

AUSTRALIAN  
PERFORMING  
ARTS MARKET

# APAM

APAM Gathering at Darwin Festival  
10 - 19 August 2021



October 2021

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## In Review

# APAM Gathering at Darwin Festival

**10 – 19 August 2021**

The Digital APAM Gathering at Darwin Festival was held alongside Darwin's annual Darwin Festival with a focus on local and national artists. The Gathering was attended by 451 national and international colleagues, from 24 countries, and included 14 Showcase works programmed for Darwin Festival, alongside 44 Profile presentations by Australian and New Zealand artists and organisations, 2 Local Players events and an extensive Exchange program.

The event was conceived as APAM's second hybrid Gathering to take place on the lands of the Larrakia people of the Darwin region across the following dates:

10 – 19 August digital program

14 – 17 August in-person program

However, due to a third wave of COVID-19 infections in Australia and state lockdowns impacting travel nationally, we made the decision to cancel the in-person program and instead deliver a fully digital program. The full program schedule is available at <https://apam.org.au/gathering/apam-digital-gathering-at-darwin-festival/>

The Gathering preparation occurred during the global pandemic of COVID-19. Australia's international borders have now been closed for over 18 months. With the exception of a small number of participants (mostly Darwin residents) attending the few in-person events, all participants took part digitally.

## Darwin Festival

Darwin Festival is Darwin's iconic arts festival with an eclectic and substantial program that takes advantage of Darwin's delightful dry season weather and spectacular outdoor venues. The Festival reflects Darwin's position at the Top End of Australia, its unique Indigenous and multicultural population and its close proximity to Asia, while showcasing some of Australia's finest arts performers.

With partnerships across the city of Darwin and nationally, Darwin Festival welcomes a diverse audience on an annual basis. Running over 18 days and nights, the program includes local and touring performances and events including outdoor concerts, workshops, theatre, dance, music, comedy and cabaret, film and visual arts.

The 2021 festival program was impacted by state border closures and a local lockdown which meant that a number of programmed works could not proceed or had to be rescheduled. This included Showcase works scheduled to coincide with the Gathering dates.

<https://www.darwinfestival.org.au/>

# Gathering

APAM's digital Gathering comprised sessions through curatorial streams including:

## + SHOWCASE

Curated and presented as part of Darwin Festival, 12 Showcase works out of 14 were presented in full length to public audiences, with full production values and were led by or featured collaborations with Australian and New Zealand artists and companies.

The digital program featured a curated selection of 14 digital showcases that explored the practice and process of the Showcase artists. In addition, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company's *Heart Is A Wasteland* was live streamed from the festival on APAM's digital platform. Planned livestreams of Constantina Bush's *Ride the Night Train* and a concert by Rainbow Chan were disrupted by the impact of COVID-19 on the festival. 413 participants engaged with the Showcase work. The individual Showcase pages were visited over 900 times with over 100 participants viewing the *Heart Is A Wasteland* live stream.

## + PROFILE

Profile saw 44 presentations from artists and companies from Australia and New Zealand.

Projects featured in Profile were selected by an international curatorial panel through a competitive expression-of-interest process, offering opportunities for artists, companies and groups to share their repertoire, ideas and ambitions. The APAM curatorial panel for the Darwin Festival Gathering included Louise Partos (ArtBack NT), Felix Preval (Darwin Festival), Jacob Boehme, Rachael Azzopardi, Mina Wang (Taiwan), Joyce Rosario (Canada) and Cian Elyse White, (Aronuai Arts Festival, NZ).

The Profile categories were:

+ Here's Our Idea // 9 works in development seeking commission or presentation.

+ Here's What We Made // 26 works with a completed premiere seeking further presentation opportunities.

+ Here's How We Work // 9 presenting organisations share the innovative ways they are working with artists and companies.

There were 6 Profile sessions scheduled across the program, averaging 150 participants per session with approximately 900 views altogether.

## + LOCAL PLAYERS

Local Players was designed to highlight and demonstrate the strength and diversity of Darwin performing artists, through talks and insights from artists and companies.

For the Darwin Gathering, APAM partnered with ArtBack NT and local independent Darwin-based company ACCOMPLICE to provide Gathering participants an insight into the rich creative culture Darwin has to offer.

These partnerships resulted in 3 events:

1) Meet The Precipice Artists: Produced by ACCOMPLICE. This digital session profiled the artists involved in the Precipice Lab coinciding with the Gathering. Artists came together on Larrakia country in a curated program to learn, interrogate and connect. The Precipice Lab was born out of a desire to foster genuine experimental artist-to-artist links in a regional environment.

2) Local Players, in person: APAM participants who were on the ground in Darwin from Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne met with local artists Richard Fejo, Rachael Wallace, Fiona Carter and Stephanie Martin of Yum Cha Arts, Putu Wartu, David Spry, Francis Diatchenko, Betty Sweetlove, Tania Lieman and Sally Balfour as part of a curated session at East Point.

