



## CHAPTER 4

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# Staging and Evaluating the ‘Finding Home’ Exhibition

**Abstract** In this chapter, Boyd describes the staging and evaluation of the ‘Finding Home’ exhibition within the context of university ‘impact agendas’. The notion of societal impact is critiqued before the tasks involved in staging the ‘Finding Home’ exhibition are detailed. The findings from the exhibition’s evaluation, which included 100 visitor surveys and 31 phone interviews with exhibition audiences, are also presented in this chapter. The chapter concludes with reflections on the labour involved in bringing a research exhibition to multiple publics.

**Keywords** Societal impact • Impact agendas • Exhibition staging • Exhibition evaluation • Stakeholder engagement • Visitor surveys

### INTRODUCTION: SOCIETAL IMPACT

Societal impact has become a feature of academic research to such an extent that commercial academic publishers are now invested in the notion. Recent research undertaken for SpringerNature suggests that there is an illogical gap between academics’ desires for societal impact and how they evaluate their performance in this domain (Arkbright et al., 2020). An over-reliance on citations or conference presentations as a ‘yardstick’ is part of the problem as these activities are unlikely to reach non-academic audiences on their own.

Societal impact is defined by the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) as 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia' (UKRI, 2022). While it is a lofty ideal, there has been an ongoing debate within academia about how impact strategies shape impact practices and ultimately affect the production of academic knowledge (de Jong & Balaban, 2022). The 'impact agenda', as it has become known across many universities, ultimately influences what academic research does and doesn't get funded (de Jong & Balaban, 2022; Martin, 2011).

Zheng et al. (2021) analysed 6882 case studies submitted to the UK's REF and Australia's EI (Engagement and Impact assessment) to determine the main types of societal impact employed by academic researchers in these countries. Using a text mining approach, they identified three types of practice. The first might be considered as 'buy-in' but the authors describe it as 'recognition of new opportunities among potential users' (Zheng et al., 2021, p. 7414). The set of practices that make up this first type of activity includes engaging with stakeholders and end-users to determine what sort of research-based solutions they need. The second practice type was 'length of use', which relates to whether the adoption of research findings has been 'constant' or 'sustained over time', and the third practice type was 'experience improvement for users' (Zheng et al., 2021, p. 7414).

Ozanne et al. (2017) contend that '[f]or research to have societal impact, scholars must engage with stakeholders ranging from consumers, businesses, and nonprofits, to media and the government' (Ozanne et al., 2021, p. 127). In so doing, they support a 'relational engagement approach' where knowledge is created through frequent interaction with these outside agencies. Societal impact, in this sense, is not only measured by discrete outcomes or 'packages' but processes of engagement and the quality of relationships (Ozanne et al., 2017). A relational engagement approach, Ozanne et al. (2017) argue, makes a space for the creation of both traditional and non-traditional academic and non-academic research outputs, but also productive interactions, improved social networks and enhanced capacity which can be carried forward into future projects. According to these authors, increased research awareness leading to greater research use and societal benefit is reliant on impact strategies that prioritise relationships (Ozanne et al., 2017).

Being able to demonstrate how a research project intends to benefit society is a feature of the Australian Research Council's Discovery Scheme

which funded the Engaging Youth in Regional Australia (EYRA) Study. Early stakeholder engagement, akin to Ozanne et al.'s (2017) relational engagement approach, was a distinct phase of the project (Stage 1), regional youth were consulted directly about their personal experiences (Stage 2) but also interpreted that knowledge through the co-production of creative works (Stage 3). In this chapter, Stage 4 of the EYRA Study—the staging and evaluation of the 'Finding Home' exhibition—is described. The 'staging' and the 'evaluation' are presented in separate sections. The 'staging' section has a similar rationale to Chap. 3 of this book in that it is described in sufficient detail to be instructive. The 'evaluation' section describes how the exhibition was evaluated as well as summarising the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected via visitor surveys and phone interviews.

### STAGING THE EXHIBITION

As an artist-geographer who maintains a modest art practice, I had some experience of planning, installing and contributing to art exhibitions prior to 'Finding Home', but I had never attempted a touring exhibition. Thankfully, there are freely available resources on the internet to help artists and curators plan their exhibitions. I found the Museums and Galleries of New South Wales (NSW) website (Museums & Galleries of NSW, n.d.) particularly useful. In addition to several 'factsheets', this website includes a link to a curatorial toolkit produced in Canada, which I can highly recommend (see 2010 Legacies Now, 2010).

If you want to exhibit in a public art gallery, then you need to approach them at least one year ahead of when you would like your exhibition to be staged. Programmes are typically planned a year in advance, so it makes sense to contact galleries as far in advance as you can. I was in contact with galleries in Port Hedland and Port Lincoln a year before 'Finding Home' but struggled to make contact with the Griffith Regional Art Gallery until I was able to visit in person. While I was constrained by pandemic lockdowns, it is also worthwhile to note that emails and phone calls can go astray. It's important to 'turn up' and meet with people face to face. It is also important to appreciate that when you talk to gallery coordinators, you are in their world. With any kind of engagement outside of the academy, it's important to abandon 'academic speak'. If you have an existing arts practice, no matter how small, then start there. Recognition and respect are as much a part of the art world as any other.

The then coordinator of the Courthouse Gallery+Studio in Port Hedland, Elisa Trifunoski, whom I met in person in March 2020, scheduled the ‘Finding Home’ exhibition for late March to early May 2021. Georgina Shirley, coordinator of Nautilus Arts Centre in Port Lincoln, whom I contacted by phone in July 2020, scheduled the exhibition for June 2021. Ray Wholohan, coordinator at Griffith Regional Art Gallery, met with me in person in early December 2020 after several months of pandemic lockdowns. Although the programme was already full, Ray agreed to stage the exhibition from September to October 2021 in their Gallery B, limiting the scheduled exhibition to Gallery A. He agreed to do so because he thought that the ‘Finding Home’ exhibition would be meaningful for the people of Griffith.

