

# on the ground & in the know

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THE VICTORIA-ASIA  
CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT  
RESEARCH REPORT  
2013



Full report available at [asialink.unimelb.edu.au/art/artsresearchreport\\_vic](http://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/art/artsresearchreport_vic)

# FOREWORD

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For over 20 years Asialink has been at the forefront of leadership, research, advocacy and program delivery in Australia-Asia engagement. In order to embrace the exciting possibilities of the rapidly developing region, Asialink has identified the need for Australia to develop deeper and more sustainable modes of engagement, and enhance the Asia-capability of people and organisations across all sectors.

To do this effectively requires good quality information and data. This is available for many industries, but lacking in the cultural sector. To redress this 'data deficit,' Asialink Arts, with the support of Arts Victoria, developed *The Victoria-Asia Cultural Engagement Research Report*. The objective was to gather data, evidence of best practice strategies and identify the needs of key stakeholders, artists and arts organisations. The wealth of resulting information may be used to guide the development of policies and strategies to further develop Asia engagement and capability over the next five years.

This summary contains key findings, recommendations, and proposed actions and initiatives arising from the research. A PDF of the full report can be accessed at [asialink.unimelb.edu.au/art/artsresearchreport\\_vic](http://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/art/artsresearchreport_vic)

The research reveals the extensive diversity, depth and richness of the cultural relationships that have evolved and are ongoing between Victorian artists and organisations and various Asian countries. This is a testament to the curiosity, energy and entrepreneurship of Victorian

artists, curators, producers and arts organisations. It is also indicative of how much has already been achieved, particularly over the last five years.

One of the key recommendations arising from the research is the need for high level leadership to advocate the value of cultural exchange between Australia and Asia, and its contribution to innovation and nurturing positive social, economic and cultural relationships. It is hoped that this challenge will be embraced by senior political, government, business and community leaders in order to encourage investment in Asia-Australia cultural exchange and build the Asia-capability of the Australian cultural sector. In particular there are opportunities for both the philanthropic and corporate sectors to contribute to this important project.

Both Asialink Arts and Arts Victoria welcome feedback and widespread discussion about the data and recommendations of *The Victoria-Asia Cultural Engagement Research Report*. We are grateful to the many artists, arts managers and organisations across government, not-for-profit and commercial arts sectors who have contributed their valuable time to this project. They have been enthusiastic pioneers in international engagement and continue to contribute to the extraordinary flourishing of cultural relationships and exchanges with Asia.



**Mr Sid Myer AM**  
Chairman  
Asialink



**Lesley Alway**  
Director  
Asialink Arts

# ENGAGEMENT AT A GLANCE

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It is broadly acknowledged that cultural engagement is a crucial pathway for developing and deepening Australia's relationship with Asia. *The Victoria-Asia Cultural Engagement Research Report* was developed to better understand the quantity and quality of Asian engagement of the Victorian cultural sector, and to suggest initiatives and strategies based on these findings. The research model comprised:

- A quantitative and qualitative survey sent to 245 Victorian arts organisations. Eighty-six organisations responded, equating a 35 per cent rate of return.
- Four roundtable discussions divided into government, non-profit, commercial and individual practitioners.

Thirty-six participants representing a range of art forms, organisations, activities and industry levels took part.

- A review of existing data collected by organisations and funding bodies.
- A review and analysis of existing Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on trade in cultural goods and services.

Where possible, the relevant data period was the past five years (2008-2012) and projecting forward to the next five years (2013-2017).



*Wedhus Gembel*, created by Snuff Puppets and Indonesian Artists. Image courtesy of Snuff Puppets

**“From a broader point of view we need to think ‘What does Asia want?’ What are the things that we are sending to Asia that they are going to be interested in?... Let’s find out the work that resonates and really support that rather than taking a blanket approach.”**

