

Pitch Lab: 7 stories of arts right now

Simone Penkethman reflects on [Pitch Lab](#), held on 4 June 2022 at the University of Canberra.

Part of the work of the ACT Creative Recovery and Resilience Forum is piloting new models to deliver arts industry support. On 4 June, 7 artists joined a facilitated pitch lab that was run as part of [Keeping it Real](#), one of the major events for the Forum.

Pitch Lab is a pitch competition with a difference: peer support. To win their place in the Pitch Lab, each participating artist submitted a 1-sentence description of their idea. There was \$4000 of ready money on offer. All selected participants received obligation-free seed funding, with extra cash for those voted 'Best of the Day' by the artists themselves.

Lavanna Neal and Adam Deusien led the group in a rapid fire yet reflective session. Participants draw on feedback from the group to develop their 1-sentence application into a 2-minute pitch.

On 4 June, I am moving between a series of large, interconnecting rooms, keeping my eyes and ears open to all the activities at Keeping it Real. There's an exhibition that documents performances, artist residencies and other projects that are happening as part of the Creative Recovery and Resilience Program. It's a feast for the senses!

Around 40 artists and arts workers are having spirited discussions at tables in the central space. There's a strong sense of connection and community. Around 4pm, the discussions wind up and the Pitch Lab participants set up in a corner of the room, ready to strut their stuff.

People are mingling and chatting but I'm keen to secure my place. Others join me and soon the room full of chatter has become a quiet and expectant audience.

Sarah Stewart – A safe comedy room

Sarah is a small, bright, older woman who begins her pitch with a joke involving Pornhub and working as a COVID contact tracer. She has the audience's attention.

Sarah wants space and resourcing to start a stand-up comedy mentoring and skills development program for older women and others.

Sarah would like to diversify the line-up of Canberra Comedy Festival. She says that older women don't have much of a voice and too few comedians talk about death or incontinence: "Death is quite funny I think."

Sarah is funny and her pitch is sharp. As a woman approaching the age of invisibility myself, she has my full support.

Nicola Lambert – Watermarks: resurfacing the stories of Canberra’s creeks

Nicola is a tall, youngish arts worker with a lilting Irish accent who aims to transform interaction with the Sullivans Creek stormwater system.

She wants to commission an Aboriginal poet to write the story of the creek. She also wants Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists collaborating on a visual artwork that will run the whole way along the storm water system, including QR codes at key points offering rich media.

Nicola’s enquiry into Sullivans Creek has been in progress for over a year and this pitch is part of an ongoing practice.

Nicola’s and her collaborators’ canvas is my stomping ground. In recent months, I’ve enjoyed coming across subversive poetry stencilled on a nearby bridge as part of their [Sullivans Trail](#) project.

Ellen Harvey – The Future Arts Manifesto

Ellen is a professional writer on a mission. She says we need a Future Arts Manifesto; not a policy or a strategy but a framework for the arts.

Ellen wants to travel the country talking to arts organisations and artists. She says that right now, with a new government and our first national Arts Minister in years, it’s a good time to talk.

The Manifesto will be a community-shaped resource that outlines the values and principles for the future of the arts to help organisations focus their work.

This is a big idea! A challenge in this project would be the lack of centralised advocacy or regulation in Australian arts at a national level. I am curious to know more about Ellen’s strategy to attract stakeholder buy-in and whose support she will be seek to champion the manifesto.

Toni Hassan – Rage against the real estate machine

Toni Hassan is a writer and visual artist with an emerging social practice. She has short, dark curls and a revolutionary zeal.

Toni wants to do housing differently. She says that housing once meant growing up together in an intergenerational way, but the commodification of housing is separating us from our community.

Toni proposes several layers of engagement with creatives to develop a new model of housing.

She says that her uncle died of homelessness. I’ve never heard the word “homelessness” being used as a direct cause of death before: it’s a stark but true statement.

Toni concludes by voicing a fear many of us share: “I don’t want to die alone in old age.”

Tashani Fuller – A short film with youth of Braidwood

Tashani is an enthusiastic young film student from Braidwood.

Her pitch is to amplify the voices of local young people through film making. She would like to collaborate with young Braidwood artists and recruit local mentors to pass on skills and knowhow that exists in the community. She wants to create networks for likeminded people.

Tashani plans to activate the local youth centre, which she says has existed for a few years but never seems to be open.

What she wants to do with the film itself is less clear but with some seed funding she can support the participants to decide.

Natsuko Yonezawa – A space that roams and foams

Natsuko is a small woman with energy and poise. She says she is terrified of public speaking but delivers a succinct and inspiring pitch. She works in dance, physical theatre, film and sound.

She wants to create a space that “roams and foams” with experimental in-progress performance works by Canberran artists.

Natsuko’s project would bring performances to unconventional urban spaces, such as drains.

She hopes her project will produce around 4 events per year, improving mental health and testing boundaries.

Dale Thain – Maker spaces in libraries

Dale describes herself as “a secondary school teacher by day.” In her beret, scarf and boots she strikes a solid stance and asks us to imagine wanting to learn a new creative skill.

Dale’s pitch is to work with Libraries ACT to develop maker spaces. Maker spaces already exist in some schools, and libraries, like schools, already have some of the necessary infrastructure.

Her project involves consultation to determine what people want: imagine a textile workshop in Dickson library, or going to the library and borrowing the right cable so you can do that technical thing.

Maker spaces in libraries support lifelong learning. In Dale’s vision, artists would be paid to deliver community workshops and exhibit art.

Drum Roll...

It’s a credit to the participants that, with no microphone, and some of them unaccustomed to public speaking, they keep the audience spellbound over the 7 pitches. Our silence is only broken by rapturous applause.

Everyone seems uplifted by the diversity and freshness of the ideas.

After the final pitch there is a flurry of participants filling out voting forms which are whisked away into the next room for counting. There is a sense of collegiate excitement among the group.

Tracy Ireland, Director of UC's Centre for Creative and Cultural Research, holds our attention until the votes are tallied. Then she announces the winners:

1. Nicola Lambert – Watermarks
2. Sarah Stewart – Safe comedy room
3. Tashani Fuller – Short film with youth of Braidwood

All of the pitches showed merit and the peer voting ensured that all participants had agency over the final decision.

I look forward to seeing the development of these brave and energetic women's ideas.