



ARTOPIA



BY ASK THE ARTIST

REPORTING ON THE FOCUS GROUP EVENT HELD ONLINE ON 31ST JULY 2021.

FACILITATED BY DEBBY MAZIARZ, NICOLE JOHNSTON & AMIE BRÛLÉE.

SUPPORTED BY ARTS & CULTURE DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNITY SERVICES, NILLUMBIK SHIRE COUNCIL AS PART OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARTS & CULTURE STRATEGY 2022 - 2026.

WHAT IS ASK THE ARTIST?

ASK THE ARTIST IS AN ELTHAM-BASED COMMUNITY FACILITATION PROJECT BY ARTISTS [DEBBY MAZIARZ](#) AND NICOLE JOHNSTON.

ASK THE ARTIST DESIGN HOME-BASED IMMERSIONS AND CONSULTATION PROCESSES THAT TAKE THE FORM OF EVENTS, BUS TOURS, GATHERINGS AND RETREATS. **WE ENVISAGE A COMMUNITY WHERE CREATIVE PRACTICE AND THINKING IS VALUED AND EVIDENT IN THE PHYSICAL, INTELLECTUAL AND SOCIAL IDENTITY OF NILLUMBIK'S PEOPLE AND PLACES.**

OUR INAUGURAL PROJECT WAS ARTOPIA, AN ARTIST-LED FOCUS GROUP EVENT THAT POSED THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

“HOW MIGHT WE BUILD A CONNECTED, RESILIENT AND CREATIVE COMMUNITY?”

IDEAS AND ENERGY CULTIVATED IN THE LEAD-UP, DURING AND POST THE EVENT WILL INSPIRE FUTURE ARTIST-LED INTERVENTIONS AND WILL CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS RAISING THE PROFILE, VALUE AND WELLBEING OF ARTISTS IN OUR COMMUNITY.



THIS REPORT

This document reports on the ARTOPIA focus group and event held online on 31st July 2021. Twenty attendees (including 6 post event survey attendees) represented the diversity of the creative community including stages of career, connection to and time spent in Nillumbik, artform and experience. This report highlights responses and images elicited from the questions, activities and discussions on the day. It also includes a call to action by Ask the Artist to Council and the wider community – an invitation to pool resources and energy to improve the state of things for the creative industries and by extension, our whole community.

THE FOCUS GROUP EVENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO COUNTRY

EVEN THOUGH WE ARE NOT PHYSICALLY TOGETHER, WE CAN CREATE A MEANINGFUL GATHERING.

WHEREVER YOU ARE NOW, CAN YOU IMAGINE THAT PLACE WITHOUT THE STRUCTURES AND SYMBOLS OF MODERN LIFE? REMOVE THE ROADS, BUILDINGS, HOUSES, POWERLINES.

CAN YOU IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THAT? SEE YOURSELF IN THE ENVIRONMENT AS JUST ONE PART OF WHAT SUSTAINS LIFE IN THAT PLACE.

THE VERY FIRST PEOPLE TO LIVE IN THIS COUNTRY LIVED THIS WAY, --- RESPONSIVE AND RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR PART IN THEIR PLACE. WE CAN ALL CHOOSE TO LIVE THIS WAY AND TO BENEFIT FROM THAT KIND OF GENUINE CONNECTION.

AND WITH THAT SENTIMENT, WE WELCOME YOU TO...

ARTOPIA, BY ASK THE ARTIST.

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

1. WHO ARE WE AS CREATIVE INDIVIDUALS?

DESCRIBING OUR CREATIVITY

"I'm the Community Arts and Cultural Engagement Officer for Nillumbik Arts and Cultural Development. So, I get to play in the creative space for work... I'm also part of a community art studio that was set up during the bush fire recovery project, called Butterfly Studio. And by profession, I'm a professional writer and editor."

"To be honest, I don't consider myself a professional artist... I do salsa dancing. I do some handicrafts with needles and string, and I also do carpet weaving. But I always love art because my professional area is so serious. And then art always, any kind, even [at] an intermediate level, helps me to relieve some of those pressures. Something that is for me... I am working on a community project as a short-term project. I am planning for a dance and music night in the town village. And in the long term, I'm hoping that I can pull out a calendar of free events for community..."

"I don't see myself as an artist, but more of a creative person. I tend to create. I have lived in Nillumbik for 14-ish years and moved to this area because it felt a bit more like home than being in the city. And being a country girl, Nillumbik felt a bit more like home for me. Something interesting, I am applying for a grant today or tomorrow, for a textile waste education and reduction program."

"My interest is jewellery. I love handicraft. I make some jewellery, and I love to do gardening and I love cooking and I love eating. Basically, any craft. I just love to learn any craft, any handicraft, apart from knitting..."



" I'M 18 AND I'M STUDYING YEAR 12. I'M A CREATIVE PERSON. I'M A FILMMAKER AND I HAVE A PASSION FOR MOVIES AND MAKING MOVIES."

" I'M AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTIST, SO THE MEDIUMS THAT I WORK WITH ARE SOUND, PREDOMINANTLY MY VOICE, MOVEMENT. I'M TRAINED IN DANCE AND CHOREOGRAPHY, AND I'VE ALSO BEEN A MEDITATION AND YOGA FACILITATOR FOR QUITE SOME TIME. I AM INTERESTED IN WHERE THE THREE OF THOSE MEET."

" I'VE LIVED IN THE AREA FOR A VERY LONG TIME. THIS IS MY PLACE OF NOURISHMENT. I DO ALL SORTS OF DIFFERENT THINGS IN THE ARTS. MOST RECENTLY, I FINISHED WORKING ON A BOOK, LOVING COUNTRY."

" I'M A PAINTER WITH A PASSION FOR AREAS THAT INCLUDE FEMINISM AND MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, ASYLUM SEEKERS... JO IS MY BEST FRIEND, AND SHE'S VITAL TO MY ART PRACTICE. "

"I am interested in sculpture out of natural materials and I love textiles and printmaking. I've been in the Nillumbik Shire community, probably for about 20 years, and worked on a lot of community art projects... I started Butterfly Studio..."

"I'm a textile designer and maker. I have my own home studio... I run my own business, making my own clothing, hand printed clothing, for three years until COVID hit... I've lived in Nillumbik for 21 years. I am involved with an environmental group in the North Eastern suburbs, and we're looking at running arts projects with that group in the community."

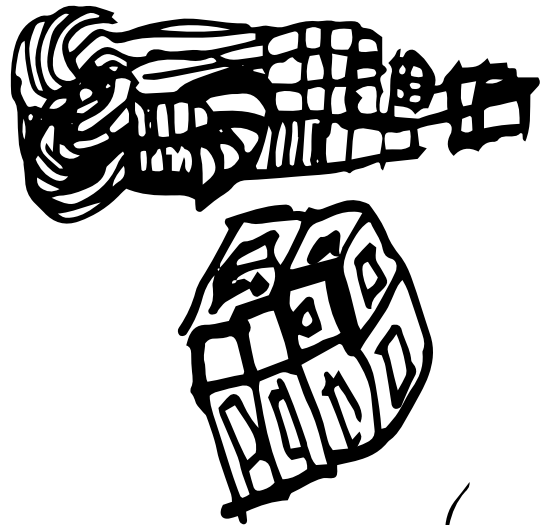
"I'm an artist and I have just installed a show. I work quite a lot with textiles too, but I work across a number of mediums.... I live near a reserve, so I'm very involved in the Bunjil bushland reserves as a way of connecting and getting to know this place more deeply. And I love tennis. Tennis is vital to my life and my practice."

"I'm a painter too, and Susie and I often paint together. I've lived around here for 40 years and I've always wondered why I haven't felt more connected to other local artists. I do paint in Kangaroo Ground and have had an exhibition at the library, at the gallery, with the Kangaroo Ground ladies, painters."

"I studied film and then realised... I like to work by myself. And so, I moved across to photography... I'm a wildlife photographer. I haven't lived in the area for too long. I moved maybe five years ago, but I normally work and travel, so barely been around. That's changed, and this probably leads into my most interesting thing. I am the father of twins, so I have little baby girls."

