

BIG *h* ART

25 YEARS

PROJECTS. PLACES. PEOPLE.

S M A S H E D

JUNK
T H E O R Y

This is Living

S M A S H E D

G I R L

Pandora Slams the Lid

S M A S

L U C K Y

S M A S H E D

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S K A T E
P R O T E C

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A S H E D

S K A T E
P R O T E C T

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25 YEARS

PROJECTS. PLACES. PEOPLE.



BIG hART

We **Make** Art.

We **Build** Communities.

We **Drive** Change.

“There is no company I admire more in Australia.”

ROBYN ARCHER, OA



Big hART extends our respect and gratitude to the Aboriginal elders, artists, participants and partner organisations who contribute to the daily life of our company.

We acknowledge over 60,000 years of enduring ecological governance, cultural stewardship and diplomacy. Our future is in the belly of the country.

Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.

This document contains reference to / images of Aboriginal peoples who are now deceased.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	10
GIRL	12
PANDORA SLAMS THE LID	16
BECOMING BIG hART	18
DARREN SIMPSON	20
EXPERIMENTATION	22
CONSOLIDATION	28
DRIVE IN HOLIDAY, RADIO HOLIDAY, LUCKY	32
ROBYN ARCHER	38
STICKYBRICKS	40
JUNK THEORY	48
NGAPARTJI NGAPARTJI	54
LEX MARINOS	62
GOLD	64
DRIVE	68
NYUNTU NGALI	74
NAMATJIRA	80
CREATIVE INDUSTRIES	92

YIJALA YALA	96
ALLERY SANDY	118
MUSEUM OF THE LONG WEEKEND	120
COSMOPOLITANA	124
BLUE ANGEL	128
PROJECT O	136
IZZI WARD	144
SKATE	146
ACOUSTIC LIFE OF SHEDS	150
20+20 PROJECT	158
CONCLUSION	160
THANK YOU	162
STAFF	163
BOARD	163
CONTRIBUTORS	164
PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS	170
JOURNALIST CREDITS	172
BOOK DESIGN	172

INTRODUCTION

Big hART premiered its first theatre work, *Girl*, on the 15th of May 1992 in Burnie, North West Tasmania. From the start, the issue of cultural rights was central to the organisation's reason for being. The name Big hART reflected our equal passion for 'heart' and 'art', process and content, values and virtuosity. We complimented this with a sense of 'Big': big scale, big impact, in a big country, with culture at its heart.

Our first project was an experiment in combining the heart and the art - by focusing on how the work was made, who had the right to participate, and whether the quality of art could still be maintained. From the word go, these concepts seemed to resonate with communities, funders and artists, and helped Big hART develop a company voice as well as define a methodology which has fuelled the organisation's productivity for 25 years. Since 1992, Big hART's process for delivering layered projects and tackling complex issues has been developed and refined in response to what we learn from working with new communities, utilising emerging artforms, and evaluating our approach.

This publication is designed to provide a snapshot of Big hART's approach over 25 years. Each project captures something of the serious issues faced by communities, the response and scale of Big hART projects, and the collaborative art that has been made. It also explores the process and the content, and the silent 'h' - the values, the cultural rights at the heart of each project.

Over that time, the company has benefited from the generosity and talents of more than 500 artists, arts-workers, producers and community workers. Big hART's varied product, across different media, is the result of their hard work. There are too many individuals to mention here. In these pages we focus on the communities and the projects they inspired - often years in the making, reflected in images and words.

Scott Rankin
CEO + Creative Director



G I R L

1992 - 1994

MAKE: Theatre

BUILD: Community support for at-risk young people

DRIVE: New approaches to preventing recidivism

CONTEXT – THE HIDDEN STORY

Big hART's first project was created on the North West Coast of Tasmania, in the paper mill town of Burnie.

Like many industrial towns, the paper mill was drastically downsizing and the local economy was in free fall. Families were hurting and youth crime had spiked. These same young people became the focus of public frustration. Simply titled *Girl*, the show was an attempt to respond to issues faced by young people heading towards the juvenile justice system. It set out to build a better understanding of the issues they faced; to stop blaming the victims, and give them a stronger voice. Through participation the young people learned new skills and began to reimagine their future. Although the project was initially viewed with suspicion, it was the end of an era for the town and there was a willingness in the community to try something new.

THE PROCESS

The young people had little interest in the arts, however some of them had made an 'art' of expressing their hurt and anger on the streets of Burnie. Initially engaged in workshops through street work, these young people began to identify with new ways of exploring the issues they faced. Paper was chosen as the main constructing material for the show, and they chose the name Rip and Tear Theatre for their project – capturing both the characteristics of paper materials,

ripping up the past life of the mill town, and the channeling of their own, at times destructive energies.

The story of one young woman became central to the narrative of the work, and her journey also became a touchstone for the underlying success of the project, beyond the art making. At the beginning of the project there was one offence per week from the target group – by its conclusion this had reduced to one offence in ten months. This evidence gained attention in various forums, from the local police to the Federal Government, and helped to kickstart Big hART.

THE CONTENT

Girl told the story of this group episodically, with a kind of hallucinogenic language. It was as if the young people themselves were as fragile as paper. Their stories unfolded through the use of paper artifacts manipulated during the course of the work: paper mazes, house bricks, paper dolls, paper dogs, string and paper moons. The theatrical language managed to be both naïve and sophisticated, as the story emerged of a young woman on the streets with a ferocious dog trapped inside her, over which she had little control, and that would frequently consume her as she struggled to hold on to what was real.

Weaving in and out of reality, the domestic and legal circumstances that lead the participating young people to their current situation were explored. In the middle of the narrative one young child remained unaffected – as if inhabiting a different reality. She seemed to be locked in a kind of innocent childhood party, where she uttered naïve poems without control. It was as if she was the innocent part of the inner life of the older ferocious girl and remained strong and innocent, refusing to be drawn into or affected by the horrific reality she was forced to endure. Hurt came out in expressions of rage, as her older self tore the town apart, when the machinations of the law, police and lack of family cornered her. This duality led to a surprisingly sophisticated and resonant narrative, and the language of the company was born.

FAVOURITE MOMENT: *A young woman who suffered from debilitating agoraphobia played a central character. She was able to cope with the audience presence by beginning the show enclosed in a small road case for 15 minutes, after which this large and intimidating young woman would roll out of that impossibly small road case, to the shock of the audience.*



“Big hART’s headline festival performances are the publicly visible part of much larger, long-term community engagements... it’s this profound level of engagement which gives the production its sense of authenticity.”

THEATRE NOTES

PANDORA SLAMS THE LID

1993 - 1994

MAKE: Theatre in Education

BUILD: Awareness of HIV amongst young people exploring drug use

DRIVE: Community wide discussion of this hidden issue

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

Girl had been an unlikely success and Big hART was subsequently given funding to develop another theatre piece with local young people, this time looking at HIV and injecting drug use. In rural Tasmania in 1993, HIV was still hidden and controversial and the project was designed to tour the state. This new opportunity spurred an interest in defining and documenting Big hART's approach, and we began to formalise these individual projects into a coherent organisation.

PROCESS

The show title - *Pandora Slams the Lid* - referred to the government's approach of not encouraging discussion about HIV amongst young people, and the danger of trying to keep the lid on 'Pandora's box'. The piece was developed through workshops with young people from the cast of *Girl*. Again the show drew on a local product associated with the local pulp and paper mills as its main aesthetic - plywood and Burnie board.

CONTENT

These early days of the company were fuelled by adrenaline as much as cash.

Content was created quickly, and influenced by companies around the world, such as the Wooster Group, which gave rise to experimental staging and content.

Pandora's plywood set was based on the fragility of a giant house of cards, with potential collapse built into each moment on stage. Many of the young cast had difficulty with attention, or were on medication, and the show required absolute concentration for the difficult and time consuming construction of the plywood set during the quiet of the performance. It brought a remarkable focus to this hyperactive young cast, with an experience of 'stillness' being one of the takeaway feelings for both them, and the audience. The show's segmented narrative was based in part on the unpredictable chaos of the lives of those in the cast. Rough and intense, *Pandora* was full of deeply confronting truths.

Together with *Girl*, these two works stamped a strong aesthetic on the company and made for a powerful, raw evening of theatre. Festival director, Robyn Archer, picked up both shows for her 1994 National Festival of Australian Theatre in Canberra, creating a springboard for the company.

FAVOURITE MOMENT: *Standing with theatre patrons in the foyer of the Canberra Theatre Centre, after opening night in a national festival, we realised the company had found a voice and purpose. Big hART's works remain large, difficult, raw, intimate and authentic. Subsequently Robyn has programmed a Big hART project into each of her Australian festivals since.*

BECOMING BIG hART

1996

BIG hART LAUNCHED AS A NFP REGISTERED CHARITY

An opportunity emerged from that first festival appearance. Here was a small arts organisation, based in the poorest electorate in the poorest state in Australia, where you would least expect it, exporting work, and delivering social impacts beyond the arts - which government wanted to purchase. The question was: could we build on it? Could we capture these results cogently, with manuals, descriptors, evaluations, and advocates, and apply this model to different social issues? Perhaps this could help release more sources of funding and help avoid the drip-feed of arts funding. Perhaps, by producing strong art, and keeping our media profile high, we would be able to bring effective attention to hidden social issues and promote change.

To this end we approached a mentor in the Canberra public service who had tracked our social outcomes, to lobby for the company and teach us how to write briefs in Ministerial language, and find unspent funds across different portfolios.

In 1996, national tragedy suddenly shaped Big hART's future. In the first months of the Howard Government, a massacre at Port Arthur demanded action from the Prime Minister, and Big hART's work with Tasmanian young people - some of whom were disengaged and perhaps capable of similar kinds of violence - was put in front of his staff. Big hART was newly incorporated, with project manuals hot off the press, delivering violence prevention initiatives, and Prime Minister Howard saw an opportunity to launch us as a Tasmanian company in Parliament House Canberra, and help heal the raw wound caused by Port Arthur.

For the rest of the Howard era it was very useful to be able to say "launched by the Prime Minister," when trying to secure meetings to lobby for new approaches to social change.



DARREN SIMPSON

PARTICIPANT, GIRL AND PANDORA SLAMS THE LID

Memories of that time are very mixed for me, from the start of Rip and Tear (Big hART's first theatre group, which produced *Girl*).

I left school in grade 9, so I didn't really get a good education. I just hung out with my mates doing whatever day to day life brought to us. My friend Nick Angel said one day that he was involved in the theatre project at the Burnie Civic Centre and suggested that I should go with him - as it was fun and really just gave us something to do for that day.

I can remember that Nick and I had a corner we sat in so we could not really be noticed from the rest of the group.

Over time, Scott was very good at getting the group and individuals doing a range of activities. It slowly brought us out of our comfort zone and built our confidence to stand up and talk about whatever the topic was, or what activity we would do. Without realising it at the time, through the activities we would do, and learning from the group (our stories and the character or personalities of each of us) - Scott was writing a play around us.

I can remember going into the city centre and wrapping Scott's car and parts of the streetscape with paper and The Advocate came and did a story about us writing a play that we would take to the Civic Centre. 'Young offenders' the media use to label us! I never could get used to hearing that.

I can remember doing and seeing lots of stories about us, and our play, in magazines and newspapers. I took part in some radio and TV interviews as well. It was great to be famous. I started seeing I had a future in life and was part of something that I could never have dreamed of being a part of.

'Show Time'.

First, we did two shows, both nights were packed out, very nervous, with all our friends and family and people that supported the whole project, this was really big for us to do the show justice... and we did. A very good group of people we

all turned out to be, and we had a party up on the stage after the show. What a great feeling it was for me to stand up and perform in front of so many people.

After the shows Nick and I didn't want it to stop there, Rip and Tear was great for us and really fun, and Big hART agreed. We took *Girl* to Smithton High School and included some of the kids from the town in the show. After *Girl*, we did a show called *Pandora Slams the Lid*, and took the show around Tasmanian schools. We had grown a lot since *Girl*. We were now roadies and performers.

A couple of years later, in 1996 I got a job at Creative Paper Mill making handmade paper. The project was designed to help long term unemployed people get a job, by teaching us basic job skills making paper. I enjoyed making paper, it was different from normal jobs and we were very creative in the papers we made. When funding dried up, the business was opened to tourists to come in and see the process of how we made paper by hand.

I was given the role of Papermaker/Tour Guide. I love the fact I could now stand in front of people having all the attention on me as I explained the process, and being able to create different papers for artists to use out of recycled materials. Over time I developed a range of paper including "Roo Poo" paper, wombat poo paper and apple paper. I have done a huge amount of interviews, talking about the paper I make which has gone all around the world, including talking on NPR radio in the States. I have now been a worker here for 21 years and worked for the Burnie City Council, which I'm proud to be a part of, and have shown tens of thousands of tourists how I make paper.

I've been married to my wife Samantha for 18 years, with three kids Alexander, Chloe and Hannah (two have now done projects with Big hART through school), and I also have a Diploma in Travel and Tourism. I owe a lot to Big hART and Rip and Tear for how my life has turned out.

Thanks for letting me tell my story.

EXPERIMENTATION

1996 - 2000

MAKE: Theatre, film, installation, exhibition

BUILD: A proof of concept for social impact projects

DRIVE: Change in rural, regional and isolated communities

Once launched, Big hART's focus turned to the possibility of integrating the arts with other policy areas. Could we escape being ghettoised by government as a do-gooder arts organisation? How could we prove our approach to social change was effective?

With ongoing mentoring in Canberra, we sharpened the alignment of our work with one of Prime Minister Howard's policy priorities - prevention of family violence. We designed two projects looking at two serious issues: 'How could young people in isolated communities seek help safely' - (West Coast of Tasmania) and 'Young people witnessing extreme violence' (Illawarra region, New South Wales).

The funding round had a new emphasis on evaluation and evidence, rare for the times and almost non-existent in the arts. Big hART began these projects simultaneously, marking the beginning of an expansion, and this growth created both new complexities and opportunities for the organisation.

In the isolated Tasmanian West Coast towns of Zeehan, Queenstown, Strahan and Rosebury everyone knows everyone. It was difficult for young people to disclose their experiences of family violence and seek help. Big hART partnered with local councils, schools and organisations to raise awareness, trained young people as peer educators, and pioneered online safe disclosure, demonstrating it could be done.



Stories of young people, families, shiftwork, violence and isolation were captured in a series of performances titled *SLR 5000*, *Three Men Walk Into A Bar*, *24 Hour Shift*, and *Heaps of Rocks*. These shows and installations were performed in schools and pubs and halls with non-arts partners across these communities over several years.

Although Big hART was still developing, and at times struggling, word travelled and more invitations flowed in from other parts of the country. The City of Wagga Wagga wanted a project with young people in the Eastern Riverina Juvenile Justice Centre. In response, a project called *Guns to Pens* was delivered. Designed to promote violence prevention, the performance involved turning wooden rifle butts into pens, live on stage. The guns had been handed in through the government's gun buyback scheme after the Port Arthur massacre, and the act of converting guns into pens during a show was a compelling backdrop to an unfolding narrative about gun violence. The production involved taking large tools - drill presses, power saws and chisels - inside the correctional facility, as well as bringing in a live audience. This was unheard of at the time, and created strong media, with the *Guns to Pens* project subsequently touring to Canberra in 1996-1997.

These new projects were combining different media - Super 8, 16mm, VHS, slides and emerging digital media - which complemented the company's use of raw materials and primary produce for visual design, alongside poetic text.

There was an urgency about Big hART's output in these formative years, as it pushed for a whole of government, whole of community positioning for the arts and cultural rights. Although not all projects were successful, Big hART's innovation through the 1990s triggered interest nationally, and the organisation began to be written about and presented in policy forums and conferences.

