



Australian Government



Australia Council  
for the Arts

More than bums on seats:

# Australian participation in the arts.

Research summary

More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts was conducted for the Australia Council by the market research company instinct and reason. [www.instinctandreason.com](http://www.instinctandreason.com)

**Rounding has been applied to the numbers in this summary.**

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Australia Council for the Arts, More than bums on seats: Australian participation in the arts. Sydney, Australia Council for the Arts, 2010.

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ISBN: 978-1-920784-49-2

## Introduction

This research paints a comprehensive picture of how Australians participate in the arts today.

In an era of increasing competition for discretionary spending and personal time this study will help arts organisations to better understand their audiences and make their art even more accessible.

For policy makers, this research identifies the key factors which will impact Australians' future participation in the arts. It also identifies barriers and incentives which impact our participation.

This research aims to provide arts marketers and policy makers with insights into the attitudes and values that influence our creative participation (where we make something ourselves) and our receptive participation (when we attend a live event, an exhibition or read literature).

The study provides a benchmark for the health and significance of the arts in Australia and will be repeated in future years to monitor how our relationship with the arts changes.

We trust it will stimulate debate within the community and the arts sector about new directions, new investments and the shape of future cultural policy.

This summary is just the beginning. Read the full report, explore the fact sheets and join the conversation online at-

[www.australiacouncil.gov.au/participation](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/participation).

# Key findings

- A.** The arts are strongly supported by the community
- B.** Attitudes towards the arts are increasingly positive
- C.** The internet is now a key tool for the arts
- D.** Interest in Indigenous arts is growing
- E.** There are significant opportunities to build arts audiences



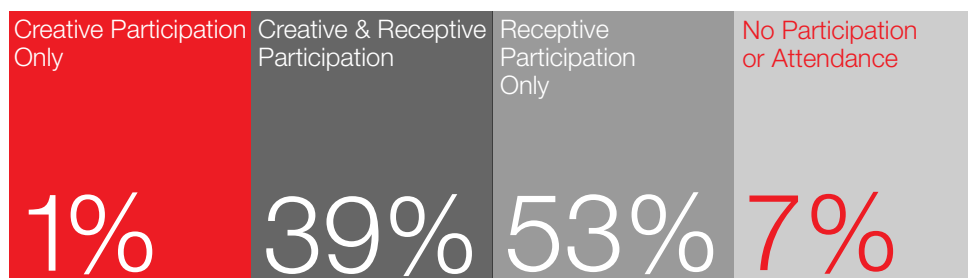
Deckchair Theatre's *Checklist for an Armed Robber*, 2009.  
Photo: Nick Merrylees

# A. The arts are strongly supported by the community

We found levels of engagement with the arts were high. In the year leading up to the research nine in ten Australians aged 15 and older had creatively participated in the arts (by making something themselves), or receptively participated (by attending a live event, an exhibition or reading literature).

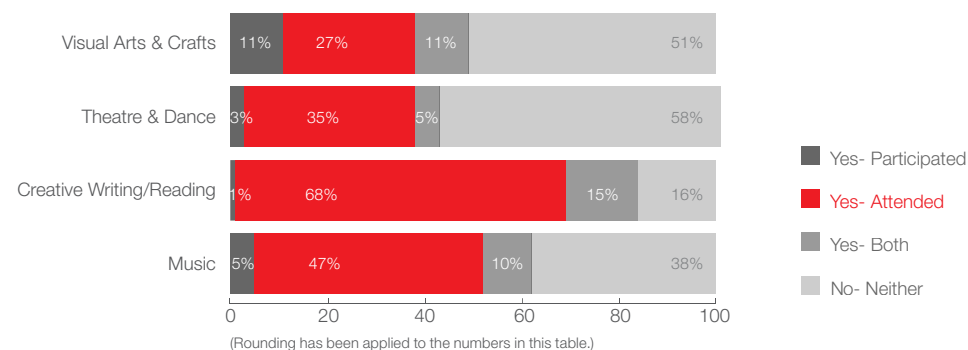
## AUSTRALIANS ARE MORE LIKELY TO TAKE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S ART THAN TO CREATE IT THEMSELVES:

- nine in ten claimed to have receptively participated in at least one art form
- four in ten had creatively participated in the arts
- only a small group (7%) were not engaged with the arts in the past 12 months.



