

TOWARDS A

CULTURAL STRATEGY

FOR
LAUNCESTON

© R Archer, Jan /Feb 2017

FOREWORD

THIS DOCUMENT HAS EVOLVED FROM INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL LAUNCESTON, TASMANIAN STATE AND NATIONAL MEMBERS OF THE ARTS AND CULTURE COMMUNITY, AND FROM THE CONSULTANT'S EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE IN AND UNDERSTANDING OF ARTS AND CULTURE AT THE TASMANIAN, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL.

Its starting point is the widely shared recognition that Launceston is culturally rich not only in its geographical, gastronomic, institutional, and organisational assets, but also in its human capital, beginning with the ancient cultures of its First Peoples and landing in the twenty-first century with the energy and imagination of its living artists and the ephemeral energy of things like festivals.

But it is also recognised that the city has as yet not found the pathway effectively to promote this cultural wealth and thus to leverage those assets.

This document seeks to address that central concern in a holistic manner. While an action plan will need to be prioritised in real time, focusing on only one part of the picture will not tell the whole story: it is the big picture, the grand narrative, which is most likely to inspire a sense of pride in citizens of the region, and thence a drawcard for future visitation. What both citizens and visitors love, perhaps more than specific events, is the sense that they are in a lively, generous city which is interesting all the time, and a place to which you want to return.

The document takes into account a number of specified objectives:

1. to develop Launceston and the Tamar region as a major cultural hub;
2. provide opportunities across the community for cultural expression and development, and enhance Launceston's values as an attractive place to live;
3. combine more effectively the arts providers and practitioners with the cultural facilities of the region;
4. provide a valuable arts resource for the community;
5. provide an important tourism attractor and other flow on economic benefits;
6. create a distinctive regional arts profile and enhance Launceston's capacity to become a destination and a gateway to the rest of Tasmania
7. stimulate a climate of activity, creativity and good ideas

and some key questions, both general...

8. How can the *Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG)* sit as a centre piece of an integrated holistic cultural strategy which presents a strategic approach to leveraging all the city's cultural assets?
9. How can the city utilise its cultural assets to drive economic yield as a tourist attractor?
10. What specific initiatives in a prioritised ranking should The Council be pursuing to increase attendance, both locally from residents and through attracting greater tourist numbers?

and specific, regarding QVMAG:

11. Efficiency of locations: Is there a coherent strategic argument for two sites or could QVMAG more effectively present its qualities to the community through one well managed contemporary site offering. What nature of capital facility augmentation may be required to effectively position the QVMAG in this respect?
12. Improved accessibility and visual awareness of the sites: A common criticism is that both sites appear “anonymous” and attendances do not reflect the iconic nature of the collections and do not attract the tourism visitations desired.
13. Developing a contemporary offering: This may include matters such as method of display, curating, quality and scale of exhibitions, collaborations with other institutions and beneficial alignments among other matters.
14. In terms of a contemporary offering: What digital opportunities are available in the cultural and arts space that offer positive prospects for QVMAG.
15. Various debates have occurred over a number of years regarding the most effective governance model for QVMAG. QVMAG is owned and operated by the City of Launceston (The Council). Some have suggested that a separate board of trustees with delegated authority to establish policy for QVMAG and operated as an autonomous group would be more appropriate. Various models exist, an understanding of what would be the most appropriate model for QVMAG in terms of contemporary cultural arts governance practices should be considered.
16. The Council currently contributes in the order of \$4.2million a year in funding to support QVMAG. What funding model most appropriately fits the nature of QVMAG. In particular, The Council has, over a period of time, lobbied the State Government for an increased contribution. The State Government currently contributes in the order of \$1.2million per year to QVMAG. The Council believes a more appropriate contribution would be in the order of \$5million per year.
17. In terms of the strategic positioning of QVMAG within a cultural and arts strategy, The Council seeks to evaluate and demonstrate the economic, social and environmental value of QVMAG and the contribution it makes to the education, intellectual, human, social and natural capital of its community. A process that has rigor in undertaking this evaluation and demonstration is required.

Most of these objectives can be met and questions answered through the holistic approach suggested in the document.

It is recommended that Council endorse the strategy in principle, and following necessary costing and negotiation, adopt and publish the strategy while embarking on a prioritised list of strategic actions.

INTRODUCTION

WITH STRONG INDIGENOUS HERITAGE, CLEAR EVIDENCE OF HISTORIC AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL PRESENCE AND A PALPABLE CONNECTION TO THE SURROUNDING LAND AND WATERS, THE CITY OF LAUNCESTON HAS INFINITE AND UNTAPPED CULTURAL POTENTIAL.

A cultural strategy for the city seeks to set out some of the ways in which that potential can be realised. It can focus and harness the energies of those who live and work here, and those who wish to contribute to its cultural futures. It also touches at numerous points with the City of Launceston Strategic Plan which in turn takes its context from the Greater Launceston Plan. The Strategic Plan says:

The greater Launceston community said that the Greater Launceston Plan should focus on increasing economic prosperity, livability and creativity in Launceston and the surrounding communities.

And it quotes that Plan:

Sustainable prosperity for greater Launceston will be achieved by consolidating and building nationally and internationally recognised strategic advantages through a focus on creativity and innovation, maintaining exceptional environmental and livability qualities and ensuring a diverse, connected and inclusive community.

All these qualities and streams – livability, creativity, innovation, environmental awareness, diversity, inclusivity and connectivity – are part of what we include in the catchment of culture. The Cultural Strategy will be of crucial importance to all these things, including the economic development and prosperity of the city and the region.

THE CURRENT CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

LAUNCESTON IS FORTUNATE TO BE HOME TO A RICH SEAM OF PASSION FOR CULTURE IN ITS BROADEST SENSE, IN WHICH CULTURE MEANS ALL THE THINGS THE CITY IS. THE CITY'S CULTURAL PROFILE INCLUDES ITS LANDSCAPE, THE STORIES THAT LANDSCAPE HOLDS FOR US, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF ITS FIRST PEOPLES, THE PRODUCE WHICH IS CULTIVATED AND CULLED FROM ITS LAND AND WATERS AND THE ARTISTS AND ARTISANS WHO ARE INSPIRED BY IT.

This landscape includes evidence, in collections, of successive layers of the land and the city's many histories, and in the ongoing daily practice of practitioners or audience/participants for and of the art, sports, cuisine, architecture, sciences and all the full quota of human activity constituting the culture of any place. Recognising the richness and reach of that profile, and **working towards the creation of a wide range and variety of platforms and processes whereby we promote, sustain and develop that profile, lies at the heart of this strategy.**



TOP Cataract Gorge - In Flood

Photograph by John Temple. Courtesy: John Temple Gallery

**LEFT Trucanini's basket,
Diplarrena moraea, c. 1876**

*Collection: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery. 1993:H:0151
Photograph by John Leeming*



TOP Fragile Matter 2017
 Photograph by Dermot McElduff. Courtesy: Tasdance

MIDDLE Festival 2017
 Courtesy: City of Launceston

BOTTOM Launceston's Abbey Hansson has scored lead roles in 'Mary Poppins' and 'Legally Blonde', 30th May 2015.
 Photograph by Phillip Biggs. Courtesy: The Examiner



CULTURAL LIFE

MOST PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN LAUNCESTON ARE PROUD OF THEIR CITY. FOR MANY, THE QUALITY OF LIFE IS VERY GOOD, WITH CLEAN AIR, BEAUTIFUL SURROUNDINGS, ABSENCE OF TRAFFIC SNARLS, AND SUPERB FOOD OFFERINGS. SOME OF THESE CITIZENS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE CURRENT CULTURAL OFFER, WHICH INCLUDES A REGULAR PROGRAM OF THEATRE, DANCE AND MUSIC AT THE *PRINCESS THEATRE* (MAINLY IMPORTED TOURING PRODUCT, EXCEPT FOR THE VERY POPULAR MENU OF PRO-AM MUSICAL THEATRE), CONTEMPORARY DANCE FROM *TASDANCE* AND *STOMPIN* AND THE EXCELLENT OFFERS FROM THE *QUEEN VICTORIA MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY* WHERE A BEAUTIFUL COLLECTION SITS ALONGSIDE CHANGING COLLECTION AND VISITING EXHIBITIONS AND PRIZES. PLANS ARE WELL IN PROGRESS FOR ITS NEW GALLERY, *THE FIRST TASMANIANS: OUR STORY*.