Big hART's hunger for diverse forums, venues, contexts and audiences saw the company expand its experimentation. In Sydney, *Happy Water Sad Water* was staged on Manly Beach. Performed by Chinese young people, it was commissioned as a response to racism and the high numbers of overseas visitors drowning at the beach. Meanwhile, in Northern New South Wales, filmmakers and arts workers expanded the geography of the company across towns from Tamworth to Moree, with a project resulting in the AFI Award winning film *Hurt*.



“Not a documentary, but an eloquent testimony, Hurt was made by 250 kids from 5 NSW country towns. Their stories are often unbelievably sad – what they make of them is intense, lyrical, stoic and heartbreaking.”

THE AGE

Although productive, this expansive time stretched the company to breaking point, while also generating new approaches to tackling complex geographies and issues. The targets of these projects – rural young people, regional inequality, homelessness – attracted the eye of New South Wales Premier Bob Carr. He agreed to launch a Big hART project in the town of Armidale, and to participate in videoing a scene for a film with young people. The encounter moved him, and through subsequent policy discussions with Big hART, he trialled an innovative cross-portfolio funding model, in 3 year cycles. This proved highly productive for the company and the government, and continued for nine years.

In 2000, at Robyn Archer’s Adelaide Festival, Big hART curated the material from these combined projects into one large performance piece called **Big hART Works**, with cast members travelling from communities around the country to perform in a run-down carpark in the city centre. The performance captured the company’s signature hybridity and quickly became an underground festival hit with directors, politicians, funders and elders in the audience, sitting on secondhand beds from homeless shelters, and enjoying soup from the homeless soup kitchen next door.

Big hART Works marked a move away from a scattergun, ‘project by project’ survival approach, to being more strategic, and adopting a new organisational restructure.

CONSOLIDATION

2000 - 2005

MAKE: Multi-platform hybrid performance and installation work

BUILD: Sophisticated projects with strong impacts

DRIVE: National change across a range of hidden issues

After the 2000 Adelaide Festival, the company's experimentation with process and hybrid media saw sweeping new projects come to fruition. The *kNOT@Home* project looked at different types of homelessness – young people on the streets, those without family, refugees, and Indigenous nations pushed off their land. The content was presented across different platforms, including an eight-part documentary series for SBS television, a website, and a touring performance piece for the Melbourne International Arts Festival and Sydney Opera House. *kNOT@Home* featured a cast from East Timor, Afghanistan, Pitjantjatjara country, and the streets of Australian rural towns. For a project that began essentially unfunded, it was a prolific and remarkable success, even if flawed by the weight of its intentions.

The high point for *kNOT@Home* was a performance in the Great Hall of Parliament House Canberra, at an awards ceremony for Centrelink staff from around the country, whose jobs involved breeching young people and getting them off their books. With these same young people in the performance, there was not a dry eye in the house as the audience saw the barriers faced by their clients daily. After a standing ovation, Big hART was able to address the Federal Minister directly as the applause died down.

While *kNOT@Home* was rolling out, other Big hART projects were running concurrently. A workshop program in the now notorious Don Dale Juvenile Justice Centre in the Northern Territory created a performance piece called *Wrong Way Go Back*. The sweet spot was bringing a general public audience

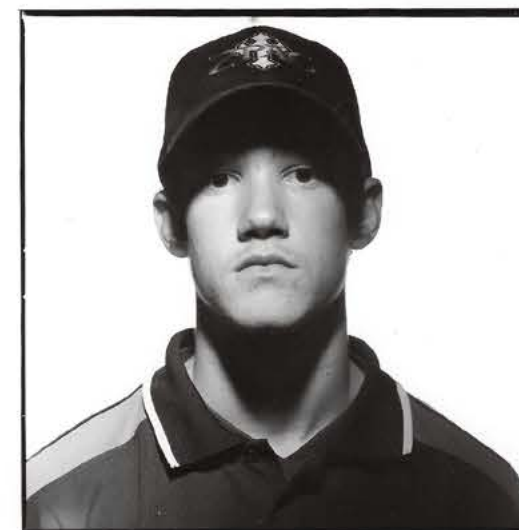
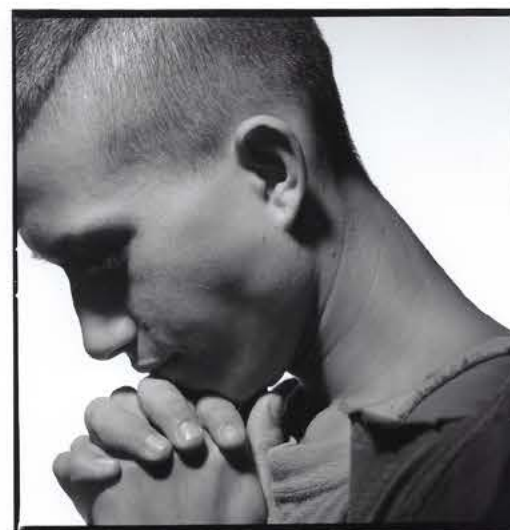
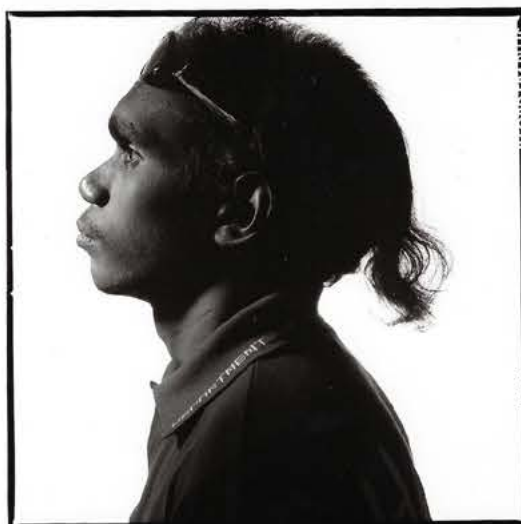
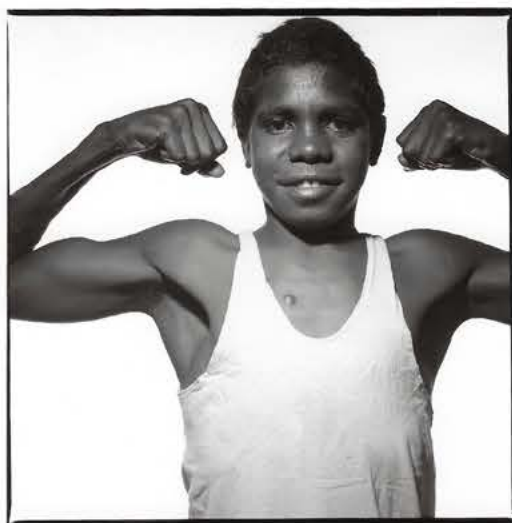
into Don Dale for the performance and then bringing young offenders out to perform at the Darwin Entertainment Centre – something that would never be contemplated now.

Subsequently *Wrong Way Go Back* led to the award-winning media project *Nuff Stuff* in Groote Eyland, Tennant Creek and the Tiwi Islands. This began to shape Big hART's approach to supporting legacy projects and building capacity for local organisations and individuals on the ground.

A series of smaller partnership projects in New South Wales were delivered, including *Sleep Well*, *Handle With Care*, *Stepping Stones*, and *RU&I@1* – a project partnering with Sutherland Shire and the Hazelhurst Regional Gallery to bring the work of at-risk young people into the gallery space.

Big hART again shifted gears significantly, implementing a new management structure based on a rhizome approach. This assisted the company to scale up and enjoy subsequent growth for the next ten years.





DRIVE IN HOLIDAY RADIO HOLIDAY LUCKY

2005 - 2009

MAKE: Radio art, visual art, video and caravan installations

BUILD: Recognition for fragile shack communities

DRIVE: Support for single mothers and children experiencing violence

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

Radio Holiday and *Drive in Holiday* were layered projects, looking at parallels between isolated communities and single parent families, and raising awareness of the need to support these vulnerable groups. At the heart of the project was a group of young single mothers who helped research, create, film and host the performances.

THE PROCESS

Over the previous decade, working with teenage single mothers had been a focus for Big hART's work. *Radio Holiday* and *Drive in Holiday* built on these approaches and were designed to keep horizons wide for these young women, supporting them to explore the skills and confidence they would need to rejoin the workforce. Young mothers from these communities often experience pressure to stay on welfare - however on this project, accompanied by their children, they worked hard, supported each other, and developed new pathways out of isolation.

The fragility and isolation of shack communities created a metaphor for staging an installation radio art piece with these young families. A mobile shack village was created using six vintage caravans gathered in a circle. Using this model, two

unique, mobile, site-specific performance pieces were staged for the Ten Days on the Island festival in 2005 (*Radio Holiday*) and 2007 (*Drive in Holiday*). These were presented in 5 isolated shack communities in Tasmania: Couta Rocks, Trial Harbour, Crayfish Creek, Tomahawk and Southport.

THE CONTENT

To create content, Big hART offered visual artists a 'holiday' in a shack community, and in exchange artists created work based on their experience, for installation inside a caravan. Radiophonic works created in the same community were played in each van. These five mini-installations of paintings and sound came together by corralling the caravans in a circle, forming a performance area. For *Radio Holiday* this circle also contained a micro-radio station, and for *Drive in Holiday*, it became a film set and restaurant.

The circle in the centre of the caravans came to symbolise a safe space in which children could play with toys made by the young mothers. In *Radio Holiday* the audience could interact and listen to the radio broadcast emerging around them, combined with live performance. The audience wore headphones as they explored the small village, entering caravans and experiencing separate soundscapes and images from each community involved.

These quirky, freeform performances were much loved, and *Radio Holiday* subsequently toured to the Melbourne International Arts Festival, presented in Federation Square.

Two years later, *Drive in Holiday* built upon *Radio Holiday*, and offered the young mothers more ambitious roles, such as staging, video and hospitality. This included feeding the audience luscious Tasmanian produce from guest chefs. As the audience ate this feast, served in individual eskies in the middle of the caravans, they were immersed in story on a deconstructed film set. The audience constructed their own journey through multiple narratives as moments from unfinished scenes were rehearsed and filmed amongst them.

Productions of this scale, with food, wine and a premium ticket price were unusual in Tasmania, yet *Drive in Holiday* sold out quickly. It became another marker in the life of Big hART, triggering the exploration of more ambitious scales, aesthetics, languages and site-specific hybridity, staged across vast geographies in isolated communities.



LUCKY PROJECT – A LEGACY

These projects, working with single mothers, generated a series of legacy projects over another two years on the Tasmanian North West Coast, bundled together and called the *LUCKY* Project. The title captured the many ways in which these young women were lucky, even if looked down on sometimes by their community. *LUCKY* became a useful focus. The more these women kept looking forward optimistically, exploring new skills and opportunities, the more they were able to create the future they wanted for themselves and their children.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: *In Couta Rocks (which has the highest percentage of millionaires of any town in Australia - a permanent population of two abalone divers) the show attracted 150 people. A fight broke out between two fishermen in the middle of the performance, and simultaneously between their two dogs. The audience thought it just another seamless element of an evening at the theatre.*

ROBYN ARCHER

FESTIVAL DIRECTOR

I'm proud to have been associated with Big hART's 25 years of projects. When I look at the long list of this company's works I recall that I invited their very first show, *Girl*, to the first festival I had the privilege to direct - the National Festival of Australian Theatre. This national capital's festival presented the very best of broadly defined Australian theatre. As curator I included dance theatre and music theatre as much as plays. Big hART's appeal was clearly its subject matter, but it was not only the raw interface with social issues. That Scott also attracted actor Lex Marinos' participation in *Girl*, and subsequently Kerry Armstrong and Roger Woodward to *Big hART Works* - a show in a carpark which I invited to my next festival gig, Adelaide 1998-2000 - indicated an ambition to ensure a professionalism intertwined with the non-professional presence of participants directly involved with the subject material. This ambition has been maintained throughout the company's history all the way to its lively present.

kNOT@Home looked at homelessness in Melbourne and offered the perfect image for my Melbourne Festival: a comfortable, always occupied bed at the front of Federation Square, just outside the barriers, before that civic meeting place was opened to the public. It drew attention to the kids sleeping rough in that wealthy town. *Radio Holiday* celebrated the caravan and Tasmania's threatened shack culture for Ten Days on the Island, and had a further manifestation for the Centenary of Canberra as caravans drove from remote locations all over the continent to a gathering in the national capital. I loved the way Scott talked about 'nation building' - not just in terms of the roads they travelled, but in the way family and friends bond on such journeys, and manage, in moments of such rare genuine leisure, to consider the big issues and talk about them. The company established a residency at the Canberra Theatre Centre and yet another splendid actor, Trevor Jamieson, was there to perform, to lead, to guide.

Big hART has featured on every festival platform for which I have been a fortunate, temporary guardian, and the company's work always sat well next to the finest from around Australia and the wider world.

Should we mention the obvious: that those on the outside of these often 'outsider' projects don't always find that mix comfortable? For those of us who have come to appreciate process as much as product, the odd ragged edge at the time of performance, despite the company's insistence on excellence, is rendered insignificant in light of the clear benefits to participants and the communities they come from. This view comes from one who insists on the best, both from myself and the artists I engage with, and one who defines excellence as a sui generis quality. Some artists need to lock themselves away to perfect their craft and deliver the dazzling results of that craft, in place and on time every time. I will defend that kind of commitment, selfishness and isolation to the end. But there are other artists who choose to work in community, to use their craft for the purposes of social change: such artists are the kind who work in and for Big hART. They have been doing so for 25 years and they provide a service as vital and essential as any other artist or doctor, nurse or police officer.

Congratulations, Big hART, your work will continue to resonate with audiences, and in places with people our society often chooses to ignore.

STICKYBRICKS

2004 - 2006

MAKE: Site specific outdoor performance work and community feast

BUILD: Community trust in a fractured public housing estate

DRIVE: An end to isolation in public housing

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

In 2004, after delivering many projects exploring homelessness across regional and isolated communities, Big hART turned its thoughts to another isolated community in the heart of Sydney - the Department of Housing's high-rise Northcott Estate. Sitting across the road from Belvoir St. Theatre in gentrified Surry Hills, Northcott had developed a notorious reputation for violence, murder and dysfunction. Callously dubbed 'suicide towers', and demonised by the press, the community needed to find a new narrative. Housing NSW had forced 900 neighbours with high needs into a vertical suburb, with little thought to the consequences, and the community was in a downward spiral.

Big hART maintained a long-term contact with a talented community development worker on the estate who, in tandem with a respected local police officer, worked closely with the community. A loose coalition of partners was formed to 'try and do something'. The project began with little engagement from funding bodies and was met with trepidation by the New South Wales Housing Department. Soon however, as the results started to roll in, the Northcott Project began to build a positive reputation, attracting the attention of the Mayor of Sydney, the New South Wales Premier's Department and the Sydney Festival.

THE PROCESS

Sydney Festival included the project in its 2006 program, and a group of



residents began working with artists in a creative workshop program running out of the community centre, building towards a large, outdoor, site-specific hybrid performance.

The community development process involved many smaller events and initiatives to draw out stories from the community, and break down fear and barriers among neighbours. Big hART became a platform to support the work of the Housing Department and police, with artists and arts workers providing a series of community engagement workshops which generated narrative and trained the community cast.

The festival show, *Stickybricks* was devised around themes from the resident's lives, such as: 'Arriving at the Building', 'Love in the Building', 'Fear in the Building' and 'Dance in the Building'. These feelings and experiences were then mapped throughout the building in 3D, turned into images and projected onto the large vertical façade during performances.