3) Local Players Digital: was conducted online and was hosted by Kyle Wamsley. APAM participants had the opportunity to meet Browns Mart Arts, GUTS Dance, Godinyamayin Yijard Rivers Arts and Cultural Centre, Darwin Community Arts, ArtBack NT, Corrugated Iron Youth Arts and NT Dance Company in a facilitated question and answer session.

### + EXCHANGE / NEIGHBOURHOOD

Curated by APAM and the First Nations Advisory Group, Exchange included panels, roundtables and networking. The Exchange program hosted 21 talks and roundtables involving 75 artists and speakers. A key component of Exchange was NEIGHBOURHOOD. The session was curated by Next Wave in association with Theatre Network Australia (TNA) and featured perspectives and offerings from local artists and arts leaders exploring the need for a national arts and culture plan. NEIGHBOURHOOD was co-presented by TNA as part of their devolved Australian Theatre Forum (ATF) program in 2021.

Another component of the Exchange program was Transmitter: Darwin x Delhi, a robust conversation looking at the growth of international relationships and creative practice via the digital realm. Two artists from India and two from Australia came together following a lab intensive and learnings on working across continents in pandemic times.

The event was supported by Serendipity Arts Foundation, Australia Council and Darwin Festival.

The Darwin Gathering also saw the introduction of Gather Round sessions, an opportunity for connection and conversation specific to art forms including dance, circus/physical theatre and multidisciplinary practice. These special offers were hosted by international colleagues, specialising in these fields.

### + INITIATIVES

First Timers and First Nations Industry Program

39 people participated in APAM's First Nations Industry Program and 44 in the First Timers program both of which were held online.



Images: Paz Tassone

# Participants

+ **451** attended the full Gathering

+ **169** of whom were international participants, from **24** countries.

+ The remaining participants were domestic with **35%** from Victoria, **21%** from New South Wales, **9%** from Queensland, **7%** from Western Australia, **9%** from South Australia, **1%** from Tasmania, **17%** from Northern Territory and **1%** from the ACT.

+ **29** participants were based in New Zealand, representing **6%** of all participants or **17%** of international participants

+ Of the Australian participants **36%**, identified as independent artists.

+ **44** first timers were accepted into the program. **32** Australian, **6** New Zealand, **5** Canadian and **1** Hong Kong SAR participant.

+ **449** participants registered to more than one session and book marked more than **96** artists or companies of interest to connect to.

+ **392** participants reached out to at least one other participant to make a connection and **97** of these participants made more than one meeting to have a direct conversation. The average number of contacts made per participant was **10.3**.

+ APAM supported the digital participation of **97** international visitors.



THE PULSE by Gravity and Other Myths  
Image: Darcy Grant

# Impact



Image: Paz Tassone

The post-event survey, individual unsolicited feedback and extensive debriefing of key stakeholders has provided the APAM team with a wealth of data to review the successes and opportunities for improvement from the APAM Gathering at Darwin Festival. The post-event survey was completed by **42 of 451** participants. Quantitative responses of note as follows:

+ **95%** of people participating in APAM made new connections, and **83%** deepened existing relationships. Of these, the majority made up to **10** new connections and deepened a further **10**.

+ Survey: **100%** of participants identified the Profile and Showcase works as a good match with the attendees.

+ **50%** of participants' primary reason for participating was international exchange or engagement. For **43%** it was networking with peers.

+ The three most valuable aspects of the APAM Gathering at Darwin Festival were:

1) Engaging in important sector and geographic conversations **69%**

2) Experiencing contemporary performance and ideas by Australian First Nations artists and companies **64%**

3) Developing diverse, interdisciplinary relationships across the performing arts **62%**

+ **67%** of participants met their objectives for attending the Gathering with **29%** indicating it was too soon to tell.

+ **86%** of participants found the Gathering valuable for increasing their national and international connections and the same number found it valuable for deepening the quality of their existing relationships.

+ **81%** of participants found the Gathering valuable for creating new opportunities.

+ **90%** of participants found the Gathering valuable for increasing their knowledge and skills.

+ **76%** of participants considered participation in APAM value for money.

+ **86%** of participants will continue to participate in online or hybrid events after participating in the Gathering.

+ **82%** of international participants believed the Gathering showcased the diversity of Australian artists, companies and practice.

+ **100%** of participants of the First Timers program would recommend the program.