The *Queen Victoria Museum* at Inveresk has healthy regular visitation from families, while the *Queen Victoria Art Gallery's* audience is small (and much smaller than it should be) though dedicated and devoted to its remarkable collection. Certainly the latter is less well known by residents and does not currently rate as a tourist destination, but should. Similarly, a small jewel like *Design Tasmania* is literally not on the tourist map at present, yet the building itself is very aesthetically pleasing (but in need of a regular maintenance regimen), and the collection a brilliant showcase for Tasmanian craftsmanship arising from the state's exquisite timber resources. The development of a new arthouse cinema, the old *Star Theatre* on Invermay Road is seen as a welcome addition to cultural life in Launceston.

On the margins are the *Academy Gallery* at Inveresk, the odd student production at the theatre there, and *Mudlark Theatre* company whose annual endeavours to create a new Australian play are to be admired. All this adds up to a satisfying menu of cultural programming for those who love the arts and see them as part of a civil society and an informed life. But it has to be said that this relatively small slice of Launceston's community also travels (to Hobart and the mainland) for its cultural fix and wants more to happen locally.

There is a strong appetite for participation, as evidenced by the passion for musical theatre at the pro-am level, and the community music programs. This passion is also something which is not only a culturally healthy aspect of living in Launceston, but, with a refreshed and expanded menu of cultural offerings, can also translate into bigger and demographically broader audiences for the arts.

Food and wine also makes up part of that cultural life and the boutique food offer is beyond compare, with exceptional fresh produce, the *Harvest Launceston Community Farmers' Market*, entrepreneurial initiative such as that of Daniel Alps at *Alps & Amici*, various good restaurants, and the popular *Festivale* food and wine festival. The latter, through its popular entertainment program, also attracts beyond just the arts and culture devotees, though the price point is beginning to be a barrier for those in a lower economic bracket.

Alongside the regular offers, there are other festivals too. In 2016, *Junction Arts Festival* stepped up under the artistic directorship of Greg Clarke, and opened its program to a wider general public both through its location at Prince's Square, and with its unique curatorial exploration of interactive and participatory performance. The *Tasmanian Breath of Fresh Air Film Festival (BOFA)* bears a similarly unique profile, and the *Tasmanian Poetry Festival* has a dedicated following as do various contemporary music events, such as *Party in the Paddock* or slightly further afield, the *Festival Called PANAMA* in Lone Star Valley. The *Tamar Valley Writers Festival* brings events into Launceston as does *Ten Days on the Island* and the *Festival of Voices*, both of which emanate from the south.

But culture can be defined in terms broader than the arts. The river is home to all kinds of water-based sport and pleasure, and the AFL matches are as popular with locals as they are in their vital role of attracting tourists to Launceston.

For a city of 40,000 rate-payers this seems rich indeed, yet there is a pervasive feeling that somehow these cultural riches are not well-enough recognised and utilised by the citizens of the region, and almost certainly not profiled in a way that would make Launceston a draw for that lucrative segment of the contemporary tourism industry – the cultural tourist. There is latent potential for much better leverage of the city's cultural assets and activities.

A cultural strategy seeks to enrich the cultural landscape first for the inhabitants of the city and the region, but in doing so, create an attractive destination for visitors – a place where tourists would want to come not just for the food and the football, but to enjoy a wider and deeper cultural experience including architecture, the physical beauty of the valley setting, the *Cataract Gorge* and the river, as well as the place's history through that geography, visual art, story-telling and architecture; alongside a celebration of the plastic and performing arts practice and creative industry of the artists and craftspersons who live and work here now.

Many professional artists and diverse creatives who live in and around Launceston agree that a new story needs to be told. This is not new in the sense of newly invented, as the stories of the place as old as the landscape itself, but new in the sense of a newly constructed narrative which will bring all these elements together to make locals and visitors alike aware of how their lives can be enriched through engagement with this remarkable place.



TOP Junction Arts Festival 2017
 Photograph by Joanne Faulkner.
 Courtesy: Junction Arts Festival.

LEFT Philip Wolfhagen, 2017
 Photograph by Chris Crerar.
 Courtesy: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery

THE SHARED NARRATIVE

WITH SUCH WEALTH OF CULTURAL ASSETS AND ACTIVITY, THERE IS NO NEED FOR LAUNCESTON TO COMPARE ITSELF TO OTHER PLACES, NEITHER IN TASMANIA NOR ANYWHERE ELSE. IT IS UNIQUE AND HAS A GRAND NARRATIVE TO PROMOTE.

This narrative must embrace not just those who now enjoy arts and culture, but those who do not yet consider arts and culture part of their lives. The economy of northern Tasmania is improving, but still we cannot ignore those whom unemployment, sometimes long-term intergenerational unemployment, has hit hard. People with lower incomes, living in outer suburbs, deserve to benefit equally from The Council's investment in arts and culture, and there are enough artists and craftspersons who enjoy working in community to make this a reality. (This ties in extremely well with *Junction Arts Festival's* ethos of participatory performance – and with proposed new directions for the *University of Tasmania (UTAS)* theatre-making curriculum). **There is a perceived urgent need for genuine community cultural development amongst those residents who may feel disenfranchised. This points to a cultural strategy which not only nurtures and leverages the city's treasures (both tangible and ephemeral), but equally supports the enrichment of all lives through arts and culture.** The northern suburbs transformation is vital for the future success of Launceston. Places like Rocherlea and Ravenswood, where lower incomes and single parent households are common, have enormous potential and are, at the same time, sources of great stories.

The other gap, not dissimilar to many other places in Australia, is the **ongoing need to acknowledge more fully the Aboriginal people of northern Tasmania.** Occupation and subsequent displacement have been a crucial factor in this region: placing the original custodians of this beautiful land at the centre of the new narrative is vital. It is heartening to witness the development of *The First Tasmanians: Our Story* gallery at QVMAG, and the *Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre's* place in *Junction Arts Festival*: these are welcome beginnings to that central concern, and we look to make more of this fundamental and precious part of the greater narrative.

The seasons are also an integral part of the story. There are not so many places in Australia where four distinct seasons can be enjoyed. Each has its charm, and while there may be an enthusiasm amongst city brokers for commercial drivers for those times when people 'come out' less frequently – the classic urge to program events which will attract tourists during the winter months – there is a lot to be said for a city which is open all seasons. What better lure there might be in winter, than the experience of cosy fires, with magnificent fresh produce and brilliant wines, and the presence of stimulating art experiences? This is a counter-intuitive approach to eventism: it says you may lure visitors with one main event, such as an AFL match, but instead of matching that with an arts event, match it with the sense that after your main sporting event, you can enjoy a truly rich winter city in which so many more cultural aspects can be enjoyed at your leisure, without the pressure of booking and paying and rushing to yet another event.

There's something intrinsically seductive about a place that you can market as 'wonderful whenever you visit'. What this points to is investment not in new gimmicky attractions or major events, but investment in regularity, in the intricate fabric of a city which becomes beautiful and enjoyable for citizens and tourists alike. A cultural strategy can make that happen and can earn the cultural trust of a wide range of people who can make the city sing.

There are a number of choices to be made in thinking about a city's futures – one is to follow the obvious path to large-scale events which attract people in specific temporal parameters. Another is to **follow the boutique instinct and learn that a place can attract just as many people to its quiet intimate but equally rich pleasures as another place might attract to major events.**



TOP Autumn City Park Launceston
Photograph by Brian Dullaghan. Courtesy: City of Launceston

ABOVE Woodfired pizza
Photograph by ribeirorocha. Courtesy: iStock.com

LEFT Saint John Craft Beer
Photograph by Chris Crerar. Courtesy: Saint John Craft Beer and Tourism Northern Tasmania

THE FUTURE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE – WHAT KIND OF A PLACE IS THIS?

