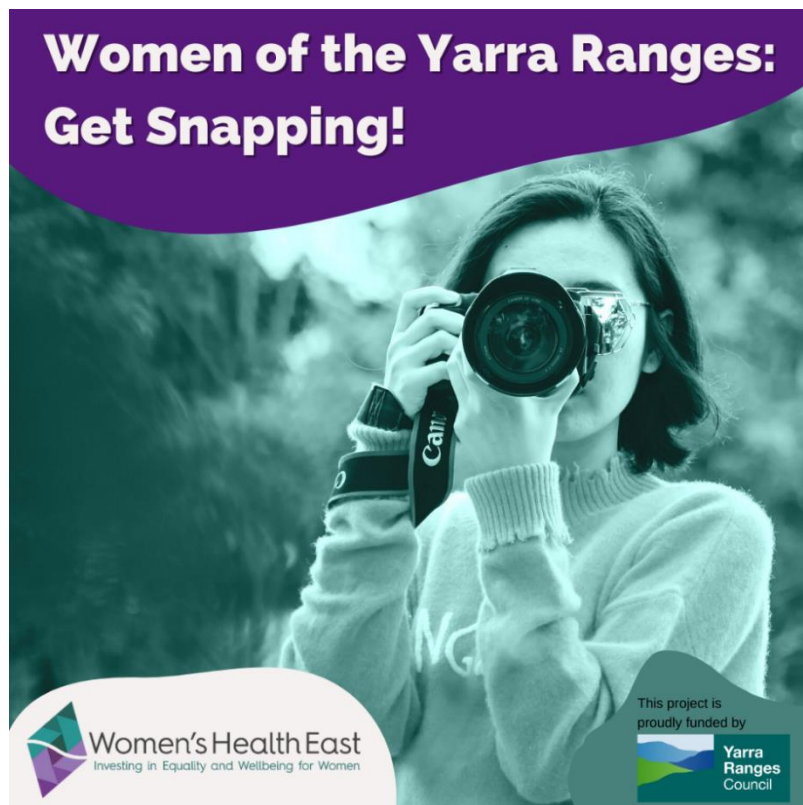



Women's Health East

Beyond the Studio: Advocating for Women's Visibility, Inclusion, and Safety through Public Art project

Project Report

September 2021



This project was proudly funded by 

Introduction

This document provides an overview of the Yarra Ranges funded, Women's Health East led, *Beyond the Studio: Advocating for Women's Visibility, Inclusion, and Safety through Public Art* project.

All work undertaken by Women's Health East (WHE) aims to 'Advance Gender Equality'. Through WHE strategic priorities, it has been identified the importance of 'Advocating for and supporting gendered approaches to build communities in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) that are inclusive and liveable, and where women are enabled to participate equitably'. There are several ways in which WHE has been working to achieve this outcome, including the release of the Women's Health East [Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces for Women](#) report, which helped inform the development and delivery of the *Beyond the Studio: Advocating for Women's Visibility, Inclusion, and Safety through Public Art* project.

Findings from the [Creating Safe and Inclusive Public Spaces for Women](#) report further exposed men and women's differences in experience and perceptions of safety in public spaces. The report discusses the role that the design of public spaces plays in creating spaces that are safe, welcoming and accessible for women. It also looks at women's experience of public spaces and highlights the importance of women's voices and expertise in creating spaces that are safe and inclusive for everyone.

Furthermore, this report touched on how the activation of public spaces, including the inclusion of artwork, can make for more welcoming environments, encourage usage, and promote ownership and pride for people in the community. Those that work within creative industries, such as the arts, are highly represented in the Yarra Ranges. In addition, rates of family violence are higher than the EMR average. Therefore, funding to undertake *Beyond the Studio* project was sort and was successful through Yarra Ranges Council.

The *Beyond the Studio* project objectives were reflective of the WHE priority area 'Advancing Gender Equality' and 'Preventing Violence Against Women', as well as the priorities identified in the Yarra Ranges Council 2017-2021 Health and Wellbeing Strategy around the need for creating equitable and inclusive communities.