— Roundtable participant, 2013

# KEY FINDINGS

## Regions which received rating as 'priority' and 'high priority' over the last and next five years

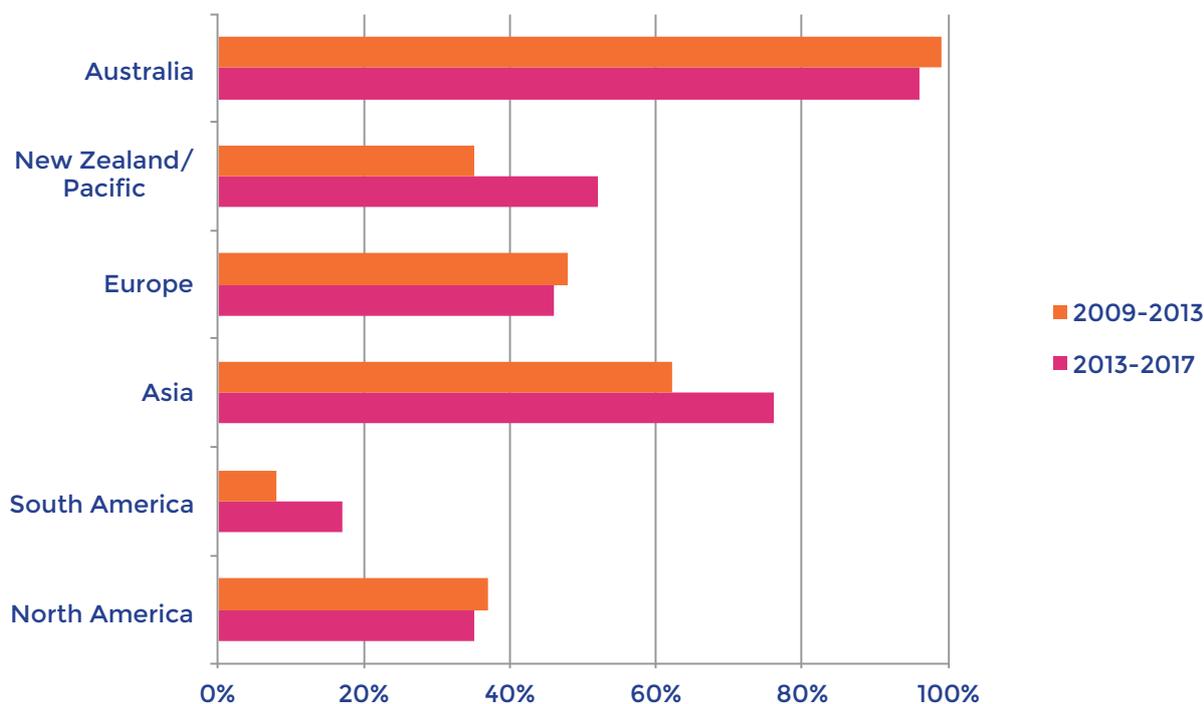


Figure 1. Source: Victoria-Asia Cultural Engagement Survey, 2013

The overall picture arising from the research project is one of a developing maturity in the Victorian arts sector with regard to the opportunities and challenges of engaging with Asia. Arts organisations are looking to increase their engagement with Asia over the next five years and want the tools and support to facilitate this. There is a great deal of realism and pragmatism from the sector about the challenges, prospects and potential role of government interventions in this area.

- Asia is a priority for more than 60 per cent of organisations. Engagement with Asia is a higher priority for arts organisations in the next five years compared to the previous five years.
- Fifty-four per cent of organisations surveyed have a specific Asia strategy. Key countries for Asia focus are India, Indonesia, China, Japan, Singapore and South Korea.
- Key reasons for cultural engagement are cultural exchange, creative development, cultural diplomacy, business development and research.
- The key activities were: touring; residencies; professional development; and exhibitions.

- The key outcomes were: knowledge, skills and networks; organisational profile and reputation; and marketing and audience development.
- Smaller organisations and individual artists were more active in cultural exchange initiatives and more willing to take risks than larger organisations that had a greater requirement to balance commercial returns with cultural exchange.
- There is recognition that one-off projects do not necessarily lead to sustainable relationships.
- Successful engagement with Asia requires a long-term commitment and substantial investment.
- Long-term relationships require repeat visitation, people-to-people communication and opportunities for two-way exchange and collaboration.
- Return on investment is most frequently quantified in terms of increased profile, skills, knowledge, confidence and demonstrating the diversity of contemporary Australia, in addition to financial returns.

