

Case study

Cairns and District Chinese Association

Details

What:

The Cairns and District Chinese Association (CADCAI) delivered a traditional Chinese kites exhibition at the Tanks Arts Centre in Cairns. The exhibition included three Cairns region artists in residence, directed by a Master Chinese Kite Maker (Mr Ou), followed by an exhibition and public workshops in Chinese kite making.

The exhibition was designed as a cultural exchange with Cairns sister city Zhanjiang, China, bringing greater awareness of Chinese culture to Cairns residents and tourists. The exhibition and residency brought the Cairns Chinese community together on several occasions—at the dinner celebrations to welcome Mr Ou from China, the community kite flying day at Palm Cove, the Exhibition opening night, dragon dancing displays and at the Sister Cities Day.

The profiles of four Queensland artists were raised through this exhibition—Arone Meeks, Priscilla Ong and Hayley Gillespie as artists in residence and volunteer artist Liliana Remedi through the three week residency and six week exhibition. Artists were promoted through Tanks Arts Centre marketing, Chinese radio and through the local newspaper.

When:

December 2013 to July 2014

Where:

Tanks Arts Centre, Cairns



Mr Ou giving a kite demonstration – Photo courtesy CADCAI

Key stats:

- Two performances, one exhibition and four workshops
- 59 workshop participants
- 4500 attendees at exhibition
- Five paid artists, one paid worker, 24 volunteers

Arts Queensland contribution:

\$15,386 – Projects and Programs Fund

Contact for further information:

Email: anthony.castles@bigpond.com

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Cadcai/272842992892363>

Outcomes

- Community workshops were held in kite making, teaching both traditional and contemporary ways to make a kite. The workshops attracted participation from James Cook University Bachelor of Creative Industries students with three of these artists exhibiting in the final exhibition at Tanks Arts Centre. Further workshops were held for children aged 4-8 and 8-12, attracting more than 30 participants along with their carers.
- The cultural exchange with Cairns sister city Zhanjiang involved sharing knowledge and skills in traditional Chinese kite making. Artists experimented and explored new contemporary versions of their work through cultural exchange with master kite maker Mr Ou, as well through the sharing of knowledge amongst each other to produce new contemporary works based around the art of traditional Chinese kite making. Artist Arone Meeks was able to share Australian Indigenous culture and other contemporary art practices with the other artists in residence.
- New networks and friendships were developed amongst artists, artworkers and CALD community group members in Cairns enabling new partnerships and collaborations on future projects.



Kids kite workshop – Photo courtesy CADCAI

Audience feedback

Audience feedback regarding the festival's exhibition was positive:

- *Inspirational beautiful creation (Sydney)*
- *Stunning (Philadelphia)*
- *The wow factor (Newcastle)*
- *Fabulous trails of colour taking flight in this wonderful exhibit - great to see such collaboration (Cairns)*
- *Beautiful, sets the imagination soaring (Stratford)*
- *Love the colourfulness (Dublin - Ireland)*
- *Wonderful (Cairns)*

Learnings and reflections

The project manager reflected on the pleasures and challenges of working with other cultures:

This has been a great learning experience in dealing with artists from other countries, in this case China. Many things became lost in translation and through differences in cultural perceptions; this was in spite of having Chinese interpreters and working with the Cairns and District Chinese Association. In hindsight, very little could be done differently as the information was relayed in detail to Chinese correspondents through various means of communication, email; telephone and foreign affairs officials as well as through the Cairns local Chinese community. As project managers, in future we would make greater efforts to explain the project and expectations to the Chinese artist before the project commenced.

Once expectations and objectives were made clear, the program was highly successful, with artists working extremely well in the cross-cultural residency workshop environment. The energy created in the workshop attracted a few volunteers to join the group as well as many curious onlookers.

Additionally, dealing with immigration and the challenges of bringing a Chinese artist into the country was an educational experience; learning about the paperwork required and which community members to call on for support in such instances.