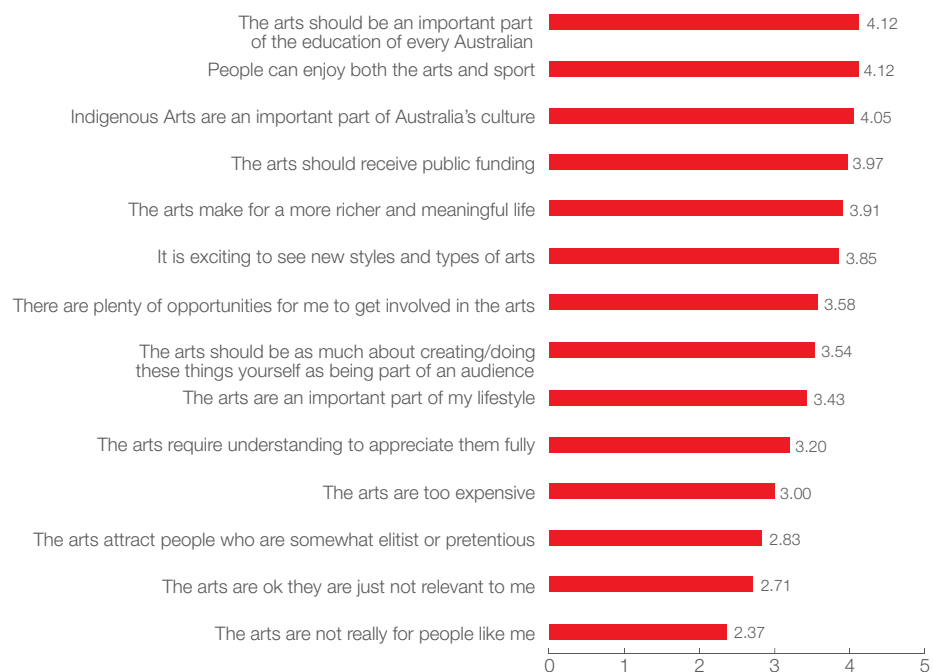
## THE KEY FINDINGS FOR EACH OF THE MAIN ART FORMS ARE:

- Literature is the most popular art form, with 84% reading – mostly novels though one in five read poetry. Creative writing was also popular with 16% engaged, 7% writing a novel or short story and 5% writing poetry.
- Nearly all Australians intentionally listened to recorded music and over half attended live performances. Most went to watch live music such as pop, rock, country and dance. Musical theatre/cabaret was the second most popular form of music attendance at 22%, followed by classical music (13%), and opera (8%). Making music was also popular (15%) with one in ten playing an instrument and 5% singing.
- More people created visual arts and crafts (22%) than any other form of art. Nearly one in ten engaged in crafts (like ceramics, jewellery making, sewing, woodcraft) (9%), photography (9%), or painting (8%).
- Theatre was attended by one in four (26%) with most going to traditional or contemporary theatre (19%), followed by circus or physical theatre (10%).
- Dance was attended by 16%, with most going to ballet or classical dance (10%), followed by social dance like ballroom or street (5%) and contemporary (5%).



# B. Attitudes towards the arts are increasingly positive

Australians' attitudes towards the arts are positive (the table below shows the average scores using a five point scale). They widely believe that the arts should be an important part of every Australians' education, make for a richer and more meaningful life, and that there are plenty of opportunities to get involved. The strength of these views increased in the last 10 years, while the belief that the arts are too expensive and attract people who are elitist decreased.

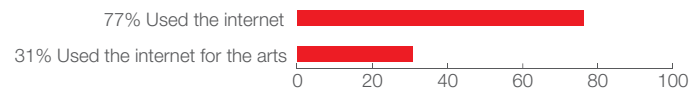


Australians more readily associated the arts with individual benefits (such as a form of expression, inspiration and personal growth) than community benefits (such as understanding others and feeling a part of the community). Many people attend the arts primarily as a social occasion and in response to requests to attend by their family and friends, rather than for the art form itself.



# C. The internet is a key tool for the arts

One in three Australians are already using the internet for the arts—mostly for attendance-related activities (such as researching artists/events or downloading music), but some are using it for creative participation (such as posting works of art, writing blogs or working with others to create art).



More than half of all 15-24 year olds had used the internet to engage in some form of art during the last year and were more creative online than others. The most widespread online art creations are writing and visual art/film/video, while the most frequent mode of creative participation is being involved in an online community or social network concerned with art in some way.