### *Gallery Agreements*

Depending on the timelines for the production of artwork, there is an inevitable delay between the informal agreement with a gallery and the formal agreement, although some galleries require artists/curators to submit a formal concept proposal as a first step which they accept (or not) in writing (2010 Legacies Now, 2010). The informal agreement between artist/curator and gallery is mainly for the sake of programming at which point you might be asked to submit a ‘hero’ image to the gallery for inclusion on their website. A ‘hero’ image can either be of a completed work, a section of a work or a comparable work. In the case of the Courthouse Gallery, the first venue for the ‘Finding Home’ exhibition, there were no completed works at the time that the exhibition went up on the gallery’s website and so Tal Fitzpatrick agreed that we could use a section of her ‘BackTrack’ story quilt she’d produced in 2018 as it was indicative of what her work in the exhibition would look like. Interestingly, some visitors came to the opening night of the exhibition in Port Hedland based on this image as they were quilters themselves.

Works need to be completed before an exhibition agreement can be drawn up and signed as it needs to include a schedule of works and their replacement value for the purposes of insurance. Galleries accept works on ‘consignment’, which allows the gallery to pay for the price of artworks after they’ve been sold. As such, the schedule will usually include a replacement value and a sale value. In the case of the ‘Finding Home’ exhibition, I decided that works would not be for sale, and so it was essential that this was specified in the agreement. My reasoning for not selling works was

that they had already been publicly funded by the Australian Research Council, so it was unclear where any profits would go. Also, being publicly funded research, there was a sense of 'giving back' to the people and communities who had participated in the project. Therefore, it had been agreed in advance that framed photographs would be returned to participants at the end of the tour, the story quilts would be donated to a community organisation within each town, the contemporary Aboriginal painting would be donated to an Aboriginal organisation, and I offered the text montage to the Regional Australia Institute in Canberra, which they accepted.

Apart from a schedule of works, gallery agreements assign responsibilities to the curator and the gallery coordinator, which includes a commitment to the exhibition dates, an opening night (or reception), expenses related to publicity and promotion, installation costs, insurance cover, transportation costs, provision of labels and assistance with installation and de-installation of the exhibition. Each of the galleries I worked with required me to be there for the installation but took responsibility for the de-installation. The artist/curator is normally responsible for transportation costs. The gallery covers insurance and usually provides labels. The gallery provides some promotion for the exhibition, maintains the exhibition (including cleanliness), and has a duty of care for the work to prevent damage or deterioration. Some, but not all, galleries will keep a record of attendance. The agreement also includes a floor plan of the exhibition layout, which, although not binding, is an important exercise to ensure that the artworks will fit within the gallery space. Galleries provide floor plans with measurements, but artists/curators need to devise their own layouts, which, depending on the size of the gallery, may include the 'stacking' of displays (i.e. hanging works above and below one another). Gallery agreements will also include a clause regarding termination of the agreement, which is usually 60 days' notice for either party.

### *Preparing Artworks, Packing and Logistics*

There are various considerations when it comes to hanging 2D art in a gallery (Museums & Galleries of NSW, 2019a). Probably the most crucial is whether the gallery allows wall fixing or uses art track. Art track is a hanging system where cables with moveable hanging hooks are suspended from a track which is attached to the top of the wall. Wall fixing is usually by a screw or nail into a hard wall or a screw with a backing into a gyprock

plasterboard. I've noticed a difference with gallery coordinators who are also artists as they tend to be very forgiving about gallery walls, or even floors or ceilings. A gallery close by to where I live in regional Victoria, Australia still bears the marks from an exhibition ten years ago where the artist-curators broke through the brick floor of one of the galleries to display a work from underneath, which they later filled in with concrete and painted over. Strangely, and although it has other benefits, art track is a way of protecting gallery walls from art. Regardless, artwork is likely to damage the wall in some way.

Photographs don't always need a fixture. It is possible to have them printed on a light material like corflute or foam board and then stick them to the gallery wall using a removable adhesive. The exhibition alongside 'Finding Home' in Gallery A of the Griffith Regional Art Gallery was a selection of photographs from *Australian Geographic* magazine of people and sites within regional Australia. All these photographs were printed on foam board and stuck to the gallery wall. In addition to being lightweight and, therefore, cheaper to transport, they are also less susceptible to damage. For 'Finding Home' I decided to frame the photographs. Because the photographs were black and white, the frames seemed more in keeping with the aesthetic but, also, frames are thought to draw the viewer in and hold their focus for longer, which is particularly important when the photographic display is also presenting an 'argument' (Harper, 2003).

Custom framing at the size and quantity for the ten photographs in 'Finding Home' was not economical, so I purchased some 'off the shelf' frames instead. It seems obvious, but if you don't have your photographs custom framed then you must find frames first and print your photographs second. The frames I found were a standard poster size (61 × 91 cm) with a matt board insert, a black frame and a plastic sheet instead of a piece of glass. I had the images professionally printed to fit the matt board, bought foam board and mounted the photographs onto the foam board backing with a spray adhesive before placing them back into the frame. They were then sealed with framing tape. Although it took more effort, this was about 20% of the cost of custom framing without compromising too much on how the photographs presented visually.

Tal's story quilts contained a 'rod pocket' for a hanging rod at the top of each work. The quilts were heavy enough to hang well from a single rod. When Tal hangs her work in galleries, she often uses a stick of bamboo which is held in place by a nail at each end. Knowing it wasn't possible to use nails in each venue, I constructed hanging rods for each quilt out of

metal piping, capped on both ends with rubber stoppers. Drilling through the rubber stoppers, I attached a piping cord to each rod. I had the text montage printed on canvas fabric, which was much lighter than Tal’s quilts, so asked the fabric printer if they could finish the work with a rod pocket on the top and bottom. I constructed hanging rods in the same way for this work as for the story quilts. The painting on wood was presented on a plinth, which each gallery already had, and the silent video projection was loaded onto a USB drive.

The labels for the exhibition were in preparation well before the artwork was completed. As Hawkins (2021) notes, labels do ‘discourse work’ which can often be exceeded by their supplementation with QR codes, web links or other printed materials. While it’s possible to complicate labels in this way, I was relying on the labels for ‘Finding Home’ to do most of the discourse work for the exhibition. The main reason for this was the inclusion of direct quotations from the regional youth who’d taken part as well as quotations from the commissioned artists. This would place the works clearly in the context of the larger qualitative study on which they were based. This also meant the labels went through a ‘member checking’ process to ensure they met the approval of those who had offered the quotations. After adopting a traditional format for the labels (see Museums & Galleries of NSW, 2021), direct quotations were incorporated as part of the description of each work and printed at A4 or A3 (much larger than normal art labels) on phototex—a recyclable and reusable polyester fabric, adhesive material which could be used across all four exhibitions (Starleaton Holdings, 2021).