A PLACE WHERE A BIG STORY UNDERPINS THE CULTURAL/ PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

1. *Cataract Gorge* is promoted as a starting point for the grand narrative. Signage and apps tell the pre-historical story and connect to QVMAG collection.
2. Permanent creative signage tells the Indigenous story on the riverside walk. The walk has ample food and drink stations. *Royal Park* opens up onto QVMAG. The river is alive with ferries and all on-water activity.
3. QVMAG is now unified into one location with the Museum now in the old TasTAFE building. Its collection provides the geological and anthropological detail informing the *Cataract Gorge* experience, as does the new gallery *The First Tasmanians: Our Story*. The architectural joining of the two buildings stimulates awe in itself, but also the story of two buildings from two different eras. The indoor/outdoor café in the Museum courtyard buzzes with children by day and events by night. The Gallery shows works from the colonial period to recent years along with contemporary interventions. A massive imagined anthropological creature (commissioned from Patricia Piccinini) dominates the courtyard, but also peers up out of the courtyard as a beacon. Another artist commission has enlivened the streetscape as a pathway to the *Paterson Street West Carpark*. In the other direction, an underpass, enlivened by a creative digital artwork, leads direct to Cameron Street.
4. The walk along Cameron Street is dotted with creative industry and artist outlets.
5. Turn right into Charles Street and encounter Launceston's boho environment, a cityscape of the boutique and the handmade, celebrated annually by the unique celebration of interactive art, the *Junction Arts Festival* at *Princes Square*.
6. Keep along Cameron Street and you are at *City Park* and *Design Tasmania*, with its superb collection of Tasmanian designers, excellent shopping for local craft and design and newly minted boutique café in the calm surrounds of the Japanese inspired courtyard.
7. Go right at the cosy corner pub and you'll find the *Princess Theatre*, home to a wide variety of local, statewide and national performances.
8. Or continue into *City Park*, beautiful in all seasons, and find *Albert Hall*, a grand old dame that 'sings' with special performances and gigs.
9. Direct to the river again, over the new pedestrian bridge and you arrive in the city's *Inveresk Contemporary Hub*, part of a thriving UTAS which makes Launceston such a successful university town. With the old heavy industry sheds as the gritty background, creative industries thrive here as a combination of design, fine art, architecture and performance training (especially participatory and in-community) takes place. In a highly interdisciplinary atmosphere. The *Academy Gallery* hosts a variety of local and touring exhibitions, the great hall (once the Museum) is used for events and undercover markets (especially on footy weekends). Local companies *Tasdance*, *Stompin* and *Mudlark Theatre* are based here.
10. Return to starting point is by ferry or foot via *Northbank* and/or *Seaport*

[an experiential description of this tour can be found at Appendix A]



THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The natural environment is in itself an inspiring asset still to be creatively exploited. Deeply connected to the human experience, *Cataract Gorge* is an obvious focal point, but the entire ecosystem is fodder for splendid cultural exploitation and is currently under-utilised. The river can be further exploited for cultural purpose. Boating, yachting, sculling, fishing, swimming – all these have a culture of their own, yet there is very little articulation of the art and science of such pursuits. That the *Tamar Yacht Club* sits on the river just below QVMAG makes it a perfect hub for river-based activity, creativity and inspiration. **The development of Northbank will lend emphasis to the river's centrality to the city, and the narrative should extend to those places of interest and activity all the way downstream. The development of more ferry services and cultural activity on the river would be a way to familiarise residents and visitors with the natural environment. Kings Wharf still has unrealised potential, as do so many other locations both sides of the rivers.**

Launceston is in the future identified as a valley city, with significant interaction with other valley cities. The conversation begins locally, but easily moves to a global perspective. Such wide-ranging but deeply interconnected thinking creates a compelling narrative for Launceston. Policy, in this case, does not proceed from arid rule-making, but from the deepest places of human and geographical intersection. The basis of cultural exchange includes things like agriculture and innovation as much as the arts. The *Tamar Valley's* natural advantages include the success of viticulture, especially in the cultivation of Pinot Noir, and this connection to excellence in wine-making makes an attractive fit for cultural exploration and artistic and scientific collaboration.

A PLACE WHERE FIRST PEOPLES ARE ACKNOWLEDGED AND CELEBRATED

LOCAL INDIGENOUS ELDERS ARE ALSO DISTINGUISHED PRACTITIONERS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE FIELDS – VISUAL ARTS, WRITING, DANCE, THEATRE-MAKING, STORY-TELLING. THEY CONFIRM THEIR DEEP CONNECTION TO THE LAND, THE CATARACT GORGE AND RIVERS, THE WATER: THE NORTH-EAST STORY IS STILL TO BE TOLD, AND IS BEST TOLD IN WAYS WHICH STILL CONNECT WITH THE LAND.

As an overarching directive: ensure that the histories of local Indigenous peoples are incorporated into the grand narrative and seen as central to must-see activities, at the same time including and celebrating the contemporary arts practice of their living descendants.

Walking tours/trails creatively telling the local Indigenous story, both of human inhabitants and the natural world from an Indigenous perspective, should be established as part of the tourist experience and subject to serious marketing investment. For example, the *Cataract Gorge* tour conducted by (Dr) Aunty Patsy Cameron is a gift of understanding to locals, and a tourist attractor in its own right.

Shared amongst these elder practitioners is a hope in education, and a clear focus on preparing the next generations for cultural leadership. This is happening in the form of training camps on country, establishing dedicated curricula in the education system, and a drive towards a major event in 2022. The visibility of Indigenous heritage is important, through signage and interpretation (which could be the work of digital artists) in crucial physical locations such as the *Cataract Gorge*, but also through hands-on interactive practice within various institutions and locations throughout the city – including the *Cataract Gorge*, *QVMAG*, *Design Tasmania* and *Inveresk*. There's a need, and a tourist demand, for authentic cultural experience.

Artist retreats, such as those conducted at South Stradbroke Island (Qld), are established in locations such as *Scotch Oakburn College*, *Girl Guides Tasmania Nindethana Campsite* at Deviot, *Scouts Australia Carnaroo Camp* at Paper Beach, and *Camp Banksia* at Port Sorell. Such retreats, where emerging Indigenous artists can be mentored by senior artists, result in fresh ideas, new ambition, upskill in craft and new opportunities; as well as the creation of mutually beneficial networking for latent and emerging talent.

A PLACE WHERE ARTS AND CULTURE ARE VALUED AND PROMOTED

Those connected to arts and culture now feel as if their creative contribution is valued by Council and by the citizens of Launceston. This value has now been effectively communicated to all citizens through active promotion and ongoing series of art-in-community projects. The majority of residents in the region can now access and enjoy the city's cultural riches; and these are now effectively leveraged in the tourism sector for the economic benefit of the city and the region. Now, in one location, the healthy family demographic which visits the brand spanking new Museum, is also drawn easily into the Gallery as well. *



As an overarching directive: ensure that all unique institutions such as QVMAG and the *Design Tasmania*, companies such as *Tasdance* and unique festivals such as *Junction Arts Festival* and *BOFA* are valued and supported by Council and actively promoted as part of the grand narrative which sets thousands of years of human habitation and achievement in this unique landscape.

The cultural sector also understands the city's capacity to do more and to do it better: they strongly advocate a stimulus to greater activity in Launceston.

- * Research in the tourism sector has already shown that even the most spectacular aspect of the landscape, the *Cataract Gorge*, does not figure as a tourist destination, but is something discovered almost accidentally once visitors are here. Once experienced, they will return, but the strategy required is to make it an attractor in the first place, something that goes on the must-see list for Tasmanian tourists. The same can be said for QVMAG, an exquisite piece of colonial architecture and a great collection, but little known, certainly not to tourists, but also, and more importantly, little visited by the majority of locals.

