



Australian Government

**Creative
Australia**

Creating Value

Results of the National Arts Participation Survey

First Nations arts and culture factsheet

Creating Value: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey is the first survey of its kind to be released by Creative Australia and the fifth survey in the landmark research series from the Australia Council, following iterations in 2009, 2013, 2016 and 2019.

The research series provides a comprehensive overview of Australians' evolving relationships with arts, culture and creativity. By examining our engagement with creativity – both through the lens of self-expression and engagement with arts and creative activities – this series builds the evidence base on participation in the arts in Australia.

The full report includes detailed insights on engagement with specific art forms, including First Nations arts and culture.

Key findings about **engagement with First Nations arts and culture** and **engagement by First Nations respondents** are included in this factsheet.

In 2022:

32%

of Australians attend First Nations arts and festivals

73%

of Australians agreed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are an important part of Australia's culture

40%

of Australians attend First Nations arts

47%

of Australians believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are well represented in Australia

87%

of First Nations respondents attend art events and festivals

73%

of First Nations respondents creatively participate

Introduction

Australia is home to the world's longest continuing living culture with a rich and unique artistic history. Arts and culture are deeply embedded in First Nations identity, community and sites of knowledge. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artistic and cultural expressions provide a bridge to connect with, understand, and respect First Nations cultures, histories and knowledge systems.

Attendance at First Nations arts and cultural events remains strong in 2022, particularly amongst younger Australians and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. However, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on First Nations arts and cultural events which experienced a drop in attendance compared to 2019.

Nearly three quarters of Australians agree that First Nations arts are an important part of Australia's culture and interest in First Nations arts is growing. However, fewer than half of Australians believe First Nations arts are well represented in Australia, indicating there is work to be done to increase discoverability and representation of First Nations creative work throughout Australia.

First Nations people are highly engaged in creating and attending all art forms and report fewer barriers to participation than other groups. However, a high proportion still report feeling that cultural and creative experiences are not really for them. First Nations artists were also significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and face unique challenges, such as the proliferation of inauthentic visual arts and crafts and lack of representation at leadership levels in arts organisations.¹ This shows that there is still work required to promote and protect First Nations voices in Australia's arts and cultural landscape.

Read on for more on Australians' engagement with First Nations arts...

For the full report and online resources see: <https://creative.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/creating-value/>

First Nations arts and festivals – live attendance

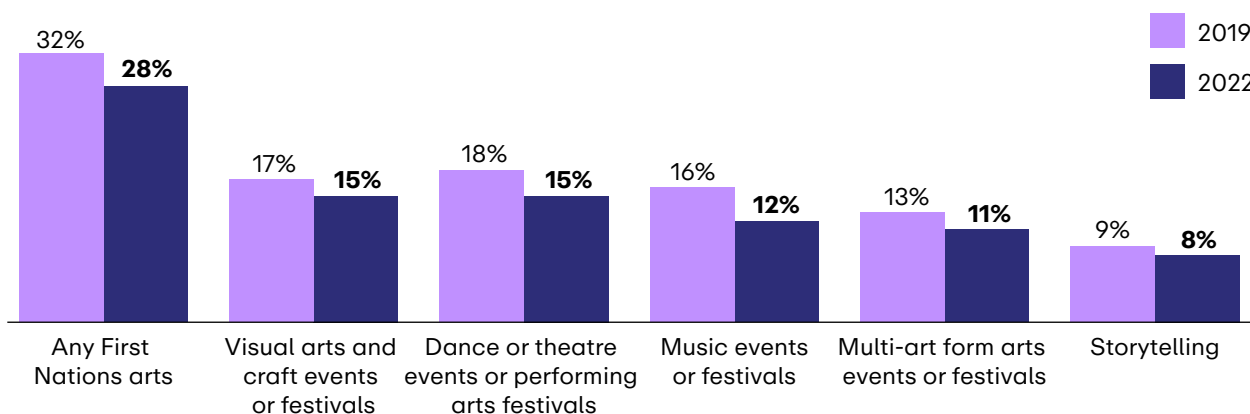
Almost 6 million Australians attend First Nations arts and festivals

In 2022, 5.9 million Australians, or 28% of the population aged 15 and over, **attended a First Nations arts event or festival.**

- One in seven Australians attended **First Nations visual arts and craft events or festivals** (15% down from 17% in 2019).
- One in seven Australians attended **First Nations dance or theatre events or performing arts festivals** (15% down from 18% in 2019).
- One in eight Australians attended **First Nations music events or festivals** (12% down from 16% in 2019).
- One in nine Australians attended **multi-art form First Nations arts events or festivals** (11% down from 13% in 2019).
- Nearly one in ten Australians attended **First Nations storytelling** (8% consistent with 9% in 2019).

