

Launch: Diverse Screens Parramatta

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Acknowledgement of Country

I would like to begin by acknowledging that these films were made on the land of Barramattagal of the Darug nation, the Traditional Owners and custodians of this land. We acknowledge the present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who reside within this area and pay respects to elders past, present and future.

VIP Acknowledgement

I would also like to acknowledge Councilor Paul Han, from the North Rocks Ward, City of Parramatta and representing the Mayor, Councilor Nathan Hegarty, Liverpool City Council and Rajni Luthra, Editor of Indian Link.

Launch

There is a question that seems to occupy our politicians, media and commentators frequently: what is the value of the arts?

In a world obsessed with accounting, numbers, profit and economic growth, we are often asked to quantify what the arts are worth: what do they bring? What benefits do they bring?

According to Yuval Noah Harari, in his book *Sapiens: a short history of humankind*, storytelling is at the foundation of all societies: it is what binds us and brings us together – it gives us a sense of who we are. Storytelling defines our history, our identity and what we strive to be.

And it is here we begin to understand the value of the arts.



The arts are the vehicle for telling our stories: they remind us of who we are, where we have come from and describe our aspirations. In fact, the arts do more than that: they create potential of what we want to be in.

The arts at their most powerful act, not only as a mirror to who we are, but a lens into what we dream to become.

Controversial German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, talked about the artists as creating a dissonance by constructing the moment that takes us out of our everyday world. This moment creates a threshold for us to cross: as we cross this threshold, we are taken from one world to another – were we see everything differently. Heidegger was talking of the poet and the painter, today poets and painters are joined by film makers and other contemporary artists.

But what happens when this artform excludes rather than includes? Or when the artforms present stereotypes that marginalise entire sections of our community. This creates a disconnection – it excludes and creates tension, for if we are not included in the stories that define who we are, then how can we ever feel we belong?

And it is this that we, at Diversity Arts Australia (affectionally known as DARTS), as so focussed on confronting.

DARTS's vision for the DIVERSE SCREENS project is to develop a national map of screen-based stories by culturally diverse filmmakers exploring issues and themes about cultural diversity and inclusion in the arts and creative sector. By asking filmmakers to address these issues in a creative way, we also hope to explore creative change and solutions to barriers and difficult issues.

The Diverse Screens project began in 2017 by inviting four South West Sydney filmmakers to address these issues and was funded by Liverpool and Fairfield Councils. Their films subsequently screened throughout Australia, in Canada and at the Adelaide Fringe Festival.

This project: Diverse Screens Parramatta

DARTS was successful in procuring funding from Parramatta City Council to invite filmmakers to tell their



stories. Each geographic area has distinctive issues and we believe this approach provides insights into the similarities and differences across different communities. This strategic project positions the artists as advocates, and creates powerful and engaging films which double as training and advocacy tools.

Parramatta filmmakers Vonne Patiag, Rashmi Ravindran and Gary Paramanathan took on the subject of cultural diversity and inclusion in the Australian creative sector, warts and all. They were awarded the grants as part of the Diverse Screens Parramatta project managed by Diversity Arts Australia (DARTS) and funded by City of Parramatta's Community Building grants program and Create NSW. DARTS anticipates these films will provide a moment for people to reflect, learn and think about how we can represent greater cultural and geographic diversity on screen.