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Asia New Zealand Foundation
Te Whītau Tūhono

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'Aotearoa New Zealand'

This report uses 'Aotearoa' and 'New Zealand'
interchangeably to refer to New Zealand.

Front cover

Thoughts on Mortal, 2019

Hanna Shim.

From the solo show at Whitespace, *Bone Like This*
Image courtesy of the artist.

Hanna Shim is an artist based in Tāmaki Makarau.

Born in Seoul, Korea, and raised in Auckland, Aotearoa,
Hanna identifies herself as a maker, working across various
mediums including installations, paintings, soft sculptures,
textile art, and video works.

Back cover

Weapon, 2003-07 (Installation view)

Yin Xiuzhen.

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery,
New Zealand, 2010.

Photo by Bryan James.

This page

So long, and thank you for all the fish (Exhibition view)

Anne Duk Hee Jordan.

14th Gwangju Biennale (2023).

Image courtesy Gwangju Biennale Foundation.

Photo by glimworkers

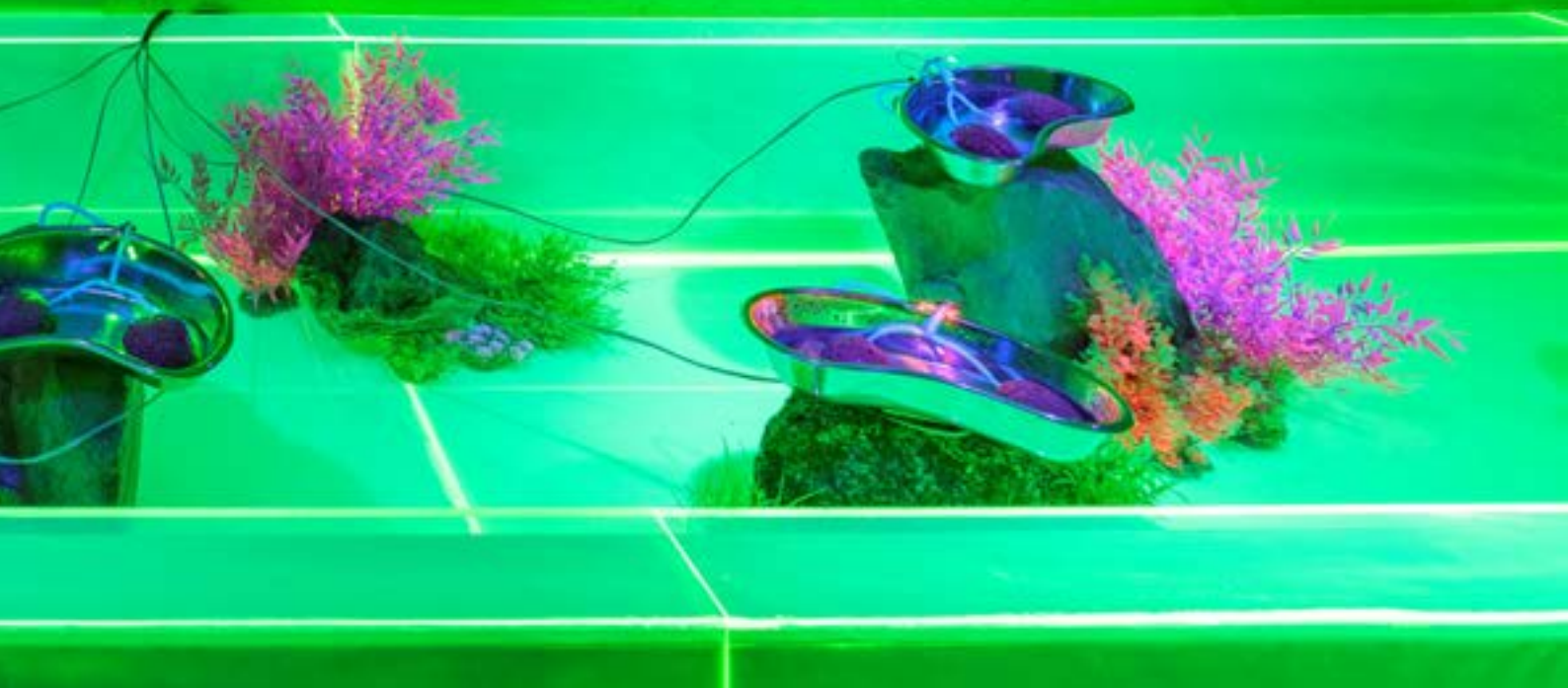
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Contents