Packing and crating is a key consideration when it comes to touring exhibitions, because artworks can be damaged through repeated handling, changes in microclimates and movement during transit (Museums and Galleries of NSW, 2019b). Depending on the fragility of works, a specialist art carrier might be needed, otherwise work can be wrapped in protective material such as bubble wrap and cardboard or packed into plastic containers before placing in a crate. Palletised crates are made from wood with a pallet attached to the bottom so that they can be lifted by a hydraulic lifter or forklift. You will need a palletised crate if you want to transport your crate through a logistics company. Some logistics companies base transport costs on cubic volume, not weight, and many of them won’t take glass. I was not aware of this when I was framing the photographs for ‘Finding Home’, and so it was fortunate that the frames I bought did not have glass in them. I made other mistakes, though, mostly relating to trusting in the first instance

that goods would be delivered on time. The artwork for the second exhibition in South Australia didn't make it in time for the installation or the opening night, because it had been sitting in an interim depot in Western Australia for two weeks. If I have one piece of advice when it comes to crating and transporting through a private carrier, it's to check with them every day to make sure your crate is on the move!

### *Installation*

Artists/curators should be present at the installation to work with gallery coordinators in determining whether the preliminary layout works well and whether the appearance of the exhibition works spatially (2010 Legacies Now, 2010). Things like the flow of foot traffic through the space and the order in which audiences will encounter works are also relevant. I was present for the installation for three out of four exhibitions for 'Finding Home'. I was unable to travel to Griffith for the installation there because the border between Victoria and New South Wales, Australia, was closed at that time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In each case, however, the preliminary layout was abandoned for a more intuitive approach which involved responding to the space of the gallery. It's difficult to describe how this is done, except that it is about how things feel in a space as much as it's about practical considerations. For the exhibition at Griffith, Ray called me multiple times during the installation and sent photographs about how it was coming together. He respectfully asked me to make decisions about placement, but it became apparent during the process of consultation that it was better for Ray to make those decisions than me, because he was in the space, and he knew the space. His layout allowed the story quilts, with all their colours, and the painting on wood, to be encountered from the back of the gallery which added an extra dimension to the visitor experience (see Fig. 4.1).

When it comes to hanging photographs, there is a standard height which is 150 cm from the floor to the centre of the picture. The formula for calculating this is 'Height of the artwork  $\div$  2 + 150 cm = Top of the artwork' (Museums & Galleries of NSW, 2019a). This is the optimal viewing height for the average, standing person, which will be less optimal for people of short stature or people using wheelchairs which may be a consideration depending on who your main audiences are likely to be. Most galleries have a toolkit with the essential tools for fixing work like a cordless drill, tape measure and spirit level. Most galleries will also have fixed,





**Fig. 4.1** 'Finding Home' exhibition at the Griffith Regional Art Gallery. Photo credit: Ray Wholohan

flexible lighting. Although most have fixed or portable projectors, not all of these will take a USB drive. It was again fortunate and unplanned that the gallery in Port Lincoln had a second portable projector with this facility as their regular projector didn't. Neither did the projector at the Courthouse Gallery in Port Hedland and so an iPad was used to run the silent video projection on a loop. The other consideration for projections is whether the gallery has a relatively dark space and a suitable wall to project on to. At the Courthouse Gallery, the only suitable space was in a 'back room' behind the main gallery space which meant that some visitors didn't realise it was there. In contrast, the Nautilus Arts Centre in Port Lincoln, the largest gallery space of the three, had a darkened corner created by an adjacent dark-coloured wall as well as the ability to turn the lights off in this section, which were ideal conditions for the video projection. The size of this gallery space also meant that the photographs could be displayed across one entire wall (see Fig. 4.2).

Last but not least is the inclusion of an introductory, information panel which would normally be encountered at the start of an exhibition. In addition to providing some background and context, an information panel



**Fig. 4.2** ‘Finding Home’ exhibition at the Nautilus Arts Centre in Port Lincoln. Photo credit: Author

helps set the ‘entrance narrative’. The entrance narrative, from museum studies, refers to the preconceptions, life experiences and worldviews that visitors bring with them to an exhibition (Doering & Pekarik, 1996). Thus, an information panel, especially when it comes to a research exhibition, should provoke audiences to be conscious about what their personal entrance narrative might be. The information panel for ‘Finding Home’ was designed to do several things. First, it acknowledged and affirmed the traditional custodians of the land on which the work was made. Second, it embedded the exhibition in the larger study from which the findings were obtained. Third, it raised youth outmigration as a relevant social issue for the region in which the exhibition was taking place, and fourth, it challenged visitors’ personal narratives around this social issue. Finally, it prompted people to complete the visitor survey at the end of their visit and acknowledged the exhibition funder and its partners. The information panel for ‘Finding Home’ was printed on phototex at A0, the same size as the textile works in the exhibition (see Fig. 4.3).

# Finding Home

## Engaging Youth in Regional Australia

*Together, we acknowledge our First Nations peoples as the traditional custodians and owners of the lands on which this work was made – Wiradjuri, Kariyarra, Ngarla, Njama, Nauo, Barngarla, Wirangu, and the Dja Dja Wurrung. We support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.*

Curated by artist-geographer Dr Candice Boyd, *Finding Home* is an exhibition of research findings from the Engaging Youth in Regional Australia (EYRA) study funded by the Australian Research Council from 2019-2021. Inspired by discussions with community groups and interviews with young people, 16 artworks were produced. Paired with explanations and direct quotations, these works aim to illustrate the research in a uniquely personal way.

Youth outmigration has been an issue in regional Australia for decades, based on an enduring assumption that young people need to leave to pursue educational and employment opportunities that the regions can't provide. This research demonstrates that choosing to stay or leave a regional area as a young Australian is a deeply emotional and complex decision – not a foregone conclusion.

What if instead of asking them “when are you leaving?”, we asked “what are your plans?”? What difference might that small shift in emphasis make so that regional youth feel free to make a home wherever they feel safe and comfortable, and not according to prior assumptions and expectations? How might Australian regions better foster young people who choose to stay, support the transition for those who leave, and value the knowledge and experience of those who return? What might we learn from Aboriginal practices of passing knowledge from one generation to another? How can we engage youth in regional Australia in novel ways as they journey towards ‘finding home’?

