

Clifton School of Arts – Annual Report for 2021-22 – from the President, David Roach

The twelve months from July 2021 to June 2022 were challenging not only for the Clifton School of Arts (CSA), but for our whole community. Despite developing and putting in place a COVID safety plan early in the pandemic, we had to close our doors for months and cancel bookings. Even our 110th Anniversary had to be postponed until July 2022. As isolation became a real issue for our members, the Management Committee looked at ways to help our community stay connected. Knowing that many of us had become adept at meeting online, we produced, 'Clifton Conversations', a series of free, live-streamed interviews with artists in their studios. We also produced Caroline Baum 'In Conversation' with the ABC's Dr Norman Swan. We received heartening feedback from participants and members expressing their appreciation for our efforts.

The ongoing uncertainty made planning a challenge. While the committee anticipated that activities and growth would be quite modest in a year like this one, the figures tell a different story. The CSA welcomed 55 new members, a growth of over 30%. Our list of activities is also surprisingly lengthy and we are indebted to our members, our volunteers and our community for their unwavering support through this time. While public events were somewhat curtailed by the ongoing lockdowns, the CSA's output hardly slowed at all.

During the year, we produced 'Community Hands', a video about the CSA featuring local violinist, Cedar Newman, playing music by Prof Matthew Hindson. Since its release, the video has had tens of thousands of views online from Australia and internationally, significantly boosting the CSA's public profile. We published eight newsletters. Our analytics reveal an 'opening figure' (subscribers who read the newsletter), of over 80%. Our first-ever members' survey gave us a deeper understanding of our community, revealing, amongst other things, that 90% our members say their main connection to the CSA is through the newsletter and 94% rate our activities and services as 'excellent' or 'good'. Through the survey, we also compiled a list of excellent suggestions that have informed the committee's planning decisions. In the last 12 months the CSA also published its third book: Dawn Crowther's, 'Chronicles of Clifton'. Launched by Wollongong Lord Mayor, Gordon Bradbery, it continues to sell well and is now into its third reprint.

While the CSA doors may have been closed for much of the year, the CSA Committee continued to work behind the scenes. We upgraded our website to make it more efficient and user-friendly, and converted our accounts to the cloud-based accounting system, Xero, saving us time and improving our financial budgeting and reporting. We workshopped our Strategic Plan in December 2021 which we published in 2022; revised our Constitution to meet requirements for a Public Fund for our application for Deductible Gift Recipient status; and revised our Life Membership policy, Feedback and Complaints policy, and our Code of Conduct. Thanks to committee members, Sarah Gardner and Bernie O'Donnell, for these improvements in our governance, which were all approved by members.

During 2021-22 we continued to maintain and renovate our heritage building. We installed projection equipment, new gallery lighting in the downstairs gallery and, thanks to members Pete Wilson and Brian Murphy, we renovated our hanging system. And we now have our own portable stage thanks to a grant from the Wollongong City Council. Our long-term goal, however, is to make the CSA accessible to all members of our community. Thanks to the hard work of members, Tim and Kim Antiohos, we succeeded in getting approval from Wollongong City Council for the Development Application for our proposed extensions.

Once COVID restrictions eased, we restarted our workshop program. Yet again we were impressed by the resilience shown by our members and supporters. We had full classes and excellent professional teachers. Particular thanks go to Prue Watson and her volunteers.

With funds from Wollongong City Council's, 'Connecting Neighbours' project, and the efforts of Blue Potter, in February 2022 we put on a series of three free workshops with teachers, Bob McRae, Christine Hill and Elspeth McCombe. In 2021-22 we hosted two recitals at the CSA; Anthony Albrecht in December and Andrew Blanch in February. Both recitals sold out and were wonderful and intimate occasions.

We restarted our popular Meet the Maker series with a screening of 'Women of Steel' at Coledale Community Hall, followed by a lively conversation between filmmaker, Robynne Murphy and Caroline Baum. In March we partnered with Collins Bookstore and Voices for Wollongong to present scientist, Saul Griffith, speaking about his book, 'The Big Switch'. We also kick-started some new initiatives. The monthly CSA 'Artists' Forum', conceived by members, Roger West and Hugo Zweep, as a chance for practising artists to discuss their work, techniques, influences and challenges, have been well attended, with excellent input from participants. During 2021-22, Judy Burke, Ian Brown and their team have been developing the CSA International Artists' Book Award, planned for November 2023.

The CSA continues to be in high demand as a cost-effective professional gallery space, with bookings through to 2024. The CSA hosted many successful shows with a good mix of professional, emerging and community artists. Worth mentioning was 'Knowhere', a group show of three young artists: Eva Matthews, Pippa Callingham and Jake Adams.

In January, after much rescheduling, we were finally able to open the Clifton Contemporary Art Fair. Curated by Vyvian Wilson and David Roach, with an enormous amount of help from volunteers, and thanks to the support of members and the broader community, we sold \$52,000 worth of artworks, with 75% of this figure going to local artists who had been doing it tough under lockdown. We also reached out to Scarborough Public School to offer art appreciation visits to exhibitions where students get to meet artists.

Planning for CSA's Gentle Project began in 2021. We are partnering with the University of Wollongong and Wollongong Art Gallery on this Illawarra-wide, public art project which celebrates the much-loved artist and educator, Ian Gentle who lived and worked at the CSA in the 1980s and 1990s. This high-profile project, led by David Roach, will feature a major retrospective, a satellite exhibition at CSA, a documentary, definitive catalogue, workshops, educational programs and a website, www.thegentleproject.org.au.

The CSA continued to develop partnerships with the Imperial Hotel, Wollongong City Council, South Coast Writers Centre, Scarborough Public School, Screen Illawarra, University of Wollongong, Wollongong Art Gallery and many others. Businesses which supported us in the past year include the Coal Coast Brewing Company, The Photo Fixer, Sketch Café, MDK Hair and Coledale Fine Wines. We have also had wonderful professional support, in particular from Di Oliver from Austi Bookkeeping, Denis Yeo from Wollongong Business Accountants and graphic designer, Karen Jeffrey, proprietor of Cocoon.

Income for the year was \$47,810, expenses were \$42,592 resulting in a surplus of \$5,218 and increasing our retained surplus to \$118,658.

In the past year, the CSA has had to adapt and adjust and we are proud of all that was achieved. In the same spirit that has kept us going for 110 years, we couldn't have done it without the ongoing support of our members and of the broader community.

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