Ensure regular formal and informal networking opportunities for the community of artists and arts workers.*

- * These are hosted on a rotational basis at QVMAG, *Design Tasmania*, *Inveresk Contemporary Hub* etc and serve to stimulate dialogue and collaboration amongst local artists and arts workers

TOP LEFT Lola Greeno, *Carrier Necklace* (detail), 2012, abalone shells, echidna quills and wire
 Private Collection
 Photograph by John Leeming. Courtesy: QVMAG

TOP RIGHT Kevin Perkins, *Cape Barren Goose Cabinet* (detail), 1996, huon pine, silky oak, ebony, fine silver, brass
 © Design Tasmania Wood Collection
 Photograph by Peter Whyte Photography



A PLACE WHERE PRIMARY CULTURAL HUBS ARE VISIBLE AND PROUDLY PROMOTED

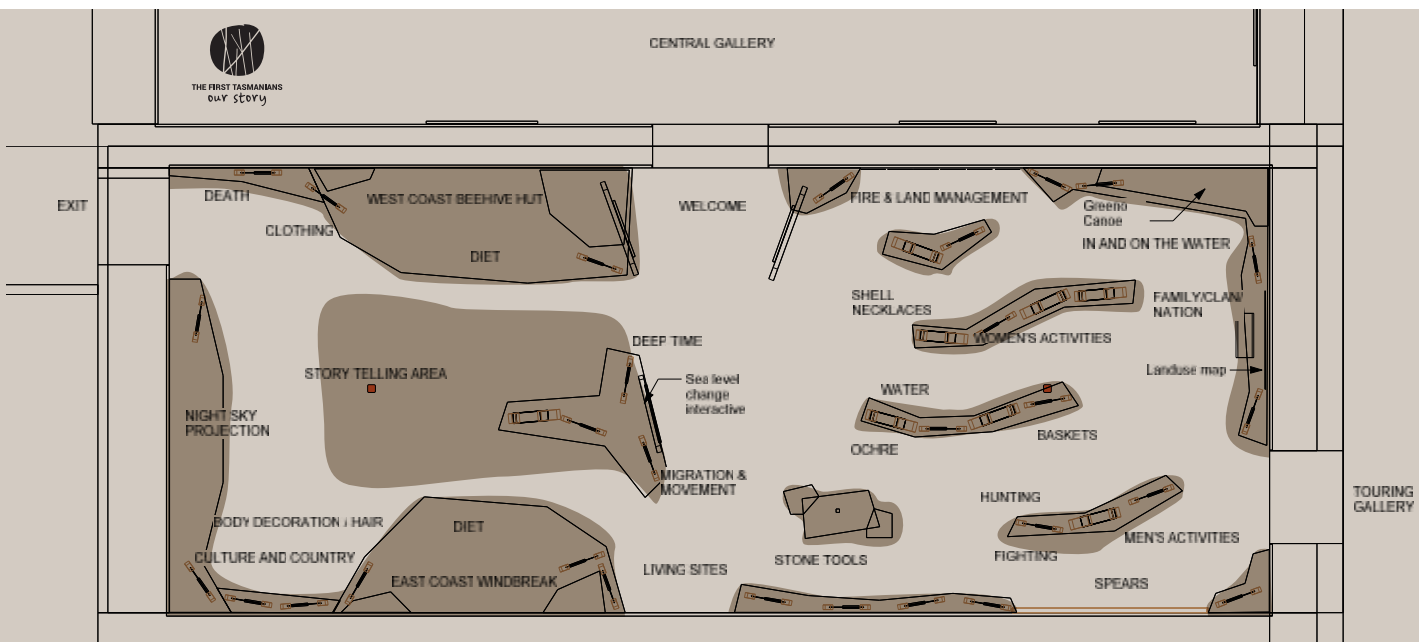
THE MAJOR PROJECTS

I QUEEN VICTORIAN MUSEUM AND GALLERY

Here is the place where all the immediate sensory intake from the *Cataract Gorge* and the river is reinforced and extended through its unexpectedly rich collections. Equally, those who visit QVMAG first will want to step into that landscape.

The collection is now held in two co-located buildings which eloquently speak, through their architecture, of the city's history. One is an early twentieth century building formerly housing *TasTAFE*, and the other is the grand old Victorian – together they put a shape to the colonial city which developed into the modern, and embraced art and education. The Museum section is housed in the twentieth century building which is built around an expansive courtyard. The courtyard space opens to the park and welcomes us in through its lively open space where an indoor-outdoor café sits with a perfect aspect to the park. As we refresh with yet more examples of authentic local food, wine and waters, we can learn of the architectural wealth of Launceston, and discover a myriad of virtual and actual architectural tours and guides to walk us through the city. Whether for local or visitor, the architectural profile of the city is an ever-changing landscape in itself, and we can constantly update our experience and knowledge of the built environment here. This includes a guide to the boutique retail and artisan offerings just a block or two away in the city proper.

The courtyard space is dominated by a creature imagined and created by renowned Australian artist/sculptor Patricia Piccinini. The creature is enormous, its head and neck rising above the roofline of the building and easily seen from the city side of the Museum, as it serves as a grand attractor and inspires awe and wonder - a creature that has emerged from the primordial depths of northern Tasmania and come to tell us a story of prehistoric times.



We know children love dinosaurs, and inside the museum the collection has its pre-historical treasures of bones and stones, rocks and remnants, remarkable histories of Tasmanian tigers and devils, but out here, Piccinini's fanciful and thought-provoking creature has become emblematic nationwide of this re-positioned and repurposed world of wonders. Family activities seem to be ever-present in another corner of the courtyard.

Entering the Museum, we explore the collections, all presented in ways which connect to that local landscape experience. The Museum building has been beautifully connected to the Victorian building, and we move through a passageway of architectural elegance and symbiotic transformation to the galleries where we view various hangs of the exceptional collection, and special temporary exhibitions of national, sometimes international touring shows, with, from time to time, the work of local artists.

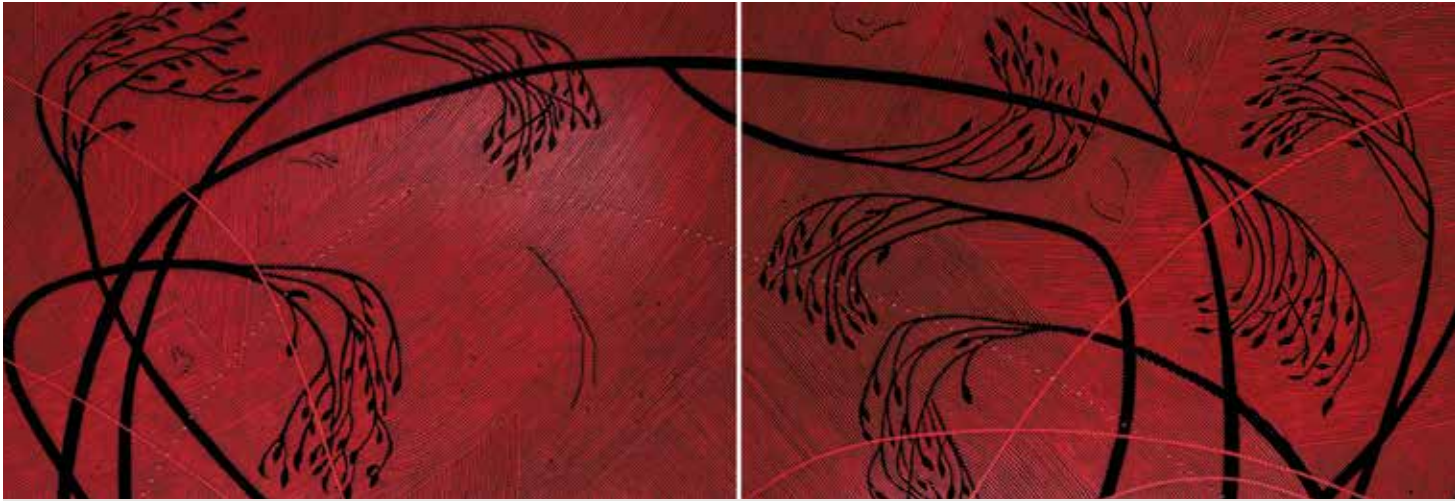
The marvellous gallery, *The First Tasmanians: Our Story* makes the seminal connection of humanity to the immediate landscape. Paradoxically, sitting within the walls of a building which screams Empire, and thus an oppressive and cruel first encounter with the Indigenous people of this region, the gallery tells the real story of these talented, highly creative and ultimately resilient people. Through art and craft, artefact and creativity, their story emerges as powerful, moving and inspiring.