We hope you ponder these and many other questions as you make your way through the exhibition and encourage you to give us your feedback via the visitor survey. Please enjoy!

FUNDED BY



EXHIBITION PARTNERS



Fig. 4.3 ‘Finding Home’ information panel

### *Media, Promotion and Opening Nights*

A reasonable critique of art exhibitions as a method of knowledge translation is that they attract audiences of a certain demographic—mostly white, educated, middle-aged women. At least, this is the case for both urban and regional art galleries in Australia (Steele & Huxley, 2010). Nonetheless, the eventfulness of an art exhibition creates further opportunities, via conventional media and social media channels, to bring the associated research to a wider public. The Australian Communications and Radio Authority (2020) estimates that 18% of Australians aged 18–44 years and 49% of Australians aged 45 years and older listen to AM (news) radio weekly, while 29% of regional Australians across both age groups listen to AM radio at least once a week. Furthermore, a recent survey published in *The Conversation* found that 61% of ‘country’ news readers prefer to get their news from their local newspaper. Although the social media page for the EYRA Study was originally set up to recruit young people to the interview stage of the project, it became useful as a platform to promote the exhibitions leading up to each event. Similarly, the event of the exhibition attracted local and national media attention—radio and press—which was then reposted online and shared on the study’s social media page.

I’m not aware of research which indicates that media outlets are more likely to contact researchers around a public event than they are from a standard press release. However, it was certainly my experience with ‘Finding Home’ that journalists became aware of the research because of the exhibition and its surrounding publicity. In all, I took part in 24 media engagements relating to the research and the exhibition, including print and radio (e.g. ‘Regional youth leave home lured by city lights but some dreams are shattered’, 2021). A local newspaper journalist in Griffith did a series of three newspaper articles leading up to the exhibition, without my knowledge—‘Art frames why youth can leave’ (2021), ‘Exhibition on youth in regional Australia postponed’ (2021) and ‘Finding Home exhibition finally here’ (2021)—which were clearly oriented around the exhibition as an anticipated event in the town.

An opening night (or reception) is an early evening event which is often promoted alongside exhibition dates. Opening night performs several functions such as introducing the exhibition and acknowledging those who have been involved, and so it’s important the exhibition’s curator attends. Opening nights are also free social events that are usually catered for with food and drink. There is a lot of variation as to whether the gallery

will provide the catering, organise the catering which you must pay for or leave the catering up to the artist-curator to organise. In most cases, however, it's something that needs to be included in the project's budget.

I produced a series of four, themed flyers for the opening nights of the 'Finding Home' exhibition (see Fig. 4.4), and mistakenly, in hindsight, spent time and money on distributing these to shops and venues in each of the towns in the week leading up to the exhibitions. Other than potentially raising awareness, I'm not convinced that this activity had any effect on attendance at the opening nights. Rather, attendance seemed to rely on the activities of the gallery—their advertising on social media, distributing flyers through their emailing lists, and direct invitations to members of the community who had lasting connections with the gallery. As such, attendance seemed to relate to the gallery's enthusiasm and efforts to support the exhibition as well as their standing in the community and the strength of their community connections.

Leading up to the opening of the 'Finding Home' exhibition in Port Hedland, we were convinced that I wouldn't make it to opening night. From March 2020 to March 2022, Western Australia's border was closed to national and international travellers for 697 days due to the COVID-19 pandemic (The Guardian, 2 March 2022). There were just a few weeks between the Delta and Omicron 'waves' where Australia had zero cases of community transmission of the coronavirus, and these coincided with the exhibition opening in Port Hedland when WA opened to travellers from Victoria for a few weeks. The opening of 'Finding Home' at the Courthouse Gallery+Studio in Port Hedland was the most successful of the four, with over 70 people in attendance. The exhibition was opened by the Honourable Stephen Dawson MP, local member for the Western Australian parliament. It was also a delight that Lorna Dawson and Kimberley McKie attended the opening and were pictured alongside their joint artwork (Fig. 4.5).

Due to the delays in the transportation of artwork from Port Hedland, Western Australia, to Port Lincoln, South Australia, the opening night at that location needed to be cancelled and rescheduled for a week later. This coincided with a long weekend (public holiday) in Port Lincoln which meant that none of the gallery staff could attend, and many local people were out of town. Sadly, less than 20 people attended this opening night which was opened by Councillor Faye Davis, who had been a great supporter to the exhibition and the research from the start. CEO of West Coast Youth and Community Support in Port Lincoln, Joanne Clark, who



**Finding Home**  
Opening Night  
Friday, 26 Mar, 6 pm

An exhibition based on the Engaging Youth in Regional Australia Study, which sought to better understand the reasons why young people leave regional Australia but also why they return. Featuring works by the researchers and participants as well as textile artist, Tal Fitzpatrick, and Aboriginal artists Lorna Dawson and Kimberley McKie.

Curated by Candice Boyd

**Courthouse Gallery + Studio**

Courthouse Gallery + Studio, 16 Edgar St, Port Hedland



**Finding Home**  
Opening Night  
Friday, 11 June, 6 pm

An exhibition based on the Engaging Youth in Regional Australia Study, which sought to better understand the reasons why young people leave regional Australia but also why they return. Featuring works by the researchers and participants as well as textile artist, Tal Fitzpatrick, and Aboriginal artists Lorna Dawson and Kimberley McKie.

Curated by Candice Boyd

**NAUTILUS ARTS CENTRE**  
THEATRE • GALLERY • SHOP

Nautilus Arts Centre, Walter Nicholls Gallery, 66 Tasman Tce, Port Lincoln



**Finding Home**  
Opening Night  
Friday, 3 Sept, 6 pm

**EVENT CANCELLED**

An exhibition based on the Engaging Youth in Regional Australia Study, which sought to better understand the reasons why young people leave regional Australia but also why they return. Featuring works by the researchers and participants as well as textile artist, Tal Fitzpatrick, and Aboriginal artists Lorna Dawson and Kimberley McKie.

Curated by Candice Boyd

**griffith**  
regional art gallery

Griffith Regional Art Gallery, 167 Banna Ave, Griffith 2680



**Finding Home**  
Meet the Artist  
Thursday, 3 Mar, 5 pm

An exhibition based on the Engaging Youth in Regional Australia Study, which sought to better understand the reasons why young people leave regional Australia but also why they stay or return. Featuring works by the researchers and participants as well as textile artist, Tal Fitzpatrick, and Aboriginal artists Kimberley McKie and Lorna Dawson.