The *Stickybricks* show sold out, and Big hART produced a feature documentary called *900 Neighbours* for film festivals and ABC television, as well as 14 other short films and a second documentary capturing the performance itself.

THE CONTENT

Most residents were part of some kind of diaspora coming to the Northcott building - attracted by the utopian ideals of slum clearance after the war, the Swedish design on the highest hill in the inner city, or forced there in later years by the Department of Housing.

The *Stickybricks* performances set out to follow the transformative dreams of the building and its origins, to reignite the desire for community amongst tenants, and to reclaim the outdoor space from the more sinister associations of drugs, suicide and violence. In preparation, derelict cars were shifted and the building's carpark was laid with fresh turf, transforming it into a peaceful green park. The set, comprised of large white sculptural shapes and stages, grew amongst the gardens, with light and projection on the 14-storey highrise forming the backdrop.

As the audience arrived they were greeted by residents and handed large white polystyrene seats to carry in and arrange in concentric curved lines around the three sculptural stages.

“It’s hard to resist a community show that so joyfully welcomes the public in to gawp...best are the memories that seem to leak out of the brickwork and windows of this extraordinary place...”

THE AUSTRALIAN

“...this is not oral history or tenant life narrative. It’s rather a façade-cracking and joyous slice of life, a self portrait in hope, possibility and pop songs.”

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

“If Linehan (Sydney Festival Artistic Director – Fergus Linehan) was looking for resonance Stickybricks has so much it’s almost bouncing off the walls.”

THE AUSTRALIAN



Wheelbarrows full of white dinner boxes were brought out and the crowd ate together in a communal meal, as baskets of fresh herbs were offered and the immersive entertainment began. The effect was like creating a village green for a picnic, and an outdoor theatre. Each night the Sydney Festival crowds showed up and the feared reputation of the building was disarmed by an evening spent together, helping the audience and neighbourhood to rethink their negative assumptions about the Northcott Estate.

Stickybricks had all the hallmarks of an embedded festival show - integrated into the life of the city, involving a large, participatory cast and crew, and using a diverse array of artforms to tell many hidden stories. Through portraiture, photography, music, immersive sound, movement and image projection, every aspect highlighted the residents and their journey to the building in a new and inclusive way.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: Watching Dolly, the very first tenant in the building having her portrait painted by Robert Hannaford, an artist renowned for painting Governors-General and Prime Ministers.



JUNK THEORY

2006 - 2009

MAKE: A floating video installation and performance work

BUILD: Social harmony and inclusion

DRIVE: Attitudinal change post the Cronulla riots

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

During the same summer as *Stickybricks* premiered at the Sydney Festival, the suburb of Cronulla erupted in an ugly rage in what were termed 'riots'. A diminishing sense of inclusion in the community was heightened by the media, as was a lack of public awareness of the diversity in Cronulla and the Sutherland Shire.

The Shire was painted as homogenous and white, with the beach being 'claimed and defended', with territorial narratives and images perpetuating the story in the domestic and international media. In response, Big hART approached Sydney Festival with a project that would work with young people from the Shire from different cultural backgrounds, to explore and highlight the cultural diversity and speak back to the city with more truthful and positive narratives, and at the same time confront the contempt with which Sydney viewed the Shire. It was called *Junk Theory*.

Big hART had a strong track record in the Shire, from a previous project with Hazlehurst Regional Gallery called *RU&I@1*, and *Junk Theory* built on those community partnerships, which meant we could work fast and complete a responsive process with the community in under a year.

THE PROCESS

Junk Theory was based on the 'theory of junk' – the way in which something we value becomes rubbish, is discarded, and is then rediscovered as highly valued



again. The workshops with young people from Sutherland were conceived as a way for them to be valued by their diverse community.

The process involved disadvantaged young people working with filmmakers, photographers, composers, sound designers, deckhands, skippers and singers, to create a floating video and music installation work on a traditional Chinese junk, navigating the waters of Cronulla. This new narrative would be colourful, visually arresting and designed as ‘media candy’ – attracting prime time stories, and disrupting the reporting on Cronulla in a positive way. The Chinese junk was already culturally different on the harbour, and the installation was designed to cruise the entire Sydney waterfront, to places of high visibility.

THE CONTENT

Filmmakers, composers and producers began working with young people, building commitment, gathering stories and creating suburban portraits. An experimental sound and video installation was prepared, with the Chinese junk as the main component. Chinese junk sails are square and flat – perfect for projection. The boat was refitted with generators, projectors, sound systems, lanterns, lighting and safety equipment. Test projections transformed the sails into glowing screens of vibrant images, and the hull was turned into a resonant sound shell.

Before, during and after Sydney Festival, the junk traversed the foreshore of Sydney, from Port Hacking, Botany Bay, and Georges River to Pittwater. As this petite vessel glided from bay to bay it appeared like a mysterious ghost ship around headlands and foreshore parks during Sydney’s summer evenings. The image glowed, reflecting on the water in an ever-changing apparition evoking Cronulla. Audiences would gather on balconies or in parks to watch and listen as it sailed by.

Wherever the boat went, weaving in and out of bays, young people travelled in teams by car, to hand out fortune cookies to those watching, mesmerized from jetties and parks and fishing spots. The fortune cookies contained proverbs from different cultures, aligned with the project themes.

This boutique, multi-layered project intrigued the media, triggering new discussions about diversity and the kind of community we want our young people to grow up in. To further this, the producer invited politicians, public figures,





opinion makers and media competition winners to come aboard the junk for parts of the journey.

Junk Theory was a beautiful, neatly conceptualised installation work which proved popular. It went on to perform at the Adelaide Festival on the shallow Torrens River, and opened the 2009 Ten Days on the Island Festival in Hobart, where it toured waterways as far as Huonville, Launceston and George Town.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: *One evening Junk Theory strayed close to the naval base on Garden Island and the Navy scrambled a crack security team, in full camouflage, to intercept this beautiful apparition. Or perhaps, having trucked the boat across the Hay Plains in a heat wave, the planks of the old Chinese junk opened up and as soon as the crane lifted her into the Torrens, she began to sink. Good times.*



NGAPARTJI NGAPARTJI

2005 - 2010

MAKE: A language and culture website, theatre work, music, short films, documentary

BUILD: An intercultural exchange

DRIVE: Change in National Indigenous Languages policy

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

Driving from Adelaide to Alice Springs in 2004, a raft of issues converged in a brainstorm between Big hART workers and Pitjantjatjara actor Trevor Jamieson: nuclear waste dumps on Pitjantjatjara lands, a lack of Indigenous language policy continuing the cultural genocide, the bombing of Pitjantjatjara people at Maralinga, and the struggle to survive trauma on Pitjantjatjara country. How could we collaborate to tell a Pitjantjatjara story about nuclear tests and subsequent dislocation, in a way that non-Indigenous audiences could engage with deeply? How could they even enter into the narrative when language is so vital to the nuance of story, and most non-indigenous audiences would be surprised to know Indigenous languages like Pitjantjatjara are still very intact? It was as if these language traditions had been barred from our cultural life, deliberately languishing untaught and under resourced by our education system.

We realised if we wanted to collaborate to tell these vital stories, we would have to rethink our approach, and demand more from our audiences. We would have to assist audiences to learn something of Pitjantjatjara language before they came to a performance that tackled these stories.

The phrase 'ngapartji ngapartji' translates as something like an exchange: "I give



“This is searingly truthful, vital theatre that pierces the heart of glossed-over periods of Australia’s Indigenous history. It is wonderfully performed and told, and is certain to be remembered as one of the memorable productions of the year.”

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

you something, you give me something.” We decided we would try not to be part of the white audience gaze, instead we’d create an intercultural work that built an exchange with the audience.

The great icon of Uluru stands on Pitjantjatjara land, and is the face of Australia generating millions in tourist dollars. Yet we are unaware of the language and culture that surrounds it. We know how to say ‘hello’ in French at the foot of the Eiffel Tower but not in Pitjantjatjara, at Uluru – how can that be? Is the lack of support for Indigenous languages part of an ongoing cultural genocide?

When we began the project in 2005 there was no national Indigenous languages policy, which meant there was no mechanism to deliver funds to schools to teach Indigenous languages. These seemingly invisible issues, relationships with the Pitjantjatjara community, and the hidden story of Maralinga survivors formed the basis of a multi-layered project. *Ngapartji Ngapartji* also pushed Big hART to question and refine our approach to working with communities and driving policy change.

THE PROCESS

We knew these meta issues were critical and urgent, however, we needed to begin with Pitjantjatjara elders and then, with permission, engage young people. The vehicle for this work became an online language and culture course created with the community, for audiences who would attend future performances. The next step was to create smaller teaching versions of the show, based on Pitjantjatjara cultural themes such as land (ngura), body (puntu), family (walytja), and story (tjukurpa) – which we would tour in advance of a big festival show. We would encourage audiences to engage with language and culture first, come to the teaching shows, and give them ‘homework’ to do before coming to the large performance piece.

At the festival show, our aim was to reverse the cultural gaze. The 37 cast members – of Pitjantjatjara, Greek, Afghan, Indian, Anglo, and Japanese descent – would say hello in their own language, and then teach the audience to say hello in Pitjantjatjara. The audience would learn the simplest of childhood songs (‘heads, shoulders knees and toes’) in language, before we even got started on the show. Through this structure, there would be an exchange, a reversal, and a reciprocity – ngapartji ngapartji.



*“It’s a discursive, personal story
of national implications, a
demand about the importance
of connection and country, and
especially the need to retain
and encourage Indigenous
languages.”*

THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

The process began with community workshops in Alice Springs and Ernabella with accompanying digital workshops to create online content, singing workshops to translate contemporary songs into Pitjantjatjara, encouraging the women's choir, lobbying for a national Indigenous languages policy, building the online community, and only then would the showbiz juggernaut hit the road and tour festivals.

THE CONTENT

The *Ngapartji Ngapartji* production presented the story of Pitjantjatjara people fleeing across the desert as their Maralinga homelands were subject to nuclear testing for over a decade, with explosions a thousand times more powerful than the blast at Hiroshima. Plutonium was spread across their country, where they had lived for tens of thousands of years, and left them refugees. This story provided a powerful vehicle to illuminate the blundering physical and cultural aggression of the last 200 years, and was contained in the story of actor Trevor Jamieson's family.

The last of Jamieson's extended kin walked out of the desert to see white people for the first time in 1986, and their story – as internal refugees in our country – resonated with the many stories of the global diaspora in the decade following 9/11. The theatre work that came out of this compelling story was musically rich, with contemporary songs translated into Pitjantjatjara, traditional public songs, and a text full of warmth, sadness and humour. Audiences laughed and wept in sold out seasons across around the country, as it toured nationally to much acclaim, at the Sydney Opera House, Belvoir St. Theatre, the Victorian Arts Centre, and venues in Perth and Alice Springs. Smaller versions then toured overseas to Rotterdam, Australia House in London, and to Japan, for the first anniversary of Fukushima.

The creative high point of the project was taking the show back to the community in Ernabella, and staging it outdoors, amongst the ghost gums in a dry riverbed. This journey home and the emotional impact of the project on many was then captured in Big hART's award-winning documentary – *Nothing Rhymes with Ngapartji*. This documentary went on to be broadcast on ABC, screened in festivals internationally, and was the recipient of many awards, including a Deadly Award.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: *Peter Garrett, then the Minister for Heritage and the Arts, sitting with senior women in the Ngapartji Ngapartji office, as they sang Midnight Oil's song – 'Beds Are Burning' – in Pitjantjatjara. Tears flowed as the point was made that soon this type of exchange wouldn't be possible, unless we have a national Indigenous languages policy. A few years later we had one. Ngapartji Ngapartji helped fuel the desire for Big hART to work in strategic ways so as to place the art in critical forums and to drive campaigns.*



LEX MARINOS

PERFORMER

25 years ago, out of the blue, I received a call from Scott Rankin to see if we could meet to discuss a show working with a group of 'misfit' kids from Tasmania's North West coast who'd found themselves on the edge of the juvenile justice system. It was to have a couple of performances in Burnie before heading to Canberra, for Robyn Archer's National Festival of Australian Theatre. I was definitely interested. I loved performing with the young people and experiencing firsthand the effect they made upon their community. And from then I was keen to work with Big hART more.

I was at a career crossroads, having worked for a couple of decades in subsidised theatre with some radio and television, and then mainly in film and television. I wanted to do more theatre but was no longer in touch with the mainstream. It had moved on and so had I. I thought it uninteresting and outdated and it probably thought the same about me. Fortunately, Big hART revitalised my love of theatre and its ability to affect change through powerful storytelling.

However, Big hART may not be every performer's cup of poison. Many, for perfectly legitimate reasons, don't want to work on new scripts, or with non-professional performers, or in remote areas. Many don't want to work with the political and the social and the bleeding-heart. Good luck to them. But, for others who enjoy these challenges, Big hART is a haven.

Hundreds of brilliant artists have committed themselves and their art to many projects and performances over the years, and I've loved the opportunity to work with them, to laugh and cry and dream together. There are far too many to list here, but in mentioning a few I pay tribute to all.

I think of Trevor Jamieson, mercurial actor/dancer/singer/storyteller at the centre of the Indigenous trilogy: *Ngapartji Ngapartji*, *Namatjira*, *Hipbone Sticking Out*. These were epic performances of wit, intellect and passion. Derik Lynch - with the angelic voice and wicked humour - joined Trevor in *Namatjira*. And the

seemingly infinite permutations of women and kids from remote Indigenous communities who sang, danced and told stories alongside Trevor.

I think of actors Glynn Nicholas and Leah Purcell, Kerry Walker and Kerry Armstrong, Simon Gleeson and Natalie O'Donnell, Sheridan Harbridge and Marty Crewes, Shareena Clanton and Jada Albert, Bruce Myles, Anne Grigg, Butoh-trained Yumi Umiuare, and many more.

Music has always been an integral part of Big hART's shows, and I had the best seat in the house to be dazzled by a passing parade of virtuosi who have joined the caravan along way. My Big hART super group would include the late Jackie Orszaczky (bass), Andrew McGregor (shakuhachi), Genevieve Lacey (recorder), Nicole Forsyth (viola), Damien Mason (guitar), Dave Hewitt (percussion), and singers Saira Luther, Maria Lurighi, Nate Gilkes. Beth Sometimes, Mikangelo and the Black Sea Gentlemen, The Dunaways... and all the painters, designers, digital artists, photographers, filmmakers - the list goes on and on, all dedicated to creating art that makes a difference to people's lives, as well as to their craft.

What a wonderful collection of actors and human beings, not that the two are mutually exclusive. What a privilege to share the stage and the creative process with them. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time 25 years ago, and so get the chance to reflect on the collective talents of all these creative people who come and work alongside producers, and community workers and bring so much to these projects.

GOLD

2006 - 2009

MAKE: Exhibitions, short films, music and website

BUILD: Connections across farming communities

DRIVE: Awareness of drought and mental health issues in rural communities

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

In 2006, at the height of national arguments about which state 'owned' the water of the Murray Darling Basin, in the middle of a long drought, Big hART was looking at the critical but hidden issue of water policy, and the resulting pressures on farming families. The General Manager at the local council in Griffith was familiar with our work and invited Big hART to consider working in his town. After consultations, we began to engage with young people in town, but quickly saw a web of connected issues covering a vast stretch of country from Queensland in the North, across New South Wales, Victoria and into South Australia, via the Murray Darling Basin. It was apparent that there was a broader group of farming families, all experiencing similar crises in different locations.

THE PROCESS

The project began by working with young people, introducing them to farming families, and supporting their learning skills through the process of collecting farming stories. The project title – **GOLD** – came from the idea that 'water is the new gold'. It began by implicitly looking at the macro issues of water policy, drought and climate change through the micro lens of stories of how this was affecting the lives of rural families. What began as a project with a focus on an almost impersonal scale, came to find its meaning in the intimacies of personal survival. Depression, relationship strain, questions around succession on farms, anger and hurt, became the flow of **GOLD's** narrative, rather than the flow of the contentious river system.



