is one of the main pillars of local government policy. We recognise culture as both a means and an end: a powerful tool for driving social change, economic development and environmental stewardship; and the very thing that gives meaning to our lives, our prosperity and our resilience.

We recognise there is no culture without freedom of cultural expression and there is no cultural life without our creative industries – the people who spin our culture into tangible objects and experiences, where we can draw meaning and find community.



### Retain

We'll review planning controls across our creative employment precincts to prioritise the retention of creative industries, local character and connections to culture. We'll advocate for creative enterprise zones that protect and incentivise development which supports local culture.



### Rebuild

We'll carry out research and advocate for our creative industries to build a shared understanding of the needs and health of the sector, including how our interventions are working. We'll use our networks across the councils of Greater Sydney to track the supply of creative workspace and ensure the right spaces are being built to meet needs and facilitate growth.



### Reimagine

We'll embrace innovation and provide the platforms and testing grounds to trial new ideas, technologies and approaches to making and sharing culture. We'll work with other levels of government, international networks and the local sector to develop export pathways for Sydney-made culture and local talent. We'll transform Sydney from being a net importer of culture to a net exporter.

## Proposed actions

- Review the Oxford Street **creative precinct planning controls** to determine if they're achieving intended outcomes, implement appropriate changes and investigate applying them to other precincts.
- Develop **place strategies** and ongoing **place keeping plans** for our cultural quarters to maintain community connections with cultural identity and places of cultural significance.
- Undertake **research on behalf of the sector**, including an affordability study to demonstrate a standard model for providing subsidised creative space.
- Develop a **network of local governments to monitor creative spaces across Greater Sydney**, to ensure there is an adequate range and supply of space to meet the future needs of the community and Sydney's cultural sector.



## Vision

An increasing number of creative workers live or work in the city







Sydney is the only Australian capital city to see a decline in its artist population since 2017. We need to stem the loss of our artistic talent, hold our people in place and begin to rebuild our creative workforce.



### Retain

We'll urgently act to retain the core creative workforce of our city through measures that address cost-of-living and housing pressures.



### Rebuild

We'll invest in local leaders and strategic staffing positions in key cultural organisations so they may build strength in our workforce and invest in local production and artists. We'll advocate for increased access to affordable housing options for artists and creative workers.



### Reimagine

We'll advocate for systems reform that improves the conditions of casual cultural employment and leads to sustainable, equitable incomes from creative labour. By increasing the number of mid-tier organisations and venues in our city, we'll encourage life-long career paths in the creative industries.

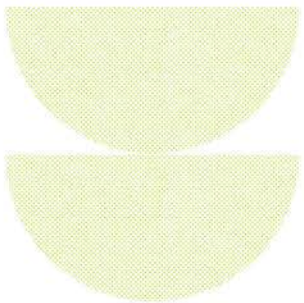
## Proposed actions

- Investigate a **fellowship style grants program** for diverse Sydney-based artists to work on their creative practice.
- Extend our **creative/live work tenancies** to 2-year leases.
- Produce a **cultural leadership program** for cultural workers, artists and the owners of creative businesses focused on peer-to-peer learning, mentorship, resilience, and professional development ambitions of our local leaders.
- Promote affordable housing opportunities for artists and work with housing providers to increase applications from creative workers and **support artists into affordable housing**.
- Identify opportunities to deliver **purpose-built artist housing** with live/work or co-located workspace for the creative sector.



## Vision

Sydney's cultural life reflects the diversity of our communities







Sydney is one of the most multicultural cities in the world, and our communities are enriched with a broad diversity of lived experiences. However, the cultural offering of our city does not necessarily reflect this and is being made and consumed by an increasingly homogenous demographic. We want to capitalise on our diversity and unlock opportunities for our city to better enjoy its rich cultural complexity.



### Retain

We'll prioritise investment in projects led by culturally diverse artists, communities and organisations and work to retain connections between migrant communities, their cultural practices and languages.



### Rebuild

We'll invest in the development of diverse leadership in our local organisations by building pathways that nurture culturally diverse talent. We'll use our own expertise and programs to mentor the next generation of creative workers.



