



Diversity Arts
Australia



'Roil Horizon' by:
Zachary Lopez,
I Am Not A Virus, 2020/21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lost Work 2.0 Report: The impacts of the pandemic on creatives of colour and First Nations creatives

MARCH 2022

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Acknowledgement of Country

Diversity Arts Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of Australia from over 250 Indigenous nations. Diversity Arts Australia's national office is in Parramatta on the traditional land of the Burramattagal of the Darug nation.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Always was. Always will be. Aboriginal Land.

Diversity Arts Australia encourages the dissemination and sharing of information in this report.

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Diversity Arts Australia (DARTS) is Australia's key organisation promoting cultural and racial equity across the creative sector.

DARTS works to build a creative sector that reflects Australia's true cultural diversity and believes creative expression is a fundamental human right, which strengthens and connects communities.

Diversity Arts acknowledges and thanks BlakDance and Koorie Heritage Trust for their contributions to this report.





OF EACH OTHER!

INTRODUCTION

Diversity Arts Australia (DARTS) is pleased to share the results of the Lost Work 2.0 report, building on research conducted from May 2020 in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lost Work 2.0 gathered data on the impacts of COVID-19 on First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) creatives one year into the pandemic. For this survey, questions about emotional wellbeing and the impacts of intensified racism in the #BlackLivesMatter and #StopAsianHate era were added. The latest analysis shows these groups have experienced heightened financial, mental and physical health strain due to increased bigotry, border closures and lost paid work from concurrent lockdowns. Furthermore, these communities, who already faced structural barriers in the industry, have had their precarity and sense of unstable work intensify, with almost 80% reporting lost income.

One welcome surprise from the Lost Work 2.0 report is 35% of respondents identified as First Nations creatives. We thank BlakDance and Koorie Heritage Trust for their critical consultation and labour, particularly in ensuring that the First Nations recommendations are reflective of the distinctive experiences of First Nations creatives.

DARTS hopes Lost Work 2.0 leads to more robust economic and professional support for First Nations and CaLD artists during this critical moment in time. We recommend the data be used in service of an industry-led, anti-racist framework and strategy embedded into organisational practices. Thank you to the DARTS team who worked on this research, in particular, Research and Policy Manager Alexia Derbas and Researcher Dr Rosalie Atie.

Lena Nahlous
CEO, Diversity Arts Australia

BACKGROUND

“Due to lockdown, lack of opportunities (gigs and work) leads back to lack of income, lack of income/funding means it is impossible to finish upcoming projects which are meant to create more opportunities and work for the future. You need money to make money basically.” **Report Participant**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating impacts on Australia’s creative and arts sectors. Work has been lost, jobs and gigs cancelled or postponed, and futures threatened. For culturally diverse and First Nations artists and creative workers, experiences of lost work and income are further intensified by rising racism, both institutional and interpersonal. The work of these artists and creative workers urgently needs to be supported if the Australian creative sector is to genuinely reflect the experiences of all Australians as they attempt to recover from the pandemic.

This report presents the findings for Diversity Arts Australia’s (DARTS) *Lost Work for Creatives of Colour and Organisations 2.0* report. This report follows DARTS’ first *Lost Work* report from March 2020, which found evidence of negative impacts of the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Lost Work 2.0* aimed to collect data on the impacts of the pandemic a year on.

The *Lost Work 2.0* report collected 191 responses from 29 March 2021 to 31 May 2021 and aimed to gather data from a diverse range of artists and creative workers on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work and wellbeing. We have collected evidence of lost work and its impacts on financial and emotional wellbeing, and evidence of experiences of racism and its impact on the work and wellbeing of respondents.

This round of the report saw a large percentage of First Nations respondents with 35% identifying as First Nations. As Diversity Arts focuses on ethno-cultural and migrant racial equity in the arts, cultural and creative industries, we recognise our limitations in speaking to these findings and advocating for First Nations communities. In coming to recommendations, we have consulted with BlakDance and Koorie Heritage Trust on our findings and sought their advice regarding First Nations artists and creative workers. These organisations were not originally consulted in report design,

however, as the report was aimed at CaLD communities. We present the findings of *Lost Work 2.0* whilst acknowledging that the settler migrant experience cannot be conflated with the ongoing experience of colonisation for First Nations people.