Curated by Dr Candice Boyd

**REGIONAL AUSTRALIA INSTITUTE**

Regional Australia Institute, Level 2/53 Blackall St, Barton

Fig. 4.4 Opening night flyers. Design credit: Author



**Fig. 4.5** Opening night at the Courthouse Gallery+Studio in Port Hedland. Photo credit: Tahnee Newton

had also been a keen supporter of the EYRA Study, performed a unique and powerful ‘mindful’ Acknowledgement of Country. In addition to the national media attention around the event, I had the opportunity to work with Paul Rohan from Eyre Media before the exhibition ended at the Nautilus Arts Centre as he created a 360 virtual (online) gallery of the exhibition, and so the time and effort spent in that location was still worthwhile. Paul’s virtual gallery can be viewed online here until 2026: <http://www.candiceboyd.net/finding-home-virtual-gallery.html>.

I only made it to Port Lincoln for the installation and opening, because I dashed across the border one week earlier than planned and one day before it was closed by the South Australian government due to new coronavirus cases in Melbourne, Victoria. Melbourne would go into its fourth lockdown during this time, closing its border to New South Wales (NSW) which also went into lockdown for the second half of 2021. This initially meant postponing the exhibition in Griffith NSW indefinitely. Thankfully, Griffith was one of the first areas of regional NSW to ‘reopen’ and so the exhibition went ahead, but the border closure between Victoria and NSW would remain in place until December 2021 which meant that I couldn’t be there. Furthermore, COVID-19-related restrictions in Griffith, post-lockdown, meant that they couldn’t have an opening.

Liz Ritchie, CEO of the Regional Australia Institute, a nonprofit non-partisan think tank, became aware of the EYRA Study in 2019 after I'd sent her a copy of the industry report based on the initial stage of stakeholder roundtable discussions. She responded by inviting me to exhibit at the institute's hub, which has an informal exhibition space. The Regional Australia Institute (RAI), located in Australia's capital city of Canberra, is heavily involved in research and policy relating to regional Australia and fosters close connections to government departments, regional nonprofits and businesses, as well as elected parliamentarians. Although open to the public, the exhibition at RAI was different in that its primary audience comprised professionals associated with either nonprofit or government agencies and organisations. To maximise engagement with this audience, it was decided, in consultation with Emilie MacIssac, RAI's events coordinator, not to have an official opening but a 'Meet the Artist' event early in March 2022, before the exhibition ended. Twenty-six professionals representing government departments and agencies registered but as with the earlier exhibitions, the event coincided with a COVID-19 outbreak in Canberra which affected attendance and even the ability for RAI's CEO to attend. For those who were able to attend (around 20), I conducted a 'floor talk' which involved taking visitors through the exhibition before finishing with a convivial, catered event funded by RAI (see Fig. 4.6). I had also planned to organise visits to the exhibition by groups of school students while it was on display at RAI, but the COVID outbreak in Canberra at the beginning of 2022 resulted in a governmental ban on school excursions, which prevented this from happening.

Only one gallery out of the four passed on official visitor numbers—the Griffith Regional Art Gallery. The exhibition ran at that location for 7 weeks and had 396 patrons during that time. Given that the exhibition in Port Hedland ran for 8 weeks, the exhibition in Port Lincoln for 3 weeks, and the exhibition in Canberra for 14 weeks, it seems reasonable to conclude that the 'Finding Home' exhibition was likely viewed by over 1000 patrons. It also seems reasonable to suspect that had the touring exhibition not taking place during a pandemic situation, the attendance would have been higher.





**Fig. 4.6** 'Meet the artist' event at the Regional Australia Institute in Canberra. Photo credits: Author and Jocelyn James

## EVALUATING THE EXHIBITION

There are better ways of evaluating visitors' emotional responses to exhibitions than a written survey, including drawing/walking methods (Boyd & Hughes, 2020), focus groups and semi-structured interviews (Tischler,

Carone, & Mistry, 2016), and Q-methodology (Brook, 2022). Methods like these give participants a greater chance of connecting with, exploring and communicating the cognitive and the visceral (bodily) dimensions of their emotional responses (Düringer, 2014). The benefits of visitor surveys, however, are that they are brief and self-paced, allowing respondents the time and comfort they need to reflect, and they don't need to be 'supervised', making them less expensive.

There are different theories, principles and methods of evaluating the arts depending on whether it occurs at the level of an exhibition or an entire arts programme (Rajan & O'Neal, 2018). For a single exhibition, a common form of evaluation is known as 'summative evaluation' (Stuart, Maynard & Rouncefield, 2015). A summative evaluation doesn't provide information on a project to help it to improve but rather it 'tries to give a pure evaluation of outcomes, the effectiveness of the process of the project in working towards outcomes, as well as its impact' (Stuart et al., 2015, p. 64). The summative evaluation of the 'Finding Home' exhibition included a visitor survey and follow-up telephone interviews. Both strategies were an attempt to gauge whether the exhibition had succeeded in translating knowledge (cognitive and affective) from the EYRA Study as well as the exhibition's overall impact on its audiences.

### *Visitor Surveys*

Ethical approval to collect data from visitor surveys at each exhibition was granted via an amendment to the EYRA Study's original ethics application. The visitor survey was designed to fit on a single page (see Fig. 4.7). In addition to collecting basic demographic information, the survey also included a series of statements which visitors were asked to endorse if they agreed with them. Visitors were also asked to rate the exhibition overall, indicate which were their favourite artworks and why, and provide contact details for a follow-up phone interview. Surveys were collected by gallery reception staff and then scanned and emailed back to researchers over the course of the exhibition with hard copies being forwarded later. Visitors received a tote bag as a gift for returning their survey to the reception desk. In all, 100 surveys were collected. This number was arrived at after following up with a small number of people who had seen the exhibition but were not able to attend the 'Meet the Artist' closing event in Canberra. Quantitative and qualitative data were entered into a spreadsheet, and quantitative data were analysed using the spreadsheet's programmed functions.

