

CEO Report | Year in Review 2023

20 March 2024

2023 was a year of consolidation and for Craft + Design Canberra (CDC). After the huge growth and massive output of 2022, we continued to act as a leader in facilitating collaboration in our community and focused our attention on the ongoing challenges of organisational sustainability in the increasingly difficult economic environment. We developed and implemented new strategies for long-term stability and growth, all while continuing to deliver world-class exhibitions and programs that achieve CDC's Mission of connecting the Canberra region's high-quality studio practice to the world by fostering innovation, building collaboration and championing a secure future for a valued, creative and essential community of contemporary craftspeople, designers and audiences.

We are proud of our 52-year legacy as a membership organisation that supports craftspeople and designers in this region. Our artists, craftspeople and designers make work that reflects and reveals our society, tells our stories, connects us with our community, and strengthens our sense of identity. I sincerely thank our artist members for their enormous generosity and creative endeavor, in which making by hand is central to positive change in our community and our world.

CDC champions the benefits of craft and design, in which design thinking and making by hand are key contributors to solving the big problems of our time. In a world that is increasingly dominated by mass production, automation, and digital engagement, the act of creating something with our human hands:

- fosters creativity and innovation, activating our imagination and problem-solving skills
- encourages a sense of community and connection through programs in which people come together and share ideas
- promotes mental and physical well-being as engaging in creative activities can induce a state of 'flow' which has been proven to reduce stress and increase overall happiness
- promotes environmental sustainability; through responsible design, material and technical choices and minimising the environmental impact of mass production and global transport through local enterprise.

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In 2023 by holding the benefits of craft and design at the core of our actions, we successfully met our strategic goals of Innovation, Collaboration, Value and Security.

In 2023, CDC continued to champion the central role of First Nations cultures and actively engage with First Nations artists and communities, with the invaluable support of First Nations artist Jenni Kemarre Martiniello (Arentee) on our Board of Management. We represented five First Nations artists in the 2023 exhibition program, six in CDC's public programs, and one First Nations writer.

CDC's staff actively engaged in developing cultural understanding and knowledge by participating in the online AIATSIS Core Cultural Learning and Indigenous language training with Ngunawal custodian Tyrone Bell.

We were delighted to meet our strategic goal of **Innovation** with an incredible exhibition program of the best in contemporary craft and design, showcasing the diversity and strength of practice globally. Across the 2023 program of 17 exhibitions, 128 artists explored concepts of identity, social and environmental change; engaging in exploration of materiality, and traditional techniques to produce sophisticated and beautiful objects of contemporary significance.

All of our exhibitions demonstrated quality and artistic excellence, with the highlights for me as CEO being our annual *Members Exhibition* which exemplifies the heart of what we do and demonstrated our artist members' innovation and the diversity of practice in our region; our *X Rainbow Takeover Exhibition*, which embodied CDC's values of inclusivity, investigating issues of identity and experience within the LGBTQIA+ community; and our inaugural *2022 Indigenous Artist-in-Residence Exhibition Homage* which showcased the results of artist Krystal Hurst's (Worimi) and Jessika Spencer's (Wiradjuri), in-depth conceptual and practice-based research at the National Library of Australia and Namadgi National Park.

We were proud to launch our new *Craft + Design Canberra Anytime Program* stream. This new program included our popular making-by-hand workshops, *Creative Kids program* and our *Open Studios Program* designed to connect our artists with our community. These programs provided income generating opportunities for our artists and helped us achieve our vision of embedding contemporary craft, making and design at the centre of everyday life in Australia's capital, a global city of design.

A highlight for me personally in 2023 was attending the *Craft + Design Canberra Anytime Open Studios Program*. On a sunny October weekend, I once again witnessed the vibrancy and vitality of our artists as they generously shared their studios, their homes, their thinking, their skills and their beautiful artwork, with each other and the lucky 1300 visitors who were given the treat of a behind the scenes experience with CDC's creatives. Of particular note was wandering, literally 'up the garden path', into Tefany Thiedeman's backyard, a veritable wonderland of luscious plantings and ceramic delights, and being welcomed by the artist, her

friends and family to sit under her pergola, drink champagne and connect with strangers, engaging in rambling discussions of contemporary crafts and Canberra life. A beautiful example of how creative practice connects our community and enriches our lives.