**“We should be leading the way in viewing our region and how we engage with it in a really active way.”**

— Roundtable participant, 2013

**“One of the difficulties is sustaining the communication and developing ongoing relationships. It takes time and it can’t be a one-off flash in the pan – you’ve got to build an understanding and a relationship, and from that some fairly important things will come.”**

— Roundtable participant, 2013



Crosshatched team, 2013. Manohar Lal, Sandra Bowkett, Ann Ferguson and Banay Singh. Image courtesy of the artist

- Key challenges and barriers to effective Asia engagement were identified as:
  - access to sufficient resources to make a long-term sustainable commitment;
  - investment in sufficient ‘in-country’ research to develop appropriate partners, navigate local logistics and planning timeframes and understand local audiences;
  - a lack of organisational capacity including cross-cultural understanding and relevant experience and relationships in Asia;
  - access to flexible funding models to respond to opportunities as they arise; and
  - access to better information and contacts about local infrastructure and business models.
- Organisations want to learn from others’ experiences in Asia through local networking across art forms and would value strong advocacy from cultural leaders about the importance of cultural engagement with Asia across all sectors.
- Many respondents to the survey provided data on Asia-related projects and activities over the last five years. Approximately 144 inbound and outbound projects cited.
- The review of data relating to Victoria-based individual artists and cultural producers revealed over 130 projects that were supported by either Asialink, the Australia Council, Arts Victoria or the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Many organisations generously shared details of their Asia engagement plans for the next five years. Forty-six future projects were cited.
- Available ABS data on trade in cultural goods and services is inadequate to give a nuanced picture of Australia or Victoria’s engagement in cultural services and activities with Asia.

## Key outcomes of cultural engagement with Asia

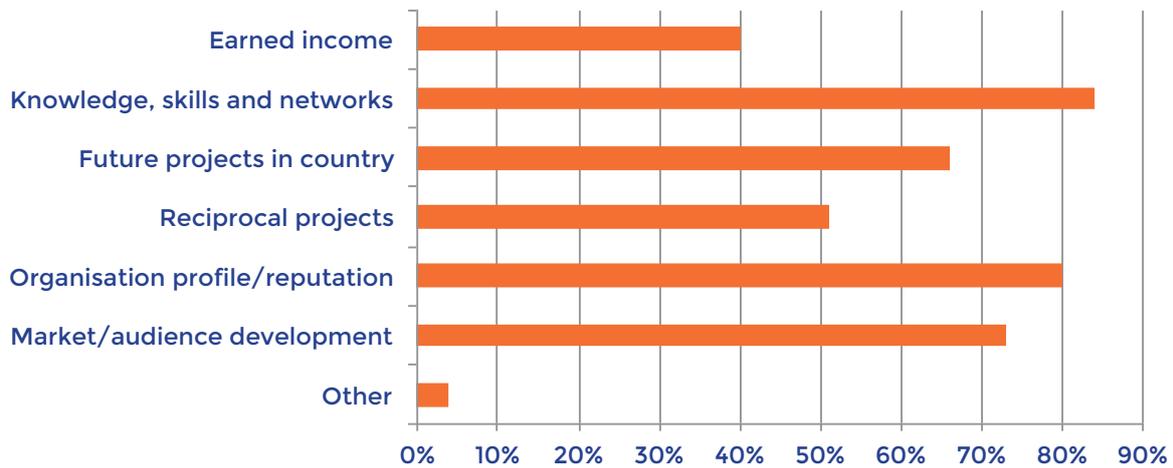


Figure 2. Source: Victoria-Asia Cultural Engagement Survey, 2013

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations respond to key priorities that were consistently identified by the survey respondents and sector consultation participants. To improve Victoria-Asia engagement the following seven strategies are recommended:

1. Develop long-term, sustainable relationships rather than one-off projects.
2. Support opportunities for two-way exchange in projects.
3. Build individual and organisational Asia-capability and knowledge.
4. Coordinate opportunities for peer-to-peer networking.
5. Provide access to quality information and advice, including documentation about opportunities, logistics and experiences.
6. Promote the 'value' of cultural engagement with Asia through advocacy and leadership at the political, bureaucratic and key agency levels to other areas of government, business and the community.
7. Invest in research on Asia-Australia cultural engagement and capability to ensure Australia is at the forefront of best practice in this field.



Photography: Chen Xu. Image courtesy of Melbourne Festival

## RECOMMENDED STRATEGY

## PROPOSED ACTIONS AND INITIATIVES

### 1. Develop long-term relationships

Resource the development of long-term, sustainable relationships rather than support one-off projects

- ◆ Seed funding research to assess opportunities and develop networks.
- ◆ Country-specific strategy funding to develop long-term engagement programs.
- ◆ Responsive, flexible funding to maximise uptake of opportunities.