The project's Creative Producer, community workers and a range of artists – (writers, filmmakers, photographers, and directors) were invited onto farms and into the lives of families, to document this drought driven struggle. The project structure was unusual in the way it began working with these disengaged 'urban' young people from Griffith, who, although surrounded by farming, had little experience of what it meant to be 'on the land'. The project brought these two groups together. These young people came into contact with farmers from a much older generation and seemingly another world, who continued to face great hardship, and out of this mixture, friendships and new perceptions grew around the difficulties everyone faced in many different circumstances.

GOLD became a strange hybrid of youth work, ecology, documentary and community building, changing direction many times over the 150 weeks of its delivery. It began to focus more on depression and mental health in farming areas, and the pressure farmers were under from isolation – the drought, powerlessness and impacts of water policy. It began to shine a light on the hidden story of farmers as potential climate change refugees.

THE CONTENT

There were many creative outputs for this project, mostly focused on websites, documentary film and installation. Original aspirations for a large touring work to be staged in the natural amphitheater of dry dams across the Murray Darling basin were set aside. The metaphor of those performances, with the audiences watching from above, standing around a dry dam would have been powerful...but then the drought broke.

The project was designed to pull communities together and ensure their story was part of the national agenda, and documentation of these rural family stories happened through different manifestations such as photographic and video installations set to music. The largest of these, **Gold Crop**, culminated at Carriageworks in Sydney, drawing families from Griffith to the city, highlighting their stories and plight, and providing a sense of support.

GOLD provided a steep learning curve for Big hART as the company was again expanding rapidly. Large scale projects were operating simultaneously in different parts of the country, and although we were passionately interested in the vital issues being tackled by each project, we needed to re-structure aspects of the organisation to meet the demand.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: *For one family in particular, deep tragedy struck during the life of the project, and GOLD became part of their process of dealing with grief, and honouring a life. These moving stories, the fragility and the continuity of rural communities found a legacy in later projects such as the successful Acoustic Life of Sheds.*



DRIVE

2007 - 2010

MAKE: Documentary, webisodes, teaching resources

BUILD: Support for young men in rural areas

DRIVE: Awareness of autocide and the issues faced by isolated rural young men

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

Worldwide, the biggest killer of young people aged 15 to 24 is the car. Statistically the car is a monumental man-made disaster; a weapon, a tool for self-harm, and a place of solace for disconnected young men. And yet, this hidden killer of young people receives little attention. Within these statistics, there is something even more sinister – the relationship between the car, young men, rites of passage, risk and depression. Hardly any group attracts less sympathy than under-educated, rural, white young men. We used to send them off to war or use them for dangerous work. Now, once we have failed them in education and employment, we wish they would disappear. Often they do. Sometimes they use ‘autocide’ – single vehicle accidents causing death of the driver. This hidden issue gave rise to Big hART’s **DRIVE** project.

THE PROCESS

DRIVE was delivered on the North West Coast of Tasmania, with a group of 96 young people – mainly young men – and a core group of 30. Central to the project was the making of a 55 minute award-winning documentary, based on 150 interviews with families, friends, sons, mothers and partners of risk-taking young men – some of whom had passed away, attempted suicide, or accidentally taken the life of a friend. Making the documentary brought these young participants into contact with professionals who are confronted by this epidemic every other day, as they interviewed police, paramedics, doctors and ambulance drivers.

Initially **DRIVE** began by looking solely at the hidden issue of autocide. This issue remains hidden because the deaths do not show up in suicide statistics, but rather as a motor vehicle accident. However, the deaths are often planned, using straight roads, involving a solid roadside obstruction such as a tree, and often rehearsed. The starting point for the process of making the documentary was to trace the invisible ‘lines of grief’ that run across the landscape, beginning at roadside handmade memorials created by friends and family of victims, and trace these lines of grief along highways, to homes and photo albums, and sometimes innocent childhood bedrooms, left untouched. These ‘grieflines’ were captured in interviews and voiced in the documentary, as well on the **DRIVE** website.

THE CONTENT

The narrative of the documentary rapidly expanded to examine the wider causes of the issue, in the existential crisis and meaninglessness young men often face before they have gathered the tools that come with maturity and experience. In their own words, **DRIVE** examined rites of passage, risk-taking behaviour and other layered aspects of their lives, as it followed a group of young men and their families.

The documentary was grounded in strong community processes with young people working with filmmakers on both sides of the camera. The presence of the project in the community on the North West Coast had a secondary effect of building a strong interest in video and narrative, as a younger group of peers watched other young participants grow over the two years of the project.

Aside from the feature documentary, the **DRIVE** project also created a photographic exhibition, an original soundtrack, 69 short films and interactive online content. Across the North West Coast of Tasmania, the project conducted over 400 multimedia workshops, 6 skate events and 10 public presentations. The **DRIVE** project won the Tasmanian Community of the Year Award, and a Crime and Violence Prevention Award from the Australian Institute of Criminology.

It was the subject of rigorous evaluations, and has won many film awards, screened in festivals internationally and on ABC TV. There are teacher’s packs, media kits, webisodes and other resources. A quick scan of the credits for **DRIVE** shows the hundreds of supporters, funders, participants, families and creatives involved, and tells the real story of this embedded community project.



Legacy projects after *DRIVE* include a short film festival - *Smashed* - featuring videos made by young people from different high schools examining alcohol consumption. *DRIVE* also helped create strong desire for young people to work together, manifesting in a collective called Two Heads Crew. The collective was born out of the process of fighting local government over the demolition of their skate park. Through skate ramp construction, skate comps, demos, annual Sk8 jams and Big hART performances - which combined skateboarders with senior citizens on stage - Two Heads Crew became central to the *DRIVE* project's success. A decade later, the *DRIVE* project continues to influence Big hART's work through *SKATE* Project, now in development as a commercial theatre show.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: *There is a moment in the documentary, which captures a mother's pure love for her lost son, and her profound grief. It became a touchstone for the value of Big hART's approach. Sometimes seemingly small moments create intense change in the journey of a participant.*

NYUNTU NGALI

2009 - 2010

MAKE: A cross-cultural theatre performance for young people

BUILD: A Pitjantjatjara legacy project

DRIVE: Intercultural awareness

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

Ngapartji Ngapartji had been much loved by the Pitjantjatjara community and had gained Big hART national attention - with sold out tours, festival performances, a documentary, strong media, a good political response, and positive independent evaluations. However, you're only ever as good as your last project, and sometimes it is easier for funding bodies to reinvent the wheel than to continue to back proven organisations. As projects like *Ngapartji Ngapartji* come to their conclusion, so to do the funding streams, the profile, and the capacity to keep working with the community.

To help overcome this boom and bust cycle, and to be able to respond to high levels of need in the community, Big hART maintains a number of projects running simultaneously in different locations. Frequently, legacy projects will present themselves at the conclusion of one project, and lines of provenance from project to project can be drawn in hindsight, linking community need and company survival.

Ngapartji Ngapartji had already helped seed the *Namatjira Project* in Western Aranda country, and at the same time provided a springboard for another smaller collaborative project in the Pitjantjatjara community of Mimili. Windmill National



Children's Theatre had begun working in Mimili, however, like many city based flagship theatre companies, they were stronger at making content than working in fragile communities. Windmill had commissioned a theatre show in Mimili from Big hART's Creative Director, and inevitably this led to the involvement of Big hART in a co-production. The resulting production was a futuristic, cross-cultural dystopian vision, a performance piece for young people called *Nyuntu Ngali* ('You We Two')

THE PROCESS

The project in Mimili was suffering from a lack of time on the ground and cultural safety in the community process. Once Big hART got involved in Mimili, we were able to build on the success of *Ngapartji Ngapartji* in neighbouring Pukatja (Ernabella) and consult with senior Pitjantjatjara women there. This steadied the project, and provided direction, translation, and the missing cultural safety. *Nyuntu Ngali* became Big hART's first co-production with a flagship company.

The *Nyuntu Ngali* project had almost come to a halt, with the initial creative team assembled by Windmill struggling because of distance from the community. However, it was difficult to just pull out of the community and drop the project, as it is so rare in places like Mimili to be given this kind of opportunity. To keep the project going Big hART negotiated with Windmill to assume more responsibility for the community process, creative team, and the aesthetic approach, and Windmill took responsibility for the build, promotion and touring - taking *Nyuntu Ngali* from Adelaide to the Sydney Theatre Company.

THE CONTENT

Nyuntu Ngali is set in the future, after the old world order, when a drive for progress and over consumption of resources has almost destroyed the planet. It is a world in which the only way to live is the way the land demands - a return to Indigenous stewardship of country. The production tells the story of a white teenage girl and a Pitjantjatjara teenage boy falling in love, falling pregnant, and falling out of favour with their elders because of a wrong-way marriage. They run away to have the baby, and try to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. The unborn baby, watching the perilous situation of his soon-to-be parents, tries to keep them alive, and in turn, save himself. The intercultural and environmental themes were big, and discussions around infanticide were quite challenging for a teenage audience. Aesthetically, the narrative was revealed through strong graphic visuals,



shadow, music and poetic dystopian text in a Pitjantjatjara/English hybrid.

Nyuntu Ngali proved a challenging project, but it was useful for Big hART to experiment with a co-production. *Nyuntu Ngali* provided a good legacy project, strong in its themes and aesthetic and providing valuable stage experience for Pitjantjatjara performers.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: *Nyuntu Ngali* was largely about the consequences of fossil fuels on the future of the planet. While presenting the show at the Australian Performing Arts Market, we were being observed from the audience and asked to consider working in the Pilbara region of Western Australia – by the Rock Art Foundation Committee, who are funded by Woodside Petroleum.

*“...a unique and multi-faceted production
- one which speaks to us about the need
to look back in order to look forward.
Though sophisticated, this is a beautiful
story, surprising and frequently funny ...
The story and the production process itself
speaks of the power of community influence
and the redefinition and the value of
passing on and sharing culture.”*

AUSTRALIAN STAGE

NAMATJIRA

2009 - 2017

MAKE: Theatre, watercolour app, animation, feature documentary

BUILD: Support for the Namatjira family and Western Aranda communities

DRIVE: The return of the copyright for the Namatjiras, and support for their art movement

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

One of the young people in the cast of *Ngapartji Ngapartji* was a 14 year old man, Elton, who was related to Albert Namatjira. He was the quietest member of the cast, and a beautiful artist, who drew his country on stage throughout the performance. Each night during the bows, when Elton was introduced as Albert Namatjira's kinship grandson, you could feel a ripple of recognition throughout the audience. As well as a deep affection for Namatjira, there was an unsettling feeling, a recognition of the injustice he suffered. Night after night, we'd listen and wonder whether this compelling narrative could speak to the unhealed heart of the country.

THE PROCESS

2009 was the 50th anniversary of Albert's passing, and building on Elton's relationship with the company we began talking with the Namatjira family about their story and their needs. What emerged was the strong desire for recognition and justice.

A collaboration between Big hART and the family clearly had the potential to raise awareness and push for change and so a community engagement process in Ntaria (Hermannsburg) - one hundred kilometres west of Alice Springs - was begun, to understand the community more deeply and design the project respectfully.



“The word is never said, but Namatjira is an enactment of reconciliation ... a sudden generosity of possibility. And that’s a rare thing to witness... a tribute to how artfully its makers step through the political minefield of this kind of community-based work.”

THEATRE NOTES

For 12 months Big hART ran workshops in the community, exploring the little known aspects of Namatjira’s story and the family’s aspirations. Many iconic issues came into focus, the most vivid being that his family didn’t own the copyright to his paintings. Even though there are many very fine painters still following his tradition, they struggle to find enough income and support to paint and sell their work sustainably.

Big hART’s long term project came quickly into focus after that first year of research and development. We partnered with Ngurratjuta Many Hands Art Centre in Alice Springs, and community workshops began in earnest in both Ntaria and Alice Springs to develop a new theatre show. Sydney’s Belvoir St. Theatre readily agreed to include the show in their subscription season. As well as working on a strategy to raise awareness regarding Albert Namatjira’s copyright and starting discussions to buy it back, Big hART organised exhibitions in partnership with Many Hands Art Centre to tour with the stage performance, and a feature length documentary recieved preliminary funding.

THE CONTENT

The family wanted their story to be told, and although touring with a theatre show was a foreign experience, and they were busy with family and cultural business, they wanted to come on the road. Each night during the performance they drew in chalk on a huge backdrop, creating a compelling Namatjira landscape across the stage, to deep appreciation from the audience.

The narrative we were telling was iconic, yet many of the details were not so well known. Albert walked out of the desert into Hermannsburg mission with his parents in 1902, as Federation formed the nation. He survived drought and poverty, and grew to be an entrepreneurial young man. The watercolour artist Rex Battarbee arrived in Ntaria - they swapped skills and opportunities, and Albert learned to paint. Rex championed Namatjira in the cities and together they began the Indigenous Art Centre movement, central to Australia’s international cultural image to this day. Namatjira became a famous and wealthy man, supporting 600 people in his family and community. Albert had citizenship forced upon him so the government could tax him, and he was ‘allowed’ to live in town, although his family were not. Racism bit hard - he was unfairly jailed and died a broken man.

Premiering at Belvoir St. Theatre the show was immediately embraced, and sold



*“Namatjira is confident, articulate
and beautifully made theatre.”*

THE AGE



*“We rose to applaud Namatjira
without hesitation on opening
night, brought to our feet by
this generous and enlightening
production.”*

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD

out wherever it toured. There was a sense of being witness to something special every night, as members of the Namatjira family, drawing live on stage, brought their country into the theatre. The combination of skills across the cast - with virtuoso musicians, actors and artists alongside the Namatjira family - was a rich and rare mixture of cultures and idioms that went on to touch the hearts of 50,000 people.

Before and after the show, the associated exhibitions of watercolour paintings proved popular, boosting art sales for the family and supporting their community. Painting workshops were held in towns and cities, with participants learning directly from the Namatjiras. School groups attended the production, and there was a shift in consciousness about the injustice the Namatjira family continued to face. People signed up each night to the campaign 'Friends of Namatjira', wanting to lend their support to securing sustainability for the Namatjira family.

At the end of the tour the production returned to Ntaria (Hermannsburg), where it was performed outdoors to an audience of hundreds, who had driven many kilometres across the desert to sit around fires and watch Namatjira's story unfold, right where it happened. The then Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion MP, was invited as part of the copyright strategy, and was captivated by the show. As a result, in the fifth year of the project, Minister Scullion hosted an exhibition of paintings by five generations of Namatjira artists in Parliament House.

Building on Albert Namatjira's historic audience with a young Queen Elizabeth, and wanting to lift the profile of the copyright quest, Big hART also toured the production to Southbank in London. The Prince of Wales, The Duchess of Cornwall and remarkably Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip, met with Albert's grandchildren Kevin and Lenie Namatjira and representatives from Big hART, at Buckingham Palace. They discussed the art work, their life in Alice Springs and showed their private collection of Albert's paintings. The UK press picked up the story of deep injustice, adding pressure to right the wrong.

Big hART created a feature documentary covering the project and its work to return the copyright, so as to assist the setting up of the Namatjira Legacy Trust, help sustain the Namatjiras and continue advocating for them and their community.

FAVOURITE MOMENT: *The full circle of Kevin and Lenie Namatjira travelling to Buckingham Palace, holding strong in their culture, having a gentle one on one chat with the Queen about the shared memory of their grandfather. The Namatjiras' strength of culture and desire for justice filling the conversation with conviction.*

“A deal perceived by many as a serious cultural injustice...the Namatjira Legacy Trust aims to set up a lasting legacy for the family.”