"I'm a designer of various things, from graphic design, to public sculpture. I've actually just come back from St Andrews. We poured concrete yesterday, for three signs that are going in next month, so keep an eye out for those. And something interesting is, I sometimes collect really weird decks of cards. And my new set that I just got recently, is called the Taro of Arcane bullshit. And you'll see the logo is an eye in flames, coming out of a bum that's in a book. So, I thought that was kind of interesting. So, if you like, I'll just pick a card for our meeting... So, the card we have for our meeting today, is the 'all seeing slice of pizza'. I think that's very fortuitous."

"I've been working at Nillumbik as their Arts Recovery Officer for the last six months... my art practice is mixed media. A bit of everything, really. Fair bit of painting, a bit of craft and textiles, but I also like to do big projects like knitting massive care blankets.... My interesting fact is, I used to sing with Jo in the choir based in your neck of the woods."



**“IDEAS.
USING A LOT OF
BRAIN POWER.”**

**“I DESIGN AND FACILITATE
EXPERIENCES THAT SUPPORT
THE GENERATION OF IDEAS,
SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES.”**

**“STORIES.
ALONE - AT HOME.”**

**“I MAKE SONGS AND I MAKE
THEM IN DIFFERENT WAYS. NEW
FOR ME. LOVE THE WAY SONGS
APPEAR SOMETIMES – E.G. POP
IN MY HEAD DURING A SHOWER.
BUT SOMETIMES I HAVE TO
WORK AT IT, EVERY WORD. I LOVE
THAT ONE THING CAN COME
OUT OF SO MANY PROCESSES.
SAME OUTCOME AS IN THE
SONG BUT IT CAN COME FROM
MANY DIFFERENT WAYS. I AM A
MUSICIAN FIRST AND FOREMOST
SO THE WORDS ARE THE MOST
DIFFICULT PART SOMETIMES.”**

“I PAINT USING ACRYLIC.”

**“ART PRINTS.
DIGITALLY DRAWN
IN PRO-CREATE,
PRINTED BY FINE ART
PRINTER IN YARRA
GLEN AND FRAMED
BY LOCAL FRAMERS.”**

**“CRAFT MAKING
WITH STRING MACRAME,
MOSAICING.”**

**“FAIRYS AND OTHER
FAIRY CREATURES.”**

ARTISTS WE ADMIRE

*“EVERYONE
WHO CREATES
IS ADMIRABLE”*

AMANDA PALMER;

"A punk musician from Boston... who had the first major crowd funding campaign. It's not my style of music but she's so honest and open and has built an incredible community, connecting people. Art should connect people."

ARNOLD ZABLE;

"His extraordinary talent and interest in the simple, poignant stories of other people."

RACHAEL CASTLE;

"Gorgeous work full of colour and fun created across a range of outputs and always stays so true to her voice."

“DAN WATERS”

DONNA JACKSON;

"The founder of the Womens Circus. She could bring hundreds of people into an empty warehouse and build a whole circus village and ecosystem from scratch."

PAMELA IRVING;

"I love her work using many different types of materials she inspires me to be more daring."

BRIAN FROUD;

"He created Labyrinth."

NELSON MAKAMO;

"His work is pure, talent, joy and colour. I love how he started from nothing, a little boy growing up in a South African township, and now Oprah owns one of his paintings."



WHERE WE GET OUR INSPIRATION

"EVERYTHING. DAILY LIFE. FOOD, WINE, CONVERSATION, LIFE, NATURE."

"OTHER PEOPLE AND THE SMALL GLIMPSES I GET OF THEIR LIVES."

"NATURE, OTHER ARTISTS, ART, PEOPLE'S STORIES AND PASSIONS."

"FROM MY ONLINE CREATIVE COMMUNITY."

"FROM ALL AROUND ME."

"OTHER ARTISTS, INTERNET."

"ANYWHERE AND EVERYWHERE! AND ALWAYS NATURE."

"GALLERIES, MOVIES, GOOGLE, OTHER CREATIVE PEOPLE, AWARD WINNING ADS, INSTAGRAM."

IF WE WERE FOOD

"A LITTLE FRENCH CAKE;

SCULPTURAL AND INTERESTING ON THE OUTSIDE AND SURPRISING ON THE INSIDE."

"A PASTA;

I WORK WELL IN A COLLECTIVE AND I AM EVEN BETTER WHEN YOU ADD FLAVOURS AND TEXTURES."

"SRI LANKAN DESSERT CALLED VATTALAPPAM;

A COMPLEX MIX OF SRI LANKAN AND EUROPEAN INFLUENCES, LIKE ME."

"TOAST WITH CHEESE;

ITS SIMPLE AND HEART-WARMING AND NEVER LETS YOU DOWN."

"CHOCOLATE MUD CAKE;

I LIKE IT AND A LOT OF OTHERS LIKE IT."

"VEGETABLE;

I ENJOY EATING ALL TYPES OF VEGETABLES."

"A LEMON;

THEY ARE BRIGHT, ZESTY AND GO PERFECTLY IN SO MANY THINGS!"

"STRAWBERRY"



OUR GAME CHANGING PLANS FOR NILLUMBIK – ARTIST AS MAYOR

"I would build an arts centre...a meeting place for artists with maybe a coffee bar and a bar that could host events. A place you can turn up to and have interesting artsy conversations. Could be an empty shop?"

"I would create a partnership with the local traders and businesses with unused or unleased spaces and turn a shopfront into a laundromat or Café that only employs artists on a casual basis in between gigs. Inspired by Money Laundering Project - an experimental business outfit for an artist-run laundromat in the feast and famine gig-economy."

"I WOULD OPEN UP AN ART SPACE THAT WAS ARTIST-RUN, FUNDED BY COUNCIL AND BUSINESSES, OPEN TO EVERYONE, INCLUSIVE OF EVERYONE. YOU COULD RUN WORKSHOPS. AN ART SPACE DEVOTED TO THE ARTS IN ALL ITS BREADTH AND COMPLEXITY."



"I would put more money towards the arts... funding things like venues or grants...this is maybe just my own personal perspective or opinion, but I feel like a lot of the art that I've seen in Nillumbik is very similar, from similar types of artists working with similar mediums. So, if I was trying to make the place a little bit more vibrant, I would probably fund artists or devote some portion of that funding to different artistic mediums. One example is, I haven't seen many performing arts in Nillumbik and maybe that's also too because I'm new here so I don't know. But just doing things like that and maybe even getting artists from other municipalities to come and do workshops because that would also bring a little bit more vibrancy and dynamicism to the space."