Objectives set out by the *Beyond the Studio* project included:

- Increase opportunities for the acknowledgment, recognition, and the value of Yarra Ranges women artists
- Strengthen the Yarra Ranges community to recognise the achievements and talents of women in their community
- Build the Yarra Ranges community's awareness of the role public open spaces play in promoting gender equality and improving women's sense of safety
- Support the Yarra Ranges local government to engage more local women artists to enhance public open spaces through their artwork

Project Overview

Outdoor exercise remained one of the permitted reasons to leave your home during many of Melbourne's COVID-19 restrictions. Given the ongoing nature of the COVID-19 situation, engagement with public spaces was likely to remain high leading into 2021. Leveraging the increased exposure to public spaces, and the evidence that was available through the WHE *Creating Safer and Inclusive Spaces for Women* report, the *Beyond the Studio* project took a digital focus to this art and public spaces project.

The *Beyond the Studio* project invited Yarra Ranges women to identify and submit photographs of public spaces in their community they believe would benefit from the addition of artwork within that space. Simultaneous to this, with the support of local photographer [Suzanne Phoenix](#), local artists were invited to take part in the project, allowing us to take photographs of several of their existing art pieces, such as paintings, sculptures, and jewellery pieces. With the skills of graphic designer [Jennifer Trott](#), the images of the artwork were superimposed/overlayed onto the photographs sent in by Yarra Ranges Community members. Several concept images were created to demonstrate how these spaces could look and be enhanced if more public art was commissioned for public display.

The *Beyond the Studio* photo submission call-out element of the project was promoted through WHE social media platforms and external networks, and artists were approached through recommendations by various art organisations and the project photographer, [Suzanne Phoenix](#). All those that took part in the project completed a plain language statement and/or consent form. These documents outlined how the images would be used, how each participant could use the images, as well as remuneration details for being involved in the project.

Six concept images were produced as an outcome of the *Beyond the Studio* project. Images, along with text that discussed the meaning of the spaces and artwork were showcased on the WHE [website](#), through a two week social media campaign, as well as sent to WHE staff and external project stakeholders. Several evaluation methods took place to gather data around the success and impact of the project. All findings will help inform future project and funding proposals addressing women's safety and inclusion within public settings and women within the arts.





Project Outcomes

The *Beyond the Studio* project took place over a six-month period and achieved the following:

- ✓ 13 x photo submissions from Yarra Ranges women community members
- ✓ 6 x Yarra Ranges diverse women artists recruited
- ✓ 6 x collaborative concept images were produced
- ✓ 1 x WHE *Beyond the Studio* project [webpage](#) was developed
- ✓ 1 x *Beyond the Studio* social media campaign took place (showcasing the six images)

- ✓ 1 x *Beyond the Studio* email signature used by WHE staff linking to the project webpage
- ✓ 2 x *Beyond the Studio* promotional material included in the WHE E-Newsletters
- ✓ 1 x *Beyond the Studio* case study written and included in the WHE [Creating Safe and Inclusive Public Spaces for Women](#) report
- ✓ 2 x stories written about the *Beyond the Studio* project in the [Mountain View Star Mail Newspaper](#)

<i>Beyond the Studio</i> Project Images		
BEFORE	AFTER	Acknowledgment
		<p>'Before' photograph by: Marilyn H Artwork by: Lucy Hawkins Artwork photographer: Suzanne Phoenix Graphic designer: Jennifer Trott</p>
		<p>'Before' photograph by: Kim L Artwork by: Sioux Dollman Artwork photographer: Suzanne Phoenix Graphic designer: Jennifer Trott</p>
		<p>'Before' photograph by: Lindy Schneider Artwork by: Chelsea Gallop Artwork photographer: Suzanne Phoenix Graphic designer: Jennifer Trott</p>

		<p>'Before' photograph by: Simone W Artwork by: Suzanne Phoenix Graphic designer: Jennifer Trott</p>
		<p>'Before' photograph by: Claudia J Artwork by: Sarah Stewart Artwork photographer: Suzanne Phoenix Graphic designer: Jennifer Trott</p>
		<p>'Before' photograph by: anonymous Artwork by: Shlomit Moria Artwork photographer: Suzanne Phoenix Graphic designer: Jennifer Trott</p>

Evaluation Methodology

The aim of the Beyond the Studio project was to contribute to work that supports women's visibility, inclusion and safety in public spaces, as well as aimed to showcase the achievements and talents of women artists in the Yarra Ranges community. Based off the project's aims, the following objectives were developed:

- Increase opportunities for the acknowledgment, recognition, and the value of Yarra Ranges women artists
- Strengthen the Yarra Ranges community to recognise the achievements and talents of women in their community
- Build the Yarra Ranges community's awareness of the role public open spaces play in promoting gender equality and improving women's sense of safety
- Support the Yarra Ranges local government to engage more local women artists to enhance public open spaces through their artwork

To evaluate if the above project objectives were achieved, several evaluation approaches and methodologies took place, these included:

- Social media data analytics
- Community consultation sessions
- One-on-one interviews
- Reflective workshop with project participants
- Online survey
- Meetings with local government council staff and teams
- Email and phone correspondence with project stakeholders
- Project lead journaling, reflections and observations documented throughout the project lifetime

Project Findings

Based off evaluation and engagement efforts that took place over the course of the *Beyond the Studio* project, the following themes and insights were discovered as a result of the project:

- ❖ **Recognition of the continued need and value of community involvement in all stages of the project planning and delivery of any public art initiative, as well as the need for including budget for public art in all local government urban design projects**

Many people expressed the value and importance of commissioning public art, that is for the community, created by the community, for everyone to enjoy. As identified through consultation, undertaking this approach would create feelings of pride and ownership over these art pieces and the places they live. One way the women identified in which this can be achieved is through community consultation and including budget for public art in all urban design projects. Noting that community consultation should not just occur after the fact but occur in all stages of planning and delivery of these types of projects, big or small. Community consultations allows for the identification of the wants and needs of that specific community. Noting that this was a strength of the *Beyond the Studio* project, specially noting the photo submission process, which showcased the advantages of engaging with the local community to help identify where they felt more public art should be commissioned, an outcome that would not have been achieved if photo submissions were not taken by residents. One project participant wrote “*Suzanne feels strongly about public art needing to be part of every budget for new buildings and public spaces and equally within budgets of the different levels of government to create spaces that are dynamic, thought provoking, safe and prevent crime*”.

❖ **Recognition for the need for further supporting evidence, that public displays of art commissioned by women, do contribute to how women would engage with a space, including their perceptions of safety within that space**

Women who engaged in the *Beyond the Studio* project spoke a lot around the importance of spaces being ‘inviting’ and ‘welcoming’ as it makes you want to use that space more and therefore make it feel like a safer space to occupy. One way in which spaces are viewed as more welcoming and inviting is through that of public art displays. Women spoke about how art in a public space creates spaces that are dynamic, engaging, create positive energy, as well as allows for greater community connection, such as stopping and observing the artwork can generate conversations with others around. Not only this, but art specifically created by women can show young girls that they too can be artists if they choose to and reminds women that “this is our space too”. One person wrote *“I really appreciated reading the stories of both the women who submitted their local places and the artists about their work and their artistic practice. Each one of these should be brought to life – not only do they add so much beauty but equally they make the spaces so much more welcoming and transform public space in a way that feels both safer and more accessible for the whole community”*. Furthermore, a survey that was open to any person that viewed the six superimposed images, was completed by six people. The survey results found that sixty-seven percent of respondents ‘strongly agreed’ that having more public art displays in their community would encourage them to use those spaces more.

❖ **Recognition and acknowledgment that women artists do face different barriers and challenges when trying to make their way in the art industry, specifically when it comes to applying for their artwork being commissioned for public display**

The topic of confidence came up several times when speaking with the artists involved in the *Beyond the Studio* project. Confidence in identifying as an artist, and the feeling of needing to prove oneself within the industry, not being taken seriously at times, as well as feeling not being qualified to apply for work. One artist shared the struggles of not having the confidence of identifying as an artist and feels like it is harder to prove oneself in the artworld being female, and suspects that sometimes it is harder for women to find their place in the art world than men. Other artists spoke about the lengthy and intimidating processes that are required to allow for public art exhibitions or commissions, such as not having the skills, time and or confidence to write these applications, so they don’t end up applying. It was also mentioned that most women don’t have the information, processes and resourcing to build these skills, time, and money. The woman also spoke to the nature of women artists underselling and undervaluing their art pieces, such as lowering the cost of their artwork as they think no one will buy it if it’s not cheap enough. Whereas they felt male artists charge what they think their pieces are worth, which is usually a higher value than women artists value their work. One survey respondent wrote *“Can only praise and encourage more projects similar in nature. Especially noting the difficult time our arts community is suffering right now”*.