ABC WORLD TODAY

“Albert Namatjira left behind our most famous indigenous art estate, so why does his family have no say in how it is run?”

THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN

“Every so often a theatre performance will come along that has the rare power to touch the heart, lift the spirit, make us laugh, move us to tears and change the way we view our world. Namatjira is such a production.”

CANBERRA TIMES



“Deeply personal...this film is a reminder of how far we have come and how far we have to go.”

THE AUSTRALIAN

“Part of what makes the film so powerful is the sense of collaboration and generosity.”

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD



CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

SCHOOLS PROJECT 2009 - 2017

MAKE: Whole school original performance works with disadvantaged students

BUILD: New creative industry opportunities for rural young people

DRIVE: Innovation and equality in education for disadvantaged communities

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

The glaring disparity of opportunities across the education sector is one of the clearest indicators of social inequality in Australia. It locks generations into poverty, reinforces the class divide, and is perpetrated and worsened by successive governments as resources are distributed to schools, in a manner that favours those who are already well resourced. This is nowhere better illustrated than in many rural and regional areas.

Students in these schools desperately need to be able to imagine a new future for themselves, and to learn the ability to self-entrepreneur, and yet creativity is one of the first things to go when resources are tight and teachers are tired.

Partnering with Wynyard High School in North West Tasmania, Big hART decided to work in the school to research, develop and design whole school multi-arts projects. These brought young people face to face with creative industry professionals as they developed unusual hybrid productions from the ground up, with the help of the community. Five large projects were conducted over 8 years.

THE PROCESS

Rather than taking a script for a production off the shelf, the process was based

on making the walls of the school porous, and bringing community members, professional artists and arts-workers into the school to create ambitious works. These works would utilise the widest possible set of skills, so as to include the widest possible group of young people.

There were no starring roles - a backstage or front of house position was valued in the same way as a performance role. A wholistic, cross-curriculum approach was taken with jobs created for teams of young people in everything from scaffold building and construction, to hospitality and VIP ticketing, social media, video, research, archiving, and documenting. This moved through to more conventional roles on stage, in dance, movement, music, choir, text - even skateboarding.

The result was a highly inclusive program which designed pathways to involvement for any student who put their hand up. Big hART would often experiment with new professional content for other shows within the school production, giving students a 'real world' experience of the creative industries. One of the secrets of success was to include highly professional mentors - and at times including them in the productions alongside students - many of whom had strong careers reaching as far as the West End. These experimental projects went some way to addressing the deep inequalities in the education system, and illustrating new approaches to valuing the creative industries as a pathway for students.

The community loved them, and audiences were very strong with around 2,000 people attending the seasons, in a town of 5,000 people who rarely go to any theatre or live performance.

THE CONTENT

Love Zombies - zombies, Burt Bacharach, at the end of the world. The production was built from the ground up across all of the school curriculum.

Two Strong Hearts - utilising the John Farnham song book, this ambitious performance piece explored homelessness and tolerance of people who don't fit. The project doubled as a creative development for a professional work within the school production and included many professionals.

We Vote Soon - an online broadcast studio, with interviews, short films, cooking, and music, all webcast live. Young people interviewed politicians and put them

on the spot regarding questions of education policy. The project was designed to reignite young people's interest in democracy.

To a Different Drum – an inclusive performance piece based on percussion, which detailed the rhythms of one day in the life of the student body and featured video portraits of people from the school who often go unnoticed – such as the cleaners, the canteen staff and the groundspeople.

This is Not a Speech Night – based on a real high school speech night and all the things that can go wrong – the choir singing out of tune, the microphones not working. The show contained subtle messages of who we value in the school and why.

FAVOURITE MOMENT: *The Deputy Premier and Education Minister being interviewed about education policy, while sitting in a wooden dinghy, in front of a film green screen depicting the ocean – with two young men cooking chocolate muffins. He was slightly bewildered, and enjoyed the muffin.*



YIJALA YALA

2011 - 2014 | LEGACY PROJECT 2015 - ONGOING

MAKE: Theatre, interactive comics, short films, music, place-making, animation

BUILD: A stronger community and a more positive Roebourne, WA

DRIVE: The presentation of the heritage values of Murujuga, and an awareness of Indigenous incarceration rates

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

The town of Roebourne is situated in the West Pilbara region of Western Australia - where the desert meets the sea. Once the main hub of the North West, it has now shrunk to a transient population of around 1000, yet maintains its place as the Aboriginal centre of the region. Big hART had been invited to work in Roebourne some years earlier, and had gained a strong sense of the community and its iconic story.

An invitation to return to Roebourne came from a completely unexpected source, the Rock Art Foundation Committee (RAFC). The ask was to meet with a group of senior women, show them a documentary about the *Ngapartji Ngapartji* project in Ernabella, and to discuss the potential for a large scale, long-term project in the community.

The RAFC was formed when Woodside Petroleum began building a gas plant on Government annexed land on the culturally sensitive Burrup Peninsula (Murujuga). Murujuga is an incredible site of over a million petroglyphs (rock art). It is of world heritage value and profoundly significant to the Ngarluma people, the custodians for the Yaburara people (Southern Ngarluma) whose community was decimated with the arrival of European settlers in the mid 19th century. This policy of the West Australian Government to place large industrial works on Murujuga had been condemned as deeply insensitive.



“Instead of being locked into the machine of theatre, Big hART and its performers sit on ‘the evolving edge of the authentic moment’, being here and now but not compromising about making great work.”

THE AGE

Perhaps in recognition of this enforced cultural travesty, Woodside set aside a corporate donation of 37.4 million dollars towards maintaining and presenting the heritage values of Murujuga. The RAFC was set up to administer these funds and develop projects with the community. A number of years into the program the RAFC and Woodside were concerned at the lack of progress, and Big hART were approached to begin a conversation with the community with a view to designing a project.

Senior women from the community quickly came to the consensus that Roebourne needed a similar program to *Ngapartji Ngapartji*, to help end the stigma about the community perpetuated by the media and to talk about the ‘New Roebourne’. This brief became the starting point for Big hART to begin building a quiet community process.

THE PROCESS

Yijala Yala began slowly and carefully, with a producer living in the community, having cups of tea and listening. Roebourne has experienced 150 years of cultural trauma, beginning in the late 1860s to the present: the arrival of white farmers, the stealing of land, destruction of food and water sources by cattle, disease epidemics and slaughter, being pushed together onto reserves, the arrival of the mining industry, welfare and native title pressures. It has been a tsunami of change and brutality.

The first year of the project was spent working with the grandchildren of the senior women who brought Big hART to the community, running engagement workshops, creating literacy outcomes, while at the same time designing a longer term approach to working with the community. Once Big hART was embedded in the community a project name was chosen - *Yijala Yala* - meaning “now” in both Ngarluma (the country where Roebourne sits) and Yindjirbarndi (a larger nation who were forced off their own land and into Roebourne). The use of the word “now” represented the desire in the community to talk about the positives of Roebourne and its future, not just the pain and dysfunction of the past – and to do so with urgency. The conceptual foundation of the project, steered by senior people, was that ‘heritage is a future concept’ – they wanted to keep looking forward, backed by their strong connection to their culture, and the past.

Yijala Yala stayed true to its brief of helping to maintain and transmit the heritage values of Murujuga by embarking on a wide range of workshops with young



people. These involved digital literacy, intergenerational exchange, traditional stories, futuristic stories, music, video, re-engagement in education, juvenile justice support, and diversion from crime. The project explored these approaches to heritage, instead of a ‘glass case’ museum approach, and the community loved it.

THE CONTENT

Quite quickly the young people began achieving beyond community expectations. Their short films were screened locally, a homegrown interactive computer game was launched, concerts in and outside the prison were held, and a growing team of professionals mentored the community in a whole range of skill building workshops. These workshops led to many spin-off projects – *Neomad*, *Hipbone Sticking Out*, *MURRU*, *Tjaabi*, *Smashed*, *How Do We Get to Space* and the *John Pat Peace Place*.

The community grabbed *Yijala Yala* and ran with it. The workshops created too many layers of content to cover them all here, however below are highlights from the first 6 years in Roebourne.

NEOMAD

Neomad is an interactive comic made for iPad – a collaboration between young people from Roebourne and a professional creative team. *Neomad* was culturally and technically ahead of its time, and in 2016 it won Australia’s top comic award - the Leger Award. The comic was hand drawn and then photoshopped by Aboriginal young people who were initially disengaged from education, with some considered almost ‘unteachable’. This core group called themselves the ‘Love Punks’, and they created comic characters based on their own aspirations, each had quirky positive characteristics- they were smart, cheeky and fast on their feet.

Neomad became an exceptional vehicle for youth work and re-engagement in the school system, fostering digital literacy and diversion from crime. Parents and elders were amazed to see the talent and positivity of these young people, and the new skills they had quickly acquired.

Futuristic and optimistic, *Neomad* builds on Roebourne’s sense of humour and adventure, as well as the importance of country and heritage. It was an immediate hit, and the community were gobsmacked when their young artists were invited to present their work at a comic conference in South Korea.



“It’s an incredible achievement for a group of students who hail from a remote 1,000-person town perched on the northern shoulder of WA, surrounded by miles and miles of the Pilbara’s swirling red sands.”

THE GUARDIAN

HOW DO WE GET TO SPACE

Neomad was such a unique project that a documentary was made to capture the process, called *How Do We Get To Space* as well as 40 other short films made with the community, aired on NITV and other platforms. Thousands of Woodside Petroleum's employees were a key audience for *Yijala Yala*, with many of these short films being played on their intranet, so as to broaden Woodside employees' appreciation of Roebourne's positive attributes.

HIPBONE STICKING OUT

The Aboriginal name for the Burrup Peninsula is Murujuga - meaning "hipbone sticking out", capturing its geography sticking out into the Indian Ocean. Murujuga is a place of deep cultural significance where law comes out of the sea, and travels inland. It was also the point of first contact for the small ship that came to 'settle' the Pilbara, bringing sheep and small pox. Murujuga became emblematic of the *Yijala Yala* project and the many untold stories, beyond the museum view of rock art heritage.

Soon after Big hART began the *Yijala Yala* project, the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation Limited (NYFL) began building a Cultural Centre in the main street of Roebourne. The completion of the centre became a galvanizing deadline to try and tell the sweeping narrative of Murujuga and the town - by the community, for the community - in time for the opening. Through story collection, skills training and creative development workshops, the project began working with the community to tell both the tragic stories from the past again, such as the '*Flying Foam Massacre*' on Murujuga, or the story of John Pat - and also stories of hope. In the end the performance folded the past into the continuity of Roebourne now, and on this basis the show - *Hipbone Sticking Out* - was conceived. Vast in scope, and varied in style and technique, it was a deeply intercultural work.

Hipbone tells the recent story that gave rise to the town we now know as Roebourne, but the production begins in 1602 with the emergence of globalisation - relentlessly marching towards the Pilbara and sweeping over these ancient Indigenous nations. The central narrative came from the Pat family. They had shared with us the tragic story of their son John's death in police custody three decades earlier, which triggered the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody. The family generously worked with the cast, and John Pat became the lens through which the show could examine this sweeping narrative. As he lay

"That Hipbone manages to keep all these different levels of reality present on stage at the same time is its astonishing achievement. It's extraordinarily generous theatre: funny and tragic, tough and tender, unsentimental, angry and heartbreaking. The show generates its complex emotional impact from its very literal enactment of maragutharra, the Yindjibarndi word for "working together", and it's explicitly addressed to a white audience. It says, this isn't our history: this is your history. And it is, told as clearly and passionately as I've seen."

THE AGE

“Hipbone Sticking Out is a joyous, moving, life-altering piece of theatre that refuses to be anything but raw and unflinching in its view of history, and nothing short of hopeful in its outlook.”

THE HERALD SUN



on the floor of the police cell in the last hours of his life, he tried to make sense of what was happening to him, by traveling across time. The Pat family wanted John's story told, and came on tour to keep the story safe.

Hipbone was three years in the making. Large in scale like an iconoclastic opera, this intercultural work combined local talent with internationally renowned artists, involving 40 people on the road.

The performance began by evoking all the opulence of European high art, and over the course of the performance the artifice was stripped away, leaving just the company on stage telling the story of Roebourne now, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous alike, all part of the narrative. The story pulled no punches, weaving multiple stories of brutality into one. There was the stealing of land story, the prison story, the slave story, the reserve story, the crowded housing, the asbestos mining, and in the end, it captured the ongoing, changing and future focused story of this strong community with a future in two worlds.

Hipbone Sticking Out was the debut show in the amphitheatre at the new Ngurin Pilbara Aboriginal Cultural Centre, delighting a packed house of people from across the Pilbara and moving them to tears of sorrow and joy. It also represented Western Australia in the Centenary of Canberra festival before touring Perth and then the Melbourne International Arts Festival, where it was a sellout sensation.

MURRU

'Murru' was John Pat's nickname, and his family liked the idea of naming the music workshops in Roebourne District Prison after him. Many people from town go through the prison, in some ways it's a rite of passage. Music is a good way of keeping inmates connected to their community. *MURRU* workshops brought many high profile artists to Roebourne and helped keep the issue of deaths in custody on the public agenda. The *MURRU* band was formed, an album produced, and the *MURRU* concert was staged.

The statistics are stark – 51.8% of young people in prison in Australia at the time of the project were Indigenous. Big hART used *MURRU* to gain attention and support for other organisations campaigning to lower these statistics and pushing for justice reinvestment (reinvesting money in prevention programs which divert young people from the justice system).

MURRU launched with a concert in Fremantle, performed in Roebourne, and

“Big hART’s Hipbone Sticking Out is gob-smacking in its ambition and its achievement. It’s a landmark work of Australian theatre that writes its own rules (and then breaks them).”

ABC ARTS

opened the 2014 Melbourne International Arts Festival with a free concert in Federation Square. It was programmed in the festival in tandem with *Hipbone Sticking Out* and a public forum at the Wheeler Centre looking at the issue of Indigenous incarceration rates. Having Ms. Juggari Pat (John's mother) and the Pat family with Big hART on tour added raw emotion and gravitas to the issue. Workshops continue in Roebourne, both in the community and the prison, building bridges beyond the prison walls, and assisting in rehabilitation.

TJAABI

As the fourth year of the project approached, *Yijala Yala* moved into its legacy phase. Often stronger outcomes emerge when you shift successful projects, creating gaps for new approaches to grow in the community with more independence.

The legacy phase began with a project name change - from *Yijala Yala*, to *New Roebourne*. Central to the legacy strategy was Big hART's residency at the new Cultural Centre, and backing creative leaders in the community. Ngarluma man Patrick Churnside had been in the cast of *Hipbone Sticking Out* singing tjaabi (a public song form) handed down from his grandfather.

Patrick was passionate about tjaabi, which can be roughly described as being like a sung haiku. Tjaabi contain precise lyrics set to an often inherited melody, with an underlay of rhythm, that capture the essence of a moment, or country, or perhaps a dream. Once a tjaabi comes upon you, you become the keeper of that tjaabi - it stays with you and is passed through your family. These sit in the public domain and can be safely heard by non-Indigenous audiences.

Although still sung, tjaabi have been under pressure for the last few generations, sitting in the background, but often brought up by elders as something that should be more alive and embraced by young people.

Patrick's love for tjaabi, and passion for passing the tradition on to young people, complimented his ability to walk between cultures. He saw how these public songs could form a generous intercultural bridge between worlds.

He became inspired to learn more about tjaabi from his elders and combine song, dance, video, movement and story in a performance piece. The community embraced this intergenerational workshop program.



