

2019: A YEAR IN REVIEW (CEO REPORT)

Craft ACT story continues to be written: our rich past, vibrant present and optimistic future. You are a part of our story: whether you're a designer, a maker, a collector, a colleague, an educator, a customer or visitor. Craft ACT has touched the lives and built the careers of thousands of people since we were established in 1971.

Craft ACT is one of the longest continuously running visual arts membership organisations in Australia. Our members, staff, collaborators and board have together played a vital role in sustaining Australia's high-quality studio practice and supporting craftspeople, designers and audiences. This is why it is so important that the work we do together now, secures a sustainable future for Craft ACT not only in our golden anniversary year in 2021, but for many decades to come.

As part of the collaborative process to develop a new strategic plan for Craft ACT, we brought together some of the many people who shape Craft ACT's past and present, to imagine a strong and creative future for the organisation. At workshops with ThinkPlace, we gained new insights and affirmed some existing understanding: craft is dynamic, enduring, entrepreneurial and respectful of tradition, uniting time-honoured techniques with contemporary interpretations built for the future. Craft ACT supports the contemporary craft practitioner, whose work occupies a unique position between tradition and innovation, thinking and doing, the local and global. What craft is and what it means has evolved: although studies demonstrate most practitioners prefer to define themselves as artists or designer-makers, craft is central to the experience of our growing membership.

The 2021–24 strategic plan for Craft ACT is part of the first chapter of the story of our next 50 years. Craft ACT's vision is to embed contemporary craft, making and design at the centre of everyday life in Australia's capital, a global city of design. We will connect 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.

In addition to the strategic planning process, 2019 was a bumper year for Craft ACT and our membership across our four strategic priorities.

At the heart of Craft ACT is its commitment to artistic excellence, supporting new work and exhibitions, and promoting member artists nationally and internationally. One of the distinctive dimensions of Craft ACT's artistic program is the respected peer review process in which acclaimed accredited professional members (APM) across craft mediums assess exhibition and residency applications. This ensures a national and global experience shapes our high-quality exhibition program. Respect for Craft ACT's artistic program continues to grow: the 2019 Canberra Critics Circle awards recognised outstanding exhibitions by Craft ACT accredited professional members: Keiko Amenomori-Schmeisser (*Folding indigo*, 2018), Julie Ryder (*The hidden sex*), and Gilbert Riedelbauch (*Form follows fold*). A Craft ACT exhibition curated for DESIGN Canberra, *Glass utopia*, has been invited to Milan Design Week in 2020. We initiated a dedicated program of essays and speeches to engage critical discourse in craft and design and showcased new trends and research with two academic journals dedicated to Craft ACT programs (*Axon* and *Fusion*).

Craft ACT is committed to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander craft and design practice into Australian arts and culture. We promoted a record number of Indigenous artists in the gallery, shop, professional development, public programs, and DESIGN Canberra festival. Accredited Professional Member Jennifer Kemarre Martiniello was selected to feature in the Glass utopia exhibition. Wayne Simon and Krystal Hurst were selected for the DESIGN Canberra auction and signature exhibition HOME:MADE. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) has committed to collecting the complete works from Craft ACT's inaugural Indigenous Craft + Design Residency and Workshops, featured in the Emerging contemporaries 2019 exhibition. Indigenous architect, advocate and lecturer Jefa Greenaway was a keynote speaker at Craft ACT's national design conference, Object Subject. Collaboration is central to all our work and I acknowledge Jennifer's mentorship, the dedication of the participating artists and designers, and the ANU School of Art & Design for hosting workshops.

Connecting contemporary craft and design to new and engaged audiences is a priority at Craft ACT and 2019 brought the work of our organisation to the attention of record audience numbers: from international and diplomatic engagement, to building local, regional and national audiences and artist participation, to media coverage, and scholarly engagement. Our acclaimed artist-in-residence program in Namadgi National Park, supported by ACT Parks and Conservation for well over a decade, continues to invite artists to be cultural interpreters of our landscape. DESIGN Canberra allows us to achieve more for our members across some measures than we do across the whole year: \$190,570 of income was generated for artists and designers during the festival, 5,361 people attended our members' open studios (28 per cent increase), we gained national media coverage for members and featured members in signature events. Significant acquisitions of outstanding work by Craft ACT members took place throughout the year, with the highlight being the National Museum of Australia's acquisition of Julie Ryder's beautiful glass slides and cyanotypes.

Dynamic and sustainable growth continued in 2019, ensuring Craft ACT can support our members, staff and community into the future. Given the challenges facing not-for-profit arts organisations, the increased and diversified funding from government, sponsorship and self-generated sources in 2019 is warmly received but should never be taken for granted. Once again a significant amount of time by staff, board representatives and members was invested in applying for and acquitting grants, including the highly competitive Australia Council's four-year funding (2021–24). Our careful financial management and efforts to attract new sources of funding have transformed Craft ACT, which has in turn helped us to remunerate staff appropriately, upgrade infrastructure, promote artists, initiate new professional development opportunities and create new platforms to showcase craft and design to diverse audiences. We introduced new cash prizes for Craft ACT members at the annual Capital Arts Patrons' Organisation (CAPO) awards, increased artist commissions and member professional development, and facilitated a partnership between home.byholly and Girl Nomad Ceramics.

The 2019 annual report shines a light on Craft ACT's vital role in our region's arts ecology and our sector's growth. As always, there is much to celebrate and cherish about Craft ACT and its promotion of Canberra's deep roots in craft and design. I thank everyone who has contributed in the past year, and would like to note a few extraordinary people. The small but mighty Craft ACT team brings so much joy, creativity, passion, cups of tea and expertise to our work every day and it is an honour to work beside them. Every member of the Craft ACT Board of Management is dedicated and encouraging and a privilege to learn from. Outgoing President Graham Humphries has been an

inspiration, a friend and educator and although I know he will remain connected to Craft ACT, I will miss his regular support and guidance. I'd like to thank the ministers and the dedicated staff at the Australia Council and artsACT who support Craft ACT not only through relevant Federal and ACT Government funding but in a multitude of ways, as well as the many generous sponsors who connect us with likeminded people.

Finally, I thank each and every member of Craft ACT for their support and note in particular the members who participated in our 2019 program of exhibitions, residencies, committees and public programs for their time and goodwill.

Dr Rachael Coghlan

CEO and Artistic Director

Craft ACT: Craft + Design Centre