❖ **Recognition of the need for greater support and understanding that public displays of art can bring multiple benefits to the artist who created them, as well as to the broader community**

A common theme from all consultation opportunities undertaken during the *Beyond the Studio* project, was that of the power and multiple benefits public art can bring to an individual and the community. First and foremost, people spoke about the joy art can bring people, walking past a public art piece can just do something as simple as put a smile on your face. People spoke to the power of art evoking feelings, memories, or even bringing new perspectives to things. People also spoke to how art can facilitate and encourage important conversations that need to be had, and the differences and important messages women artists bring to their work. Some women spoke to the education opportunity public art can bring, as well importance of public art being interactive and accessible for everyone to enjoy. Others spoke about the economic benefit public art can bring to the community, as it creates a 'destination' for that community and could bring people from outside of the community to come and visit. One participant wrote "*When I saw the images combined, I had that gasp moment - how epic is this! It really was an amazing experience to see the artworks revealed. Especially in the times we are living through. What joy!*"

Furthermore, all project objectives were seen to have been met. It was through the *Beyond the Studio* photo submission campaign, social media campaign, project webpage, dissemination of the second addition of the [Creating Safe and Inclusive Public Spaces for Women](#) report, as well as this project report, that has allowed for opportunities for acknowledgement, visibility and recognition of the local artists and community members that took part in this project. Continually, delivering a project such as this, has enabled broader conversations and awareness around the role public spaces and the design of these spaces do play in promoting gender equity. This has been evident through the multiple meeting with different local government officers who have expressed interest in future collaborative work when working to support local women artists to be commissioned for public display.

Conclusion

The *Beyond the Studio* project was very well received. All involved in the project were shown to have benefited in some way. Women's Health East were able to undertake work that supports the commitment to advancing gender equality, by undertaking work in a setting that is less understood in needing to address gender inequality. The *Beyond the Studio* project also allowed for the strengthening of relationships with organisations within the Yarra Ranges. Opportunities throughout the course of this project further allowed for the advocating for the need of taking a gender lens to all work, including that of public urban design, as well as allowing for promotional opportunities of the local women artists.

The women that participated in the *Beyond the Studio* project spoke to the need for projects like this, as it allowed for a platform and opportunity to have much needed conversations around how gender inequality is experienced within the arts industry and what more can be

done to support women within the industry. Those involved also spoke to how being involved in this project brought them so much joy in tough times that is COVID-19, and the joy of getting to know and work with like-minded and talented women.

The showcasing of the six superimposed images that were collaboratively created through the *Beyond the Studio* project saw great reach, engagement, and positive feedback. Many comments that came through the WHE social media channels, email responses from different involved organisations, and feedback from WHE staff, all spoke to how they wish for these public artworks to become a reality, how the artwork brings the space to life, as well how expressing how seeing these artworks would in fact create a space, they would feel safer and more welcome. With one social media comment stating “*I would love to see this project become a reality. Now that I’ve seen this, the riverside looks bare without it*”.

Next Steps

There have already been such positive outcomes since the completion of the project. Including the project artists being approached to further showcase their work, WHE being brought into conversations around future collaborative work, as well as most project participants expressing interest and enthusiasm in being involved in any future WHE projects. The [*Beyond the Studio: Advocating for Women’s Visibility, Inclusion and Safety through Public Art*](#) project does not end here. This project is just one piece of work that contributes to creating greater equity within the art industry, as well as building the capacity for local government and other organisations to take a gender lens and approach in urban design planning, in order for women feel more included and safer within places they live, work, and play.

These are the following actions Women’s Health East are taking to build on and support work in this space:

- Exploring potential grant and funding opportunities that will allow the actualisation of some of the [artworks](#) featured in the *Beyond the Studio* project
- Undertake wide dissemination of the second addition of the Women’s Health East [*Creating Safe and Inclusive Public Spaces for Women*](#) report, which includes the addition of two case studies showcasing WHE’s work in this area - the *Beyond the Studio* project, and the *Gender Equity Walks* project.
- Engaging with various stakeholders to share the learnings and outcomes of the *Beyond the Studio* project, and discuss opportunities for future collaborative work that continues to address reducing gender inequalities within the arts sector and within urban design planning