To meet our strategic goal of **Collaboration** CDC continued to work intensively with our incredible artists, arts organisations, national cultural institutions, government departments, business and local embassies. We refined the model for the *Craft + Design Canberra Festival* to be biennial in order to build a stronger more sustainable biennial Festival of international significance, commencing in November 2024 and concurrently we launched our *Craft + Design Canberra Anytime Program* to support and promote our artist makers and Canberra as a global city of design year-round, not just during the Festival. We were honoured to win a Commendation Award in the Major Events Category of the *Canberra Region Tourism Awards* for the successful *2022 Design Canberra Festival*, a testament to CDC's ability to facilitate the extraordinary collaboration of over 1400 stakeholders.

We collaborated with our wonderful colleagues at local and national not-for profit arts organisations when presenting the *Craft + Design Anytime Open Studios Program* and working on the insurance working group to advocate for affordable insurance for artists, and the Kingston Arts Precinct Project. As part of enacting our goal of Collaboration, CDC continued to embed accessibility and inclusion into our work ensuring key programming decisions were informed by these values.

We met our strategic goal of **Value** by rebranding our organisation to Craft + Design Canberra, combining the best of the Craft ACT and Design Canberra Festival brands to enable a celebration of time honoured traditions of crafts and Canberra as a 'City of Design'. We enhanced digital presence and engagement by live streaming exhibition openings and artists talks, increasing engagement with social media and securing radio interviews and media articles.

CDC continued to support our members with enriching professional development opportunities including our long-standing *Artist-in-Residence* and our *CO:LAB Program*, connecting our makers with industry. One of my favourite of these programs being our *Artist-in-Residence Open Day* in which our resident artists, Julie Bradley and Holly Grace, provided workshops for CDC visitors at Namadgi National Park. Combining hands on making, with human connection and being immersed in nature - the best of contemporary craft, enriching our community.

In late 2023 two of our Accredited Professional Members, Jennifer Kemarre Martiniello (Arentee) and Kirstie Rea were honored with the title Craft Masters of the Asia Pacific Region by the World Craft Council, and we congratulate them for this significant achievement.

We advocated for contemporary craft practice when traversing issues with insurance for our members; and continuing our contributions to the Kingston Arts Precinct Project - adding to

the scope of our future premises four workshops spaces which will provide our artists and our audiences with opportunities to participate in skills-based learning onsite in jewellery, textiles, wood and ceramics. We took a small step in this direction in our current location by renovating our gallery to include a new workshop space and adding a gallery wall so as not to compromise our exhibition capacity.

In 2023 our core focus was on the critical goal of **Security** due to the ongoing challenges of financial security within the current economic environment.

In 2023 CDC was partially supported by the ACT Government's organisational funding 2023-2026 and Creative Australia four-year funding 2021-2024. We were successful in securing four years of additional funding from Creative Australia for 2025 – 2028 which contributes to organisational stability for CDC into the future, and we thank both the ACT and Federal Governments for their ongoing support of our organisation.

CDC generates income for the organisation, and our artists through our exhibitions, retail and programs. In 2023 artists earned \$130,059 from our activities and we saw an increase in artist income from exhibitions, workshops, professional development programs, public art commissions and prizes to artists. However, the total income to artists was lower than 2022 due to it being a non-festival year. There was also a drop in retail sales which we attribute to the economic downturn.

To enhance our goal of Security we increased the number of professional development programs and awards for our artist members in 2023, with the addition of the *Namadgi Public Art Commission* and *ACT Historic Places Art Prize* opportunities. CDC also supported staff and the Board of Management to develop their skills and knowledge with a particular focus on governance, tourism and urban planning.