We further explore the colonial period collection, and into the twentieth century and indeed the twenty-first, whence contemporary interventions here and there sit in a stimulating conversation with works from the past.

TOP LEFT Students on the front lawn of the Government Technical School [now QVMAG], Launceston 1919.
Photograph by Robinson Studio [QVM.1993.p.0821]
Courtesy: QVMAG

TOP CENTRE Queen Victoria Art Gallery
Courtesy: QVMAG

ABOVE The First Tasmanians: Our Story Floor Plans
Courtesy: QVMAG



II UTAS AT INVERESK

The introduction of courses (full time and fee for service, short, afterschool and holiday) has seen the pro-am musical theatre appetite raise the bar so high that the annual productions, also employing theatre designers, stage managers and other back and front of house arts workers trained at the northern campus, are now drawing audiences not only from the local community, but from all over the state. In introducing Musical Theatre to its menu of performing arts offers, UTAS also saw the wisdom of reintroducing music to the northern campus, and since then the musical life of the city has been re-invigorated

By attuning itself more closely to the natural arts affinities of young people and practitioners in the region, the curriculum of studies now attracts excellent student numbers as well as a wide variety of the state's finest professional arts practitioners as instructors, part-time and sessional lecturers. This in turn has strengthened the arts ecology throughout Tasmania, as those professionals find another outlet for their craftsmanship and a pathway for sustainable careers in the state. It's a win-win situation. The introduction of theatre-making courses with a focus on interactive performance and theatre in community has also fed *Junction Arts Festival*, and the proximity to architecture, design, fine arts, and even food preparation and hospitality training means there is a genuinely lively and innovative approach to a new brand of performance being created here.

ABOVE Melissa Smith, *Searching* (detail), 2013,
Linocut (diptych)
Courtesy: the artist

ABOVE RIGHT Launceston Railyards
Photograph by Stephen Carter
Collection: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.



III INVERESK CONTEMPORARY HUB

From *City Park* side, the architectural elegance and whimsy of the new foot/cycle bridge across the river signals we are entering the city's, *Inveresk Contemporary Hub*. The beating heart of the University city, Inveresk immediately shows signs of a contemporary present linked in a gritty creative way to the city's industrial past. Architectural and heavy machinery relics of this industrial past and its railway heritage sit in delicious contrast to the creative industries of the present and future. The bulk of the *UTAS* northern campus is now at this site where students keenly pursue their education/training in a Bauhaus-like conglomerate of architecture, design, fine art, performance, music and theatre-making.

The training regimes, keenly attuned to the feeder colleges, independent service providers and innate tastes of young people in the north, sit in close proximity to the professional outlets which will in turn benefit from new graduates in their respective fields. Once the Museum part of QVMAG relocated next to the Gallery, it released important spaces to be repurposed for housing the city's excellent performance companies – the nationally acknowledged *Tasdance*, *Stompin* and *Mudlark Theatre*, all actively pursuing the commissioning and creating of new Australian works.

The *Academy Gallery* shows student work but also hosts touring exhibitions and reinforces the contemporary feel of this site. Out the back, the old railway sheds serve as an architectural reminder of the city's innovative industrial past, and the heavy machinery collection housed there inspires students in all disciplines, as well as professional artists, to create highly creative interventions. This tradition began as early as 2001, when Australian composer David Young undertook an artist residency at the *Cataract Gorge Cottage* and worked with the Inveresk community to create a soundtrack (still in use) and event for the main engine room. It is one of the most exciting 'galleries' in Australia, and draws an ever-interested public from the student, tourist and community body, all of whom are attracted to the ever-changing stream of invention and reflection.

This kind of energy persists in the *Inveresk Contemporary Hub* precisely because of the advantageous mix of genres taught and nurtured here. The site is so successful that students who once thought they might find a place in the *Victorian College of the Arts* (VCA, Melbourne), now also look to enrolling here, given that it's only a short jump across the ditch to home, and the city is extremely affordable in comparison with Melbourne. It has drawn new lifeblood into the city, and that in turn has upped the creative ante and again in turn given residents and tourists alike a unique playground of ideas and activities. While the expanded student body at Inveresk has afforded the site and the city a much higher percentage of young people, *UTAS* here attracts a large number of mature-age students and those seeking lifelong learning programs. That mature age sector, however, consists of the young-at-heart and those who are inspired by fresh ideas and innovative thinking: they sparkle with the energy the *Inveresk Contemporary Hub* engenders and find multiple opportunities to engage outside their formal curricula.

A PLACE WHERE THE EPHEMERAL IS AS VALUED AS MUCH THE INSTITUTIONAL

LAUNCESTON IS NOW A PLACE WHERE ITS ARTS AND CULTURE OFFERINGS ARE ENJOYED BY ALL CITIZENS, AND WELL-PROMOTED TO VISITORS YEAR ROUND. BUT FESTIVALS AND SPECIAL EVENTS POP UP AT REGULAR INTERVALS. ONCE ENVIOUS OF OTHER FESTIVALS AND EVENTS IN TASMANIA, SUCH AS MONA FOMA, DARK MOFO, TASTE OF TASMANIA, TEN DAYS ON THE ISLAND, FESTIVAL OF VOICES AND QUEENSTOWN'S WONDERFUL ART FESTIVAL - THE UNCONFORMITY, THE NORTH NOW BOASTS A THRIVING AND UNIQUE JUNCTION ARTS FESTIVAL, ITS INDOOR WINTER SEASON OF MARKETS/BANQUETS AT INVERESK, TASMANIAN POETRY FESTIVAL, MUSICAL THEATRE SEASON, AND CELEBRATE THE VALLEY (THE NEW ARTS/SCIENCE/VITICULTURE COMBO FESTIVAL).

Launceston no longer looks over its shoulder for festival seasons, but has nurtured a unique menu of its own. Residents can now plan to be 'at home' at certain distinct festival seasons, and visitors now plan to be in Launceston for these moments. While *Festivale* has grown its local attendance, *Junction Arts Festival* is now attracting not only a huge local patronage, but visitors as well, as its reputation for participatory performance grows nationally. As one of the nation's very few specific poetry festivals, the *Tasmanian Poetry Festival* has been promoted widely, and also grown its audience.

More recent has been the additional leveraging of the four AFL matches during autumn/winter/spring. The relocation of the Museum to the old TasTAFE building vacated the beautiful big exhibition room once used for the main museum display. UTAS saw the value of maintaining this as an indoor venue for multiple uses. One of the reasons for Hobart's successful carriage of events has been its access to the massive wharf sheds at the heart of the harbor city. For a long time Launceston lacked such expansive indoor spaces. UTAS welcomed the knowledge-exchange potential of a large space where the public would want to attend, and encouraged the creation, in collaboration with The Council's Arts and Culture Unit, of winter events coinciding with footy weekends.

The Markets/Banquets have proven most popular. Given that the main hall is just a stroll from the Sports Stadium, an indoor winter market is open during the morning, allowing residents and visitors to explore and buy the very best of northern Tasmanian artisan and craftsmanship, as well as local produce.

While the footy match is in process, an artist-designed banquet is set up - one which allows the participation of UTAS hospitality students, but also gives attendees the chance to taste the best of local produce under the direction/curation of the state's finest chefs. These winter extravaganzas have become the hottest ticket in the state and sell out well in advance, while the stream of footy fans still has the choice of a booking at one of the regions fine restaurants, or just stroll to the pop-up vans at the Inveresk site.

A new festival, *Celebrate the Valley*, is still in its infancy, but has already given reign to the idea that the original innovative spirit of this region is still very much alive, and brilliantly combines arts, science, philosophy and fun and connects with other valley cities throughout the world. This festival has splendid potential and is evidence of Launceston's active pursuit of new ideas for ephemeral events which will stimulate residents and visitors alike.