### Reimagine

We'll support sector-led initiatives to address systemic exclusion and review our own grant and procurement processes to maximise inclusion. We'll support local organisations to authentically meet diversity targets and set up structures that sustain diversity, in both representation and participation in our cultural life.

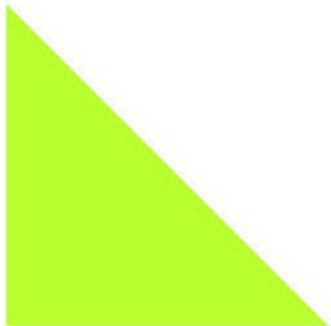
## Proposed actions

- Explore a **funding program** that supports local cultural organisations to **recruit strategic, diverse staff positions**, including dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander roles, people with disability and creative workers from diverse cultural backgrounds through placements, mentorship and professional development opportunities, supported by appropriate wrap-around services.
- Offer **traineeships for producers and event managers** through our events and cultural programs, prioritising diverse, emerging local talent.
- Review **procurement, creative tenders and grant application processes** to maximise accessibility and inclusion.
- Review our **artist employment and commissioning practices** considering the Modern Awards Review by the Fair Work Commission.



## Vision

There is an  
increased supply  
of accessible  
creative space







In the decade from 2012 to 2022, the City of Sydney area lost more than 172,000m<sup>2</sup> of creative floor space. We need a mix of government, private sector and cultural sector led creative space projects to rebuild this infrastructure and retain our position as the home of Australia's creative industries.



### Retain

We'll urgently act to retain at-risk cultural infrastructure and de-risk new cultural infrastructure projects.



### Rebuild

Through strategic partnerships we'll unlock the potential of City of Sydney-owned assets to rebuild workspace for core creatives – artists, musicians, writers and performers.



### Reimagine

New financing and governance models and for-purpose property development will encourage cultural infrastructure at scale and new avenues for philanthropic impact. We will explore the establishment of a creative land trust for NSW that would take custodianship of suitable buildings or sites for cultural uses. We'll reimagine the cultural sector as landholders and caretakers of place, providing long-term security for cultural assets.