**'Finding Home' Exhibition**  
Visitor Survey

About you

- |                                       |  |   |   |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female       | <input type="checkbox"/> Male          | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary     | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer Not to Say                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18-24 years  | <input type="checkbox"/> 25-36 years   | <input type="checkbox"/> 37-55 years    | <input type="checkbox"/> 56-69 years <input type="checkbox"/> 70+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> From Hedland | <input type="checkbox"/> From Griffith | <input type="checkbox"/> From P/Lincoln | <input type="checkbox"/> From Elsewhere .....                     |

Please tick the boxes below if you **agree** with the statement:

- The exhibition gave me new knowledge about regional youth
- This exhibition only told me what I already knew
- I better appreciate the reasons why young people choose to stay or leave because of the exhibition
- The exhibition communicated the research in a way that was more helpful than a presentation
- I was moved by the artworks and the stories they conveyed
- Communicating research through art doesn't work for me
- I would not have known about this research if it wasn't for the exhibition

How would you rate the exhibition overall?

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10

Why did you give this rating?

Which was your favourite exhibit (and why)?

- Text Montage     Young People's Photos     Story Quilts     Painting     Video

.....

.....

.....

Can we contact you by telephone for an interview (10 mins) about your experience of the exhibition?

- Yes      Your first name ..... Your phone number .....

*Thank you for completing this survey. Please return to the front desk to receive a complimentary tote bag.*

**Fig. 4.7** Visitor survey

Consistent with general gallery audiences in Australia (Steele & Huxley, 2010), 78% of survey respondents indicated that they were female and 14% male. No respondents indicated that they were non-binary; however, the one person who ticked 'Prefer not to Say' wrote next to it that their gender was 'none of these', suggesting that it would have been better if this category had been 'Other' with the option to write a response. Seven people (7% of respondents) didn't provide information about their gender. In terms of age, and also consistent with general gallery audiences, 34% of respondents were in the age group 37–55, 16% were in the age group 56–69, 13% were in the age group 18–24, 13% were in the age group 25–36, and 7% were 70+ years. Seventeen people (17%) did not give their age.

Regarding location, 24% of survey respondents indicated that they were from Hedland with an additional 3% of people who attended the exhibition at that location indicating they were from elsewhere. In contrast, 11% of respondents said they were from Griffith with 6% noting that they were from elsewhere. The remaining 14% of respondents were from Port Lincoln with 3% of visitors who had attended that exhibition being from elsewhere, and 12% were from Canberra with 4% from elsewhere. Most of the people from elsewhere who attended exhibitions at Port Hedland, Griffith or Port Lincoln (12% in total) were visiting regional locations from an urban location. A total of 23% of the sample didn't indicate where they were from.

For statements about the exhibition and the question about favourite artworks, dummy variables (i.e. coded 0 or 1) were created for each item within these questions. Figures 4.8 and 4.9 display the results by item, and because these were dummy variables, the values have been converted to percentages for ease of interpretation (i.e. by multiplying by 100). It can be seen from Fig. 4.8 that not only did respondents indicate that they gained new knowledge from the exhibition but that they were 'moved' by the exhibition and the stories it conveyed. Accordingly, the favourite artworks in the exhibition were the young people's photographs, followed by the story quilts and then the text montage.

The average overall rating for the exhibition was 8.66 out of 10, with a standard deviation of 1.36. However, there was an outlier (which is also evident in the data presented in Fig. 4.8) where one respondent gave the exhibition a rating of 4 out of 10. Without this outlier, the mean was 8.70 with a standard deviation of 1.07, and, therefore, the outlier had no real effect on the overall average. The reason this person gave for their rating

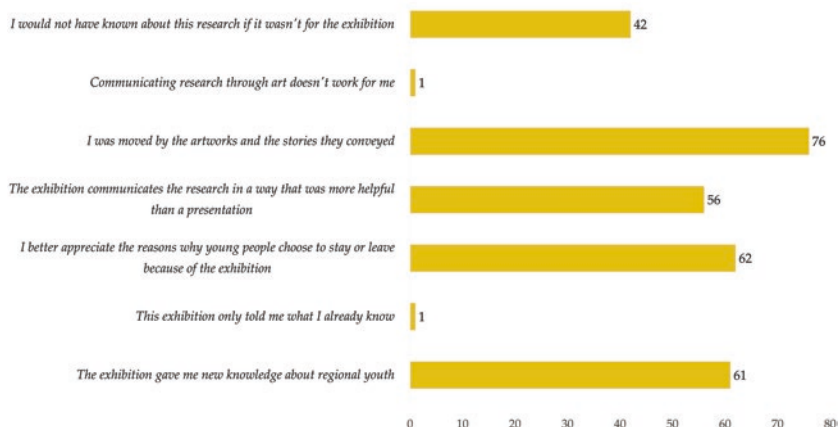


Fig. 4.8 Impact of the exhibition

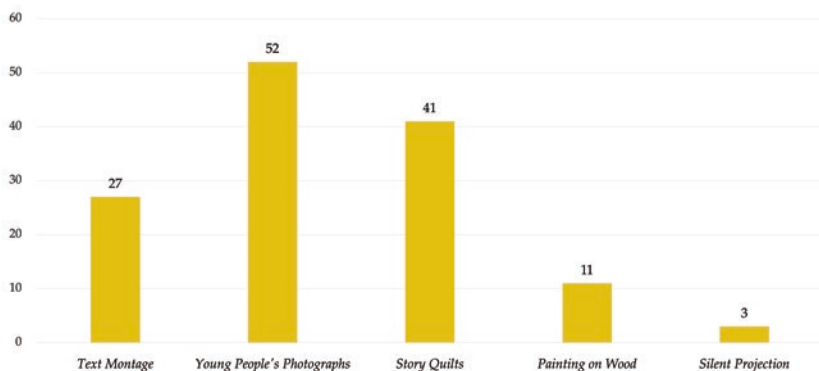


Fig. 4.9 Favourite artworks

was that, for them, art had to display technical skill and so they were potentially comparing the artworks in the exhibition unfavourably to what is sometimes considered to be 'high art' (Winston & Cupchik, 1992). Only two people didn't provide an overall rating of the exhibition, and 81% of respondents provided a short explanation. These explanations included general praise, appreciation for the insights into regional youth

provided by the exhibition, liking the variety of art forms within the exhibition, and positive feelings in response to the exhibition. The follow-up phone interviews provided the opportunity to explore these responses in more depth.