TOP Party in the Paddock 2017

Photograph by Scott Atkins. Courtesy: Lusy Productions

MIDDLE LEFT Young Afghan women at What Tomorrow Brings screening and discussion about empowerment and the role of education

Photograph by Scott Gelston. Courtesy: Tasmanian Breath of Fresh Air Film Festival (BOFA)

MIDDLE RIGHT Harvest Launceston and Hawthorn Football Club Players

Courtesy: Harvest Launceston, Community Farmers' Market

BOTTOM LEFT Party in the Paddock 2017

Photograph by Charlie Hardy
Courtesy: Charlie Hardy Photography

BOTTOM RIGHT Harvest Launceston

Courtesy: Harvest Launceston, Community Farmers' Market



IF THAT'S THE GLORIOUS FUTURE, HOW DO WE GET THERE?

1. **Confirm the vision – this is central to all that follows. What follows here are the first important steps.** Central to that vision is not only a commitment to the bright and sparkling infrastructure centerpieces, but to an approach which embraces the boutique and eschews futile event-driven competition with larger places which can more easily afford the spectacular. Trust the boutique instinct and back it wholeheartedly: a strategy which cares as much, if not more, about the ongoing quality of cultural life for citizens as it does about the tourists. It also demands a commitment to the region's First Peoples as vital to the culture of the place.

Investment is required to join up the cultural riches of this city. The key elements of this wealth are:

- Indigenous Heritage and connection to the land;
- Artists of the region and their work;
- The city's collections and architecture;
- The unmatched quality of natural food and wine;
- The potential of UTAS' northern campus.

These elements have profound interwoven connections and each will be a part of the other. The main plank of this cultural strategy will be the way in which we draw all of those elements together to create the great narrative

2. **An Economic Feasibility Study needs to be undertaken immediately for all elements of the strategy including the following:**
 - a. The consolidation of QVMAG to one site.
This study to include costing acquisition of current *TasTAFE* building, re-purposing and fit out of that building, including the development of the courtyard for inside-outside dining and event space, an elegant and creative architectural solution to joining the two buildings internally while bearing in mind the splendid architectural profiles of buildings from two different eras, and possible approaches to parking onsite. Feasibility Study also to cost the move itself of Museum content to new site and any ultimate additional fit out of the old Inveresk railway sheds and workshop.
 - b. Additional Feasibility Study for pedestrian and non-vehicular wheeled overpass or underpass from Cameron Street to *Queen Victoria Art Gallery* + artist lead
 - c. Cost of commissioning major new public artwork from eminent artist as beacon to the newly re-integrated QVMAG
 - d. Cost of commissioning public street artwork to connect the nearest public carpark (*Paterson Street West Carpark*) to the newly re-integrated QVMAG
 - e. Cost of investigating and tendering for specialised local produce food and beverage approach for the newly re-integrated QVMAG

The Feasibility Study must also include an approach to State Government to fund the co-located institution to a more equitable level – bearing in mind that it serves a northern population at least equal in number to that of Hobart.

3. **Begin a serious dialogue with UTAS about the establishment of the *Inveresk Contemporary Hub*** – and everything that this discussion paper implies – from the repurposing of certain buildings at Inveresk, to the invitation to local companies to have a home there, and changes to the curriculum: all of which would contribute to the revitalisation of the site, and the building of Launceston's reputation as a university town.
4. **PRIORITIES** – clearly these depend on funding outcomes arising from the feasibility studies, but first steps should include renewed and expanded assistance for artists/companies/community access alongside the big ticket items such as QVMAG. Council's new enthusiasm for the benefits of arts and culture should value the contribution of living artists as much as collections and buildings and understand they too are vital for the city's bright future.
5. The final strategy/vision should be a visually enhanced document eventually made public. Reserve funding for this.
6. **A new ongoing senior role should be created for the ongoing advocacy and overview of implementation of the Cultural Strategy.** Funding needs to be found for this new position.

What kind of person do you need as Strategic/Creative Lead?

This person will champion the new cultural strategy and ideally have a breadth and depth of experience of arts and culture at the national and international level. They may have expertise in one or two artistic genres, but will have experience of the entire landscape, and will be able to research and understand the local talent, capacity and gaps.

They will understand funding and philanthropic opportunities and have an ability to inspire local stakeholders including artists, organisations, Council and potential audiences in the wider community. They will also ideally understand twenty-first century concepts of the importance of place and the value of a unique identity. They will not be advocating the emulation of other places in Tasmania or elsewhere, but be working to build the unique profile of Launceston and suggest how the arts interface with all other cultural and environmental aspects – such as science, sport, food and wine, the seasons, and the physical landscape. It is the kind of skill-set which develops in, for instance, those who direct multi-genre festivals in specific places, or in all-embracing roles in arts and culture directorates. The role is not necessarily full-time and could be conceived as a consultancy.

While curatorial approaches at QVMAG are most appropriately evolved in-house, this senior position might contribute to the conversation, as well as to the matter of governance.

7. **A dedicated *Arts and Culture Unit* should be established within The Council and this unit should establish a new grants program that it runs.** Both the unit and the program require funding

What would an *Arts and Culture Unit* look like – and what does it do ?

An *Arts and Culture Unit* would typically have the following functions:

- confirming and maintaining The Council's Cultural Strategy
- communicating the strategy to local artists and companies
- setting up and administering an arts grants program
- providing advice to local artists and companies
- setting up and administering mentoring programs, for local emerging artists
- organising forums for artist inspiration and interchange
- ensuring that local artists engage in mutually beneficial networking
- continuing to research and implement fresh strategies to enrich and expand the local cultural network
- work collaboratively with the state's funding body, *Arts Tasmania* to enhance opportunities for local artists, and for Tasmanian and other national and international artists to collaborate with local artists

The team would begin with at least two experienced arts workers who could research and understand the extent of the local arts infrastructure, talent and opportunities They would benefit from the advice and guidance of a leading Arts/Creative Strategist as described in point 6 above.

8. Undertake research and then the infrastructure for multiple innovative interactive information installations, and signage on trails which are part of the greater narrative
9. Ensure that *Junction Arts Festival* is properly supported both in its funding model, and in the personnel entrusted to its lively and sustainable carriage
10. Undertake research to prioritise investment in other key entities owned by The Council, such as *Design Tasmania*
11. Create an environment which will foster new ideas for ongoing enrichment of the cultural landscape as well as the ephemeral things like festivals.
12. Undertake research to reveal the most effective marketing tools for the promotion of arts and culture in Launceston and the region
13. Undertake research into and planning for the public transport networks required to make cultural exploration of the city a genuine possibility.

APPENDIX A

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL FUTURE LOOKS LIKE - THE EXPERIENTIAL VERSION

The year is 2026, and Launceston has become a lively, creative and culturally energised city. This can be seen not only in the high profile now attained and nurtured for its cultural assets (which seriously outstrip the size of the city itself), but in the way the citizens of this city and surrounding region utilise those assets and participate wholeheartedly in the cultural activity of the city and support its wealth of creative artists and artisans. This in turn has made Launceston a cultural destination in its own right. No longer just an incidental one-night stopover for those flying in and keen to move on, visitors now understand, along with resident citizens, just how much this city has to offer, and increasingly plan to come here and lengthen their stay. We do well to remember that it was Launceston's innovative and entrepreneurial spirit which was responsible for the founding of Melbourne. The city now proudly wears that mantle, and has emerged in recent years as a remarkable and resilient city, imbued with twenty-first century smarts in the context of charming boutique experiences.

With its green and hilly terrain, Launceston is a small city set within a place of undisputed natural beauty. One of the great advantages this city shares with other successful twenty-first century cities is its walkability: the micro-geographical context of the city is eminently walkable. So, let's take that 'walk' through the contemporary experience of Launceston.

THE LANDSCAPE

The idea of landscape embraces multiple cultural themes, while at the same time intersecting with the significant geography of a place. There's a rich and complex story to be told of Launceston and the region, and we cannot be unaware of the story as it comes at us each step of the way. Trails, tours, 2D signage and digital interfaces, exhibitions and the living, working presence of local artists all contribute to our deeper understanding of this unique valley city, its history, present and future. The art and information is not hiding behind closed doors, but out in the open, present at every turn.