Patrick's grandfather was a famous tjaabi singer, and it was important to bring the extended family on the journey of the project by inviting them into the workshop and rehearsal space. The *Tjaabi* project pulls young people together for workshops, bring elders in to advise on song and dance, supported by other arts workers as the show is assembled. These workshops have triggered extensive talks with other families who hold many other tjaabis across the Pilbara.

The *Tjaabi* project is central to the legacy of Big hART's work in the Pilbara. There were around 900 people living in Roebourne, and when we first performed *Tjaabi* in the amphitheatre, with Patrick's family sitting up close to support him, and about 900 people turned up. It was one of the most powerful moments in 25 years of Big hART's work. Here was a wave of joy, relief and respect for the songs and a flowering of potential, as Patrick sang and young men and women danced, and senior men spontaneously joined him on stage, dancing in support.

While *Tjaabi* is being created to tour Australia and South East Asia, it also provides a local vehicle for working with young people in the Ngurin Pilbara Aboriginal Cultural Centre.

JOHN PAT PEACE PLACE

Big hART's legacy in Roebourne also involves bringing resolution to the Pat family around John's story, and providing the community with a safe and peaceful place to remember his life, while looking positively to the future. A small landscaped garden, the John Pat Peace Place, sits in the grounds of the Cultural Centre, positioned inclusively as part of the amphitheater and overlooking the peace of the river, with subtle design features alluding to John's life, and a new future for the community.

BIG hART IN ROEBOURNE

Big hART's legacy projects all come under the banner of *New Roebourne*. This is an enthralling community, with its wet and dry seasons, cyclones and intense heat, nestled where the desert meets the sea. It sits in the West Pilbara on the Ngurin River, now dammed to provide water for mining. It is beautiful, harsh and hurting. The resource industry will be gone in a generation or two, and the community is working hard to straddle different economies and secure a future benefit. In the meantime, the main aspirations focus on family and culture rather than resources. Roebourne sits as the only town on the highway between

Geraldton and Broome, and has so much potential to become a centre of intercultural excellence, and cultural tourism.

Roebourne's population of 1000 expands and contracts with transient families at different times of the year. Around 400 of these are young people, and Big hART has worked with 80% of them across many layers of the project. Here is the heritage. Here is the potential. The struggle is the consistency of support.

Before Big hART began to work in the Pilbara, the author Nicholas Rothwell, who writes passionately about his experiences of Aboriginal Australia, was writing a story on the *Namatjira* Project. When he heard we were also beginning work in the Pilbara, he said it was his favorite part of the country, "but the Pilbara eats people." He didn't expect us to last a year. Six years on, the community has afforded the company a remarkable privilege.

FAVOURITE MOMENT: *This community is much maligned by the media, however its generosity is expansive - it is a warm generous place with a strong sense of family, always working to build a better future for their young people. Watching kids like Max, who started as a small child and is now a strong young man - mentoring other young people on how to walk in both worlds, is especially rewarding.*



“Pilbara songs are hanging in the air under a swollen moon, near a stony riverbed edged with spinifex grass... Indian prayer bowls brimming with salt, spinifex seeds, sand and water have been laid on pillows of red dirt... Earlier in the day, lead performer Patrick Churnside rehearsed his cherished songs, with a dozen local children behind him.”

THE AUSTRALIAN





“Since the show opened, on a daily basis people are coming up to me and wanting to talk about it because it was dealing with incredibly important issues ... and doing so in a very impactful and poignant way. It was an enormously important work and quite central to the entire program.”

JOSEPHINE RIDGE, MELBOURNE FESTIVAL DIRECTOR, 2015

ALLERY SANDY

CULTURAL ADVISER, PERFORMER - YIJALA YALA AND NEW ROEBOURNE

I have learnt a lot from Big hART. I have learnt about their love and compassion for people, and their role in bringing out untold stories about things that have happened, but have never been told. Big hART directs strong teams and has effective relationships with community groups. Big hART has lots of compassion and respect for elders, I saw this all come about in the Roebourne *Yijala Yala* project, when we began working on *Hipbone Sticking Out*. When I saw the finished version of *Hipbone Sticking Out*, it hit me so powerfully that I was standing in tears, and I have never experienced that in my lifetime. Everyone hears and tells their story as a intercultural company, and it came out beautifully with the kids from Roebourne.

Big hART's work shows little kids know how much they can learn and achieve. These projects encourage the younger generations to continue with their school and look for greater challenges in their life. I can see this happening with my grandsons, going back to school and their involvement in the Big hART programs and community leadership.

I can trust Scott Rankin and when I met him and I felt like I had known him a long time. Our working relationship and communication grew strong to benefit the community people. I feel safe in everything that he does, but if he jumps off the track I can tell him. Big hART has a vision for the community. Its work with Aboriginal people is something that we can trust, rely on and we know it will perform. I have been watching how they operate, keeping things moving forward gently and powerfully.

I see Big hART fighting for funding, getting projects on their feet and fighting for the support on our behalf. It is about the untold stories, so they can come alive through art. There has been an introduction to music through Big hART programs and music hits your heart.

Big hART has been doing this for 25 years. I hope they keep going with the work that they have done with both cultures, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, for they have a heart for the people. They have great respect for the community and know how to bring about projects, by working alongside and listening to us.



MUSEUM OF THE LONG WEEKEND

2012 - 2013

MAKE: Site-specific, collaborative, installation and performance

BUILD: Participation nationally in the Centenary of Canberra

DRIVE: New ways of celebrating nationhood, beyond work and sport

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

Big hART has enjoyed years as a company in residence at the Canberra Theatre Centre, running workshops and bringing unusual work created in far-flung places to the national capital. *Museum of the Long Weekend* was part of that residency and had a national focus. Created for the Centenary of Canberra in 2013, this was a project which involved people participating thousands of kilometres apart – as far as Western Australia's Pilbara region, North Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Southern Tasmania.

The concept behind the work was to find a way to highlight the importance of leisure and how it helps us flourish – in ways that work can't – and to bring the love of the long weekend into the celebration of the national capital. It's often in times of leisure, when the pressure of work is gone, that we look deeper, confront each other, or glimpse what is meaningful, and this is worth celebrating alongside other symbols of nationhood.



THE PROCESS

Museum of the Long Weekend was a simple concept – find people with beautiful caravans around the country who would like to go on the road all at the same time and travel to Canberra for a long weekend. In the lead up to the trip, we would match artists to each family and caravan, and they would work with stories associated with the van, or the family, or holidays in general, to create an art installation inside the van. These installations would be transported to Canberra in the caravans, and form a pop up museum on the banks of Lake Burley Griffin. Free, open, accessible... and driven away again after three days.

Along the journey to Canberra, each caravan travelling from the furthest point would join up with others closer to the nation's capital. Over many days and nights, this growing convoy would stop in caravan parks or truck stops, light a campfire and begin conversations – sharing stories, songs, damper, and BBQ. This same low-fi improvised performance would roll out each night in Canberra in the midst of 'the museum' of caravans.

THE CONTENT

The event was hugely popular, with thousands drifting through at their leisure each day, and many staying for campfires and projections on the side of caravans and an uncontrolled curatorial free for all, full of eccentric moments.

In some small way, as the lights of the caravans twinkled on the waters of the lake, *Museum of the Long Weekend* commented back to the monolithic institutions – galleries, museums, libraries – that stare with European solemnity out across the shimmering lake. *Museum of the Long Weekend* was deliberately ephemeral. There was something of national significance to be discovered in leisurely conversations around a campfire, or by welcoming strangers into a proudly kept caravan, which was then pulled apart and driven off into the sunset. There was also something quintessentially Australian about celebrating the nation's capital by doing 'nothing' on the weekend.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: *The reflection of this ephemeral, pop-up museum of leisure on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin, combining on the glistening surface with those from the monolithic institutions on the opposite shore.*

COSMOPOLITANA

2013 - 2015

MAKE: Theatre performance, concerts, music albums

BUILD: Community pride and intergenerational connection

DRIVE: Stronger recognition that this country is built on migration

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

In 2013 Big hART was invited to Cooma by South East Arts and Cooma Monaro Shire Council to explore the possibility of a new project in the remarkably beautiful Monaro region. This began as part of Big hART's company in residence at the Canberra Theatre Centre (CTC), which had seen presentations of *Namatjira*, *Ngapartji One*, *Museum of the Long Weekend* and other projects and workshops.

Beginning initially from the CTC office, and driving to Cooma an hour away in New South Wales, the potential for cross-border collaboration presented an interesting opportunity. Cooma sat in the shadow of Canberra. Eden-Monaro is a 'bellwether' seat, and much of Canberra was built by families who immigrated to Cooma to work on the Snowy Mountains Scheme. At the time there was a strong anti-immigration voice coming out of one demographic in Cooma, and gaining national attention.

THE PROCESS

CTC were interested in supporting a new work in collaboration with the band Mikelangelo and the Black Sea Gentlemen, who had grown up in the area. Aligned with the project there were strong political parallels between the contemporary fear of the 'other in our midst' created by the political use of the refugee crises, and the society-changing immigration immediately after WW2 which fed into the build of the Snowy Mountains Hydro Scheme near Cooma.



These stories, of immigration and creation, provided a rich context in which to make a new work with the community, reflecting on an era where Cooma experienced so much cultural change.

Cosmopolitana celebrated the gifts brought to Australia by those who have come from around the globe in search of a new life. “Cosmopolitan” can be defined as: “to be at ease in and with different countries and cultures”, or “free from provincial or national bias... where a person can feel at home” and “a place bustling with diverse nationalities and cultures”. Although it was not without conflict, Cooma managed to make a transformation during 1950s and 60s. Immigrants, who only a decade before were fighting each other in WW2, began building Australia, while transforming the local culture in so many ways that are taken for granted today. (Arguably, the first espresso machine in Australia was introduced to Australian culture in Cooma). The project set out to explore the conflict, the culture, and the progress, through intergenerational eyes.

Cosmopolitana began with a community process working across generations and cultural groups - in the high schools, retirement villages and nursing homes. In Cooma’s heritage, a richly layered cosmopolitan past lay just below the surface, and the Snowy Mountains Hydro Scheme loomed large as the defining moment, in what had been a quiet rural town and the gateway to the Snowy Mountains. Here were dramatic stories of sacrifice and loss, love and belonging, of vision and entrepreneurial spirit, and a pioneering struggle from people new to the country to create cultural diversity in Australia. The social fabric of Cooma and its surrounds continues to this day to be enriched by subsequent waves of migrants and refugees, and yet many of the same struggles exist.

THE CONTENT

Through workshops in music, dance, oral history and archival research with the Cooma community, *Cosmopolitana* generated a wealth of material to feed into a new theatre production - *Ghosts in the Scheme* - which premiered locally in a concert version, and later at the Canberra Theatre Centre. *Ghosts in the Scheme* brought together actors, musicians, videographers and a community cast. It tells a story of three complex friendships, over a lifetime, full of the secrets, loves, and twists of fate that all of us face, and were mirrored in local story collections, set amongst the haunting gothic hills of the Monaro.

Music was central to the workshops, and *Cosmopolitana* provided the opportunity

for the Black Sea Gentlemen to record and tour an EP *The Alpine Way*, and an album of songs *After The Flood* - inspired by the community as an ongoing legacy to the project. As a result of *Cosmopolitana*, Big hART continues to work in Cooma through *Project O* - working with the community’s young women, encouraging their leadership and capacity.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: *Hearing the stories of love and wild times in the main street, as this sleepy hollow was transformed by espresso, gambling, new food, wines and clubs, and men from the other side of the world who could dance! The whispered stories of love and lust that were eagerly shared by older residents during workshops.*

BLUE ANGEL

2013 - 2015 ONGOING

MAKE: Site-specific theatre performance, concert, exhibition

BUILD: Stronger understanding of the vulnerable seafarer community

DRIVE: A campaign for Fair Shipping

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

90% of everything we buy comes to us via the sea. There are approximately 1.3 million seafarers working on the world's oceans - 24 hours a day. Around 700,000 of them work essentially as slaves, importing our products and resources, yet consumers remain blissfully unaware. If people knew about this invisible issue they would demand change. *Blue Angel* was set up to work with the seafaring community to help tell this story, and lobby for Fair Shipping.

The genesis of the *Blue Angel* project began on the waterfront in Liverpool, UK, while tracing the history of the port and its docks. Robyn Archer had invited Big hART to imagine a project for Liverpool, in the lead up to the European Capital of Culture in 2008. Big hART recognised Liverpool's connection to both genius navigators and their global exploration, as well as ruthless slavery and imperialism. The city is still silently haunted by its unresolved seafaring past, and from this beginning Big hART designed a project to respond to the blue planet, its oceans, its seafaring economies and its hidden slaves.

THE PROCESS

In Australia, the *Blue Angel* project began with a series of workshops and discussions with the shipping industry and the seafaring community. Like many other communities there were elders, icons, people and organisations engaged across the many layers of the community. Big hART set out to help tell the hidden story of slaves at sea using different media and forums, including large



“This show is bold ...with big knotty things to say, it takes an eclectic form; comedy, concert, documentary, portraiture, installation, interaction, cabaret, drama...”

THE MERCURY

performance works created in port cities such as Hobart, Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. From this awareness-raising, it was hoped to begin a campaign promoting Fair Shipping, whereby consumers could trace the transport provenance of their goods, and choose to buy a product because it has been stamped with ‘Fair Shipping’.

Workshops were used to capture the stories of individuals within the industry – using portraiture in film, paint and text. Seafaring was also examined in continuity across centuries, exploring the danger, romance, adventure, heroism and horror. The seafaring community is not just at sea. Half the community wait on the shores, in ports around the world for the return of loved ones. 2000 seafarers die at sea each year, making it one of the most dangerous jobs in the world – 17 times more dangerous than mining – yet we take all this for granted.

THE CONTENT

What emerged from the workshops were a series of mini-narratives, images and themes which could be told separately or woven together. An ambitious site-specific performance piece was created, that allowed these evolving stories to be consumed in diverse ways, by small promenading audience groups, in different orders, across interlinked small venues, with no one person able to see the whole story on any one night.

Each show in each port city was designed to focus on a different theme, inspired by unusual performance spaces.

In Hobart, where the first iteration of the show was staged, the theme was ‘Romance and the Sea’ – the unrequited, those left behind, the longing. Created for Ten Days on the Island Festival, it was staged in The Astor Hotel, as well as a deserted cabaret venue next door, in the basement, the restaurant, adjoining Legacy Hall, in the street and in shipping containers. There were nine venues running simultaneously, dividing the crowd into small groups.

The audience could choose different ways of seeing the show – they could stay overnight in the hotel, have a meal in the restaurant and see additional performances, or they could just see the show later in the evening. There were boutique performances during the meal, and sound design overnight, with perhaps a seafarer visiting your room as you drifted off to sleep in your bunk. Each hotel room was dedicated to a seafarer, with their portrait on the wall, and



seafarers' trunks containing autobiographical trinkets to explore in each room. Specially monographed linen, crockery and whiskey were created for the 'Good Ship Astor'.

Like all Big hART's projects for Ten Days On the Island, it was one of the festival's most ambitious works, exploring new forms and content, designed to evolve in response to each port.