¹ Productivity Commission 2022, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander visual arts and crafts*.

Figure 1: Australians’ attendance at First Nations arts and festivals, 2019 and 2022



First Nations arts attendance at events and festivals custom variables. Base: General Population 15+ (n=9,396)

What type of First Nations festivals do Australians attend?

- 7% of Australians attend multi-art form **First Nations festivals**
- 7% of Australians attend **First Nations visual arts and crafts festivals**
- 6% of Australians attend **First Nations theatre or dance festivals**
- 5% of Australians attend **First Nations music festivals**.



What do we know about engagement at Indigenous art fairs?

Indigenous art fairs are an important platform for showcasing a range of First Nations artists, creative practice, and communities.

In 2022, the Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair (DAAF) brought together 77 art centres, representing the artwork of over 1,800 First Nations artists from across Australia. The DAAF provides audiences with a range of authentic, and ethically produced, First Nations art with all proceeds going directly to the artists and art centres.

The hybrid event attracted 33,353 visitors with 16,279 online fair visitors and 17,074 physical fair visitors. Over half of visitors were from interstate (55%). The fair also brought in a record \$4.33 million in sales (up 28% in 2021), generated by both the physical and online components of the fair.²

Who attends First Nations festivals?

- **CALD respondents** are twice as likely to attend First Nations festivals than non-CALD respondents (30% compared to 13%).
- **Respondents with disability** are more likely to attend First Nations festivals than those without disability (21% compared to 15%).
- A quarter of **Australians living in remote areas** attend First Nations festivals (26% compared to 13% of those living in regional areas and 18% of people living in major cities).
- **Men** are more likely to attend First Nations festivals than women (19% compared to 14%).
- **Australians under 50** are more likely to attend First Nations festivals than older Australians. A quarter of **Australians aged 15–24** and nearly a quarter of **Australians aged 25–49** attend First Nations festivals (25% and 23%). Australians aged 50 and over are significantly less likely to attend (7%).
- **Parents with children under 16** are more likely to attend First Nations festivals than those without children under 16 (23% compared to 14%).

² Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair 2022, *DAAF 2022: One for the Records* [Media Release], 22 November. daaf.com.au/daaf-2022-one-for-the-records/

Attendance has decreased at First Nations festivals and all First Nations art form events

Prior to COVID-19, 6.5 million Australians, or 32% of the population aged 15 years and over, attended First Nations arts or festivals. This was an increase from 26% in 2016.³ However, since COVID-19, attendance has decreased at First Nations festivals and all art form events (28% down from 32% in 2019). See above for more detail.