The presence of *Cataract Gorge*, with its clues to pre-history and its core importance to the First Peoples of the region, is central to this landscape, as is the junction of rivers, and the valley itself. These things also contribute beyond just historical background, but provide links to the present and the future as well. Beyond pre- and ancient history, if we think about Launceston in the colonial period, it tells an unavoidable tale of cruelty and dispossession for the original inhabitants, but also bespeaks the entrepreneurial energy and innovative practice that was responsible for the founding of Melbourne and the development of rich pastoral and marine practice.

In addition to its powerful natural beauty, *Cataract Gorge* has its own archeological and environmental story to tell. A pathway walk from the *Gorge*, along the river, tells the story of First Peoples' inhabitation, beliefs and practices through signage, interactive digital platforms (available in situ but also on personal devices), and onsite studios where we can observe and engage with artists at work. The riverwalk is similarly dotted with equally creative installation features which imaginatively communicate the science of these landforms and waterways;

most are interactive and highly enjoyable, and the food and drink offer along the way departs from the clichéd offers of other waterfronts and sticks to a brilliant menu of ultra-fresh local produce and culinary art, all as affordable as the basic take-away. And don't be fooled about the weather. Four beautiful and distinct seasons are part of the enjoyment of this place, and you can stroll and enjoy, whatever the weather.

Passing by iconic institutions such as the *Tamar Valley Yacht Club* (whence comfortable ferries regularly transport you downstream to gorgeous spots such as *Beauty Point* towards the mouth (fishing, bird-watching, kayaking, picnics, photography, reading and just kicking back are priorities), we encounter the green and flowered expanses of *Royal Park*. Yet again, through various modes of information technology, we gain insights into the introduced flora and fauna and the history of gardens in this city, and through interactive artisan projects, inspire the passion of a new generation of hand-made enthusiasts for plants and flowers.

THE QUEEN VICTORIA MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

From *Royal Park*, we can now see looming the splendid QVMAG, where all the immediate sensory intake we have just experienced on our walk will be reinforced and extended through its unexpectedly rich collections.

These are held in two buildings which eloquently speak, through their architecture, of the city's history. One is an early twentieth century building formerly housing Tafe, and the other is the grand old Victorian – together they put a shape to the colonial city which developed into the modern, and embraced art and education. The Museum section is housed in the twentieth century building which is built around an expansive courtyard. The courtyard space opens to the park and welcomes us in through its lively open space where an indoor-outdoor café sits with a perfect aspect to the park. As we refresh with yet more examples of authentic local food, wine and waters, we can learn of the architectural wealth of Launceston, and discover a myriad of virtual and actual architectural tours and guides to walk us through the city. Whether for local or visitor, the architectural profile of the city is an ever-changing landscape in itself, and we can constantly update our experience and knowledge of the built environment here. This includes a guide to the boutique retail and artisan offerings just a block or two away in the city proper. We plan that adventure for another day.

The courtyard space we are occupying is dominated by a wonderful creature which has arisen from the imagination of the renowned Australian artist/sculptor Patricia Piccinini.

The creature is enormous, its head and neck rising above the roofline of the building and easily seen from the city side of the Museum, as it serves as a grand attractor and inspires awe and wonder – a creature that has emerged from the primordial depths of northern Tasmania and come to tell us a story of the prehistoric times. We know children love dinosaurs, and inside the Museum the collection has its prehistorical treasures of bones and stones, rocks and remnants, remarkable histories of Tasmanian tigers and devils, but out here, Patricia's fanciful and thought-provoking creature has become emblematic nationwide of this re-positioned and repurposed world of wonders. And family activities seem to be ever-present in another corner of the courtyard.

Once refreshed, we are ready to enter the Museum and explore the collections, all presented in ways which connect to that local landscape experience we have had. The Museum building has been beautifully connected to the Victorian building, and we move through a passageway of architectural elegance and symbiotic transformation to the galleries where we will view various hangs of the exceptional collection, and special temporary exhibitions of national, sometimes international touring shows, with, from time to time, the work of local artists.

But our first encounter is with the marvellous *The First Tasmanians: Our Story* gallery, which at last makes the seminal connection of humanity to that landscape we now know something of. Paradoxically, sitting within the walls of a building which screams Empire, and thus an oppressive and cruel first encounter with the Indigenous people of this region, the gallery tells the real story of these talented, highly creative and ultimately resilient people. Through art and craft, artefact and creativity, their story emerges as powerful, moving and inspiring. We emerge to explore the colonial period collection, and into the twentieth century and indeed

the twenty-first, whence contemporary interventions here and there sit in a stimulating conversation with works from the past. Having consolidated this experience of pre-history, through human inhabitation to the colonial period and through the twentieth century to the present, we are now well-equipped to venture out into the inner-city.

Of course this 'walk' is already day two days' long! The elements of this total journey would require us to split it into several days of adventure, but let's just pretend for now that we have 24-hour energy to complete the grand narrative.

In any case, we would be expressing and promoting Launceston's arts and culture as a complete narrative (this elegantly joined-up experience), even when it can be split into component parts. The journey we are making here is of the go! to wo! variety.

THE INNER CITY

We emerge from the Gallery via the garden-scaped front entrance and soon find ourselves at the entrance of a striking artist-created underpass. This creative extravaganza has taken its inspiration from the QVMAG collections, and stimulates our retrospective response to all we have absorbed in the recent visit.

While distracted by the beauty and creative invention of this work, we are in fact making our way beneath the major vehicular traffic thoroughfare and into the architectural pleasures of Cameron Street [Some visitors enter and leave QVMAG via the nearest public carpark in Paterson Street. Here also is a lively and imaginative commissioned artwork which allows an interactive stroll to and from the museum.] But back to our chosen path in leading to Cameron Street: there is little traffic here, and we have the time and space to take advantage, again via 2D labeling and digital interactive interfaces, of the history of these buildings.

Artists and small creative industry businesses have been encouraged to take up shop all along this street (it started with the artist-run collective *Sawtooth* and the establishment of the QVMAG *Innovation Circle*) and it's a fascinating insight into the current creative forces of the city as we eventually reach *City Square*, a pedestrian precinct and the result of an earlier project called *City Heart*, which precisely set out to make this part of the city so pleasant, yet so interesting and engaging.

At this juncture we have the choice to turn right to Charles Street which has developed into the boho precinct of Launceston, or to continue on to *City Park*.

If we take the Charles Street route, we will find cleverly designed boutique coffee shops and eateries, boutique artisan clothing and craft shops, cool barbers, pop-up food offerings and all manner of self-driven enterprise from the young creators living and working in Launceston. Every now and then this enterprise takes the form of state-of-the-art digital design and other services, a product of the city's early investment in technological innovation.

If you happen to be in this area during Launceston's *Junction Arts Festival*, centred around *Prince's Square*, further along Charles Street, you will encounter a unique celebration of the arts. Focussing, as no other festival in Australia does, on participatory and interactive arts, this festival allows you to sense and understand the city and its citizens through, performance, music, dance, food, visual arts and any other applicable genre. Affordable and accessible to adults and children alike, the central hub in the square has a program of music, dance and talkfests, while other performances and exhibitions all happen within a stroll or easy walking distance in marvellous venues and locales, all retrieved from the past and rescued as platforms for this festival. Walking tours take you to various workshops and other enterprises and you get a deeper insight than you might by just strolling and seeing by yourself. The presence of the *Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre* here is significant and contributes to a sense of the contemporary place of Indigenous culture in the broadest sense.

In recent years *Junction Arts Festival* has become a draw-card to Launceston for audiences and artists (especially recent graduates from revamped *UTAS* training courses) alike, and it has done this not in desperately trying to emulate the event mentality of other cities, but by following the intuitive feel of the city for an impressive aggregate of more intimate boutique experiences.

The alternative route from *City Square* takes us all the way to *City Park* where we find yet another set of experiences, surprising in such a relatively small city.

We arrive at the ornate gates of the park and take a brief right turn to *Design Tasmania*. Home to the unique *Design Tasmania Wood Collection*, the Japanese inspired design of this building is a joy in itself. In all seasons the inner courtyard, with its coffee, cake and tapas offerings provide a welcome spot to sit and contemplate. Its retail offering provides the best of northern Tasmanian artisanship and the collection itself is a design-lovers dream. *Design Tasmania* has become a popular venue for the small cool conference or seminar.