APAM's evaluation over the period 2020–2024 will be undertaken by BYP Group who, towards the end of 2021, will reconnect with Gathering participants to seek further input on the outcomes of connections and relationships begun and deepened through the APAM

## The Response

*It was interesting to see what artists and producers and presenters were handling COVID times...the creators continue and time was their gift ...*

*I had my own perspective of all of the gifts and I think it helped me clarify what can be possible in the present so always amazed at artists creators and how resilient and creative they are, so Salute to all!, and thank you all the work to put on despite your challenges to do so as well.*

– Survey participant

*I took the opportunity to catch up with all the content yesterday and wanted to send my thanks for inviting me to attend such a rich programme.*

*In particular I appreciated the opportunity to hear first nations voices and the parallels that we share in our work and practice.*

– Pawlet Brookes,  
Serendipity Artist Movement

*The Online platform has been fantastic and you have been so great, delivering everything so smoothly with plenty of clear communication and support for everyone, especially under the circumstances. Plenty of amazing conversations happening. Thanks for facilitating!*

– Showcase Artist

*Massive congratulations on getting another conference on at this time. The caring and invitational world your team manages to create online is truly inspirational to us! We really haven't had a parallel experience over the past two years, and we know it's largely due to the care and compassion you all have for the industry and the relationships that hold it together.*

– Participant

*This is a brilliant platform, congratulations. I've seen some great conversations and presentations.*

– Presenter

*The online experience is phenomenal, brilliantly orchestrated and as a participant, I was offered incredible choice. The actual experience of engagement was one of clarity, synergy and fluidity. Participation was effortless.*

– Survey participant

*I learnt so much about the companies and activities in the NT.*

– Survey participant

*There was a moment during an in real time exchange where one of the organisers made sure to invite me to contribute. As a first time attendee this was very kind, and helped me to feel very welcome in the space.*

– Survey participant



Image: Paz Tassone

## Learnings

As previously noted following our DreamBIG Gathering, the APAM team is committed to testing, trialling and responding to ideas and feedback.

The global pandemic continues to affect international engagement. The impact on national and international touring has been catastrophic, with venue seasons and festivals cancelled or indefinitely postponed, and many artists and companies losing work including engagements that have been years in the making. APAM's focus since March 2020 has been to continue to support artists and presenters to remain connected and in a productive dialogue through Gatherings and the year-round work of the APAM Office.

In constructing another hybrid event, close consideration was paid to the intersecting journeys of the digital and in-person participants. Due to restrictions worsening as our Gathering drew near, a decision was made with our project partners to make the Darwin Festival Gathering a wholly digital event. Programs that could be reshaped for the online world were adapted; other in-person events which could not be adapted were cancelled. The digital program was a 10-day program which was carefully scheduled to take into account global time zones and screen fatigue, with a daily offering of between 90mins and 2.5 hours. Most sessions were also available for on-demand viewing following their scheduled screening.

The APAM team in partnership with Darwin Festival worked to facilitate networking opportunities as well as opportunities to attend shows; however even these few in-person events were affected by a snap three-day Darwin lockdown. The switch to the live streaming of a select number of works was considered, with lockdowns again impacting on this plan. It was a thrill to be able to live stream ILBIJERRI Theatre's Heart is a Wasteland, showing our national and international participants the incredible quality of First Nations work coming from Australia.

For many participants, the Gathering as a digital market was a new experience. We are a national sector in transition to the digital realm, with a lack of long-term investment and strategy in arts policy, meaning that many Australian artists and companies are well behind their international counterparts in the development of digital practice, distribution and market development. It is obvious that digital engagement will be an essential element in determining the future of international mobility.

The hybridity of the event adds a layer of complexity to event communications with multifaceted information being developed about the two layers of programming and the mechanism of the digital platform. Moving to a digital-only delivery mode meant that we worked meticulously to simplify communications in comparison to our DreamBig Gathering, and the response to this approach was wholly positive. Given we had some repeat Gathering attendees, the sector's increased understanding and familiarity with digital and hybrid market events also helped with understanding our format and curatorial vision.

The decision to use Swapcard as the digital platform for the Gathering made sense following its success for DreamBIG. We again received universally positive feedback about the ease of use of the platform, with many participants praising its intuitive design. The APAM team spent considerable time testing the platform from a user perspective ahead of the Gathering, and this attention to detail paid off with minimal requests made to the Help Desk or APAM team during the event. The ability to brand the platform strongly again made it feel less corporate and more in line with APAM's tone and approach. We approached the showcasing of performance work within the platform in a very targeted way, and received positive feedback from artists who reported that this approach successfully supported and represented their work.

For Darwin Festival, we chose not to present full length recordings of all live work on the platform – instead, we planned to livestream a small number of works to test the response from Gathering attendees for consideration during future markets. COVID restrictions resulted in these works not going ahead as scheduled, though we were able to share ILBIJERRI's work as noted, with some very positive feedback. We will consider this option again in the future.