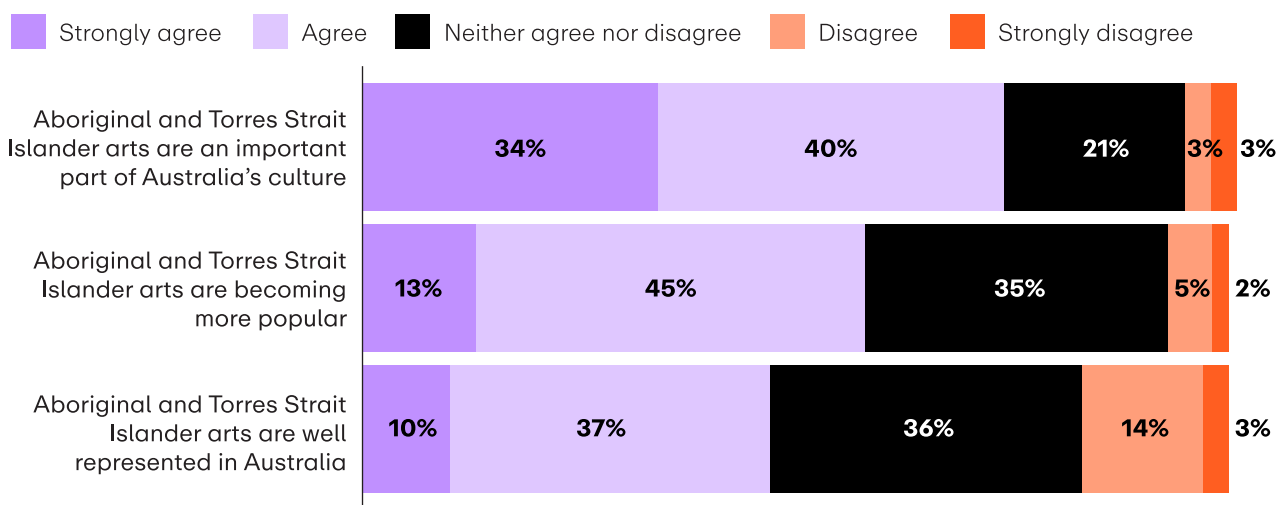
Many First Nations arts events and festivals were affected by COVID-19 disruptions. For example, both the 2020 and the 2021 Garma Festival, Australia's premier forum for the discussion of Indigenous affairs, were cancelled due to COVID-19 safety concerns.⁴ In addition, many remote Aboriginal communities restricted public access throughout this time, limiting their operations in tourism and at arts and cultural centres.⁵ However, while 2022 saw a decrease in attendance from 2019, this level of attendance is still higher than attendance rates seen in 2016.

Sentiment towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts

Australians consistently agree that First Nations arts are an important part of Australia's culture

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts contribute to Australia's rich history, playing an important role in helping us understand who we are as Australians. In 2022, 15.2 million Australians agreed that **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are an important part of Australia's culture** (73% slightly down from 75% in 2019). This includes 34% of the population who strongly agree.

Figure 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts in Australia



Q34. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Base: Australians 15+ (n=9,396)

3 For consistency with the 2019 methodology, 2016 figures are reported for the online sample only and may differ from those published in the previous National Arts Participation Survey report, *Connecting Australians*.
 4 Steve Vivian 2021, 'Garma Festival Cancelled Over COVID Fears in 'Big Blow' to Local Communities', ABC, 31 May. abc.net.au/news/2021-05-31/nt-garma-festival-cancelled-due-to-covid-concerns-2021/100178382
 5 See Government of Western Australia 2022, *More Public Health Measures Phased Out Following WA's Soft Landing*. wa.gov.au/government/announcements/more-public-health-measures-phased-out-following-was-soft-landing

Who is more likely to feel that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are an important part of Australia's culture?

- **Women** are more likely than men to agree with the statement *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are an important part of Australia's culture* (78% of women compared to 68% of men).
- **First Nations respondents** are more likely than non-First Nations respondents to agree with the statement *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are an important part of Australia's culture* (82% compared to 74%), and specifically-engaged First Nations respondents living in remote/regional Australia are more likely to agree compared to the Australians overall (89% compared to 73%).
- **CALD respondents** are more likely than non-CALD respondents to agree that *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are an important part of Australia's culture* (79% compared to 73%).

Interest in First Nations arts is growing

Nearly three in five *Australians believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are becoming more popular* (57%).⁶ **First Nations respondents** are more likely than non-First Nations respondents to feel Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are becoming more popular (74% compared to 57% of non-First Nations respondents).

Since COVID-19, interest in First Nations art has remained steady (40% for both 2022 and 2019). Among those interested, nearly half reported a **growing interest** in First Nations arts (46% compared to 45% in 2019).