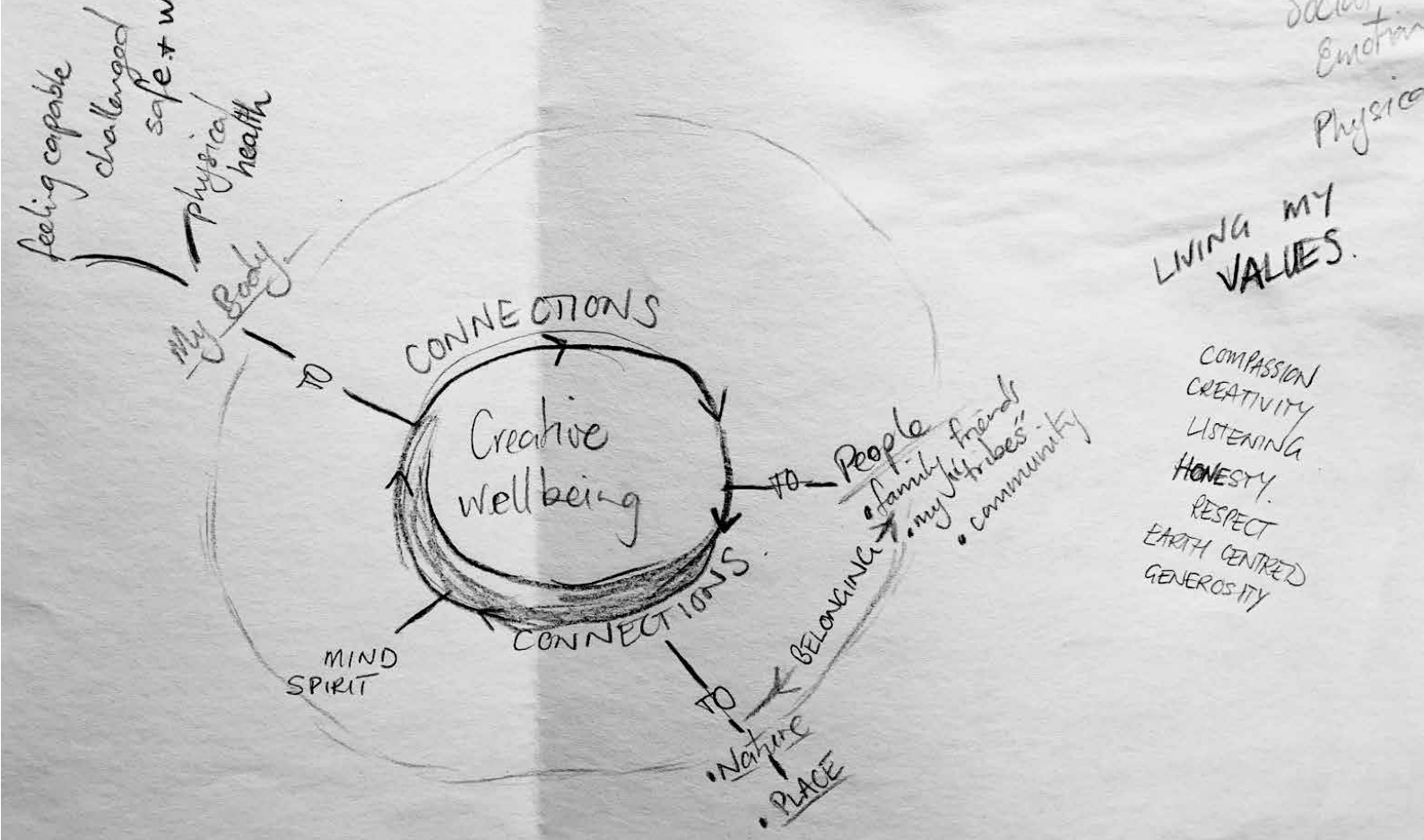
"I would like to set up a committee for managing and assigning different projects in collaboration with artists. After participating in these programs, I realise how many great artists are here, but for somebody who walks in the Shire, art is not at the centre or on the front of the Council. One example that I like to share is Santa Fe in the US, New Mexico. If you walk... in that city, for example, there is this alley street full of art workshops, different things, Native American art and the whole city is impacted by great art, artists, events, etc.... If I was a mayor, I would create that committee to create this kind of space and focus on the arts..."

"Already we have so many venues that are viable, good spaces to be utilised, but they're largely inaccessible... finding ways to make them vibrant and available and running all sorts of interesting things for people as a consistent everyday process and how to bring that also to the awareness of the broader community. The value of the arts, I think is understated."

"The community centre, it's a bit of an anomaly because not many people get to go inside it unless you pay for it. It can't be a community centre if it's a business model. We had our son's 21st in the foyer, it cost a fortune for just the foyer. Why can't we reassign something for that community centre and make it more available to artists?"

"Make it a policy that there's a role for an artist included in multiple sectors of Council business. So, just as a matter of course, an artist's perspective and presence are included in planning or implementing, or challenging a problem."





"We have the open studios for people to come and view painting and pottery in people's homes, etc. But if you come into town, there's no gallery or space that presents people's works, and it would be wonderful just to have a space where local artists could exhibit their work and that would charge perhaps a very small commission. Smaller than commercial galleries. Just the 10 or 15% price, and people could put their works in for a month at a time and it would just keep rotating so that people actually just have access to see the paintings and the pottery on a regular basis. You need a gift, you pop in to have a look, what's in The Artists Co-op, if you called it The Artists Co-op Shop, it would become something that was always in people's eyes. I live in Glen Iris, and I was fortunate enough that when I moved into the area, the local framer... I actually came to him to frame my paintings that were going into the Eltham Library Community Gallery Exhibition, and he was lovely enough... And his window was so boring, I said to him, 'Why don't I put some of my paintings in your window? And he said, 'Great idea.' And I said, 'I'm happy to pay you a commission.' And he said, 'No, no, no, I definitely don't want a commission.' I said, 'Well then, as a win-win, I'll just keep framing in your shop.' So, as a result, I just had, regularly, paintings in his window. Now, I sold five paintings just from people walking by and thinking, 'Oh, I like that. I'll take that home.' There was nothing about marketing, there was nothing big about it. It was just some people walking by and obviously thought, 'That's in my price range and I like it enough to live with it.' But there's no exposure for artists in Nillumbik."

"Multi-disciplinary arts residency/program/festival to encourage collaboration between art forms."

"LISTEN TO ARTISTS, THEY MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY BEAUTIFUL."

"Create a big centre/market so local artists can have their work for sale creating an income for themselves."

"More community-based exhibitions."

"Set up a mentoring/guidance program connecting artists with other artists to support each other in their practice."

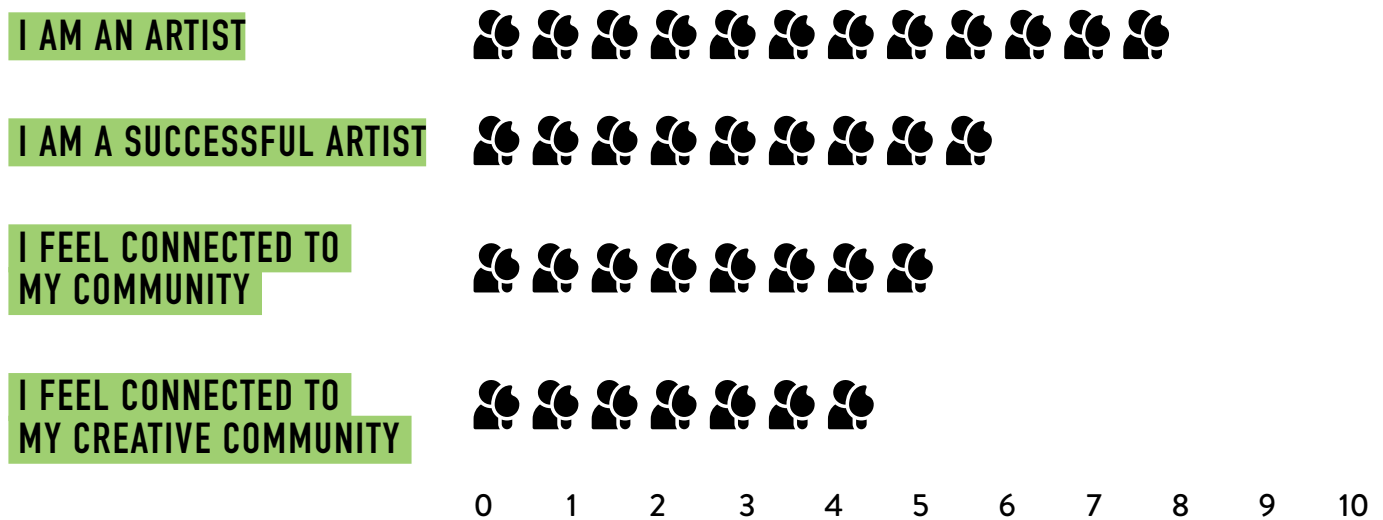
"Build a public museum or creative space that could showcase all types of art but also be a space that people can make art in and brings creative people together. Make the creativity more visible and accessible to all."



HOW WE SEE OURSELVES



Average score from 22 participants rating from 1 (I do not identify) to 10 (I strongly identify)



In discussion after this activity, participants highlighted that the meaning of each statement and weighting was different for each person.

EXTRA COMMENTS ON IDENTIFYING AS AN ARTIST AND WHAT SUCCESS MEANS TO US

"Success to everyone is different, of course. And because I'm an art therapist, I feel successful when either myself or my clients feel expressed."