Our activities are only possible due to the ongoing and generous support of our partners, sponsors and donors, who donate both cash and in-kind support to ensure we can meet our strategic goals. In 2023 we evolved our sponsorship model to be more sustainable long-term, by focusing on multiyear commitments rather than one off or project-based support. We were delighted that our long-term supporter Home by Holly was the first to sign up to our new model as a four-year partner in 2023; and are so grateful for Home by Holly's ongoing generosity and commitment to CDC.

I would also like to thank our long-term government partner, ACT Parks and Conservation Service for their generous cash and in-kind donations towards our annual *Artists-in-Residence Program* and the *Namadgi Public Art Commission*; and the 17 donors whose cash donations ensured we could run the *Craft + Design Canberra Anytime Open Studios Program* in 2023.


I extend my gratitude to the following organisations for their in-kind support in 2023: Ale Mary, Australian National Botanic Gardens, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra Glassworks, Cultural Facilities Corporation (incl. ACT Historic Places), Embassy of Uruguay, Megalo Print Studio, M16artspace, National Portrait Gallery, National Library of Australia, PhotoAccess and Thors Hammer.

During 2023 we welcomed six new board members who provided invaluable strategic advice to the organisation and worked on the constitutional review, due to be finalised in 2024. I thank the Board of Management for all the voluntary hours and wise advice they have donated to ensure the smooth running of CDC.

We restructured staff roles and raised staff salaries in April 2023 to align with National Association of Visual Arts Standards for arts workers. This supported staff retention, slowing down the rate of staff turnover after implementation. However, staff who resigned in 2023 still reported low salaries, in comparison to the public service, as one of the reasons for leaving. Staff turnover remains an ongoing challenge for CDC.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the staff that worked at CDC in 2023; they have worked many long hours, taken on diverse roles, upskilled themselves and pulled together to support each other as team - they are incredible people who have demonstrated commitment, creativity, professionalism, and resilience. I thank our staff for their extraordinary work:

- Core staff | Belinda Neame, Moraig Mckenna, Waratah Lahy, Eve Fairhall and Ella Myer
- Casual staff | Elmi Slater, Melissa Hammond, George Pople and Edeline Ohk
- HR consultant | Jenni Gordon Carr
- Volunteers | Maree McGarry, Dee Hopkins and Peter Boreham
- Photographers | Davey Barber, Tim Bean and Tim Ngo

And I would also like to thank previous staff who left CDC in 2023; Welly McGarry, Rachel Skeehan, Travis Bullock, Frances Spurgin, Christian Sirois, Kirstie Kearney and Daniel gules.

CDC also conducted work to support our goal of Security in 2023 by running two strategic planning days, developing a new policy framework and a new risk management system; revising our Constitution, and implementing our new customer relationship management system.

In summary during 2023, CDC successfully met its key strategic goals by:

- Showcasing the best in **innovative** craft and design through its exhibition and public programs.
- Working intensively with our stakeholders to promote **collaboration**, changing the Festival model to be biennial, and launching the *Craft + Design Anytime Program*.

- Promoting the **value** of craft and design by rebranding the organisation to Craft + Design Canberra and increasing online engagement to reach wider audiences and supporting our members.
- Building a **secure** future for CDC by attaining four years of additional funding, increasing artist income through core programs, providing successful professional development programs for members, increasing staff salaries and improving operational systems and processes.

By successfully meeting these strategic goals, CDC demonstrated its commitment to fostering Innovation, Collaboration, Value, and Security in the contemporary craft and design sector.

I feel privileged to work at such a dynamic and creative organisation, that champions the benefits of contemporary craft and design, design thinking and making by hand. All is only possible due to collaboration and the generosity of our artists members, staff, Board of Management, sponsors, partners and our community. Together we make a tangible difference to long term cultural and economic gain and enhance community wellbeing.



Jodie Cunningham
CEO + Artistic Director
Craft + Design Canberra