Those who are interested in First Nations arts are young and diverse:

- Interest in First Nations arts is high among **younger Australians** and lower among older Australians: from almost half of Australians aged 15–34 recording interest in First Nations arts (46%) to 43% of those aged 35–54, and 33% of those aged 55 and over. **Younger Australians aged 15–34** are twice as likely to be **strongly interested in First Nations arts** than those aged 55 or older (14% compared to 6%).
- Interest in First Nations arts is high among **those who live in remote areas** and lower among those who live in metropolitan areas (55% compared to 39%). **Australians living in remote areas** are also nearly four times as likely to be **strongly interested in First Nations arts** than Australians living in metropolitan areas (37% compared to 10%).
- Interest in First Nations arts is high among **parents with children under 16 years** (46% compared to 38% of those without children under 16).
- **First Nations respondents** have considerably higher interest in First Nations arts than non-First Nations respondents (76% compared to 39%). **First Nations respondents** are also six times more likely to report that they are **strongly interested** (54% compared to 9%).
- **CALD respondents** are more likely to be interested in First Nations arts than non-CALD respondents (49% compared to 38%). **CALD respondents** are also nearly twice as likely to report that they are **strongly interested** (16% compared to 9% of non-CALD respondents). This is a strong indicator for intercultural empathy.
- Interest in First Nations arts is high among **respondents with disability** (46% compared to 39% of those without disability).

⁶ 2022 was the first year this statement regarding the popularity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts was included in the National Arts Participation Survey.

More than half of Australians feel First Nations arts are not well represented in Australia

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are central to understanding who we are as Australians, less than half of Australians believe **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are well represented in Australia** (47% down from 51% in 2019). This shows there is much work to be done to increase discoverability and representation of First Nations creative work throughout Australia.

- **Men** are more likely than women to agree **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are well represented in Australia** (49% compared to 46%).
- **CALD respondents** are more likely than non-CALD respondents to agree **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are well represented in Australia** (51% compared to 47%).
- **Parents with children under 16** are more likely than Australians without children under 16 to agree **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts are well represented in Australia** (52% compared to 46%).

Case study

SILENCE by Karul Projects.
Credit: Simon Woods.



SILENCE by Karul Projects

Karul Projects' latest work, *SILENCE*, was choreographed, written and directed by Minjungbal-Yugambah, Wiradjuri and Ni-Vanuatu man Thomas E.S. Kelly. The work explores the silence that surrounds the issue of a treaty for First Nations people. It features a complex musical score, interspersed with live percussion and interludes of spoken, often witty, dialogue.

Kelly explains: '*SILENCE* was created to contribute Karul's voice to the conversation about our struggles and freedoms as First Nations peoples. It calls for Treaty and/or meaningful negotiations about land, reparations and redress.'⁷

In late 2022, *SILENCE* toured around metro and regional Queensland. The work then travelled to Melbourne as part of DanceX festival and began its national tour in March 2023. The performance has received positive responses from audiences, with one sharing:

'The work had the overall feeling of hope and change with respect at its core [...] I had the sense of being part of a crowd that was passionate about the issues, enlivened by the performance and brought together as a collective in witnessing.'⁸

⁷ Staff Writer 2022, '*SILENCE* – Open Letter From Karul Projects', *Scenestr*, 5 October.

⁸ From BlakDance survey 2022.

First Nations respondents

Almost nine in ten First Nations respondents attend live arts events and festivals

Nearly nine in ten First Nations respondents attend arts events and festivals (87%). First Nations respondents attend arts events and festivals at substantially higher rates compared to non-First Nations respondents (68%).

What types of arts events do First Nations respondents attend?

- Nearly one in five **First Nations respondents** attend **music** (63%, compared to 47% of Australians overall). This includes **traditional** or **folk** music events (18% compared to 6% of non-First Nations respondents), and 12% attend **art music** (eg new classical, experimental new music, improvised music and sound art), compared to 5% of non-First Nations respondents.
- **First Nations respondents** are more likely than non-First Nations respondents to attend **live theatre events and festivals** (43% compared to 35%), in particular they are more likely to go to a **circus** performance (10% compared to 6%) or children's theatre (8% compared to 5%).
- 60% **First Nations respondents** attend **visual arts** events and festivals, including painting, drawing, printmaking, or street art events compared to 38% of non-First Nations respondents.
- More than half of **First Nations respondents** attend **dance** events and festivals (56% down from 66% in 2019, compared to 28% of Australians overall). Almost a quarter (23%) of First Nations respondents attended **at least one form of dance event** – not including festivals – over the past 12 months, twice as many as non-First Nations respondents (12%). The most popular forms of dance for First Nations respondents to attend are **contemporary dance** (11% compared to 6% of non-First Nations respondents) and **classical/traditional/folk dance** (10% compared to 3% of non-First Nations respondents).
- More than two in five **First Nations respondents** attend **book or literature** events (44% down from 53% in 2019).
- Two thirds of **First Nations respondents** attend **festivals** (68% compared to 43% of non-First Nations respondents). Of all First Nations respondents who attend festivals, 85% attended at least one First Nations arts festival in 2022 (compared to 34% of non-First Nations festival goers).