### 2. Support opportunities for two-way exchange

- ◆ Funding for hosting inbound visitors.
- ◆ Enhanced opportunities and resources for reciprocal residencies.
- ◆ Connect inbound projects through arts organisations in Australia, for example, Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV).
- ◆ Pilot 'virtual' engagement models.

### 3. Build individual and organisational Asia-capability and knowledge

Implement a range of training and professional development opportunities both in Australia and in Asia to develop Asia capabilities

- ◆ Position Australia as a leader in cultural engagement with Asia by investing in key organisations and infrastructure.
- ◆ Develop specialised cultural trade delegations and cultural components of business delegations.
- ◆ Use established Asia engagement programs/projects as mentoring and professional development opportunities for emerging arts leaders.
- ◆ Develop a paid internship program for graduates to work on Asia engagement projects.
- ◆ Resource and profile a range of regional Victoria-Asia engagement projects and programs.
- ◆ Expand residency opportunities and provide options for shorter residencies.
- ◆ Develop specialised training on best practice cultural engagement, including how to present and market Asian cultural programs in Victoria.

### 4. Coordinate opportunities for peer-to-peer networking

Opportunities to meet and share knowledge and project information across art forms with other organisations/artists working in Asia

- ◆ Facilitate seminars and workshops to profile and discuss Asia engagement programs and projects.
- ◆ Develop a comprehensive residency induction program.
- ◆ Develop a post-residency alumni network.

### 5. Provide access to quality information and advice

Coordination and sharing of information and documentation on cultural engagement and trade with Asia

- ◆ Document programs and projects both digitally and in high quality print formats.
- ◆ Include an Asia focus in all relevant cultural sector conferences.
- ◆ Develop an Asia engagement web portal that hosts project documentation/blogs/information and other resources.

### 6. Promote the 'value' of cultural exchange with Asia through high level leadership

Advocate for the importance and value of cultural engagement strategies and programs across governments, business and the community

- ◆ Promotion by senior political, government, business and community leaders of the cultural, social and economic value of cultural engagement with Asia.
- ◆ Advocacy to the philanthropic and corporate sectors on the opportunities for and benefits of supporting Asia-related programs and capability.

### 7. Invest in research on Asia-Australia cultural engagement and capability

Position Australia as a leader in best practice Asia cultural engagement and capability by investing in R&D in this emerging field

- ◆ Extend the research to other states and territories to capture national data.
- ◆ Explore 'concept mapping' as a tool to map cultural engagement outcomes and to capture the value of new models.
- ◆ Document best practice case studies.
- ◆ Identify both local and international 'Asia-capability' training and development models and program opportunities for the cultural sector.
- ◆ Investigate 'virtual' models for international cultural engagement.
- ◆ Identify opportunities and barriers to increasing philanthropic and corporate support for cultural engagement with Asia.

## ASIALINK ARTS

Asialink Arts is based at the University of Melbourne. Its role is to expand opportunities for cultural exchange between Australia and Asia and develop the Asia-capability of the cultural sector based on the principles of partnership, collaboration and reciprocity. Asialink Arts manages four key programs: the Residency Program; Exhibition Touring; Writing Exchange Program; and Utopia@Asialink.

Three strategic priorities of Asialink Arts are to:

- Prepare the next generation of arts leaders to develop the skills, knowledge, networks and experience to work effectively and with confidence in Asia;
- Operate Asialink Arts programs as a laboratory to develop, test and communicate new models and platforms for cultural exchange to position Australia as a key cultural partner within the region; and
- Contribute to the development of best practice Australian international cultural policy that encompasses both creative and market development as well as cultural diplomacy strategies.

## ARTS VICTORIA

Arts Victoria is the Victorian Government's arts funding and policy body, located in Melbourne, Australia. Established in 1972, the organisation is part of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and reports to the Minister for the Arts. Arts Victoria is responsible for making the arts accessible to all Victorians and for supporting and developing Victoria's artists and creative industries. Arts Victoria's International Program was established in 1995 in recognition that the Australian market is small and provides limited exposure opportunities for Australian artists. A key focus of the International Program has been developing and maintaining opportunities in established markets in the UK, Europe and North America, while also supporting new opportunities in emerging markets, such as Asia.

The Victoria-Asia Cultural Engagement Research Report is an initiative of Asialink Arts and Arts Victoria.



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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