A large percentage of survey respondents (44%) didn't provide a reason for why the artworks they'd nominated were their favourite, whereas only 2% didn't nominate any artworks at all. Of those who did provide a reason, it was apparent that visitors had mostly liked the young people's photographs and the text montage because of their emotional response to the combination of images and stories, and visitors who liked the story quilts were mostly responding to their aesthetics, for example, colours, technical skill and composition. In the next section, visitor's reasons for the responses they gave to the survey are explored in greater detail.

### *Phone Interviews*

Follow-up telephone interviews with those who had provided their details on the visitor survey were conducted by Dr Elizabeth Straughan, and these were overwhelmingly positive. There were 31 interviews, between 5 and 10 min in length, which took place within 2 weeks of visitors completing the survey—7 from Griffith, 10 from Hedland, 10 from Port Lincoln and 4 from Canberra. Respondents were mostly women, with approximately one-third from the 25- to 36-year age group and two-thirds from the 37- to 55-year age group. The qualitative findings from these interviews are grouped into two parts in this section: detailed explanations about responses to the endorsed statements from the visitor survey and explanations regarding favourite artworks.

### *Endorsed Statements*

In reference to the first statement, about whether the exhibition had provided visitors with new knowledge, respondents indicated that the exhibition had made them rethink their assumptions about regional youth migration decisions. This finding also reinforced that the dominant narrative, and the one that regional people are most aware of, is the reasons why young people leave.

I never appreciated that there was some really good routes for young people to go down if they want to go into shipping or mining or things like that. There are actually some good opportunities up here that kids from the city don't have.

That whole concept that everyone wants to leave and go to the city is just not true ... there's so many reasons why someone might stay or go. It's a really personal decision that anyone who grows up regionally ... when you think about it there's no surprises, it's just getting someone to think about those concepts, it's just been a perception that every country kid wants to leave.

It allowed me to see all of the reasons, but also the emotion behind them. I know a lot of people who have left, but not a lot of people who have come back so I liked hearing about those who had returned.

The importance of place for young people, and that it comes in a variety of forms, and it's not necessarily what we might think of ... a jetty, a dog ... and it was as much a feeling as it is a thing.

Being a city-dweller, I think it's very easy to label the country and to think about things in more simplistic terms without thinking through some of those things.

The main reason why people appreciated the exhibition in preference to a research presentation was being able to 'wander' and 'roam' as well as having time to 'wonder' and 'think'. Several respondents emphasised that they appreciated being able to speak to the researcher/curator at the opening night and enjoyed the social aspect of these events. Others said that they wouldn't have gone to hear a presentation on the topic, or, if they had, it wouldn't have had the same impact.

I don't always do things in order, so I like being able to take my time and enjoyed doing it at my own pace. No one is pushing information on to you.

The choice of images were beautiful. I'm someone who gravitates towards visual storytelling, so I thought that it made the research really accessible. The writing [labels] were helped by the images to really lead you in and help you to engage.

[The researcher] sent me through the report, and it's a report and it's great, but to see the exhibition and all that great work, I just thought it was amazing. I've never been a part of something that resulted not just in a report but something that took into account different people's ways of learning and

retaining information ... I thought it was great. I was really 'blown away'. It really captures what she learned while she was here.

When you have a presentation, it's normally people sharing statistics and information from a not-personal perspective. I find that a really good aspect was that you could connect with the emotion behind the research ... it made it stick in my head more and connect to it more.

I read a lot of research reports. You don't get a connection out of a piece of paper. The exhibition connected people to what the exhibition was about.

However, some people pointed out the exhibition's limitations:

Sometimes I feel like you're not getting the people you need to. You're not accessing the ones you need to. The people who are going to a gallery are the parents who are already engaging ... there's a snapshot that wasn't being represented.

I think the exhibition would need to be more interactive to engage younger people, say age 12 to 18, who are about to make these decisions in the future.

In terms of being 'moved' by the artworks and the stories they conveyed, respondents talked about relating personally to stories and/or having new insights into the experiences of others. For example:

I just loved all of it. I felt like it was so relatable. It was beautiful and grounding.

Some stories, I could see myself reflected in and having that sense of a shared experience.

I thought that some of the insights were really profound. A couple of them touched me quite deeply how the opportunity to contribute [to the exhibition] had really been good for them and gave them a chance to reflect ... I think it's good for young people to reflect on what the town does for them, and if it doesn't, what is it that they want.

It stirred up a lot of feelings about what home is ... hearing people's stories is what made it moving.

When it came to not knowing about the research if it weren't for the exhibition, respondents said:



We have a lot of people with government funding who come to the community, you don't even know what's going on. They'll be people out there doing research ... they'd be doing stuff out in the community ... and we wouldn't get any feedback and they'd be finding all this interesting stuff out. It never came back to the service providers who actually work in the community. I was really pleased that she had the exhibition, because I at least knew what was going on ... often the institution holds on to it and as a community we don't learn anything from it, so I liked that about the exhibition.

It made me think about it, otherwise I wouldn't have thought about it.

I was excited to go to an art exhibition that was art and science combined. It was really nice to see funding go to something like this, as a scientist. It was nice to see people doing art and creating and geography and all these amazing interdisciplinary things ... it was great to see an art-science 'love child'. We often talk about art and science as separate things, but it was nice to see art and science merged together.

If it had been put on my desk as research, it would go into a folder of 'things I'd love to read, but I'm not going to do it, because I'm too busy' ... I found out about the research and now I'm wanting to know more, because of having an emotional attachment to it.

General feedback on the exhibition included liking the layout and the descriptions accompanying the works, as well as experiencing the exhibition as 'cohesive', 'interesting' and 'varied'. People also used superlatives like 'awesome', 'impressive', 'amazing', 'magnificent' and 'beautiful'.

I just thought that it was a really beautiful touch to talk to people from these different communities but also engage with the local artists in those communities. I think communities really respond to that and it goes a long way.

I was glad to hear that it was going to be exhibited in each of the communities, and thought it was a great way to link those communities together.

Moving forward with any research involving young people, what an innovative way to do research and then to present the findings. It was just amazing, and there should be more of it.

### *Favourite Exhibits*

When it came to the young people's photographs, people mentioned liking the black-and-white aesthetic and the 'uniformity' of the photographic

display. Others said that the black and white colour scheme was a pleasing contrast which pulled them towards the more colourful works in the exhibition. Moreover, respondents emphasised the importance of linking stories (or direct quotations) with the images, not just in making sense of them but also personalising them.