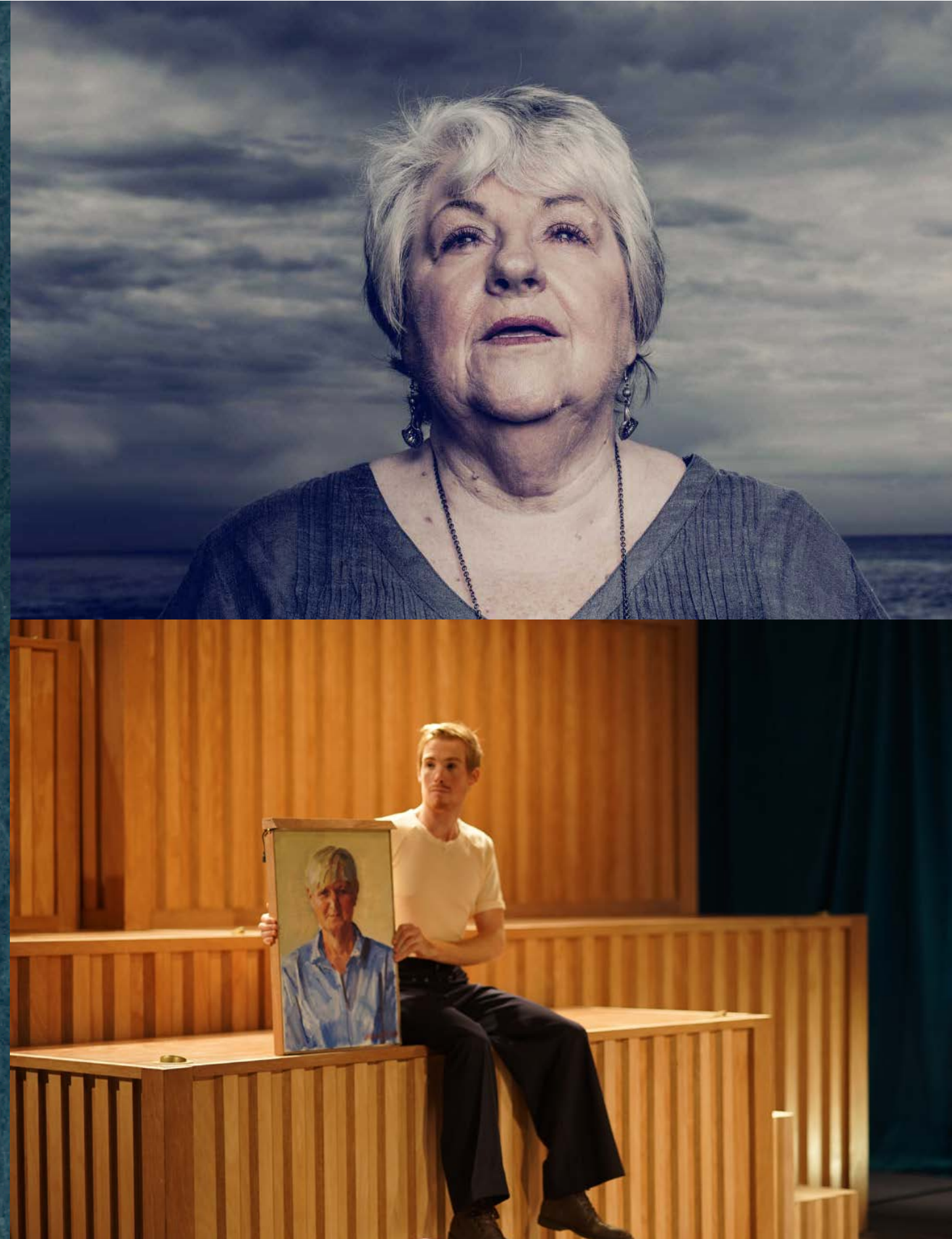
Blue Angel is ongoing, and has presented a concert version in Federation Square, Melbourne, and a workshop version on a ship in Sydney Harbour, as well as workshops in Rotterdam exploring this global issue. *Blue Angel* is a work that continues to evolve globally, stretching beyond the confines of traditional venues and festivals.

FAVOURITE MOMENT: *Seeing the pride and joy on the retired seafarers' faces, as their painted portraits were unveiled, honouring their life at sea. Then guests, cast and crew drinking their undrinkable homemade whiskey, post-show in the lounge of the Astor Hotel, singing sea shanties till 3am.*



“...the Big hART team are unrelenting seekers of artistic truth and beauty... I’m extraordinarily proud that Big hART has chosen to tell the story of seafarers through its Blue Angel production.”

PADDY CRUMLIN, PRESIDENT, INTERNATIONAL
TRANSPORT WORKERS FEDERATION



PROJECT O

2014 - ONGOING

MAKE: An art-marathon event, theatre performance, podcasts, film

BUILD: Community support for rural young women as change-makers

DRIVE: Generational change to prevent family violence

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

In the early 1990s Big hART forged its identity around two significant issues - juvenile justice and family violence prevention. A series of projects beginning in 1994 through to 1998 addressed these issues and dovetailed with the Howard Government's *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* initiative. The evidence from Big hART's evaluated projects subsequently influenced Government approaches to working with young people, and the prevention of family violence has remained in Big hART's DNA ever since.

THE PROCESS

Primary prevention is vital to long term change, and *Project O* is Big hART's ongoing response to the issue. If we don't push for generational and attitudinal change, to help denormalise family violence, we will end up in the same place, trying to fix the crisis end, running the same kinds of projects every decade - to no lasting effect.

Project O backs rural young women to drive change in communities affected by family violence. The project takes a generational approach, working with young women to increase their personal agency and build their skills through a series of workshops and mentoring opportunities, creating attitudinal change towards their capabilities. *Project O* has been successfully piloted in Tasmania and, having gained the attention of the Federal Minister for Women, has now been rolled out in Cooma NSW, Canberra ACT, and Roebourne in WA.





“People in Wynyard aren’t talking to me about girls at risk anymore. There are still girls at risk, but there is now also this group of girls who have stepped up and faced their challenges and found their voice... These young women now have a positive profile in our community, and they set an example for themselves and their peers and the rest of us about what girls in our town can do and be.”

ROGER JAENSCH MP, MEMBER FOR BRADDON

Project O works in tandem with a Big hART's legacy program **20+20** – which provides ongoing opportunities for these young women to find and sustain employment, after graduating from *Project O*. Both projects assist them to identify new horizons and move beyond negative generational expectations and gender norms.

THE CONTENT

Project O begins initially with a peer-to-peer research and development workshop process, through which young people identify issues they are facing. This then develops into an engagement workshop program focused on young women aged 12 to 15 years, to increase their skills and strengthen the desire to contribute to their community. As skills are learned, opportunities are created to test them in the community in a series of art-based advocacy events, building confidence based on real achievement and reward.

A visual art endurance event – called **Colourathon** – is then run by the young women, in partnership with local businesses. Young people and community groups colour in for up to 24 hours, with each hour being sponsored. It is a galvanising event with a festive atmosphere that brings the community together to support the efforts of these young women, while raising the issue of family violence locally and in the media. Each hour sponsored, and an associated crowd funding campaign raises money for a local women's shelter, providing child trauma training for staff and resources for young children fleeing violence.

Colourathon has proved immensely popular and has been developed into a family-friendly colouring event for festivals, community days and corporate events. Having been piloted in Tasmania, it is now being rolled out in other communities nationally.

Project O also incorporates a performance piece called **O**, designed to create an intergenerational exchange between older and younger women. **O Play** is a one-woman show for an older actor, at the height of her performing powers. The story is a reinterpretation of story of Hamlet's Ophelia. Hamlet contains around 31,000 words, with Ophelia only being given around 1,000, and yet we remember this iconic character, who was robbed of agency by her father, her brother, and her lover. This older Ophelia turns the narrative around, looking across 400 years of women in the theatrical canon, helping us to listen to the often silenced voices of young women today.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: *At Colourathon, the local footy team and coach sitting around a table in their team gear colouring in with the young women, the local Police, the Women's Legal Service and the CWA - all showing their solidarity and support of rural young women and family violence prevention.*



“I had the pleasure of seeing the work of the remarkable young women from Big hART’s Project O, who are taking positive action in rural communities affected by family violence. I am thrilled to see that this primary prevention project is now going national and promoting generational change.”

ROSIE BATTY, AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2015

IZZI WARD

PARTICIPANT, PROJECT O AND 20+20 PROJECT

Project O was the class I learnt most from.

As a group of young women, and as individuals, we've achieved so much with the help of *Project O*. We've been spoken about in Parliament, we've helped the Commissioner for Children release his report on family violence, we have spent time with Rosie Batty, we've met with all the big politicians, as well as getting jobs and work experience. We ran our *Colourathon* to raise money for kids in women's shelters, which we were all super proud of. It was, for most of us, one of our biggest life achievements.

Up until our last event - *The Acoustic Life of Sheds*, I thought *Project O* and Big hART were mainly teaching us job skills and teamwork. But they're just the things we knew were learning.

"It's harder to hurt someone if you know their story".

Big hART is a storytelling company, yet the company doesn't tell our stories for us - we do. Through *Project O* we learnt we all have stories. We learnt how to tell them, and all the while, we were learning how to own them.

Now, the most valuable thing I've learnt from Big hART is that other people have stories too. Even if you don't know it, (especially if you don't know it) respecting that story is the best thing you can do for anyone.

Big hART set out to find stories worth listening to. Stories of individuals and communities. They didn't know yet the collective story of the women of Wynyard, but they knew it was worth telling.

There was this quote I found from Stephen Covey that says "Listen with the intent to understand, not the intent to reply". I didn't think much of it, until I started to think of Big hART as 'a company who listens'.

That is why the people who work for Big hART make such brilliant mentors. They value our stories as much as we value our learning. They are always listening. It's always felt as though they're on the same level as us, and even though we are half their age - they never devalue us.

Usually empathy is a trait we use to describe individuals, not companies - but that is what Big hART is. They listen empathetically. They have helped us young women to tell our story, and helped others to hear it, and understand.

By helping people understand, Big hART was able to do something to change things. The women of Wynyard weren't succeeding - career-wise or life-wise. By working with young women in school they were challenging the problem early on, preventing it, helping us before crossroads to either success or failure were upon us. We had a lot of help from Big hART but they didn't do it for us - they just showed us what we could do, then let us make our own decisions.

Project O has become part of us, and our community, and has taught us to listen for the bigger story.

SKATE

2015 - ONGOING

MAKE: A dynamic, commercial theatre performance

BUILD: Ongoing finance for Big hART's work in disadvantaged communities

DRIVE: Social impact, and change in the community's view of skateboarders

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

SKATE has a long genesis in Big hART, beginning with the first *No Comply* event at the Burnie skate park in Tasmania, July 2005, involving an exhibition of deck art, music, evolving murals, video and street artists. These events continued and some of the young people took to videography and the making of the award-winning Big hART documentary *DRIVE*. Performative aspects from this culture and the artform of skateboarding began to be explored in shows and projects being created during a ten year partnership with Wynyard High School, developing approaches to combining creative industries with a disadvantaged school's curriculum, through long-term whole of school projects.

One of these projects in 2013 explored the building of a large show around beats, using rhythm as a tool for inclusion in the project. Big hART built a skateboarding sequence into that performance piece, bringing in an older skateboarders to work with the students as mentors, while experimenting with the form of this new show *SKATE*.

THE PROCESS

We noticed on these various skateboarding projects that skateboarding itself could create a strong percussive groove, and that it was probably possible to skate in time, perhaps shifting the surface textures to make different sounds. We explored this ensemble skateboarding successfully, added tracking projection and light and knew we had a product that could have wide commercial appeal – not only to skateboarders, but to families and the general public.



Pursuing this commercial imperative became a focus for Big hART following the frustration of more than 20 years of project-by-project funding. Despite many exceptional evaluations and strong evidence of cost-saving impact for the taxpayer, it was difficult to establish an ongoing funding arrangement with government or the philanthropic sector. The scale of Big hART's projects and the magnitude of the issues we were dealing with in communities - often isolated and expensive - meant that the maximum funding we could access through bodies such as the Australia Council was limited, and in fact often placed our arts workers in danger. One response was to try and add a commercial arm to our fundraising and to create a profitable product which could generate a healthy box office, which was not attached to an expensive community process. Rather, the social impact would come as a result of the funds raised through **SKATE's** success, for our work in disadvantaged communities.

Getting the necessary investment for a large commercial venture however seemed near impossible. That is until Perpetual Trustees invited Big hART to put in a submission to an innovative funding stream which would look at funding what we considered our 'biggest need'. We suggested the capacity to self-fund was vital to our sustainability, and put forward **SKATE** as a model.

THE CONTENT

SKATE is a percussive, choreographed, commercial performance piece using the art of skateboarding to create movement and music, combined with tracking projection. Think **STOMP** on wheels, with more colour and movement. It is designed as spectacle rather than narrative, and is staged in conventional theatres, not skateboarding venues. The skateboarders are amplified, with every move becoming part of the music making. On top of this, projectors track each skateboarder to create an ever-changing visual image on stage. The cast is made up of a combination of musicians, dancers and skateboarders who combine seamlessly into a musically enthralling, visual, commercial show.

SKATE has a small touring cast, no language barriers, and can be performed anywhere in the world with different casts in a repeatable way. It requires a very high degree of skill and the results can be spectacular. Workshops and creative developments have been in progress since 2015, with a creative showing to be followed by touring in the lead up to the Tokyo Olympics, which is including skateboarding in competition. If successful, profits from **SKATE** will help Big hART address the pointless whims of the funding cycles that inhibit social impact in the field, and are led more by ideology than community need.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: Auditioning skateboarders all night at Riverslide skatepark during White Night Melbourne, listening to the percussive potential of their craft.



ACOUSTIC LIFE OF SHEDS

2014 - ONGOING

MAKE: Site-specific experimental music in the landscape

BUILD: Connection and inclusion in farming communities

DRIVE: Support for rural communities

CONTEXT - THE HIDDEN STORY

Acoustic Life of Sheds is a continuation of over a decade of Big hART's work on site-specific projects like *Radio Holiday*, *Drive in Holiday* and *GOLD*, focusing on farms and exploring the relationship with ephemeral architecture. It began as an attempt to think about Tasmania not only as part of the mainland, but uniquely part of an archipelago of islands - that stretches from Kangaroo Island in the West, through King, Robin, Philip, and Flinders Islands, all the way to New Zealand.

Each of these islands has a strong relationship to changing our rural heritage. Farming these small pieces of land has given rise to utilitarian sheds dotting the landscape, often made from various repurposed materials from different eras. Many, abandoned or replaced by bigger sheds, still stand and carry histories and shadows of the past, as they resist both technological change and the raging winds of the Roaring Forties that rattle their iron walls.

THE PROCESS

Standing in these sheds and listening it is clear they have an acoustic presence, but also a resonance of family and agricultural provenance. The structure of *Acoustic Life of Sheds* is simple. For twelve months, musicians in sheds across the landscape collaborate with the shed's architecture and its owners, working with



“The Acoustic Life of Sheds sees power pop performed in a calving shed at Flowerdale, haunting experimental music fill a hay barn at Boat Harbour, opera ring out in an old stables and steel guitar bring a shearing shed to life at Table Cape.”

THE MERCURY

“Animating the human story that’s invested in those buildings...”

RADIO NATIONAL



them to recreate the sounds and atmospheres of the shed, and extending each shed to become part of the instrumentation.

The act of sitting down with a farming family, or perhaps their descendants, and hearing the stories of who built the shed, when and why, creates an avenue for valuing this often hidden toil, and building connections back into the community. This part of the process is not rushed and is driven by the Creative Producer, who carefully selects which shed, on which property, with which musician. This ultimately creates the most interesting journey through the landscape, the music, and the stories for the audience.

THE CONTENT

During the performances, the audience drive between each shed, and discover it transformed into a venue. They move from property to property over an afternoon and absorb the shed's acoustic life, the landscape, the music, the varied composition and the local produce. *Sheds* is a free event and brings with it an unadorned atmosphere, virtuosity, story, and slow conversation with others driving between sheds.