Comment from the Chief Executive	2
Comment from the Director of Arts	4
How to read this report	6
<hr/>	
Executive summary	7
Recommendations: Invest in the future	9
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Part 1 — From Tāmaki Makaurau to Changwon	14
Part 2 — A huge, untapped audience in Aotearoa	18
Case study — A deeper current: Kia Mau	24
Part 3 — A new Asia	28
Case study — Japan	32
Case study — South Korea	36
Case study — India	44
Part 4 — Across oceans: Australia	48
Case study — Staying hungry: The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery	52
Part 5 — Across oceans: Aotearoa	58
Case study — Evolving the conversation: Te Tuhi	62
Case study — Challenging assumptions: Auckland Arts Festival	68
Case study — The open door: SCAPE Public Art	72
Part 6 — The opportunities	76
<hr/>	
How we did this research	96
Contributors	98
Appendix	100



For the last 30 years, the Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono has focused on helping New Zealanders to grow their knowledge, skills and connections in Asia, so they are equipped to thrive in this incredible and increasingly influential region.

Over this time, we have seen astonishing demographic and economic changes throughout Asia, and the emergence of cutting-edge technologies and trends. Here in New Zealand we have seen our own population and diversity grow. Today, around 16 percent of New Zealand's population is of Asian heritage, compared to less than five percent in the mid-1990s.

We are also facing more complex challenges, such as climate disruption, the rise of AI and quantum computing, and global political unrest and conflict.

Equally the connections that we have built between people, within communities and across borders, present amazing opportunities. In this report, these connections are captured through the lens of our creative sectors.

Over the past three decades, artists from Asia have gone from being considered 'niche' to global trend setters. These artists are setting the pace of global pop culture while also delivering important social commentary that demands our attention.

There is no question that art provides an amazing means to gain a better understanding of Asia and our place in the region and helps transcend linguistic, cultural and geographic divides. But are we making the most of these connections? And how can artists and arts programmers in New Zealand engage more effectively with their counterparts in Asia?

New Zealanders are consuming more Asia-related entertainment than ever before — for a third of New Zealanders, this is at least once a month — yet this report illustrates that there remains a significant and growing unmet demand for art and entertainment from Asia in New Zealand.

Commissioned by the Asia New Zealand Foundation and written by Rosabel Tan, this report offers you unique insight into New Zealand's changing relations with and in Asia through the arts, and how those relations are changing the nature of what is happening here in New Zealand.

For practitioners and programmers, this report sets out a comprehensive picture of the opportunities on offer in Asia, as well as recommendations for how those working in our arts sector can better serve this growing demand in New Zealand.

For policymakers, it identifies the need for an overarching strategy when it comes to growing meaningful connections between arts practitioners and programmers in Asia and New Zealand. Such a strategy is vital if we are to make the most of emerging opportunities.

Finally, I hope this research leaves you with a tangible sense of Asia's vibrant arts sectors and the value to be gained — both professionally and personally — from connecting with them.



Suzannah Jessep

Chief Executive
Asia New Zealand Foundation
Te Whītau Tūhono



Me, You, Then, Now
Muna Tseng
Presented as part of Singapore
International Festival of Arts,
Singapore, 2023.
Photo by Moonrise Studio.

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF ARTS

The purpose of the Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono is to raise New Zealanders' knowledge of the region and help them develop their cross-cultural capabilities. We do this by supporting the building of meaningful connections between Asia and Aotearoa New Zealand across our eight programmes of work: Arts, Business, Education, Entrepreneurship, Media, Research, Sport and Track II diplomacy.

Rather than support the development of one-off artworks, our Arts Programme prioritises fostering relationships within the sector, nurturing connections that expand the horizons of New Zealand's arts practitioners to encompass the rich cultural landscape of Asia.

The programme has evolved from sponsoring art from Asia to be shown in New Zealand, through events such as Diwali and the Lantern Festival, to facilitating residencies in Asia, providing grants for New Zealand arts practitioners to travel to Asia, and by leading tours to Asia for curators and arts programmers.