**Creators** are more likely to be:

- 15-24 years
- Highly engaged: both participating & attending
- Attending Indigenous arts
- High school or tertiary students
- Really like the arts

**Consumers** are more likely to be:

- 35-64 years
- Attending only
- Not attending Indigenous arts
- In full time paid employment, carrying out home duties or retired
- Like or neither like or dislike the arts

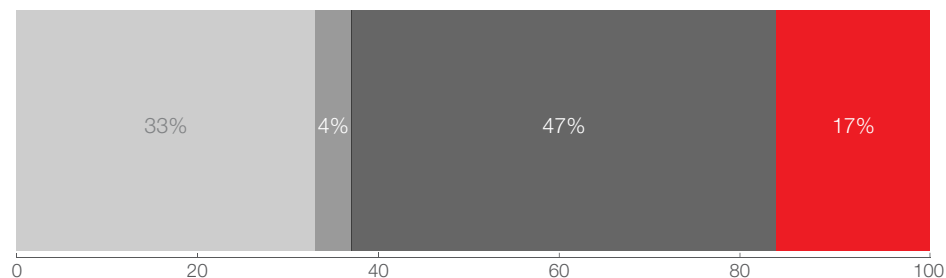


Jude Henshall in Windmill Theatre Company's *Wizard of Oz*.  
Photo: Tony Lewis



# D. Interest in Indigenous arts is growing

Of the three quarters of people who had attended visual arts and crafts, theatre, dance or music in the past 12 months, nearly a quarter (23%) had been to arts created or performed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander artists. Attitudes to Indigenous arts are increasingly positive, indicating a great opportunity to grow the Indigenous art audience across Australia.



- Indigenous arts are of low interest to me and will continue to be low
- My interest in Indigenous arts is declining
- My interest in Indigenous arts is growing
- I have a strong interest in Indigenous arts and will continue to

(Rounding has been applied to the numbers in this table.)

As is expected, there is a relationship between attitudes to Indigenous arts and attendance, with those who had attended an Indigenous arts activity having significantly stronger and more positive interest.



*Jacky Jacky in the Box* presented by Ilbijerri Theatre Company.  
Photo: Steven Rhall

## Levels of participation

### YOUNG PEOPLE ARE HIGHLY ENGAGED WITH THE ARTS.

- Young people displayed higher levels of creative participation than the rest of the population. They were more likely to be creatively engaged in visual arts and crafts, theatre and dance, creative writing and music. This was to some degree a reflection of education; with young students more active in creative participation than young workers. Arts participation levels amongst younger people also appeared to be on the rise, with this group more likely to have increased their involvement in the arts in the last year. With a higher concentration of internet users, young people were engaging with the arts in new and evolving ways.

### COMMUNITY ARTS TOUCHED AROUND A QUARTER OF THE POPULATION.

- Of the people who had creatively or receptively participated in visual arts and crafts, theatre, dance, creative writing or music in the past 12 months, a third (32%) engaged in some form of community art. Those living in rural areas were more likely to attend community arts than others.

### THESE GROUPS WERE LESS ENGAGED WITH THE ARTS:

- Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country have significantly lower levels of both creative and receptive participation compared to the total Australian population.
- Those for whom the main language spoken at home is not English are less likely to attend arts events.
- People with a serious illness or disability experience significant difficulties accessing the various services offered by the arts and consequently had much lower levels of arts participation.
- Regional areas have significantly lower levels of attendance at music events than inner metropolitan areas.
- Rural residents are more likely than inner and outer metropolitan residents to have had a below average year of receptive participation in the arts compared to the year before.



Teenagers enjoying the *generation next* event at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.  
Photo: courtesy MCA



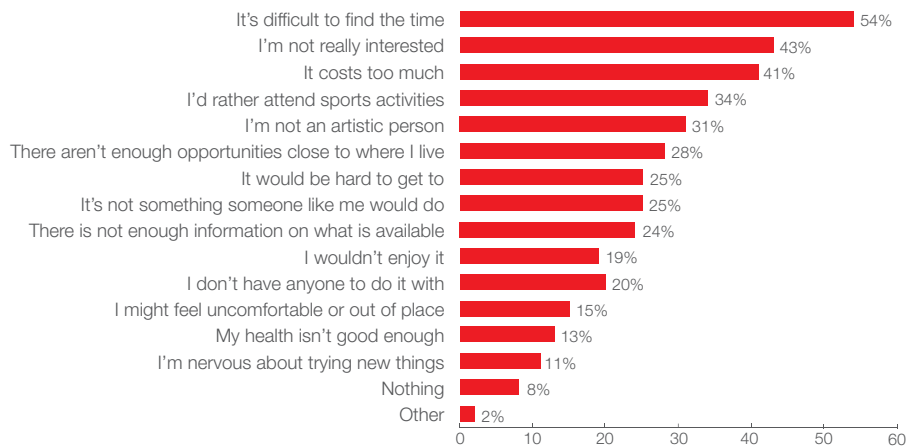
# E. There are significant opportunities to build arts audiences

**IF WE FOCUS ON ATTENDANCE AT AN ARTS EVENT WE FIND 28% HAVE NOT ATTENDED ANY ARTS EVENT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS. THESE PEOPLE ARE:**

- more likely to be older, male, affected by a disability or serious illness, have a lower level of education, speak a foreign language (other than English) at home and be on a lower wage.

