

Submission
No 63

INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY CBD

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**LEGS ON THE WALL'S
SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURAL
INFRASTRUCTURE OUTSIDE THE SYDNEY CBD**

Background

Legs on the Wall is a physical theatre company based at Lilyfield in the Leichhardt Municipality of Sydney.

Legs on the Wall transforms the power and intimacy of theatre into spectacular outdoor performances of extraordinary physical strength and skill - always challenging the boundaries between circus, theatre and dance and our understanding of the world in which we live.

The integrity and significance of Legs on the Wall's performance is realised through a proud Australian aesthetic and sustained by strong working relationships with our physical theatre community and artists from around the world.

LOTW is a unique, internationally recognized physical theatre company with a distinctive brand. We are recognized as Australia's leading physical theatre company by international festival and venue presenters within Australia and overseas. We have strong relationships with local, state, and international organizations, including major Australian festivals, venues, educational and community organizations.

LOTW provides a critical leadership role for the physical theatre community with training, education, mentorship and emerging artist programs that supports and mentors new artistic journeys and projects. We collaborate with the best and most daring practitioners in their field. New work develops the personal skills and artistic development of individual artists, and enlightens members of the company, our peers and audiences alike.

Issue of public and private funding and allocation of resources

Legs on the Wall receives funding amounting to 50% of our income from Arts NSW and the Australia Council for the Arts. The remainder of our income is sourced from commercial activities such as corporate events, venue hire and our educational programs for schools, local communities and professional & emerging artists.

LOTW exploits commercial opportunities including our corporate events and team building programs developed over the past few years to provide financial support for the company's artistic programs and a means to ease our reliance on government funding. This activity will also provide vital employment and continuity of artistic practice for our 'family' of performers and production personnel.

As a locally based arts company Legs on the Wall have the will and capacity to contribute in a significant way to Leichhart Municipal Council's(LMC's) arts & cultural programs but their resources are rarely sufficient to make this a reality. LMC and LOTW have attempted to negotiate partnership programs in the last 18 months but neither organization has adequate funds to proceed in a meaningful and appropriate way.

We would also very much like to engage in local festival and community arts activities but again there is not sufficient resources to allow for our participation. Dedicated funding is required to facilitate these relationships for ongoing programs.

Recommendation 1

That the state government expands cultural grants funding programs to enable locally based arts organizations such as Legs on the wall and local governments to develop sustainable partnerships for long term arts and cultural programs

Suitability of Public Infrastructure for Arts and Cultural Life

"..... the greatest threat to Sydney's creative ranks is property prices, so Sydney needs to make itself more affordable for artists and musicians" Richard Florida Street Ahead, The Age, 11 May, 2007.

LOTW manages a purpose built rehearsal venue, the Red Box and office spaces for five arts organisations at the Canal Road Lilyfield site on behalf of Arts NSW.

There is currently no dedicated training and rehearsal space in Sydney for the physical theatre community. This is a fundamental requirement for a healthy and growing industry¹.

Unfortunately with our current limited facilities LOTW are not able to provide this desperately needed space. When not in use by LOTW the Red Box is heavily booked by other arts organizations and corporate hirers.

This means we are limited to the artists we know, those with a commitment to their on going training who understand the strength and flexibility required to sustain rehearsals in harness and acrobatic choreography. However our core members are in demand and we are unable to guarantee their availability for our projects. We know of many artists who move to Melbourne due to the circus and physical theatre culture in that city. They move away from Sydney because access to training and skills development is cheaper and easier.

There is also chronic shortage of affordable studio space and rehearsal spaces in Sydney for visual artists, musicians and dancers.^{2 3}

There are currently significant areas of interior vacant space on the Lilyfield site owned by Arts NSW. These areas would be appropriate for the purposes physical theatre training, visual artists studios and dance rehearsals.

Making these areas available to local artists would;

- Develop a broader base of multi skilled Sydney based physical theatre performers who are suitable for professional artistic activities such as new work and corporate programs.
- Create welcome opportunities for Sydney based dancers, visual artists and musicians to practice and produce their work in an arts friendly and supportive environment.

Recommendation 2

That the State Government makes available the current vacant interior spaces at Canal Road Lilyfield site for the purposes of physical theatre training spaces and studios for Sydney based visual artists, dancers and musicians.

The desirability of locating cultural facilities in close proximity to creative hubs

Hub activities for Physical Theatre

Pivotal to the future realization of Legs on the Wall's unique artistic productions is our ability to strengthen and expand the base of the physical theatre pyramid.

We intend to expand significantly on current artist development programs to ensure that our home at Canal Road Lilyfield is an accessible, supportive and challenging environment for

¹ Ausdance NSW Dance Space Report 2005

² Cultural Development and the Arts in Everyday Life, Australia Council Scoping Study, Deborah Mills, 2006

³ Ausdance NSW Dance Space Report 2005

physical theatre artists. Covering a range of activities from learning new skills and testing new ideas to creating and showing new productions we have three programs:

1. **Breeding Ground** - dedicated training space for the physical theatre community;
2. **Feet First** – Emerging Artists' Program; and
3. **Yellow Submarine** - a program for mid-career/transitional (submerged) for physical theatre performers and directors

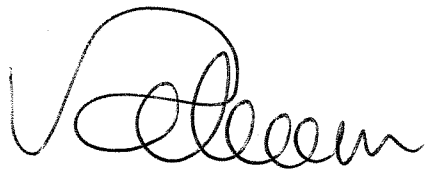
All three programs are inter-linked, informing and inspiring each other. **Breeding Ground** is the missing piece of the puzzle, for it is here that we will see mid-career (submerged) artists core artists and emerging artists working together, providing a continuity of physical training and practice between the Hub of activities and the New Works. Organic relationships and the sharing of artistic understanding is one of the invaluable bi-products of this shared training program. **Artists attract artists.** We anticipate that we will deepen relationships with performers and other creative theatre makers as the Red Box becomes a hive of creative activity. We hope that artists from around Australia and overseas will feel welcome to join this physical theatre hub. We look forward to providing a sense of community and home for independent artists and new groups in a more formal and stable way.

Hub activities for other creative activity

The Lilyfield site is also home to Community Cultural Development NSW, Shaman Theatre Productions and Red Rug, an independent film production company. The site's vacant spaces could also be easily adapted to meet the demand for a wider range of artistic practice including dance, music, and visual arts. This site is particularly suited for development as an arts hub, given its proximity to the greater inner west via Hawthorne Canal greenway, and proximity to the CBD on the City West Link, as well as close proximity to Sydney College of the Arts.

Recommendation 3

That the State Government in partnership with inner west councils, undertakes a feasibility study of the potential of the Canal Road Lilyfield site to become a sustainable arts hub for physical theatre, dance, music and visual artists.



Vyvian Wilson
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Legs on the Wall
August 2008