"I think a lot of women artists I've noticed throughout history they tend to be taken seriously once they get to about 70 or 80. So, I'm still waiting. So, I'll just hang in there and keep on plugging away. And each day I get up and call myself an artist, I think that's a success."

"I think it's a really big hurdle, isn't it? That moment where you can actually say publicly, 'I'm an artist.' Whatever medium that actually is. Whether that's as a writer or a painter or whatever, musician. I think that is quite a hurdle to get over sometimes."

"...you have different stages of your life and your career. And I was a performing artist for quite a long time. And now I feel like, I can't say for sure I'm a dancer because I don't perform anymore, but I'll always feel like I'm a dancer. I mean, that's what I do. That's the way I use my body, the way I see the world. So, when somebody asks me about it, it takes a lot of confidence to answer that."

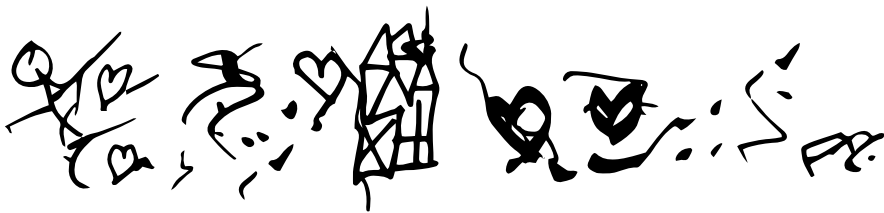
"I was always too shy, or maybe not confident enough to say, 'I'm an artist,' because then people would say, 'What do you make?' And then I'd have to say, 'Well...' Yeah. Sometimes I make things that are ephemeral and you can't see, or I create experiences and they're not things that you can hang on the wall. So, it's hard, it's interpretation. Sometimes it's easier to say, 'Actually, I'm not really an artist. I'm kind of an artist, but I'm creative. I'm definitely creative.' "

"I'm very conscious that creative people aren't given the respect that we deserve, in that everything we do is something created from nothing. To me, that's alchemy. And that is not only precious, but it's almost... Very, very few groups of people can say they do that, but artists do. Any kind of an artist. Except a bullshit artist, which I've been called."

"When I heard that question, what do artists want? The word that came to my mind is respect. And it's respect for difference, it's respect that we are all different, we all have different approaches to our sense of art, being an artist. And that can work in so many different ways and that's what needs to be broadened. So, I just go, yeah, clap, clap, respect. Thank you."

*“AND IT IS HARD WORK.
IT IS HARD WORK
TO CALL YOURSELF
AN ARTIST. YOU ARE
SUCCESSFUL IF YOU
ARE CONTINUING TO
PRACTICE IN ANY WAY,
SHAPE OR FORM.”*

“...when someone else takes you seriously, you start to view yourself more seriously. For me, I'm 57 and I was only perhaps 49 or so when I started to take myself more seriously as an artist. And then I, at some point, made the executive decision between myself and myself that I would believe in myself, not wait for other people to believe in me. I would believe in myself...”



2. WHO ARE WE AS A CREATIVE COMMUNITY?

ASSET MAPPING

WHAT WE HAVE TO SHARE AND WHAT WE NEED RIGHT NOW TO SUPPORT OUR CREATIVE PRACTICE AND LIFE

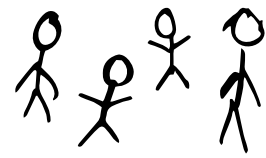
Possible collaborations have been identified and colour-coded by **Ask the Artist** after the workshop. Non-coloured bullet points have not been categorised.

HAVE

- › Grant writing skills. Pay me as a mentor and/or join free online grant workshop.
- › Community building skills...which I give away, organically for nothing but also charge for when producing a project.
- › Professional writing and editing skills. Barter.
- › Expertise in community art and community engagement, funding applications, etc. FREE - part of my job at Nillumbik Shire Council Arts.
- › Studio space @ Butterfly Studio in Christmas Hills. Very small fee - \$15 - \$25 per full day (negotiable).
- › A home-based retreat where you can come and stay, do some craft, artmaking, cooking and get some arts business or career coaching. Pay or barter.
- › Sewing machine to make and repair.

NEED

- › MONEY + More creative brains to collaborate with.
- › Exposure.
- › Help with marketing as well as funding for art projects within the community.
- › I would like to work in a studio and have community space to share work, ideas and cups of tea and chats.
- › I need a personal cook, housekeeper, masseuse, trainer, pet sitter, pool boy (but have no pool). JUST KIDDING. Or am I?
- › A holiday.
- › Video editing.
- › To find people who are passionate, and reliable.
- › How to plan in the time of COVID-19.

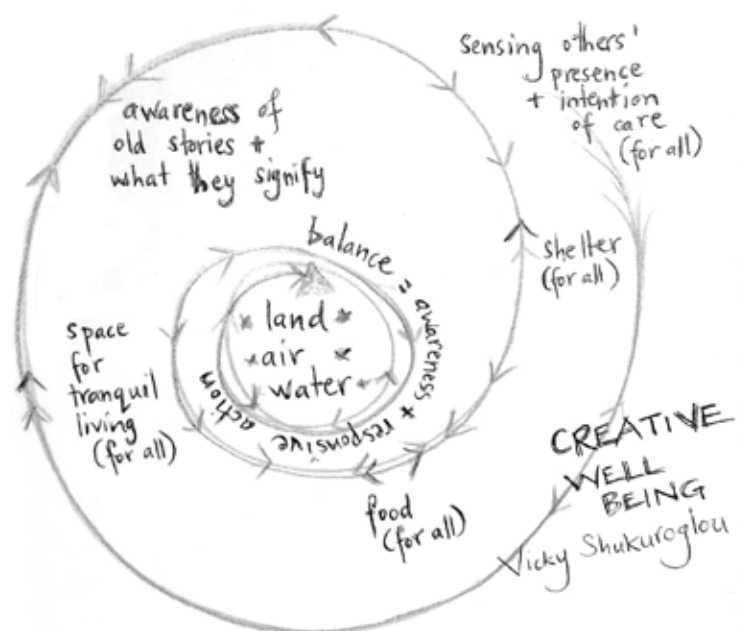


HAVE CONTINUED...

- › Garment design. Sell or trade.
- › Video editing skills, ideas for films, music, passion to create. Up for collaboration.
- › Textile printing and design skills, clothing upcycling and repair skills. Workshops and trades.
- › 120 acres of land. 1) in the style of a local retreat that encourages reconnection to nature and disconnect from chaos 2) in more of a permaculture and/or non-monetary economy context where people can come for the sake of sharing, community and learning.
- › Skills of an artist and an OT. Share ways art can be used as a relaxation/mindfulness method.
- › Permaculture design perspective. Talking through 'problems' challenges to find creative solutions.
- › Lots of contacts in the Melbourne arts scene. Can e-introduce you.
- › Creative recovery experience. I sell my time as a consultant/mentor to help artists work with disaster affected communities.
- › Expertise in transformation & facilitating transformative spaces through meditation, movement, and breathe through my offerings, including 1:1, group settings, and community contexts.
- › Photography for free online and prints for sale.
- › I can teach how to make a neck warmer. Pattern available or buy from me on marketplace.
- › Project management skills. Party organiser (Good cook, cocktails).
- › Idea generation skills. Up for a thinktank or brainstorming session over lunch.
- › I have awareness of great human capacity. Enable people to self-generate ideas, BE aware, active, responsive, connected, and with contentment.
- › Slinger tennis ball machine that I am willing to trade time with.
- › Experienced artist. Mentor young artists.
- › Art therapist - up to 4 people in my studio at a time with the aim of painting together talking about our work in depth and sharing insights towards personal growth.

NEED CONTINUED...