It's because they were so directly linked to the person, the piece was by the young person whose story it was. I also liked how simplistic they were, even though they were simple, they told a big story.

It was a really good way to have a conversation with others in the room ... we reflected upon why we thought that location would be important, and whether it would be a place that we would like to be, or even a place that we go to, and what it is about them ... they were great catalysts for me to think about why I live where I live.

To me, you had to have the story behind the photo absolutely linked. If it was just the photos, it wouldn't have worked. The story is what moves me more, and then the visual.

Respondents who liked the text montage appreciated the way it had been composed of several different perspectives and experiences of regional youth. Interestingly, some people had taken the time to read the whole piece while others were able to 'grab' segments of testimony.

I loved the piece that had the excerpts from the interviews. That was really cool how it chopped and changed conversations ... it resonated with me personally. I thought it was really cool to hear about people's different experiences of staying or going.

The image with the words and the picture, I think, to me, that was the one that really stood out to me. That was the one was the most striking. And the tapestries [story quilts] were striking. [ES: Did you read all the text on the text montage?] Yes, I did. I thought it was really powerful. I think the use of imagery is really important in telling stories like that.

I loved its simplicity and its complexity, and how it wasn't possible to take in all the words, but some just popped out at you.

People who liked the story quilts were impressed by their colourfulness and how well their composition represented each area:

I loved being able to tell through the colours, which town it was. There are all these characteristics within each town, which makes them special.

I felt like those landscapes and vibes were similar to a lot of regional areas.

I loved how vibrant the quilts were, and each in their own way with their own colour schemes, and just how much of that particular region it was possible to get in there.

Consistent with the results from the visitor survey, not many people who were interviewed mentioned the contemporary Aboriginal painting on wood or the silent video projection. However, it is important to note that in the phone interviews, respondents were only prompted about works that they had already nominated as their favourites in the survey. Nonetheless, the following comments were offered about these final two works:

I liked the storylines in it [the painting on wood].

I liked to see the connection to Country, because Country is everywhere.

The 'haiku idea' video. That was so clever. I could have happily sat there for half an hour just looking for details that I missed the first time through, but it was just little snapshots of ordinary-ness. When you go and visit somewhere, like a famous place, I'm always struck by how ordinary it is, but when you go to an ordinary place, I'm struck by 'hey, they've done this here' and it just makes it unique.

That little bit extra [the video] gave you some insight into what the places looked like. I think the main factor of it was seeing it all in real life.

### CONCLUSION: DEMONSTRATING SOCIETAL IMPACT

As an example of arts-based knowledge translation in human geography, 'Finding Home' conveyed knowledge from the Engaging Youth in Regional Australia (EYRA) Study. Not only did those surveyed say that they had learned something new, but, via interview, they were also able to specifically describe what that new knowledge was. They also reported being affected or 'moved' by the exhibition, not just in relation to their own experiences but in empathising with regional youth whose experiences were different to their own. This is important because affective knowledge translation through art isn't about entertaining audiences or

making them ‘feel good’, it’s about transmitting ‘felt’ knowledges so that they might be ‘felt’ again. In ‘Finding Home’, these feelings related strongly to a sense of belonging, which had positive associations for visitors, but affective knowledge translation is equally applicable to experiences of suffering and trauma, although in these instances it is more challenging to do it ethically and safely (see Boyd & Hughes, 2020).

There are three definitions within the Australian Research Council’s (ARC) Engagement and Impact (EI) assessment that are relevant for arts-based knowledge translation efforts like ‘Finding Home’ and comparable to those used in other countries like Canada and the UK. The first is *research* itself, which the ARC defines as ‘the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way to generate new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings’ (ARC, 2019). ‘Finding Home’ certainly meets this definition, but it does so under the category of Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTROs; ARC, 2018). With an accompanying research summary, there are three valid NTROs from ‘Finding Home’—the exhibition itself as a major work, the text montage as a minor work, and the silent video projection as a minor work. Although they make up the exhibition, works produced by participants or commissioned artists are not considered to be separate NTROs as they weren’t created by a researcher employed by an academic institution. The second relevant definition is *engagement*: ‘[r]esearch engagement is the interaction between research and research end-users outside of academia, for the mutually beneficial transfer of knowledge, technologies, methods, or resources’ (ARC, 2019). ‘Finding Home’ satisfies this definition. Under the EI, at present, quantitative indicators need to accompany an explanatory statement for this to be assessed, which is controversial within the arts and humanities (see AAH, 2020).

The third, relevant definition within the Australian Research Council’s (ARC) Engagement and Impact assessment regards *impact*. Research impact ‘is the contribution that research makes to the economy, society, environment or culture, beyond the contribution to academic research’ (ARC, 2019). The ARC does recognise that for many engagement and impact activities, especially those which are new, there may not be any impact to report and so it was not a requirement for submissions to the 2018 EI assessment to have them. They did, however, need to have evidence of engagement. Furthermore, the EI has two impact ratings—one for impact and one for the *approach* to impact (which are the mechanisms to encourage translation). ‘Finding Home’, as an example of arts-based

knowledge translation, can demonstrate the effectiveness of its mechanisms for facilitating societal impact but actual societal impact, like changes in local government policy and/or cultural changes in narratives around regional youth migration, are much more difficult to determine and would require additional time and resources beyond the project's timeframe.

The artworks from the exhibition were all gifted back to communities after the final exhibition in Canberra. The Griffith story quilt now hangs behind the reception desk at the Griffith Community Centre, the Hedland story quilt hangs in the Youth Involvement Council's mindfulness space in South Hedland. The Port Lincoln quilt is hanging in the offices of West Coast Youth and Community Support, and the Regional Australia Institute accepted the text montage. As it proved less expensive to have participant's works reprinted and a new frame sent to them than to post their framed photographs back, one of the participants photos remained at the RAI, another hangs in the offices of SARRAH (Services for Rural and Remote Allied Health), and the remainder will be hung in an independent school in Canberra. The contemporary Aboriginal painting on wood was presented to the Clontarf Foundation in Perth—an organisation that improves the education, life skills, self-esteem and employment prospects for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. The work and impact of the 'Finding Home' exhibition has the opportunity to continue and grow through these more permanent displays.

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