A quick note, too, on our use of the term “Culturally and Linguistically Diverse” (CaLD): DARTS acknowledges the limitations of this terminology, as well as the flattening effect it has on addressing diverse communities with diverse needs. Throughout this report we refer to CaLD respondents as they identify: as first, second or third generation migrants, or from ethnic communities. Unfortunately, CaLD artists and creative workers, regardless of cultural background, are collectively experiencing significant changes to how they work and live during the pandemic. For this reason, we use CaLD, while acknowledging that the term can’t capture the nuance and lived experience of different people based on culture, ethnicity, residential status, language, class, gender and sexuality. At times we refer to CaLD respondents as people and creatives of colour to further emphasise that non-white communities experience the problems we are presenting around lost work and wellbeing through the framework of race and of being racialised people.

The report presents data on the following themes: lost income and its impacts; racism and racialised exclusion and its impacts; the Black Lives Matter movement and its effects on organisations and individuals; wellbeing of respondents, including financial and emotional; and, finally, an exploration of the kinds of support creatives need.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1 Most respondents lost income due to the pandemic. 79.1% of respondents have lost or expect to lose income as a result of COVID-19. First Nations respondents indicated higher rates of lost income at 85.3%.

"Both of my industries have been completely cut with Covid, there has been almost no work since Australia's borders closed to international students, there is some online teaching work but it tends to go to the permanent non CaLD employees and then within the museum world, again all contract and casual staff have been let go in favour of permanent, usually non CaLD and usually male workers."

Report Participant

- 2 Women are slightly more likely to have lost income during the pandemic. For female respondents, 79.1% indicated they lost income, compared to 67.9% of men. 16.5% indicated this was more than half their usual income.
- 3 Income loss has had far-reaching implications for diverse creatives, with many citing worsening precarity and increased job cancellations due to public health orders.
- 4 Financial insecurity is rife amongst diverse creatives. Concerningly, around half of respondents indicated that they had experienced problems paying their rent or mortgage, their bills and medical care.
- 5 Financial supports provided during the pandemic have provided some respite to respondents. In particular, JobKeeper or JobSeeker support from the Australian government was accessed by 44% of respondents.
- 6 Racism is common and has increased during the pandemic. 53.4% of respondents reported they had experienced racism prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most (72.3%) believe it to have gotten worse during the COVID-19 context.

"There is a greater sense of being other and seen as such when walking in my neighbourhood or at the supermarket and in everyday life. Eg. at the height of the pandemic, people in my neighbourhood would never step aside but would 'force' me to be the one who walked aside or onto the road to keep 'social distancing'!"

Report Participant

- 7 Racism continues to deeply affect creatives of colour and First Nations creatives. Asian/Asian Australian respondents have shared stories of increased racism due to the racialisation of COVID-19. Creatives of colour who participated in our report experienced hyper-surveillance and the policing of their behaviour, but they also noted that racism is not new and is ingrained in the structures of Australian society (including the arts).
- 8 The arts and creative sectors have had their processes and practices impacted by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, with which comes extra burden for First Nations and Black artists and creative workers, and organisations.
- 9 Emotional wellbeing and mental health in the COVID-19 context is of grave concern. Respondents reported much lower levels of ability to "snap back" after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to pre-COVID levels.
- 10 Grants and government financial assistance were most often mentioned when respondents were asked what would help them. Ongoing and paid, secure work, mentoring opportunities, advocacy, and relationship building are crucial to respondents.

"I lost weekly lessons in a community centre which had potential for growth. Also I lost the opportunity to run regular workshops. I lost already arranged gigs and performances, and also I lost two bands which one of those I formed myself."

Report Participant



DISCUSSION

The Lost Work 2.0 report demonstrates how the COVID-19 pandemic, and associated restrictions and lockdowns, has had devastating impacts on First Nations and culturally diverse creatives, artists and organisations. Significantly, we have found that most First Nations and CaLD artists and creative workers have experienced a loss of work, increasing racism, stress, anxiety and depression, and an inability to pay bills, rent and their mortgage. The wellbeing of creatives of colour and First Nations creatives is of primary concern, with women more likely to experience financial insecurity. Younger women, in particular, have been shown to have lost more work during the pandemic.¹ Financial insecurity and racism are health issues which require structural interventions.