- › Recreate a creative space (physical).
- › Website development skills.
- › Work opportunities that are closer to home.
- › Social media support - marketing myself.
- › Part time job to pay the bills so I can do my art.
- › Affordable/low cost spaces for emerging artists to display artworks.
- › Time for my artistic practise.
- › A deadline...something that makes me say "that work is done".
- › How I can attach an invite to my show in Footscray in the chat? <http://fivewalls.com.au/>
- › Musicians/sound artists to collaborate that have a depth of experience with studying and/or middle eastern scales (particularly the Phrygian scale).
- › Help building a website on a platform that is unfamiliar to me, and a terrific agent.
- › A visible retail/exhibition/maker/workshop space and a living wage/funding.
- › Volunteers to help young people sew/construct products from repurposed textiles.
- › Exhibition space without severing an arm and leg to pay.
- › Music bands and some dancers with different themes - in-kind or discounted fee.

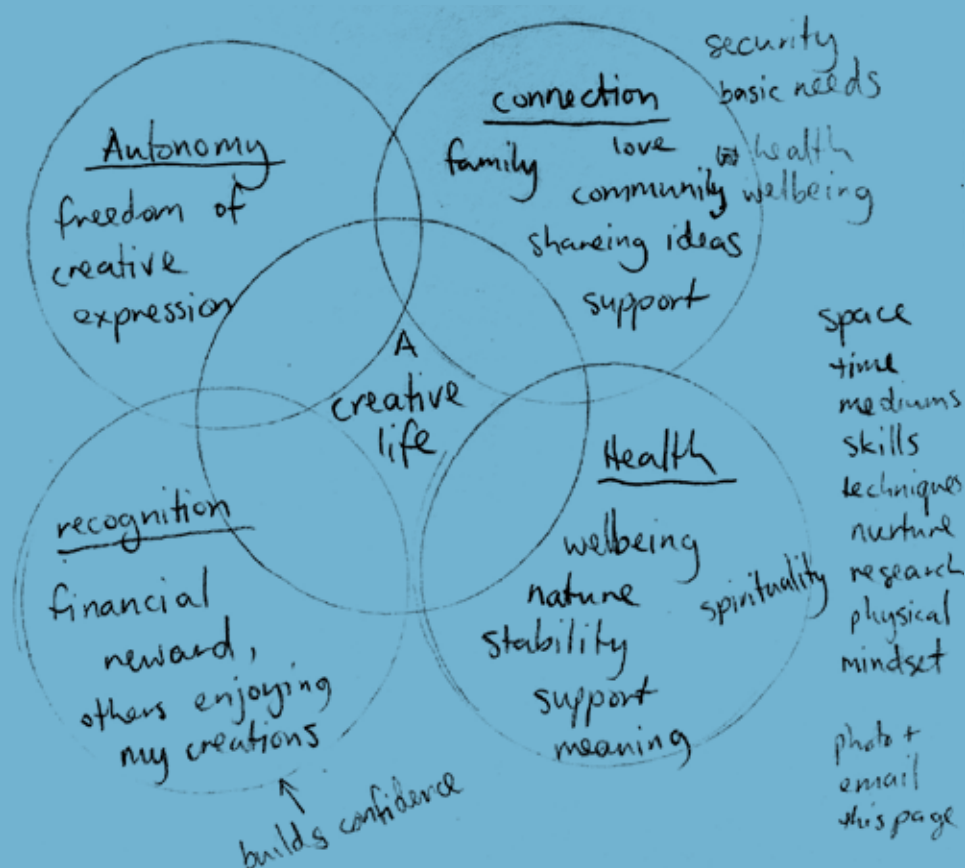


HAVE CONTINUED...

- › Brighten up the environment /dull spaces with my colourful art. Volunteer.
- › Local environment knowledge. Walk together.
- › Art making skills. Art workshops with community.
- › Artwork. Create a book, have an exhibition.
- › I have creative writing skills that I can share in workshops.
- › I would share mosaic, macramé and card making workshops.
- › I have making skills I could teach. I have materials to use for that.
- › I'm experienced creating artwork digitally and turning this into printed products i.e. Prints, Art tea towels, greeting cards etc and I'd be willing to share this knowledge. I have fine art prints and original artwork that can be bought. Can design and paint murals or help out as an assistant.
- › I have a husband who can design and build products. I can think of ideas and help shape strategies.

NEED CONTINUED...

- › To learn more about how local government works - to reveal ways of engaging, participating, influencing my community.
- › Work that 'fits' with my skills/experience/context etc.
- › A chauffeur.
- › A woodworker.
- › I need exposure for my recently published book.
- › Life and still life drawing skills.
- › Space to have workshops.
- › I would like more photography skills. and skills on photoshop.
- › Advice/guidance on where to source and what to use as a base for some paintings I want to do on a marine ply/ artist board or similar. Regular time in my week just to play and freely create. Set up my studio so things have a home and there's some space to work.
- › Inspiration, networking, opportunities.



3. RESOURCE SHARING IN THE CREATIVE COMMUNITY

WHAT ALREADY EXISTS THAT WE KNOW OF?

NILLUMBIK BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

Economic Development newsletter.

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAM

A series of webinars designed specifically to help creative businesses operate a 'best-practice' business.

NILLUMBIK COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTORY

Register your practice and post events.

MONTHLY CREATIVE CATCHUPS

At Earthbound Café on Bolton St. Being accountable for our plans/artwork. A place we can ask for help.

THE MAKERS MARKET AND THE MAKERS COLLECTIVE

MADC MELBOURNE ADVERTISING, DESIGN AND CREATIVITY CLUB

BOOK AN ARTIST

Has a Facebook group page for artist community to ask questions.

LEVERAGE YOUR ART

Has a Facebook community for artists to share work, ask for help etc. (paid course)

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE INTERNET

Facebook, Instagram, Etsy and webpages.

SCHOOL AND LIBRARY

THE OPEN STUDIO

Event that happens in Eltham every year.

ELTHAM BOOKSHOP

NILLUMBIK LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

Place Shapers. Women's Leadership Program. Young Women Leaders.





NEW IDEAS FOR RESOURCE SHARING IN THE CREATIVE COMMUNITY UNDER HEADINGS

FIND OUT

- › Digital noticeboard where people can ask questions, ask for help, find the people they need,
- › Artist Directory with list of haves and needs.
- › Gumtree for artists in Nillumbik.
- › Artist Helpdesk.

CREATE

- › Art events for women, disadvantaged groups.
- › Artists collaborating on projects.
- › A multi-disciplinary residency or program to encourage collaborative projects or cross-pollination of ideas between different artistic disciplines (e.g. visual arts, literature, film making, performing arts).
- › Facebook page specially for creatives, asking for and offering resources.
- › Something OFF Facebook would be great for online. Local meetups could be a good idea.
- › A creative hub that exists physically as well as digitally. A place that creatives can meet and share and is accessible to the public too. Encourage the whole community to take more ownership of the artists in the area.

CONNECT AND SUPPORT

- › Nillumbik Artist Network.
- › Skill shares.
- › Monthly creative catchup drinks, meetups and networking (roving locations).
- › Repair café.
- › ArtBook (not Facebook).
- › ARTOPIA the app – artist profiles and offerings pop up on your smartphone when you drive through Nillumbik.
- › Nillumbik Artists Facebook group.
- › Trade show/barter market for artists inspired by Barter Town in Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome.
- › Create Market 3095 for selling art inspired by Market 3196.
- › Creating connections beyond the 'arts' community - looking outward.
- › Street library, tool library, food share models.