First Nations respondents are highly motivated to attend arts events and are less impacted by barriers to attendance than Australians overall

- **First Nations respondents** are more likely than non-First Nations respondents to attend arts events *to understand other perspectives and cultures* (56% compared to 36%); *to improve their wellbeing* (45% compared to 32%); and *to express themselves* (32% compared to 13%). However, **First Nations respondents** are less likely to attend arts events *to have fun and be entertained* (57% compared to 70% of non-First Nations respondents).
- **First Nations respondents** are more likely to identify *a lack of information and awareness* as a barrier to arts attendance (38% compared to 27% of non-First Nations respondents).
- However, **First Nations respondents are less likely to be impacted by almost all other the reported barriers of attendance.** First Nations respondents are less likely to find *ticket and entry costs* (38% compared to 56% of non-First Nations respondents); *location of events* (28% compared to 40% of non-First Nations respondents); *difficulty getting to events* (21% compared to 29% of non-First Nations respondents); *lack of interest from family and/or friends* (19% compared to 26% of non-First Nations respondents) as barriers to attending arts events.

First Nations respondents are more likely to feel the arts are not for them

- While First Nations respondents are highly engaged in the arts, a high proportion report feeling that *cultural and creative experiences are not really for them*. Two in five First Nations respondents report that *cultural and creative experiences are not really for people like me* (39% of First Nations respondents compared to 27% of non-First Nations respondents).
- These seemingly contradictory results, also seen in previous iterations of the survey for some groups, suggest an ongoing disconnection between active participation and engagement, and perceptions of the arts as expensive, hard to access and narrowly defined. They also resonate with observations of the under-representation of non-dominant cultures and groups in audiences for certain forms of publicly funded arts and culture, adding important context to the body of research that seeks to understand who has access to arts and culture and why.⁹

Creative participation in the arts is very high among First Nations respondents

First Nations respondents are highly engaged in **making art** (73%) and are more engaged than non-First Nations respondents (42%).

What types of art are First Nations respondents creating?

- Two in five First Nations respondents **create visual arts and crafts** (40% compared to 23% of non-First Nations respondents).
- One in four First Nations respondents **create music** (27% compared to 16% of non-First Nations respondents).
- One in four First Nations respondents **participate in dance** (25% compared to 8% of non-First Nations respondents).
- One in four First Nations respondents **produce creative writing** (25% compared to 13% of non-First Nations respondents).
- One in seven First Nations respondents **participate in theatre** (15% compared to 6% of non-First Nations respondents).
- Half of First Nations respondents **use digital platforms to create art** (51% compared to 29% of non-First Nations).

Levels of **reading, listening to recorded music and online engagement** are higher amongst First Nations respondents:

- **Reading for pleasure** is slightly higher among First Nations respondents (70%, compared to 69% of non-First Nations respondents).
- Over nine in 10 First Nations respondents **listen to recorded music** (94% compared to 91% of non-First Nations respondents).
- First Nations respondents are more likely to **engage with the arts online** with three quarters doing so (95%) compared to 87% of non-First Nations respondents.

Research approach

The 2022 National Arts Participation Survey was conducted in September–October 2022 and the results are based on a nationally representative sample of 9,396 people. The previous National Arts Participation Survey was conducted in 2019, prior to the disruptions of COVID-19 and provided a benchmark of Australians' arts engagement before the pandemic. The 2022 survey results, in comparison, provide an update on arts engagement in the wake of COVID-19.

The 2022 survey results provide critical insights into how Australians' arts engagement might be changing following the disruptions felt by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in relation to the role of the arts for our individual and collective wellbeing. The 2022 survey closely examined Australians' relationship with the arts throughout lockdown periods, providing insights into the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and wellbeing. It asked participants to reflect on their digital arts engagement throughout this time and to share their own perceptions of how their engagement might have changed.