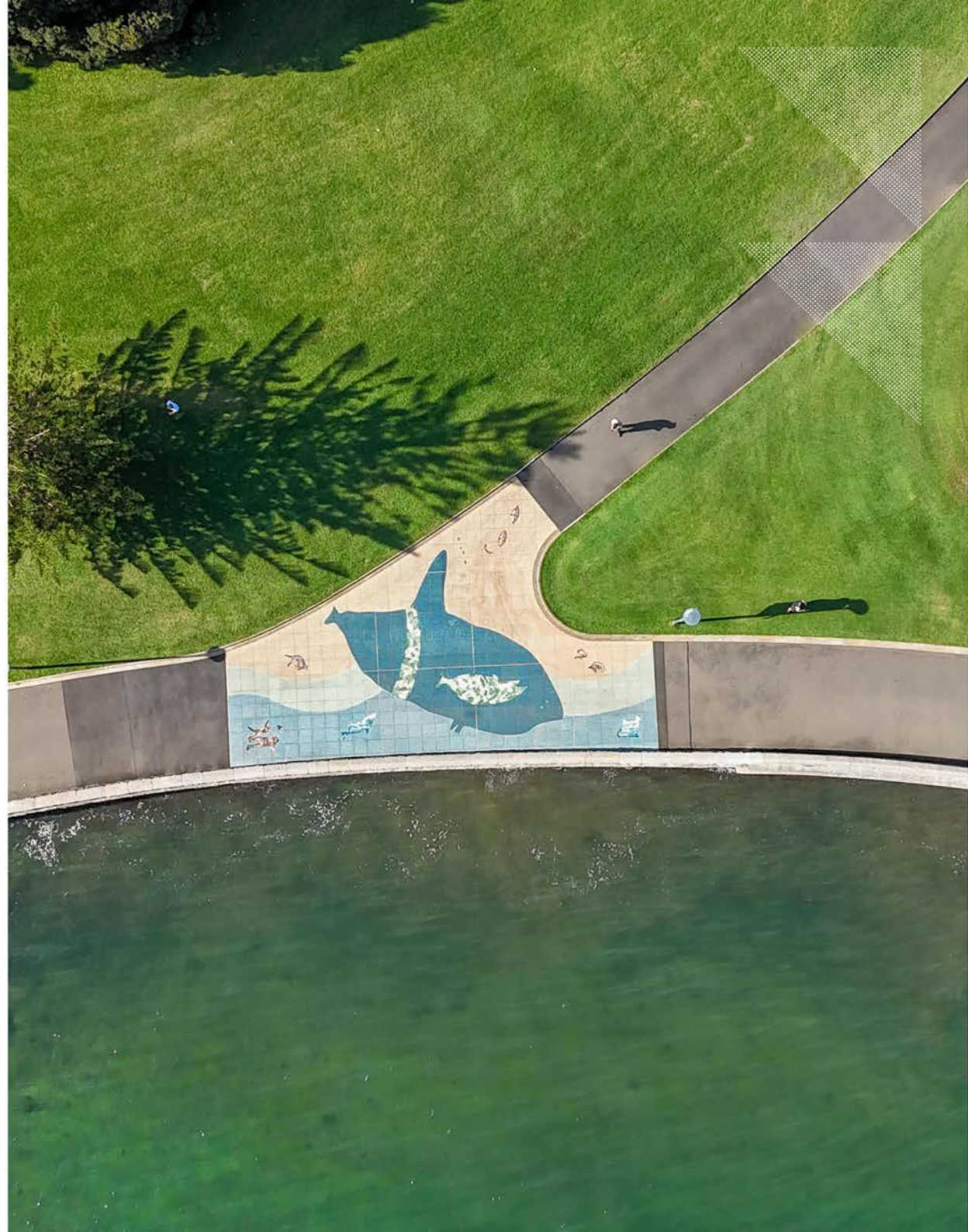
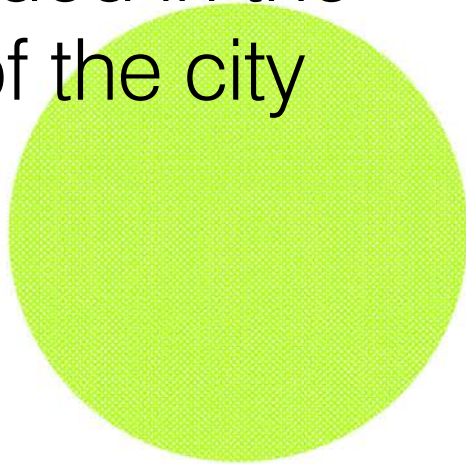
## Proposed actions

- Provide a **cultural infrastructure improvement grant** to assist existing creative spaces and venues to upgrade their facilities and meet compliance costs.
- Provide a **creative spaces startup grant** to assist new creative spaces with establishment costs, expert advice, fit-outs and the first 3 months of rent.
- Provide access to **dedicated spaces for artists, musicians, writers and performers** in suitable City of Sydney-owned properties.
- Offer **artist residencies** across our library network, in community centres, and within appropriate departments of the City.
- Provide seed-funding to facilitate the establishment of a **creative land trust**.



## Vision

Creativity  
and culture is  
embedded in the  
fabric of the city







A thriving cultural life is felt in every aspect of a city, from the built form to open spaces, bold and inspiring public art, and surprises hidden in unexpected places. It is not just about how the city looks, it's about how we use it and how we feel connected to it.

For Sydney to tell its story to the world, the city centre must reflect who we are and what we value. Our culture needs to be woven through all our public spaces, and the functions of the city must enable and enrich our daily cultural life.



### Retain

We'll retain the fine grain character of our local area through creative urban design. We'll support street art projects, busking, human-scale experiences and public art.



### Rebuild

We'll work to restore Gadigal place names across our local area and to reclaim space for human interaction. We'll increase open space, pedestrianised lanes and green corridors in the city centre, and bring these spaces to life with public art.



### Reimagine

We'll facilitate culture in unexpected places and spontaneous experiences that surprise and delight. We'll continue to create temporary art programs in laneways and public squares to infuse culture with the daily experience. Urban design will encourage culture with plug and play infrastructure, such as more spaces designed for street performance and similar community gatherings.