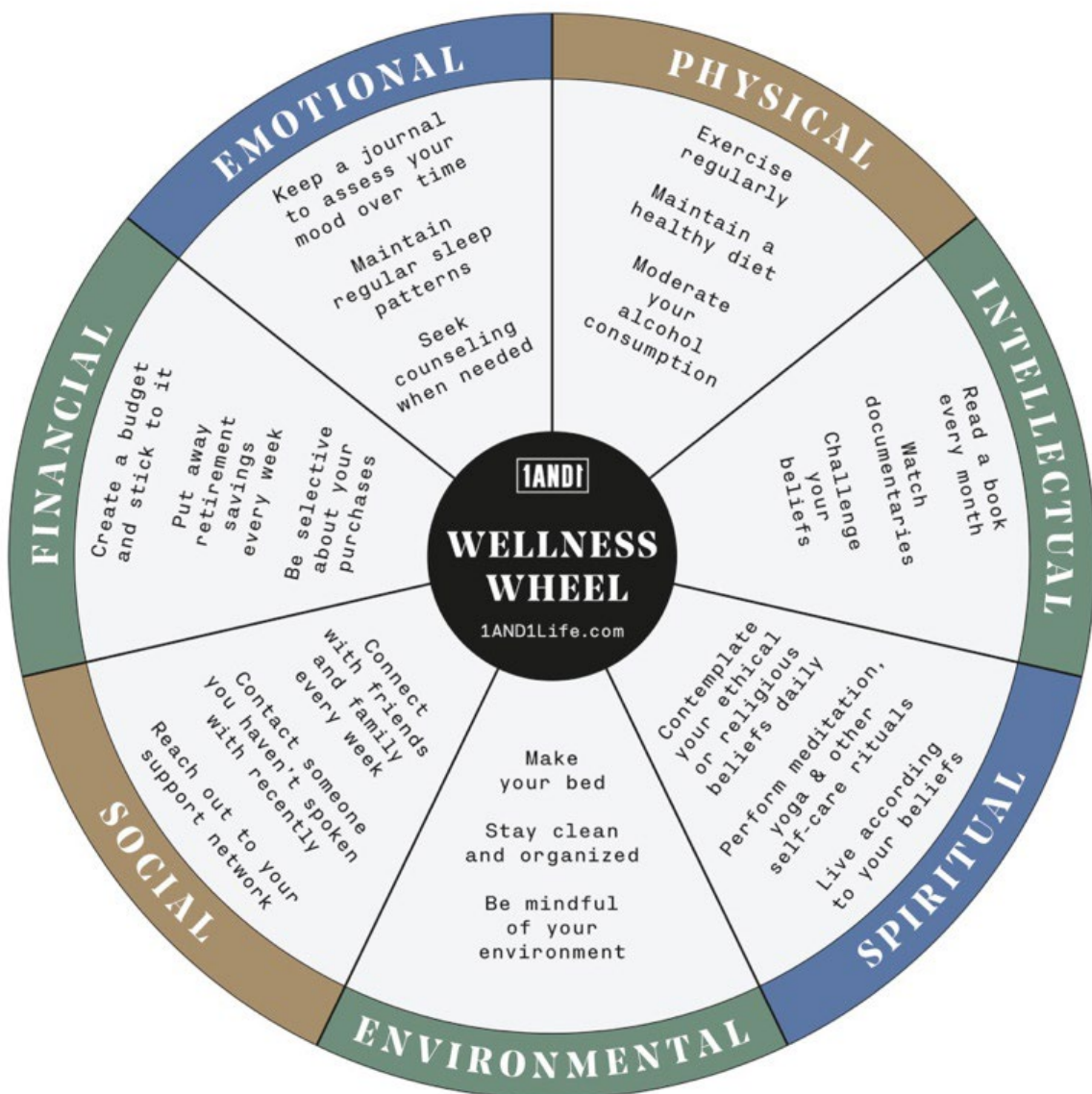


4. CREATIVE WELLBEING

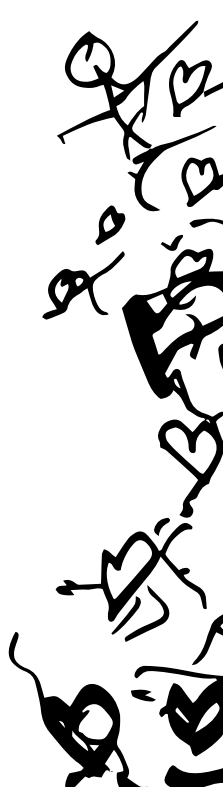
WHAT DO WE NEED TO THRIVE IN OUR ARTS PRACTICE AND CREATIVE LIFE? WHAT DO WE NEED TO CREATE OURSELVES? WHAT NEEDS TO COME FROM OUTSIDE?



Participants were introduced to the 7 dimensions of the Wellness Wheel.



They were then asked to create their own creative wellness models in 6 minutes. Some participants worked on these further after the event. These are scattered throughout this report.



5. HOW MIGHT WE?

KEEPING IN MIND A VISION FOR A MORE CONNECTED, RESILIENT AND CREATIVE COMMUNITY, 'WE ASKED PARTICIPANTS: 'HOW MIGHT WE...'

The artists came up with rich, imaginative propositions and we've grouped them into:

- › MAKING IT HAPPEN OURSELVES
- › INVITING PEOPLE IN
- › INFLUENCING CHANGE

MAKING IT HAPPEN OURSELVES

How might we make more work?	How can we build artists' capacity in project planning? Ideas: Steering committee to link skills in the community, professional development for artists, Council run Place Shapers Program.	How might we create that central arts space or artists meeting place? Do we need more than one?
How might we connect with other artists? Ideas: Red chair, artist market, marketing artists.	How might we follow artist trajectories? How might we follow community art projects' progress? Ideas: Artist-run social media, project check ins.	How might we bring art more visible in our community? How might we create spaces for community to engage in art making in the community? How might we make Nillumbik the creative hub of Melbourne?
How might we create a network where we are automatically able to support each other as artists and creative businesses?	How do we, as artists, come together to support each other?	How might we use creativity for wellbeing in our community? How might we find locally created art/ creative products?
How might we create a visible accessible physical space? Ideas: Casual drop in, funding from Council, artist run, physical space in a central location...day workshops, evenings, dynamic space...profile an artist, studio set up, pop-up version profiling different artists, accessible, Council officer advisory role, membership and retail, talk to people who have done it.	How might we create an Artist Co-Op? Ideas: Social media, physical space, networking, regular meetings, research creating an artist coop, skill shares, PD workshops, regular events, needs a governance structure, get a mentor.	

INVITING PEOPLE IN

How might we make Nillumbik arts scene more engaging to non-artists and visitors?	How might we make the performing arts more visible?	How might we transform the arts scene in Nillumbik so that it explicitly reflects diversity of arts and artists that exist?
How might we engage multiple generations in our community to collaborate and support each other? Using art to create meaning and connection?	How might we rouse up people's love of this place? How might we decorate Hurstbridge so others will come from far and wide to see this amazing township?	How can we reach a wider audience as artists?
How do we access owners of buildings so we can create art on walls/buildings? Ideas: Collaborate on murals, get a list of businesses and asset owners and coordinate an approach.	How might we develop a system where other businesses might be able to help support better outcomes for everyone?	How do we make others in the community e.g. businesses aware of the benefits of arts and what we can do for them?
How might we showcase the creative/ artistic industry to community? Ideas: Collaborate with Café owners to showcase and display artists' work.	How might we get more people reading short stories in Nillumbik and raise the profile of writers at the same time?	How might we get more creatives connecting with each other and talking about and showing their work?

INFLUENCING CHANGE

How might we use Nillumbik's (community, place, Council) resources to help and support artists?	How might we use the art we're creating in Nillumbik to make a difference in the broader community? (mental health, general health, connection)? Ideas: Make activities fun and simple, build artists capacity to work with community.	How might we use the art that we're creating to make a difference to how the COVID situation is impacting on people? Improving social connections, mental health, wellbeing? Ideas: fun and simple activities that bring people together, focusing on place: to build connections with people, getting to know and care for the place, practical restorations - guided walks, local reserves, love making work on Country.
How might we raise the profile and value of artists in Nillumbik? Ideas: Profile an artist in the window of a real estate agent, like a house for sale, build partnerships, activate blank boards in Nillumbik dedicated to artist profile building.	How do we ensure art is part of everyday life? Ideas: Create an artists' sector/ laneway e.g. like a 'little Italy' type feel, green areas are the inspiration for all of my artworks, display art within the community, tie it in with the environment, support public live art (not statues), happenstance, bump into an interactive, participatory art experience on the way to the market, be creative all the time, not just when we are making art in our studio, artist take over the Nillumbik Christmas time space activation funding program.	How might we shift the system to be more sustainable that is kind to all living creatures and the lands and waters that sustain them? Ideas: Role modelling and showcasing how - to support a major mindset shift, create a wayfinding strategy in partnership with First Nations peoples.
How might we enable greater commitment and participation given perceived limitations and pressures?	How might we fast track creative projects to reduce 'red tape' time?	How might we encourage Council to make venues affordable for community to hire? How do we find affordable spaces?