The precarity of the arts and creative sectors have national and global economic ramifications. UNESCO's 2022 Global Report, *Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity – Addressing culture as a global public good*, demonstrates global inequities in cultural production, highlighting that “inclusive and equitable cultural participation” must be supported to ensure sustainable development.² The report has shown how climate action and environmental sustainability, too, must include investment in creativity and diverse creative expressions. Importantly the UNESCO findings are framed in terms of human rights and fundamental freedoms, recommending: affirmative action in promoting diversity in cultural participation, “improving the status of the artist”, building “capacities to protect artists and cultural professionals’ social and economic rights”, and, supporting international human rights frameworks via “local monitoring systems and concrete implementation mechanisms”.³ Further, DARTS also makes recommendations which work towards eliminating “precarious labour practices in the cultural sector such as short-term contracts, long working hours and pay gaps.”⁴

Our findings are contextualised with research previously conducted by DARTS, which found that during the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, lost work, increasing racism and negative impacts of the pandemic on wellbeing were already of grave concern.⁵ Clearly, almost two years into the pandemic, such issues are still at the fore of the experiences of creatives of colour. Further, research conducted in 2020 by First Nations performing arts organisations has reported on the needs of First Nations artists and creative workers during the pandemic.⁶ The report states that there is “an urgent need to ensure impacts of the virus on First Nations Elders are minimized to ensure ongoing cultural leadership, to maintain the arts as a key source of economic empowerment for First Nations people, and to ensure survival of the world’s longest continuously living culture”.⁷ Research therefore indicates the long-term effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had, and is likely to continue to have, on First Nations and CaLD people as Australia and the creative sector recover.

Research also suggests creatives of colour face significant job insecurity. Diversity Arts Australia’s 2019 report, *Shifting the Balance: Cultural Diversity in Leadership Within the Australian Arts, Screen and Creative Sectors*, provides important context for the findings presented in this report.⁸ At the time, our research found that “CaLD Australians were under-represented across every leadership role in every cultural sector, organisational type and jurisdiction” measured.⁹ While CaLD Australians are heavily involved in the creative industries, rarely are they in leadership positions or positions which offer financial stability and security. We believe that structural changes to arts organisations can lead to more equitable experiences of being an artist or creative worker during the international crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Equity Economics and Australians Investing in Women (2021) *Changing the Trajectory: Investing in Women for a Fairer Future*.
2. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, *Executive Summary: Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity – Addressing culture as a global public good* (2022), 32.
3. Ibid., 35.
4. Ibid., 36.
5. Diversity Arts Australia (2020) *Lost Work for Creatives of Colour: Results from Our Report* www.diversityarts.org.au/lost-work-creative-colour-results-report
6. ILBIJERRI, Yirra Yaakin, BlakDance & Moogahlin (2020) *First Nations COVID-19 Performing Arts Wellbeing Report: Summary of Findings*.
7. Ibid., 4.
8. Diversity Arts Australia, BYP Group and Western Sydney University (2019) *Shifting the Balance: Cultural Diversity in Leadership Within the Australian Arts, Screen and Creative Sectors*, Sydney
9. Diversity Arts Australia, BYP Group and Western Sydney University (2019) *Shifting the Balance: Cultural Diversity in Leadership Within the Australian Arts, Screen and Creative Sectors*, Sydney, 2.



DISCUSSION

Further, 2020-2021 marked a significant shift in the creative sector, with increasing visibility around issues of racism due to mass anti-racism movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) and #StopAsianHate. Monique Choy writes in ArtsHub: "It was the year that saw Chris Lilley's blackface comedy shows removed from Netflix, a Sydney Film Festival film edited after criticisms about racial representation, Jack Callil and Bec Kavanagh stepping down from a cohort of 'all-white' arts critics at the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, as well as public criticism around racial representation levelled at NIDA, Josh Thomas, Canberra Writers Festival, and the Rob Guest Endowment. These conversations have continued into 2021, with the leaking of the report into the Collingwood AFL club's culture of systemic racism."¹⁰ Choy also cites Creatives of Colour research, which found that the top problem faced by artists of colour was 'the white lens and how it tokenises and exoticifies people of colour'. According to founder Rani Pramesti, 'COVID only exacerbated the existing systemic inequalities and barriers that creatives of colour were already experiencing in the creative sector.'¹¹

DARTS intends for the Lost Work research to provide insights into the experiences of those who are the most underrepresented in the arts and creative sectors, as they navigate the COVID-19 pandemic reality. The pandemic has exposed inequalities in our national and international communities and as Pramesti states above, barriers to diverse creatives' participation in the arts risk becoming further entrenched as communities recover. First Nations organisations assert that it is "vital that support for First Nations culture remains central across portfolios in the policy response. Culture is the foundation of First Nations health and wellbeing and is now more important than ever."¹² This also follows Article 5 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which requires that "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their rights to participate fully,

if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State."¹³ Australia endorsed the Declaration in 2009. Under the declaration, states are required to provide redress to First Nations people for loss of land and life. Our recommendations below follow such commitments.