Below the surface however, there are other issues being explored. The provenance of food, its sovereignty, the changing face of farming. What is being lost and gained, the fewer family farms and the expanding average size of properties. What that means for community networks and issues such as mental health, heritage, connection, succession planning and grief. Although these issues are not directly addressed, they sit just below the surface and are felt in the patina of each shed.

Sheds was first performed for the 2015 Tasmanian Ten Days on the Island Festival, and was so popular the festival asked Big hART to do another version for 2017. This time we changed all but one of the farms, as well as many of the artists, and called it *Acoustic Life of Sheds, Cape to Cape*. This defined the landscape between Table Cape and Rocky Cape on the North West Coast of Tasmania – which has become our precinct for innovation, research and development.

Again the project was phenomenally successful, and included a large sell-out concert, combining all the musicians. The plan is to keep exploring *Sheds*, and the company plans to take the project to other archipelagos such as Scotland, Denmark and New Zealand.

“Acoustic Life of Sheds was a compelling and enjoyable journey of discovery within spaces that usually remain the domain of their owners. The caliber of performers cast for each site made for unique experiences that ranged from the congruent, such as Lucky Oceans improvising country riffs on pedal steel in the filtered light of a shearing shed, to the incongruent - Genevieve Lacey losing herself in a contrabass recorder.”

REAL TIME



Acoustic Life of Sheds works hand in hand with Big hART's *20+20 Project*, creating employment, work experience and new opportunities for rural young people to overcome the barriers they often experience in seeking work. Local young people worked in each shed, delivering important aspects of the project and gaining experience in how to self-entrepreneur, building new pathways as knowledge workers as well as manual workers, through the creative industries.



FAVOURITE MOMENT: *A farmer in his nineties, who thought we were a bit left-field, coming to every performance - crowding in with the audience to listen to his old working shed being interpreted by musicians - his creaking place being brought to life.*

20+20 PROJECT

2016 - ONGOING

MAKE: The creative industries visible in rural communities

BUILD: Pathways to new employment opportunities for rural young people

DRIVE: Generational change to shift long term unemployment

CONTEXT – THE HIDDEN STORY

The success of *Project O* in working with rural young women as leaders required new thinking, as well as a legacy project for them to ‘graduate’ to. It was clear these young women had established a strong sense of agency for themselves and were taking action in their lives and their networks. However, family violence, in some sections of the community has become so normalised that we need generational change, rather than individual change. In response, Big hART decided to pilot a project which would work with young women in the same community, 20 per year for five years, resulting in 100 activated, engaged young women who want a different and stronger future. A hundred young women in a small town who are likely to stay in their community rather than getting cherry-picked out is a formidable force for change. *20+ 20 Project* was the resulting design.

THE PROCESS

The name *20+20* relates to the age of participants – the pilot group will be 20 years old in the year 2020. It also captured the idea of 20 young women per year graduating from the project, and a sense of team.

20+20 Project gained the eye of the Federal Minister for Employment and was funded as a pilot, with a strong emphasis on young women, and those at risk of long-term unemployment. Beginning in 2016, the project has broadened its focus to both young men and women, while still maintaining a key commitment to building a group of 20 activated young women.

THE CONTENT

20+20 Project is an unusual project for Big hART in that by itself it doesn’t generate its own content. Rather, it makes use of other Big hART projects that are being delivered to create pathways to employment – such as the *Acoustic Life of Sheds*. By utilising these models *20+20 Project* provides participants with role models in the creative industries to work beside and observe, when they are working on projects and improving their skills. These role models from the creative industries know, by necessity, how to self-entrepreneur and build a career. They are also based in the knowledge economy, rather than the manual economy. By simply doing their job alongside young people, they help to open up new doors and new ways of thinking. In turn this creates new habits of work, opens up new horizons away from negative generational expectations and barriers to work, as well as establishing new community networks, which tend to be vertical rather than horizontal.

From these platforms of being able to observe what work might look like in their future, young people begin to gain stronger work habits, entrepreneurial skills and mentored networks. *20+20 Project* then begins to provide pathways into other areas of the community. Implicit in this strategy is the development of personal agency that contributes to generational change around the issue of family violence.

Data from these individual journeys, and the unique setting in which the approach is taking place, is being collected so as to form a strong evidence base for sharing and potential roll out, as part of an approach to drive generational change. This is a layered project, and complex social problems require complex layered solutions in response.

FAVOURITE MOMENT: *Watching time and again as young people who face so many barriers choose to excel and thrive when given the opportunity.*

CONCLUSION

Capturing Big hART's 25 years of diverse practice in a few pages without diminishing its complexity is difficult. It has proved even harder to do justice to all the people who have made such valuable contributions over so many years. Rather than try and capture their tireless work within these short project descriptions, we have listed as many contributors as we can in the following pages.

Our intention throughout this book has been to provide a picture of an organisation in transition, growing as we have learned from projects, artists and thinkers, and applied these learnings to new challenges.

Our first 25 years has been made incredibly rich and rewarding by the generosity of communities who invite us in, the variety of experiences, and the meaning that comes from watching change occur. It is humbling to list all those talented people, with such valuable careers, who have contributed so much to each project, and to the company as a whole.

Big hART is not the sum total of its achievements, and it doesn't live or die by the art we have made. Rather, it lives in communities of people - the dedicated workers and producers, and the artists who contribute and then move on to new opportunities. Mostly it lives in the contribution of participants who give to projects, gain skills and experiences and then, with new resilience, simply get on with life.

Sustainability is an overused word. Society doesn't really want organisations to last forever - we want them to continually transition, to crack open at the right time, and seed new things.

Big hART will continue until it stops. For 25 years it has remained a company largely without infrastructure, maintaining a soft footprint. It lives in the heart and the art of those involved. At times projects have been successful, at other times less so. Big hART is an attempt to make hidden issues visible - knowing that justice may arrive slowly, but it does arrive.

It's an experiment in two old fashioned ideas - values and passion.



THANK YOU

25 years is a while.

Time doesn't seem real. Perseverance does.

Many people come and go and contribute.

Others change the life of the organisation and make it theirs.

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SCOTT RANKIN

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4	Participants	Blue Angel	Photo: Brett Boardman
6	Participant	Tjaabi	Photo: Frances Andrijich
11	The Stables	Acoustic Life of Sheds	Photo: Heath Holden
14,19,23	Participants, West Coast TAS	West Coast Projects	Photo: Philip Crawford
25	Participants	Big hART Works	Photos: Randy Larcombe
29	Participant	Big hART	Photo: Unknown
30,31	Participants	Big hART	Photos: Randy Larcombe
34,35	Federation Square, Melbourne	Radio Holiday	Photo: Mel Robertson
36	Tomahawk, Tasmania	Radio Holiday	Photo: Neal Rodwell
37	Trial Harbour, Tasmania	Radio Holiday	Photo: Rick Eaves
41	Participant	Northcott Project	Photo: Keith Saunders
45	Stickybricks Performance	Northcott Project	Photos: Keith Saunders
46	Participant with Robert Hannaford	Northcott Project	Photo: Keith Saunders
47	Stickybricks audience	Northcott Project	Photo: Keith Saunders
49	Chinese junk, Sydney Harbour	Junk Theory	Photo: Keith Saunders
51,52	Participants	Junk Theory	Photos: Keith Saunders
53	Chinese junk, Sydney Harbour	Junk Theory	Photo: Keith Saunders
55	Participant	Ngapartji Ngapartji	Photo: Jeff Busby
58 Upper	Trevor Jamieson and Yumi Umiu mare	Ngapartji Ngapartji	Photo: Jeff Busby
58 Lower	Performance at Pukatja (Ernabella)	Ngapartji Ngapartji	Photo: Brett Monaghan
61	Child at Pukatja (Ernabella), Film Crew	Ngapartji Ngapartji	Photo: Brett Monaghan
65 Upper	Irish Lords, via Ivanhoe	GOLD	Photo: Mark Scott
65 Lower	Participants	GOLD	Photo: Tracey Hardy
67 Upper	Gold Crop Exhibition	GOLD	Photo: Krystal Seigerman
67 Lower Left	Gold Crop Exhibition	GOLD	Photo: Krystal Seigerman
67 Lower Right	Participant	GOLD	Photo: Sera Davies
70,71	Participant	DRIVE	Photo: Lisa Garland
72	Participant	DRIVE	Photo: Telen Rodwell
73	Participant	DRIVE	Photo: Lisa Garland
75	Trevor Jamieson	Nyuntu Ngali	Photo: Tony Lewis
77	Anne Golding and Derik Lynch	Nyuntu Ngali	Photo: Tony Lewis
78	Derik Lynch, Trevor Jamieson and Anne Golding	Nyuntu Ngali	Photo: Tony Lewis
81	Participant	Namatjira	Photo: Brett Boardman
84 Upper	Trevor Jamieson	Namatjira	Photo: Brett Boardman
84 Lower	Audience at Ntaria (Hermannsburg)	Namatjira	Photo: Oliver Eclipse
89	Trevor Jamieson and Genevieve Lacey	Namatjira	Photo: Brett Boardman
91 Upper	London media interview	Namatjira	Photo: Jasmine Bilson
91 Lower	Participant	Namatjira	Photo: Greer Versteeg
95	Participant	This is Not a Speech Night	Photo: Heath Holden

97	Salt onstage	Tjaabi	Photo: Frances Andrijich
100	Love Punks on set	Yjala Yala	Photo: Chynna Campbell
102 Upper	Mentor Stu Campbell and Love Punks	Yjala Yala	Photo: Chynna Campbell
102 Lower	Participant	Yjala Yala	Photo: Chynna Campbell
107	Trevor Jamieson, Dave Hewitt and Participant	Hipbone Sticking Out	Photo: Greer Versteeg
111 Upper	Participant and Trevor Jamieson	Hipbone Sticking Out	Photo: Chynna Campbell
111 Lower	Participant	Tjaabi	Photo: Frances Andrijich
113	Participants	Tjaabi	Photo: Frances Andrijich
115	Patrick Churnside	Tjaabi	Photo: Frances Andrijich
116	Participant	Tjaabi	Photo: Frances Andrijich
119	Participants	Hipbone Sticking Out	Photo: Chynna Campbell
121	'The Fossicker'	Museum of the Long Weekend	Photo: Beth Sometimes
123	Audience	Museum of the Long Weekend	Photo: Beth Sometimes
125	Lex Marinos and Mikelangelo	Cosmopolitana	Photos: Wouter Van De Voorde
127	Anne Grigg, Pip Branson, Lex Marinos, Mikelangelo, Sam Martin	Ghosts in the Scheme	Photo: Lorna Sim
129	Participant	Blue Angel	Photo: Brett Boardman
		Graphic Design:	Wah Cheung
132	Mikelangelo	Blue Angel	Photo: Tony McKendrick
133	Participant, aboard the British Loyalty	Blue Angel	Photo: Brett Boardman
135	Participant	Blue Angel	Photo: Brett Boardman
135	Michael Whalley with portrait of participant	Blue Angel	Photo: Chris Gosfield
137 Upper	Participant	Project O	Photo: Heath Holden
137 Lower	Participant	New Roebourne	Photo: Angela Prior
138	Participants	Project O	Photo: Heath Holden
141 Upper	Participant	Project O	Photo: Heath Holden
141 Lower	Participant	Project O	Photo: Zachary Simpson
142	Participants	Project O	Photo: Heath Holden
147	Skaters, White Night	SKATE	Photos: Gregory Lorenzutti
149	Skaters, White Night	SKATE	Photos: Gregory Lorenzutti
151	The Calving Shed	Acoustic Life of Sheds	Photo: Heath Holden
153 Upper	Lucky Oceans	Acoustic Life of Sheds	Photo: Chris Gosfield
153 Lower	Bruce's Shed	Acoustic Life of Sheds	Photo: Lisa Garland
156	Jack's Shed	Acoustic Life of Sheds	Photo: Beth Sometimes
157	The Tulip Farm	Acoustic Life of Sheds	Photo: Heath Holden
161	Night in Roebourne	Tjaabi	Photo: Frances Andrijich

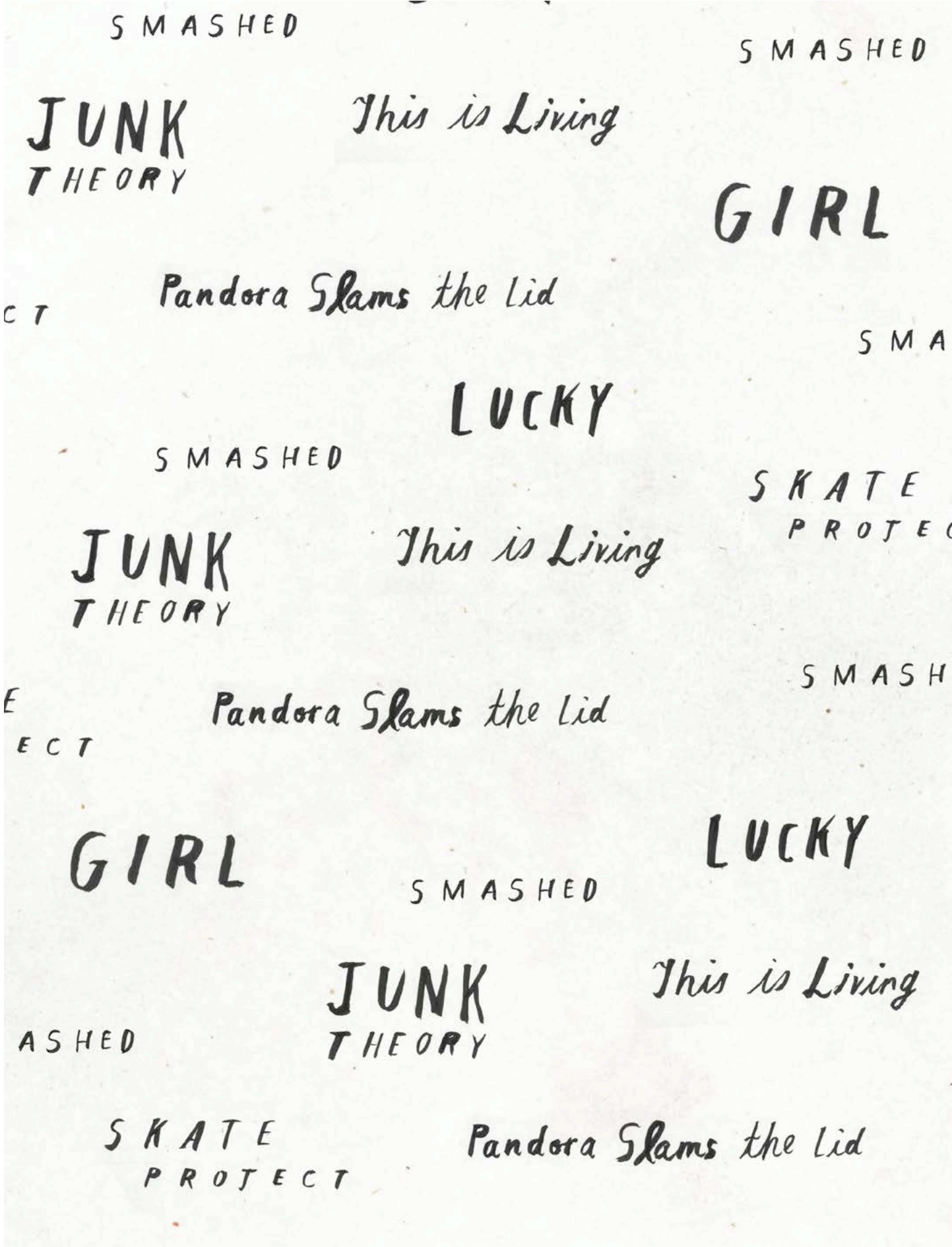
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