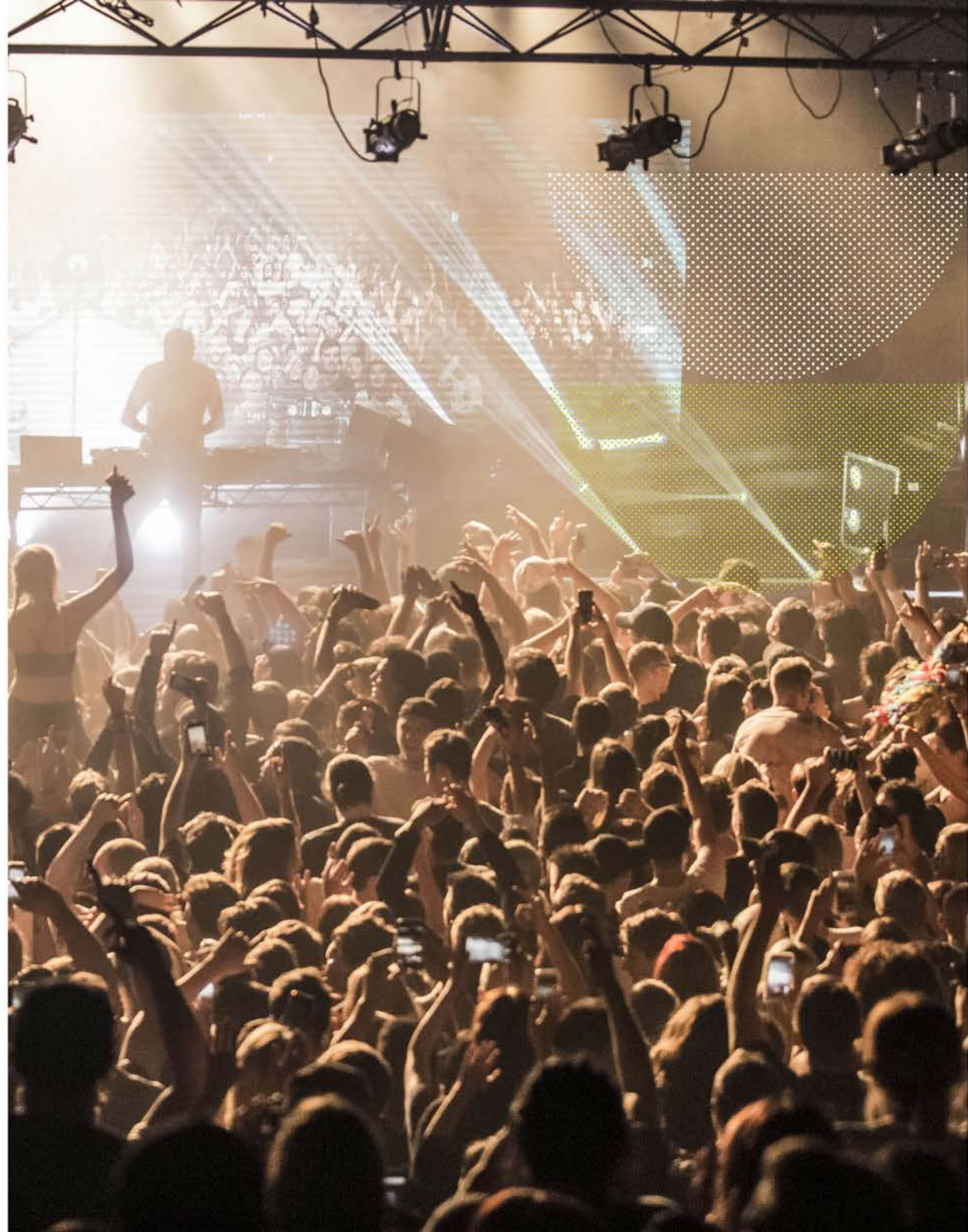
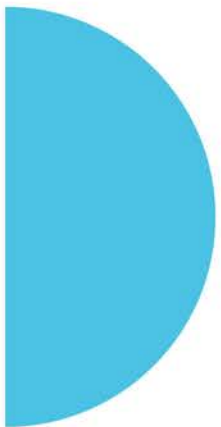
## Proposed actions

- Continue to promote **Gadigal place names** by naming and dual naming across the local area through research, community consultation and collaborative projects to acknowledge Gadigal culture and language in places of significance.
- Explore opportunities for **temporary public art programs** to test new ideas in public spaces and provide opportunities for emerging artists.
- Explore opportunities for **plug and play performance infrastructure** in public spaces.
- Work with the property sector and suitable creative industries to develop a pilot project to put **underused commercial property to creative use**. Research the benefits of co-locating creative operators in commercial spaces and the scalability of the approach.