Since the impacts of the pandemic are likely to continue to be compounded, ongoing support and research is needed. UNESCO warns the global community that the "economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with its impact on cultural employment, raises serious concerns, such as the risk of a talent drain."¹⁴ UNESCO calls for economic and social conditions which facilitate professional development for artists and creative workers. As a respondent in our report states:

"I think we won't know the full extent of the impact until down the line. Effects have not been immediate but a lot of the programs we report against for our funding have been severely affected by COVID and we will need to rebuild."

Report Participant



Illustration by
Clara Yee

10. Monique Choy (2021) 'COVID one year on: Impacts on creatives of colour,' Artshub, www.artshub.com.au/news/features/covid-one-year-on-impacts-on-creatives-of-colour-262607-2371033/

11. Ibid.

12. ILBIJERRI, Yirra Yaakin, BlakDance & Moogahlin (2020) *First Nations COVID-19 Performing Arts Wellbeing Report: Summary of Findings*, 4.

13. United Nations (2007) *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*.

14. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Executive Summary: Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity – Addressing culture as a global public good* (2022), 7.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We must collectively ensure our creative sector does not become more inequitable and unrepresentative as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. In line with what respondents in the Lost Work 2.0 report have told us, DARTS makes the following recommendations.

We begin with First Nations recommendations which have been made in consultation with BlakDance and Koorie Heritage Trust. Recommendations 4-11 are not First Nations-specific, but follow the issues arising from our report findings as they relate to CaLD, POC, migrant, as well as First Nations artists and creative workers.

1

Targeted support for First Nations artists and creative workers:

Small-medium First Nations businesses and organisations require targeted financial support to remedy the crisis state of employment pathways for First Nations artists and creative workers. Funding must be increased for self-determined First Nations arts organisations, in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which requires government funding be targeted to Australian First Nations people as a result of their land being usurped. Sovereignty has never been ceded and First Nations people are still directly impacted by the generations of trauma and loss since Invasion.

2

Platform First Nations artists and creative workers:

Create processes and settings for artists and performers who are not employees of organisations to have their voices and needs foregrounded, particularly in terms of what it means for First Nations artists and creative workers to engage in the sector meaningfully and safely.

3

First Nations procurement:

The sector requires procurement policies and practices seeking work from First Nations artists and creative workers – and not just culturally specific work. This necessitates a national standard for providing economic and business opportunities to First Nations businesses, artists and creative workers, facilitating ethical Indigenous creative control.

4

Industry led anti-racism strategy:

The Australia Council for the Arts, Screen Australia and State/ Territory arts and screen agencies must develop anti-racism strategies, campaigns and frameworks, and embed this work in their programs. The arts and creative sectors are not immune to racism, as found in this research.

5

Focused COVID-19 Support Packages:

All support packages must be equity-tested to ensure they support the most marginalised people in an already precarious industry. A minimum of 30 percent of COVID-19 relief and funding for the creative sector should be earmarked for CaLD, POC and migrant organisations, artists and programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6

Strengthen underrepresented CaLD employment in the creative sector:

Introduce targeted programs focused on creating CaLD employment, supporting micro businesses and strengthening existing businesses. Develop programs to retain CaLD talent, including internships and mentoring opportunities.

7

Invest in the arts and creative sectors:

Develop dedicated CaLD, POC and migrant artist funding opportunities, and the development of programs that receive longer-term funding (3-5 years). CaLD artists and creative workers require greater certainty and job security.

8

Emotional wellbeing and mental health:

Develop and bolster culturally appropriate and culturally safe programs and support tailored to the arts and creative sectors to address emotional wellbeing and mental health. The work of organisations such as Creative Recovery should be supported to work within CaLD, POC and migrant community contexts.



Illustration by Nin Hol

9

Diversity, equity and inclusion:

Support creative sector organisations to undertake the educational work of diversity, equity and inclusion. Provide funding for cultural and racial equity capacity-building programs and support, with priority to this work being led by CaLD/POC and First Nations-led organisations/ companies (or people with lived experience). Make this work mandatory for organisations and companies receiving Federal and State funding.

10

Intersectional strategies:

Develop strategies to support First Nations women, CaLD women and women of colour who have lost more income than their male counterparts during the pandemic.

11

Inclusive representation:

Commit to national policies in the arts, media, screen, education and creative sector, and minimum diversity standards that promote inclusive representation of First Nations CaLD Australians in the creative sector.