And just another brief turn even further into the city finds us at the *Princess Theatre*, now hosting a popular mix of theatre, dance, music and spoken word for all tastes. Its black box space, the *Earl Arts Centre*, has become known throughout the state, and indeed the nation, for the nurturing of new Australian works for the theatre. This has come about through *Theatre North's* expanded commissioning and play-reading programs which have brought emerging northern Tasmanian writers and theatre-makers out of the woodwork and into the spotlight. The new works commissioned, workshopped and produced here are now touring state and nation-wide to great acclaim. The *Princess Theatre*, together with QVMAG have gained joint repute as hosts to the city's arts community, holding regular gatherings for networking and sharing ideas and the potential for collaboration.

This hubbing practice is one of the successful pieces in the process of drawing once-isolated pods of arts practice together into a cohesive, collegiate and powerful group that advocate the arts as vital to a thriving twenty-first century city.

Back past *Design Tasmania* we enter *City Park* proper and encounter an inspiring all-seasons experience. Autumn, winter, spring and summer all have their special attractions as citizens and visitors alike take the opportunity to picnic, having purchased from the dedicated pop-up outlets, affordable hampers of local produce. At the far corner of the park sits *Albert Hall*, home to a wide variety of popular concerts and other events.

We are now approaching the penultimate phase of our grand narrative for arts and culture in Launceston.

INVERESK CONTEMPORARY HUB

From *City Park*, the architectural elegance and whimsy of the new foot/cycle bridge across the river signals we are entering the city's *Inveresk Contemporary Hub*. The beating heart of the University city, Inveresk immediately shows signs of a contemporary present linked in a gritty creative way to the city's industrial past. Architectural and heavy machinery relics of this industrial past and its railway heritage sit in delicious contrast to the creative industries of the present and future. The bulk of UTAS' northern campus is at this site where students keenly pursue their education/training in a Bauhaus-like conglomerate of architecture, design, fine art, performance, music and theatre-making.

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This kind of energy persists in the *Inveresk Contemporary Hub* precisely because of the advantageous mix of genres taught and nurtured here. The site is so successful that students who once thought they might find a place in the VCA (Melbourne), now also look to enrolling here, given that it's only a short jump across the ditch to home, and the city is extremely affordable in comparison with Melbourne. It has drawn new lifeblood into the city, and that in turn has upped the creative ante and again in turn given residents and tourists alike a unique playground of ideas and activities. While the expanded student body at Inveresk has afforded the site and the city a much higher percentage of young people, *UTAS* here attracts a large number of mature-age students and those seeking lifelong learning programs. That mature age sector, however, consists of the young-at-heart and those who are inspired by fresh ideas and innovative thinking: they sparkle with the energy this contemporary hub engenders and find multiple opportunities to engage outside their formal curricula.

By attuning itself more closely to the natural arts affinities of young people and practitioners in the region, the curriculum of studies now attracts excellent student numbers as well as a wide variety of the state's finest professional arts practitioners as instructors, part-time and sessional lecturers. This in turn has strengthened the arts ecology throughout Tasmania, as those professionals find another outlet for their craftsmanship and a pathway for sustainable careers in the state. It's a win-win situation. The introduction of theatre-making courses with a focus on interactive performance and theatre in community has also fed *Junction Arts Festival*, and the proximity to architecture, design, fine arts, and even food preparation and hospitality training means there is a genuinely lively and innovative approach to a new brand of performance being created here.

The introduction of courses (full time and fee for service, short, afterschool and holiday) has seen the pro-am musical theatre appetite raise the bar so high that the annual productions, also employing theatre designers, stage managers and other back and front of house artsworkers trained at the northern campus, are now drawing audiences not only from the local community, but from all over the state. In introducing Musical Theatre to its menu of performing arts offers, *UTAS* also saw the wisdom of reintroducing music to the northern campus, and since then the musical life of the city has been re-invigorated

We'll talk about another set of events at Inveresk in the section below

THE EPHEMERAL

As we leave Inveresk for the final leg of our tour, we reflect on those occasions when we might have chosen a specific time of the year to be in Launceston.

Once envious of other festivals and events in Tasmania, such as *Mona Foma*, *Dark Mofo*, *Taste of Tasmania*, *Ten Days on the Island*, *Festival of Voices* and the wonderful *Unconformity*, the north now boasts a thriving and unique *Junction Arts Festival*, its indoor winter season of Markets/Banquets at Inveresk, *Tasmanian Poetry Festival*, Musical Theatre Season, and *Celebrate the Valley* (the new arts/science/viticulture combo festival).

Launceston no longer looks over its shoulder for festival seasons, but has nurtured a unique menu of its own. Residents can now plan to be 'at home' at certain distinct festival seasons, and visitors now plan to be in Launceston for these moments. While *Festivale* has grown its local attendance, *Junction Arts Festival* is now attracting not only a huge local patronage, but visitors as well, as its reputation for participatory performance grows nationally. As one of the nation's very few specific poetry festivals, the *Tasmanian Poetry Festival* has been promoted widely, and also grown its audience.

More recent has been the additional leveraging of the four AFL matches during autumn/winter/spring. The relocation of the Museum to the old TAFE building vacated the beautiful big exhibition room once used for the main museum display. Yet again in its wisdom, *UTAS* saw the value of maintaining this as an indoor venue for multiple uses.

One of the reasons for Hobart's successful carriage of events has been its access to the massive wharf sheds at the heart of the harbor city. For a long time Launceston lacked such expansive indoor spaces. While *Albert Hall* was in theory accessible, it proved to be an expensive rental proposition. *UTAS* welcomed the knowledge exchange potential of a large space where the public would want to attend, and encouraged the creation, in collaboration with the *Arts and Culture Unit* of the City of Launceston, of winter events to coincide with the footy weekends.

The Markets/Banquets have proven most popular. Given that the main hall is just a stroll from the *University of Tasmania Stadium*, an indoor winter market is open during the morning, allowing residents and visitors to explore and buy the very best of northern Tasmanian artisan and craftsmanship, as well as local produce.

While the footy match is in process, an artist-designed banquet is set up - one which allows the participation of *UTAS* hospitality students, but also gives attendees the chance to taste the best of local produce under the direction/curation of the state's finest chefs. These winter extravaganzas have become the hottest ticket in the state and sell out well in advance, while the stream of footy fans still has the choice of a booking at one of the regions fine restaurants, or just stroll to the pop-up vans at the Inveresk site.

A new festival, *Celebrate the Valley*, is still in its infancy, but has already given reign to the idea that the original innovative spirit of this region is still very much alive, and brilliantly combines arts, science, philosophy and fun and connects with other valley cities throughout the world. This festival has splendid potential and is evidence of Launceston's active pursuit of new ideas for ephemeral events which will stimulate residents and visitors alike.

THE RETURN

If we are the kind of people who like to tie up the ends, and feel as if our journey has both beginning and end, then there is a return segment. For many of us, what we have learned in this introductory tour is that it is only the beginning. But for the sake of completion, we can make our way back to the *Cataract Gorge* in a couple of different ways. A ferry can take us on from Inveresk.

The ferries have any number of design and information components to keep us entertained, but we may simply wish to be 'on the water' and reflecting on everything we have learned about this remarkable place. We can go directly back to the *Cataract Gorge* by water, or we can stop off at *Northbank* and its medley of cafes, a state of the art playground, and a stroll along *Kings Wharf*. Or we can walk - first to *Northbank*, then across yet another of the new pedestrian/cycle bridges to the boardwalk, which takes us past the thriving *Seaport*, and thence to the point at which we left it some time ago now to enter *Royal Park*.

We can't wait for another opportunity to return, and pick up on all the detail we have missed in this first-time cultural visit.

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FRONT AND BACK COVER IMAGE Artist
blacksmith Pete Mattila in the Museum's
Blacksmith Shop (detail), 2015
Photograph by Scott Gelston.
Courtesy: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery



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