6. CREATING CULTURAL VALUE

GENERAL DISCUSSION ABOUT ARTISTS, THEIR ROLE IN COMMUNITY AND VALUE CREATION

“ IT'S GREAT TO CONSIDER THE THINGS THAT WE HAVE OR NEED AND MOVE IT OUTSIDE OF THE TRADITIONAL MONETARY ECONOMY AS WELL ...TO THE ACT OF EXCHANGE, TO BUILD COMMUNITY AT THE SAME TIME AND KIND OF GET SOME MOMENTUM PERHAPS BEYOND THE SPENDING OF A DOLLAR. ”

ASK THE ARTIST OBSERVATION:

Alternative systems, mechanisms and processes that support artists and build cultural value.

Creative thinkers can bring different perspectives on all aspects of community life if they are well supported.

“ BRINGING TOGETHER OUR SKILLS, 'PUMPKIN SOUP AND PROBLEM SOLVING'... I THINK WE'RE BUILDING COMMUNITIES. I MEAN, COMMUNITIES ARE ABOUT PEOPLE. WE'RE CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE. WE BUILD OUR OWN COMMUNITIES AROUND US, SMALL COMMUNITIES, BIG COMMUNITIES. ”

ASK THE ARTIST OBSERVATION:

Artists don't just need spaces and training - we need a creative ecology – a system of interconnected social relationships present in community and beyond.

“ IF ARTISTS ARE WELL - LOOKED AFTER - ABLE TO CARE FOR SELF, OTHERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT, THE CULTURE, OUR CULTURE AND OUR COMMUNITY WILL BENEFIT. ”

ASK THE ARTIST OBSERVATION:

An artists' tacit knowledge, inherent abilities and capacity for community building is extraordinary and underutilised.

7. ARTOPIA TO ME IS...

A COLLECTIVE BRAINSTORM ABOUT WHAT ARTOPIA IS AND SHOULD BE

FUN! Rewarding. COMFORTING. Inspirational.

...A place of ideas abundance, collaboration, inspiration, and big hearts.

A universe of art.

FREEDOM FOR ARTISTS.

A magical land where anything can and does happen.

Possibilities.

A treelined street of arts.

When art is everywhere!

Not tucked away but accessible and part of everyday life.

Vibrancy.

Connecting all artists in one place.

A place to feel safe and connected to other creative people. A place to display creative works.

...Going to be realised if people like us continue to meet and share ideas, skills, talents, resources and build a sense of belonging through our art and our way of seeing the world.

Creativity is seen as our superpower from which we are all nourished.

Is where the inside is outside and everyone can share in creativity.

More cross-disciplinary collaborative opportunities.

A place where artists feel valued and can participate in the economy by selling their art at a price point that can sustain their lifestyle.

Encouraging artists to keep going.

A forum to stimulate people's creativity.

Accessible and approachable for ALL artists.

A place where there are more creative people with big ideas and open minds. More people who say yes to ideas and find ways to make them happen.

8. A RESPONSE AND CALL TO ACTION BY ASK THE ARTIST

ARTOPIA: A SUSTAINABLE, CONNECTED, RESILIENT AND CREATIVE COMMUNITY

INTRA – FROM WITHIN	INTER – BETWEEN	EXO – FROM OUTSIDE
<p>Artist-led initiatives and interventions that support connection, creation and collaboration.</p>	<p>The creative community in partnership with non-arts sectors to create mutually beneficial opportunities and outcomes. Developing cross-sector understanding, learning and relationships as a pathway to opportunity and innovation.</p>	<p>Creating the conditions and environment for artists to live, create and thrive.</p>
<p>Possibilities: Artist driven circular economy: developing mechanisms for maximising local assets, reuse, repair, share and trade systems to meet local needs, support sustainability and wellbeing. New artist-led business models and principles: to support space, place, business and community activation. E.g. Artist run spaces, co-op, committee of management and collectives.</p>	<p>Possibilities: Artists inform development of policies and strategies across sectors and industries: E.g. Artists represented on panels, Boards and advisory committees. Invite sectors to interact with artists to support value creation in the arts and stimulate new cross sectoral collaborations. E.g. Artist in Office: Artist placements in offices to address culture change, team building and visioning goals. Arts Value Cards: a series of collectable cards or tea towels placed all over town outlining what artists bring to the community, economy, presented as stats, facts, tidbits derived from research. Fact Sheets & Guides: for businesses on how to engage an artist, includes a directory of local artists, fee schedule, sample contracts and IP clauses, best practice principles in working with artists. Offer artist placements in community building and town planning projects in the design, roll out and evaluation stages. E.g. Artist in Residence: place an artist for 12 months in Council's Economic Development and Tourism department to support economic stimulus initiatives. Artist as Mayor: artist at one Council meeting a year.</p>	<p>Possibilities: Develop a Nillumbik 'commitment statement' to the creative community, leading the way in recognising the important role artists play in social, cultural, environmental and economic development. E.g. 'Nillumbik proudly pays artists for their time.' 'Nillumbik knows that art and creativity is essential for a healthy, vibrant community.' The implementation of the Nillumbik Shire Council's Arts and Culture Strategy 2022-26 incorporates the 11 guiding principles of Aboriginal self-determination and supports meaningful First Peoples engagement. Creative wellbeing is incorporated into the municipal health and wellbeing plan. Investment in creative industries sector development. E.g. Opportunities for artist capacity building in areas such as community engagement, skill development, commercial viability, self-development and partnership development. Accessible services and resources to kick start creative ideas, projects and businesses. E.g. Art for the Dole Program, Pay it Forward Loan Schemes. Funding program to support creative development, presentation, collaboration and capacity building. Incentives to businesses, property developers and landlords to engage artists (E.g. Renew Australia). Economic stimulus initiatives benefiting the creative community. E.g. Nillumbik Art Card, like the Nillumbik Shop Local Campaign, can be used to purchase artists' goods and services. All Nillumbik residents receive a \$20 card to kick start campaign. ARTOPIA App: mapping local artists and their wares, linking visitors/tourists to artists.</p>



9. FINAL WORD

We imagined a room full of artists and creatives, a long table brimming with homegrown, carefully prepared delicious food with objects from nature that we could use to build a mini ARTOPIA. A 3D collective installation that reflected our ideas and aspirations for how we can better connect, create and live with each other and the land.

We designed an experience that invited artists into our homes and we wanted to share our skills and ideas in a nurturing and inspiring environment. At the centre of the project was; a warm invitation, the asking and the intention to build relationships. Our early investigations and then numerous COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions saw us redesign our project numerous times. Like most artists during this pandemic, we had to creatively adapt the project and still stay true to our intentions. These experiences constrained what we had originally thought possible, but also taught us a lot about the creative landscape in Nillumbik.

This document captures some of what happened during the online focus group event and includes a co-authored response and call to action which we are proposing to the creative community, the Council and wider community.

Since November 2020 we have made contact with 41 artists who signed up to ARTOPIA in some way. What we have come to know is that the arts and culture scene in Nillumbik is vibrant and growing.

Artists were effusive and generous in response to our invitation and the questions we posed. The act of asking

delivered both validation to the people in the room and the kind of openness we were hoping for as hosts of this gathering.