## Vision

Creativity and  
great experiences  
fuel the vitality of  
the city







Sydney is a great experience city with unmatched natural beauty, an exceptional climate year-round, vibrant street life and a busy 24-hour economy.

For our city to maintain its vitality, there needs to be a rich layer of culture woven through the 24-hour experience, bringing depth and personal connection to life in a global city.



### Retain

We'll support appropriate planning and regulatory reform that makes it easier and cost effective to produce events and programming in a broad range of businesses and spaces. We'll advocate for straightforward and fair management of the amenity impacts of cultural vibrancy with reasonable conflict resolution. We'll provide hands-on support to assist the creative sector through planning processes for venues and events. We'll continue to produce our own annual program of free public events that inspire and engage our diverse communities.



### Rebuild

We'll provide long-term certainty for key organisations and local festivals by offering 5+ year contracts for major events and creative tenants. This security will empower organisations to plan for sustained growth and meaningfully connect with local communities to provide broader cultural and economic impact. We'll help increase attendance at diverse cultural offerings.



### Reimagine

We'll work with government partners and local stakeholders to evolve the visitor economy in Sydney and deepen the visitor experience by putting culture at the forefront of the tourism offer. At a local level, in small businesses and our own venues, we'll support programs and events that keep our nightlife cultural and inclusive.

## Proposed actions

- Trial a **planning guidance service** to assist with navigation of approvals processes for venues and events.
- Continue working on a **fair and straightforward model for managing entertainment sound**, supported by venue design guidance.
- Advocate for **exempt development and simplified approval paths for small scale cultural activities and pop-up events**.
- Review the terms for multi-year festival and event funding to offer **5-year terms**.
- Install **light-touch performance infrastructure in suitable libraries and community venues** to create new bookable performance spaces for the community.
- Explore opportunities to safely use **temporary street closures for neighbourhood-focused community, cultural and business activities**. Work with the NSW Government on processes to streamline and simplify approvals and minimise management costs.
- Collaborate with key stakeholders to identify gaps in services and offerings and develop a plan to **evolve the visitor experience**.



## Vision

There is equitable access to education and learning opportunities, everyone can participate in a creative practice







Our research found that maintaining a creative practice directly correlates with higher levels of personal wellbeing, and learning creative skills builds social bonds and a sense of belonging.

In our city, where people tend to live in smaller homes, it can be difficult to find space for creativity, and there are cost barriers for some. That's why we need to ensure there are creative centres, arts spaces and art classes that everyone in our communities can access.



### Retain

Maker spaces, writers' rooms and artist studios in our libraries and community centres will facilitate open-access community participation in creative practice. We'll support circular economies that share and repurpose resources, retain design skills, technical crafts and the materials they use.



### Rebuild

We'll provide access to our civic collections to stimulate creativity and generate new artworks. The knowledge of our historians, producers and event managers will assist community members in their creative research. We'll continue to fund new creative projects that tell the stories of Sydney.



### Reimagine

We'll support the community to be active contributors to Sydney's cultural life. Community curators will be invited to co-design our cultural programs and we'll mentor and assist community projects to be produced.

## Proposed actions

- Explore opportunities to provide more **maker spaces** and open-access creative workshop space within appropriate City venues. Complement these spaces with **skills exchange programs**.
- Support **research residencies** for the development of new literature, artworks, performances and events. Explore ways that residents can access our archives, collections and staff expertise, such as our historians, producers and event managers to assist with creative content development.
- Develop a **community curators** program to support members of the community to devise and present creative programs in our community spaces.