**THE REASONS FOR THEIR LACK OF PARTICIPATION ARE:**

- practical (such as time constraints, prohibitive cost and a perceived lack of information about the arts events available, and poor access) and
- attitudinal (such as lack of interest, feelings of inadequacy or a preference for sports over the arts).



Despite this, almost two thirds (63%) of those who had not attended an arts event in the last 12 months had attended at some time in the past. Moreover 39% of those who had not attended in the last 12 months are interested in attending arts events in the future. Time poor but highly interested people can, and should be, encouraged to find ways to engage with the arts.



## Attitudinal segments and arts marketing

THIS STUDY IDENTIFIED FOUR ATTITUDINAL SEGMENTS WHICH HAVE IMPORTANT IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETING THE ARTS:

- **The lovers** (38%) are highly engaged with the arts and see the arts as an integral part of their lifestyle. They also hold the view that the arts provide them with a more meaningful and richer life as well as help them feel part of their local community.
- **The flirthers** (26%) are more likely to be influenced to attend arts events by their friends than the 'The lovers'. They like the arts, but are not necessarily convinced that they help them feel part of their local community. However they strongly believe that the arts provide a way of saying important things that need to be said in our society.
- **The un-attached** (19%) are those who have a neutral attitude towards the arts- many have not actually participated in, or attended any, of the main art forms in the past year, and some have never experienced these art forms at all. While they do not dislike the arts per se they just cannot see the personal relevance of the arts to them.
- **The outsiders** (17%) believe the arts tend to attract people who are pretentious and elitist. They believe the arts require a reasonable level of understanding to appreciate them fully and therefore the arts are "not for them".

Each of these segments can increase their level of engagement with the arts, although the strategies to stimulate demand vary.

For example even 'The lovers' have a significant sub-segment with no to low attendance. The strategy needed here is to encourage habit forming attendance. This segment want to attend and participate, they really like the arts but a claimed lack of time and awareness of upcoming events prevents attendance.

Half 'The flirthers' attend frequently and this positive behaviour needs to be reinforced to ensure the frequent arts attendance continues. The majority of 'The un-attached' are more difficult to reach. They need to be tempted by arts offers and information that relates to them and stimulates their interest.

Lastly, 'The outsiders' need to be convinced why the arts should be on their agenda.

These four distinct 'mindsets' were then crossed with the levels of attendance to produce nine segments based on attitudes and behaviours. Each of these community segments will demand different marketing and policy responses from arts organisations looking to build audiences.

The full report details strategic insights and potential responses to each of these segments.

	<b>The lovers</b> 38%	<b>The flirthers</b> 26%	<b>The un-attached</b> 19%	<b>The outsiders</b> 17%
high attendance 16+ times 14% Reinforce and maintain	med-high attendance 6+ times 13% Reinforce and maintain	med-high attendance 6+ times 4% Encourage attitudinal change	med-high attendance 6+ times 2% Encourage attitudinal change	
med attendance 6-15 times 14% Encourage behavioural change	no-low attendance 0-5 times 13% Encourage behavioural change	no-low attendance 0-5 times 15% Encourage attitudinal and behavioural change	no-low attendance 0-5 times 15% Encourage attitudinal and behavioural change	
no-low attendance 0-5 times 10% Encourage behavioural change				

+ Attitude towards the arts -

## Methodology

THIS RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED IN THE SECOND HALF OF 2009 AND INCLUDED:

- a literature review
- 12 focus group discussions with the public
- 15 stakeholder interviews with arts marketers and
- a telephone survey of 3,000 Australians.

The national telephone survey was a stratified random sample designed to improve the representativeness of the sample by reducing sampling error. The survey results have been weighted to ABS Census data so that they are nationally representative.



Marrugeku, *Burning Daylight*.  
Photo: Christian Altorfer

## Want to find out more?

Part of our role in supporting the arts is to generate research that creates value for the arts sector, and adds new knowledge to the field and provides insight and direction for policy, practice and innovation.

Visit our Research Hub to find out more about this research and other information on the arts.

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[www.australiacouncil.gov.au/participation](http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/participation)