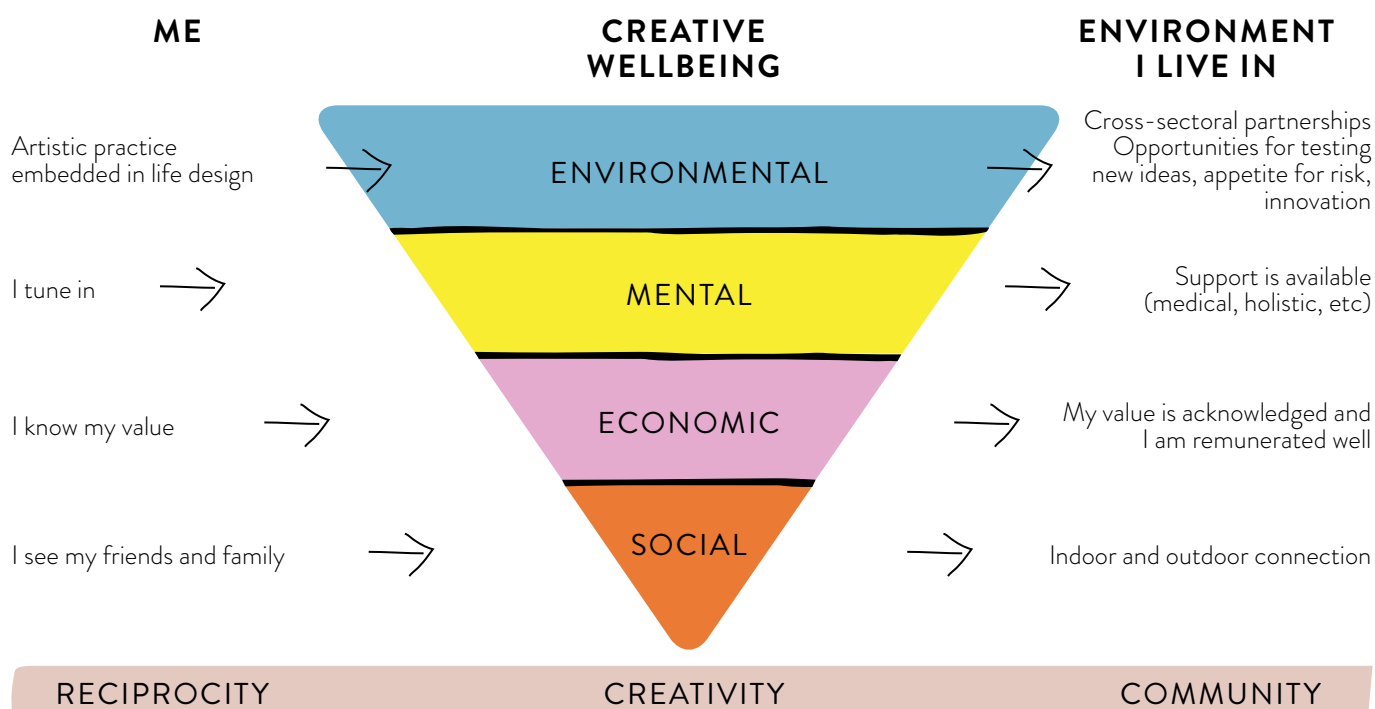
Reflecting on all the words, images, ideas, notions and expressions of what ARTOPIA means to us, revealed great agency in the creative community.

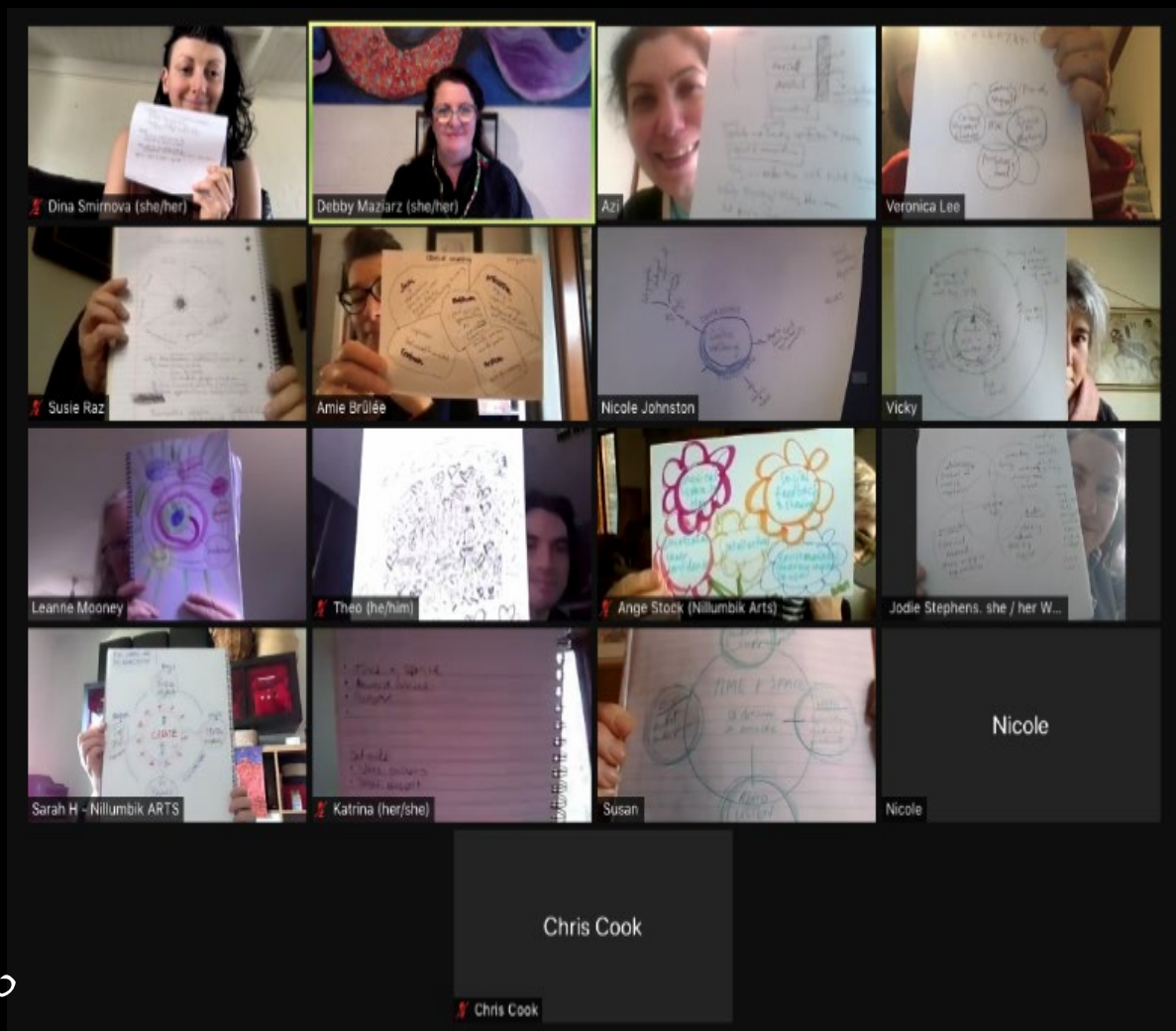
When thinking about community building, no single sector has all the answers, but we do know that artists are highly skilled at devising creative solutions, joining-the-dots and imagining possibilities. This document is rich with ideas and diverse perspectives on how we might support artists to build a connected, resilient and creative community that contributes to life for everyone in Nillumbik.

It is our absolute pleasure to contribute the findings from ARTOPIA to Nillumbik Council's 2022-26 Arts and Culture Strategy. We hope you will agree that there are great rewards when you Ask the Artist. We want to thank our families for supporting us, all the artists who collaborated on this event and for Nillumbik Arts and Culture Development for partnering with us.

The whole process from concept to the gathering we hosted some 9 months later, has been thought provoking and rewarding. We remain committed to continuing the conversation with you, the creative community, Council and everyone else.

Debby and Nicole (Ask the Artist)





“THANK YOU

THANK YOU FOR BEING AN ARTIST

THANK YOU FOR MAKING YOUR WORK

**THANK YOU FOR CHOOSING THIS LIFE
WHICH CAN BE HARD**

IT IS IMPORTANT WHAT YOU ARE DOING

**OUR CULTURE NEEDS YOU TO DO IT
AND DO IT WELL”**

(ANDREW SIMONET ‘MAKING YOUR LIFE AS AN ARTIST’)