# CREATIVE EMPLOYMENT AREAS AND CULTURAL QUARTERS







We know the creative industries benefit from locating near their peers and supply chains. This is how a city evolves to feature clusters of creative economies and local precincts with a distinct cultural flavour. *In Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision* we proposed a precinct-based approach to preserve and grow cultural space and local creative economies. To help guide this work, we have identified key creative employment areas and cultural quarters.





## Harbour

Hugging our city's spectacular foreshore, the Harbour precinct is home to the country's major cultural institutions including the Sydney Opera House, Art Gallery of NSW, Museum of Contemporary Art, Walsh Bay Arts Precinct and Barangaroo. This precinct:

- celebrates our national identity and creative excellence
- reveals First Nations histories and cultures
- supports destination and cultural tourism
- generates local employment in the arts and major events sectors.

Public domain priorities include delivery of the Eora Journey Recognition in the Public Domain program including Yananurala – Walking on Country and making more space for people and trees.





## City East

Capturing the performance venues of Kings Cross, the small theatres and galleries of Darlinghurst and Woolloomooloo, the art schools and nightlife of Oxford Street, City East is the home of authentic, small-scale, uniquely Sydney culture. This precinct:

- supports training and employment pathways for new and emerging creatives
- champions new work by local artists
- strengthens the small-to-medium and independent sector through secure, affordable access to production and presentation spaces.

Public domain priorities include walkability from venue to venue especially at night, public art including street art and laneways, and expanding Taylor Square by re-imagining the interface between the national art school, surrounding institutions and the public domain.





## Newtown Entertainment Precinct

The Newtown Entertainment Precinct runs from Eveleigh through Erskineville and along the border with Inner West Council. It includes the Seymour Centre, Carriageworks, PACT, and the many varied music venues along King Street. This precinct:

- provides a vibrant, inclusive, culture-led nightlife
- supports live music and performance in local venues
- provides affordable and authentic cultural experiences for local audiences.

Public domain priorities include improving public and active transport connections across the precinct while ensuring spaces for people remain safe and inviting, especially at night.







## Tech, Media and Design Arc

The Tech, Media and Design Arc stretches from the Pyrmont precinct, International Convention Centre and Powerhouse Museum, through the University of Technology Sydney and University of Sydney, taking in Tech Central and Surry Hills, to the entertainment and recreation precinct of Moore Park and Disney Studios. This precinct:

- connects the innovation sector through university programs, business events and SXSW Sydney
- generates employment in the creative industries, screen, tech, gaming, fashion, architecture and design sectors
- attracts talent and investment
- builds export pathways for Sydney success stories.

Public domain priorities include integrating and improving public and active transport connections for people walking and cycling to and between institutions and increased green space.





## Southern Industrial Zones

The Southern Industrial Zones of Alexandria, Waterloo, Rosebery and Green Square are essential for creative industries. These areas maintain light industrial creative production and fabrication space and logistics support. They hold some of the only remaining warehouse stock in our area and intersect with the Southern Enterprise Area identified in our Local Strategic Planning Statement. This precinct:

- supports necessary industrial space for the supply chains that service performing arts, major events and film and TV sectors.
- provides space for manufacturing creative products
- supports logistics, storage and transport
- protects affordable warehouse studio spaces for a broad range of inner-city artists.

Public domain priorities include improving public and active transport connections across the precinct and increased green space.





## Oxford Street

Oxford Street is an important place for LGBTIQ+ communities. The street is an international symbol of diversity, inclusion and pride, and is essential to Sydney's identity. Our priority for this area is to:

- retain a diverse fine grain business mix that connects with LGBTIQ+ communities
- provide LGBTIQ+ community and cultural spaces
- increase public art and heritage interpretations that make visible and celebrate LGBTIQ+ histories and culture
- increase events and activities that celebrate LGBTIQ+ communities.

Public domain priorities include making more space for people while improving local and regional access to the Oxford Street bike path. We will maintain rainbow crossings using the Progress Pride design.







