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CEO REPORT 2021

Jodie Cunningham, CEO+ Artistic Director

2021 has been a significant year for Craft ACT. As the organisation celebrated its 50th Year, its Golden Anniversary, we continued to respond to the challenges of the pandemic in creative and innovative ways; we experienced profound transformation in our activities, in the team, and the board of management. Even though we have traversed change, rescheduling, cancellations, and difficulty, as I look back on 2021, I notice not these challenges but the luminous gems of many accomplishments and successes, and the gorgeous community of makers and supporters that make Craft ACT such a vibrant and dynamic organisation.

As the new CEO of the organisation, a highlight of the year has been getting to know Craft ACT staff, members, sponsors, supporters, and government partners. I feel privileged to be in this role working with such an incredible and generous community, one that understands the intrinsic value of craft and design in telling our stories, connecting us to our humanity, strengthening our sense of belonging and identity, contributing to our wellbeing and making our lives, and our city more beautiful.

During 2021, many previous staff and Board members have moved on to new opportunities, and as the new CEO, I feel incredibly fortunate to have inherited the wonderful legacy they created. I extend my sincere gratitude to previous staff: Rachael Coghlan, Kate Nixon, Maddy Zabel, Meagan Jones, Vy Tsan, and Selena Kang. Sincere appreciation also to previous board members: Graham Humphries, Jennie Cameron, and David Marshall for everything they have done to make Craft ACT and the DESIGN Canberra Festival what it is today. I welcome our wonderful new staff: Justine Merrony, Moraig McKenna, Welly McGarry, Bethany Lick, Georgia Arndell, Olinda Narayanan, Travis Bullock, Rachel Byron, and Swan Ricco and new board members: Rod Bobeldijk, Charles Brewer, and Caroline Forster. I thank them for the outstanding creativity, flexibility, commitment, and hard work they have given the organisation in such a short time.

I feel privileged to work with this new team of talented and committed staff and Board members and Craft ACT's 466 highly skilled and very lovely members. All of them showed resilience, creativity, and a collaborative spirit in response to the challenges of 2021. I feel optimistic and excited about working with them to contribute to the growth and vitality of Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre. Together we

work towards realising Crafts ACT's vision to embed contemporary craft making and design at the centre of everyday life in Australia's capital, a global city of design.

This annual report surveys the many successes of the Craft ACT community, including member artists, staff, board members, sponsors, donors, and collaborators. These successes are particularly impressive given they were delivered in the context of continuing uncertainty and challenges, including another lockdown in which we had to close our gallery and work remotely while also dealing with the ongoing restrictions to public gatherings.

Our organisation showed resilience and innovation in traversing the ongoing uncertainty and frequent changes the pandemic brought. Despite of all of this, we were proud to host a thriving program of exhibitions with 19 exhibitions in total. We postponed the DESIGN Canberra Festival to 2022, successfully replacing it with the Nurture program, a suite of programs designed specifically to support our member artists and our audiences in this challenging time.

To celebrate our 50th anniversary, we were proud to share our strong 50- year history online by sharing stories from our archives. As one of the longest-running membership organisations of its type in Australia, 50 years strong, I was most impressed by the strength of our exhibition program and the calibre of artist members' works. A highlight for me was Transformation– our annual members' exhibition. The exhibition's central theme was how our members, much like alchemists, transform the materials they work with into objects of beauty and meaning. I was delighted to engage with the work of such a vibrant community of craftspeople, all working to make the world a better place, one transformation at a time.

Another exhibition highlight which showcased our members was the first CO:LAB exhibition. This was the culmination of a year-long Craft ACT member professional development program funded by the generous donors of our Circle of Hands program. Artist members Cathy Franzi, Dan Lorrimer, and Allison Jackson engaged in an invaluable opportunity to work with architects, clients, and sustainability experts in an interdisciplinary lighting project that transformed their practices, with the resulting innovative lights being displayed at their exhibition.

An international success was our DESIGN Canberra touring exhibition, Glass utopia, featuring the work of many Craft ACT artists, which arrived at Milan Design Week and showed from September 4 to September 10 2021. Glass utopia had been travelling through Italy since September 2020. The exhibition's final stop was at the gorgeous SIAM old library - 5VIE District at Milan's premiere design festival. This leg of the tour was generously supported by Mr. Lawrence design consultancy and the Embassy of Italy in Australia, Intesa Sanpaolo, and the Prosecco Consortium.

We continue to promote our member makers and the value of high-quality craft and design through our onsite and online retail operations. To this end, in 2021, we established a new membership category for shoppers and supporters, the Craft and Design Lover member.