This was the second Gathering delivered by the APAM Office intended to run with the hybrid format, the first that took a rapid turn to be wholly digital. We worked closely with the sector in programming the Gathering to showcase the innovation and quality of work for which the Australian and New Zealand sector is internationally known. APAM was well supported in this ambition by the Darwin Festival team. The strength and diversity of the Festival program was critical to the success of the Gathering. The market development opportunity offered by the Gathering was significantly embraced by the Australian and New Zealand arts sector, and we hope to develop other initiatives and programs to better service makers and presenters of exciting contemporary works.

The implications of developing, delivering and communicating two distinct but connected Gatherings simultaneously were well managed by a small, tightly resourced team. The rapid shift to a fully digital program was decided as a team with input from the sector and stakeholders.

The learnings from our first hybrid Gathering were incorporated into the structure and planning for the Darwin Gathering. We remain committed to continuing to work in a hybrid approach as a means of providing greater accessibility for artists, producers and presenters nationally and internationally and in response to the likelihood of ongoing disruption from the effects of climate change. The APAM team is grateful for the generous and detailed feedback received from Gathering participants through the survey and other means which provide learnings and directions for improvements.

## Partnerships

We are grateful for the ongoing support of the Australia Council for the Arts, particularly the international and sector development teams alongside the support of the Victorian Government and the staff and Creative Victoria. Thanks to Darwin Festival and team and the support of the Northern Territory Government through ArtBack NT and ACCOMPLICE. We also thank our partners at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the National Foundation for Australia–China Relations as well as Creative New Zealand, Canadian Heritage and the Consulate General of Canada in Sydney.



**APAM Gathering at Darwin Festival  
by the Numbers**

October 2021

The following data has been drawn from Participant Registrations and recorded responses to post-Gathering Surveys and Evaluations.

## Registered Participants

+ **451** participants registered to attend the Gathering

+ **169** of whom were international participants, representing **24** Countries. APAM supported the attendance of **97** of these participants.

+ **282** of whom were from Australia, of which:

- + **35%** came from VIC
- + **21%** from NSW
- + **17%** from NT
- + **9%** from QLD
- + **9%** from SA
- + **7%** from WA
- + **1%** from TAS
- + **1%** from the ACT

Of the Australian participants:

- + **102 (36%)** of participants identified as Artist/Maker
- + **100 (35%)** of participants identified as Producer
- + **38 (14%)** of participants identified as Presenter
- + **28 (10%)** of participants identified as Government
- + **12 (4%)** of participants identified as Advocate
- + **2 (1%)** of participants identified as Agent/Tour Manager

+ **29** participants came from New Zealand (representing **6%** of all participants or **17%** of international participants)



# Gathering Programming

The Gathering included **43** virtual sessions, across the following program streams:

- + **2** x Official Opening & Closing
- + **2** x Showcase
- + **6** x Profile
- + **5** x Exchange pre-recorded sessions
- + **12** x Exchange live sessions
- + **11** x First Nations Industry Program & First Timers
- + **1** x Darwin Festival livestream performance
- + **4** x Sessions produced by partner organisations (including ArtBack NT, Theatre Network Australia, ACCOMPLICE, Darwin Festival)

## + SHOWCASE

+ The APAM Gathering included **14** Showcase works from the Darwin Festival program.

+ Of these works, **4** were created by First Nations artists.

## + PROFILE

+ **125** artists/organisations applied for a spot in the Profile program, across the two.

+ Artist/Maker streams: Here's What We Made and Here's Our Idea.

+ **35** successfully presented in **1** of the **4** Profile sessions for Artists/Makers scheduled across the APAM Gathering.

+ **9** presenters/curators applied for a spot in Profile: Here's How We Work. All were presented.

+ **9** of the successful projects identified as being Australian First Nations-led.

+ **4** of the successful project artists/organisations are based in New Zealand.

## + LOCAL PLAYERS

+ The Gathering included two sessions curated and produced by ArtBack NT, featuring artists, companies, producers and presenters who live and work in the Northern Territory:

+ **1** x IRL, featuring **12** individuals (all artists)

+ **1** x online, featuring **9** individuals

## + FIRST NATIONS INDUSTRY PROGRAM

+ **39** individuals were admitted to the First Nations Industry Program. Of the successful applicants:

+ **26** are Australian

+ **9** are New Zealander

+ **4** are Canadian

## + FIRST TIMER PROGRAM

+ **44** individuals were admitted to the First Timers program. Of the successful applicants:

+ **32** are Australian

+ **6** are New Zealander

+ **5** are Canadian

+ **1** is from Hong Kong

## + DIGITAL PLATFORM: SWAPCARD

+ Of Australian Participants

+ **1,513** connection requests were sent

+ **1,019** connection requests were accepted

+ Of International Participants

+ **671** connection requests were sent

+ **491** connection requests were accepted

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# APPAm