## Redfern

All of Sydney has always been Aboriginal land. But Redfern and Waterloo in particular, play an important role in contemporary Aboriginal identity, drawing on many decades of community action. Our priority for this area is to:

- retain First Nations people's identity, self-determination and community connections
- provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and cultural space, including delivery of 119 Redfern Street
- increase public art and heritage interpretations that recognise and connect with First Nations histories and cultures
- increase Indigenous-led enterprise and creative/cultural businesses.

Public domain priorities include delivery of the Eora Journey Recognition in the Public Domain program, improving the quality and amenity of public space and improving active transport connections and pedestrian flow throughout for people walking and cycling.





## Haymarket

From colonial times onwards, Haymarket has long been associated with the experience of Chinese migrants in Australia. It has become an important place for Asian communities in Sydney. Our priority for this area is to:

- retain Asian identity and strengthen the visibility of diverse Asian cultures
- provide for Chinese and pan-Asian community and cultural space
- increase public art and heritage interpretations that celebrate Asian-Australian histories and culture
- increase events and activities that celebrate Asian cultures.

Public domain priorities include making more space for people and celebrations, creative lighting for cultural expression, and improving access and green corridors across the precinct.



## Your feedback on this strategy

This draft strategy outlines our proposed approach to supporting Sydney's creative industries through current complex challenges, and sets a path toward achieving our community's vision for a thriving cultural life in Sydney.

We want to hear your feedback on what we are proposing. You can visit **[sydneyyoursay.com.au](https://sydneyyoursay.com.au)** to find out more, complete a survey or submit a written response. We will review the feedback we receive, update the strategy accordingly, and put the updated strategy to Council for approval by the end of the year.



# SYDNEY'S CULTURAL LIFE CAN BE...

**Broad** Brave **Provocative** **Entrepreneurial**  
Better Funded **Wilder** More Integrated  
**First Nations Led** Sustaining **Supportive**  
Joyous **Unique** Robust **Constant** Collaborative  
**Inspirational** A Competitor **World Leading**  
Community Driven **Transformative** Resonant  
**Nurturing** **Trailblazing** Truthful **For Everyone**  
Expansive **Global** Local **Thriving** All Day And  
All Night **Cool** An Asia-Pacific Powerhouse  
**Soft Inspiring** More Than One Thing **Pumping**  
Accessible To All **Always In Reach** Alternatives  
**Stable** A Diverse Haven Of Respect And  
Celebration **Richer Capable For The People**  
**Fruitful** Complex **Affordable** **Artist-Centric**  
A Springboard For Global Success **Hopeful**  
**Bold Ambitious** Connected To Country **Kind**  
**More Than We Ever Imagined**

We asked the creative sector to describe what Sydney's cultural life *can be*, this is what they said



# Credits

Cover - SNYE New Year's concert, 2016  
(Katherine Griffiths/City of Sydney)

Page 2 - Artwork: Jagun, by Kim Healey, 2023

Page 4 - Sydney New Years Eve, 2024  
(Daniel Tran/City of Sydney)

Page 6 - Green Square library, 2018  
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Page 8 - Sydney Writers' Festival, Carriageworks, 2023  
(Jacquie Manning)

Page 10 - Pine Street Studios, 2024  
(Abril Felman/City of Sydney)

Page 11 (L to R)  
- Launch of bara, 2022  
(Chris Southwood/City of Sydney)

- Australian Fashion Week, Carriageworks, 2018  
(Katherine Griffiths/City of Sydney)

- Fine Fellow Studio, Foley Street Creative program,  
(Katherine Griffiths/City of Sydney)

- Fintan McGee's feet, 2022  
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Ultimo Community Centre  
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- Pine Street Creative Arts Centre, 2015  
(Sarah Rhodes/City of Sydney)

- Australian Fashion Week, Carriageworks, 2018  
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- The Metro Theatre, Sydney,  
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- Equitable Access  
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- Legs on the Wall. Thaw. Sydney Festival  
(Supplied by Sydney Festival)

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Opera House at Night and Gabrielle Mordy, Studio A  
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Project NEXTGEN runway show. Victoria Bliss collection  
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(Supplied by The Bearded Tit)

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Page 59 - Drag Queens at Sydney World Pride,  
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Page 60 - Welcome to Redfern, by Reko Rennie, 2015  
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Page 62 - Photo by Ahmad Odeh on Unsplash