We are pleased to report that Craft ACT dramatically increased retail sales in 2021, with a 68% increase from 2020. We firmly believe that integrating locally made craft and design into the wider economy benefits both maker and buyer. Our members' beautiful high quality products reflect a deep connection to our community and are locally made with a small carbon footprint. We look forward to supporting our members by advocating for further economic opportunities for them in 2022.

Craft ACT continued our support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Craft and Design practice during 2021 through multiple projects, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Craft and Design practice into Australian arts and culture, with increased representation and participation. We celebrated National Reconciliation Week, 2021, by showcasing our First Nations retail stockists in our exhibition, Deep listening; we ran multiple Dilli bag-making workshops with Krystal Hurst (Worimi) from Gillawarra Arts and launched the Between earth and sky exhibition by Jennifer Kemarre Martiniello (Arrernte).

While unfortunately, three of our scheduled programs for 2021 had to be postponed due to the lockdown, we are excited about bringing them to fruition in 2022 and running the first dedicated Indigenous Artists-in-residence program with Krystal Hurst and Aidan Hartshorn.

In October, due to the effects of the pandemic, we had to make the difficult decision to postpone the DESIGN Canberra Festival until 2022. However, in keeping with the theme of 'transformation', we took stock of our ambitions and created the Nurture program. The Nurture program was designed to support our member makers who had suffered adverse effects in the pandemic and to foster connection within our community in a safe way, using the benefits of making to enhance health and wellbeing.

The Nurture program drew on the well-documented benefits of creativity and making to support mental wellbeing by engaging in goal-oriented, repetitive sensory processes with making activities like textiles, ceramics, and woodworking- which can calm the mind. Such activities have been scientifically proven to reduce stress and anxiety and improve wellbeing. (*Tahsin& Davidson, 2018, Craftfulness, Quercus).

The Nurture program included both online and onsite programs: a creative journaling challenge, mindful making workshops, professional development workshops, video interviews of our maker members (Studio stories), a craft and design auction, and a craft and design public art trail commission.

Over 61% of our Nurture program audience was composed of new participants indicating the appetite in the wider Canberra and Australian community at this time for creative wellbeing activities.

Overall, the Nurture program was a great success, with over 603 people participating in 53 fully subscribed programs and 9986 viewing our artists' Studio stories online. We received positive feedback via participant evaluation and bought in over \$33,000 of income for our member artists.

The last part of our Nurture program, Discover: Craft and Design Public Art Trail, will be launched in 2022. The program was developed in collaboration with the City Renewal Authority and it will provide Craft ACT members with a professional development opportunity to work with mentors in creating public artworks. These works will be presented during Contour 556 and the DESIGN Canberra Festival 2022, activating City West and providing our audiences with a new way of engaging with Craft and Design.

One of our most popular Nurture programs was the Creative journaling challenge. Participants were provided with a journal and encouraged to participate in a daily creative practice responding to a daily prompt. I was struck by the diversity of creativity in the responses to the provided prompts, which demonstrated the extraordinary skill our creatives have in interpreting their experiences.

It is this kind of creative thinking, mobilised by the Craft ACT team and members in 2021, that transformed our expectations of what creative programming can look like. It moved us beyond the traditional genres of exhibitions, festivals, and programs and into new and hybrid activities. These new activities allowed Craft ACT to thrive and grow despite the challenges and actively contributed to the health and wellbeing of our community.

I feel privileged to work with the extraordinary staff at Craft ACT (both previous and current) and thank them for their innovation, flexibility, and tenacity. I am grateful to the Craft ACT Board of Management and thank them for their strategic advice and invaluable support. I thank each and every member of Craft ACT for their support, their creativity and commitment to their practice, and everything they do to make the world better through making. I'd especially like to thank the members who participated in our 2021 program of exhibitions, residencies, committees, and public programs for their time and generosity.

We are extremely grateful to our sponsors and partners, who showed flexibility, loyalty, and generosity in rolling over funds for the 2021 DESIGN Canberra Festival to the 2022 DESIGN Canberra festival and in supporting our new Nurture programs.

I extend a special thank you to Minister Tara Cheyne MLA, her Senior Advisor Michael Liu, and the dedicated staff at arts ACT who continue to support Craft ACT through ACT Government funding; who in 2021 generously supported our 'pivot' from the DESIGN Canberra Festival to Nurture and who believed in our vision to create a responsive program for the arts in Canberra. In doing so, they recognised the critical importance of our activities for our community and our city.

Finally, I thank everyone who has engaged with us, worked with us, participated in our programs, and visited us. It is the community that keeps us strong, and we are so grateful for the Craft ACT community.

Jodie Cunningham CEO + Artistic Director

Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre



Photo: 5 Foot Photography