By enabling arts practitioners' connections with Asia, our aim is that the relationships they forge, the knowledge they gain, and the creative works they exhibit, perform or screen will in turn illuminate Asia's vibrant arts scene to the New Zealand public and foster deeper understanding of the region.

In my role as the Foundation's Director of Arts, I often hear about hesitancy within our arts sector to run exhibitions or events that focus primarily on art or entertainment from Asia. Programmers fear such events will not generate sufficient local interest or resonate with their usual audiences. This report shows the opposite is true — New Zealanders throughout the motu are eager to engage with Asian art in a wide variety of forms, and yet this demand is going unmet.

One of the aims of this report is to equip our curators and programmers with the knowledge and skills they need to bring Asian art to those of us in Aotearoa. I hope it also leaves them with the confidence that events will be well attended and will in turn generate ongoing interest well into the future.

A second concern I often hear comes from arts practitioners themselves. Many are interested in Asia's dynamic arts scenes or in partnering with Asian artists, but don't know where to start. This report and the accompanying funding guide available on our website provide practical guidance and recommendations for artists looking to begin or deepen their engagement with the region.

This report has been several years in the making. It features interviews with a range of experts from across Asia, New Zealand and Australia, as well as striking images from some of Asia's most exciting recent exhibitions and projects. I hope you enjoy it.



Craig Cooper

Director Arts
Asia New Zealand Foundation
Te Whītau Tūhono



In Lieu of What Was (detail), 2019
Alia Farid
Presented as part of QAGOMA
— The 10th Asia Pacific Triennial
of Contemporary Art (APT10),
Australia, 2021-2022. Courtesy
of the artist and Portikus, Frankfurt.
Photo by Diana Pfammatter.

As many countries across Asia continue to invest in their creative sectors, leading to a blossoming of creative work across the region, how do we meet the growing audience appetite for that work in Aotearoa New Zealand — and how do we meaningfully harness the opportunities presented in this rapidly evolving landscape?

This report offers a brief background to the many different ways that the creative industries across Asia are growing and, in turn, highlights the unmet demand for Asian art, culture and creativity in Aotearoa that is growing in parallel — and how we might meet that demand.

Drawing on interviews with practitioners, the report examines some of the considerations and questions we should be asking ourselves as we invest in artistic and creative relationships across Asia, not only at an artist and organisational level but at a governmental level as well.

Accordingly, this report is written with two audiences in mind: our policy makers, those who have the power and the responsibility to ensure sustainable frameworks are in place to unlock the immense potential that collaborating with Asia can bring; and arts sector leaders — particularly those who are new to engaging with artists and arts organisations from across Asia — who will be harnessing that potential on the ground.

Some important terms to consider

'ASIA'

When 'Asia' is mentioned in this report it refers in this instance to the broad region that spans from Pakistan in the west to Japan in the east, and from Mongolia in the north to Indonesia in the south. There are many definitions of 'Asia', and this is just one framing, which is based on the activities that the Asia New Zealand Foundation supports and funds.

'ART', 'CULTURE' AND 'CREATIVE INDUSTRIES'

Throughout this document, art, artists, culture and creativity are often referred to. Given the audience for this report, this relates broadly to those aspects of art, culture and entertainment that have the potential to be experienced (whether physically or online) in Aotearoa. This should be considered an expansive and evolving definition, and includes TV shows, games, films, performance, visual art, craft, writing, and design in its many forms. Accordingly, 'creative industries' here refers to the industries that support the development, production and transmission of these forms.

This report also recognises and centres the meaning of culture relating to the beliefs, values, customs and knowledge of a group or region — the different ways of knowing and doing, and their associated expression. This forms a critical part of all arts, culture and creativity: it sits at the heart of these more tangible manifestations of culture, from how work is made to what it is trying to say to how it hopes to be read. These aspects inherently travel with a work but are not always as visible.

Acknowledging the intersection of these two definitions is critical, as it is easy to focus on the former without attention to the latter. But without equal attention, we risk clumsy curation or programming, damaged relationships with artists, and work that never fully meets its potential audience.

'AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND'

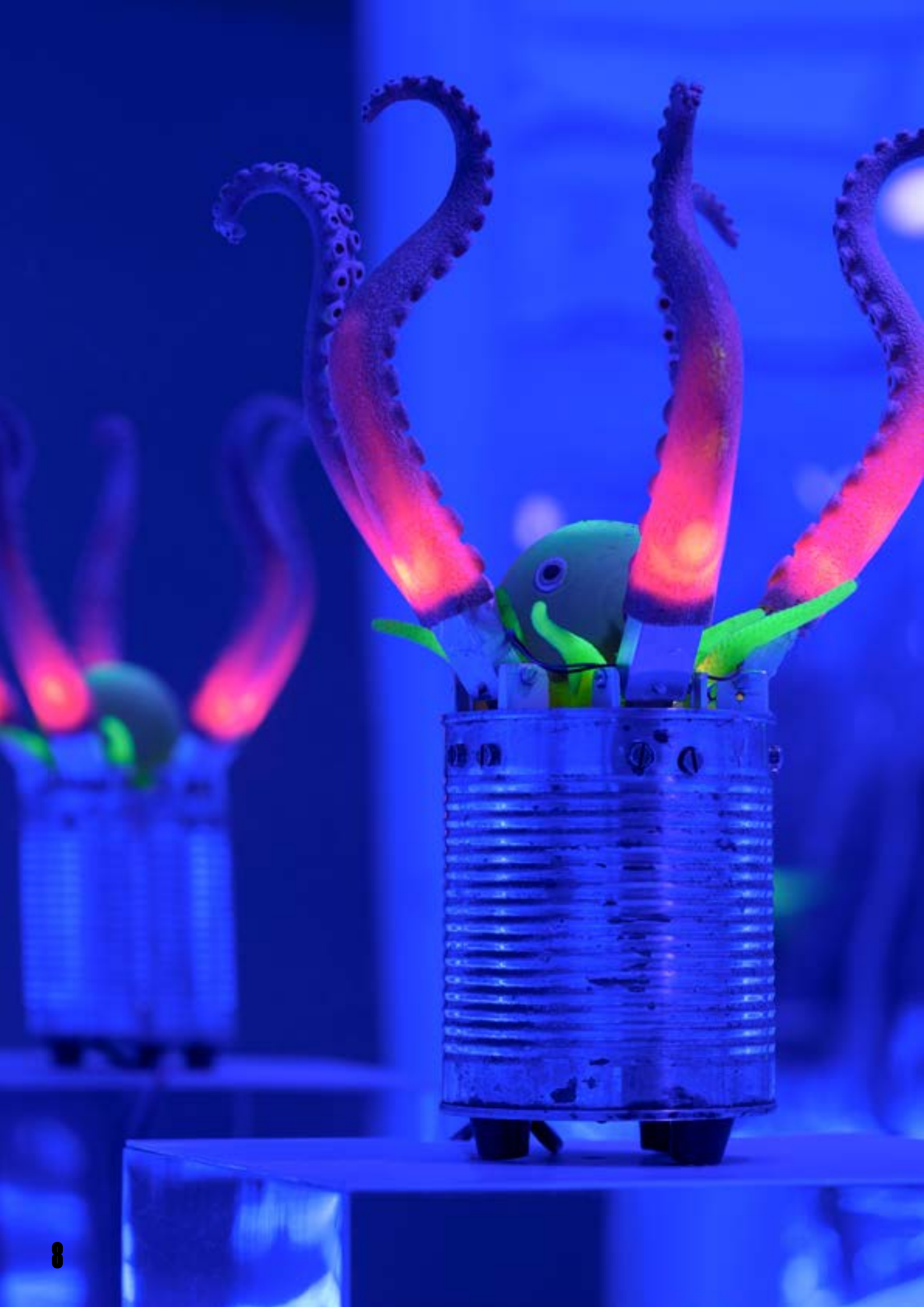
This report uses 'Aotearoa' and 'New Zealand' interchangeably to refer to New Zealand.

Over the past few decades, many countries across Asia have focused on establishing themselves as global creative powers, with governments recognising the economic, social and political value of investing in their creative economies. The impact of this has been significant, and its influence on Aotearoa has been profound. We are now witnessing a growing, unmet demand for Asian arts and cultural experiences — with, for instance, 1.6 million people interested in attending an art exhibition of Asian artists for the first time.

This demand will only increase as countries across Asia continue to invest in their creative industries, and we have a powerful opportunity in Aotearoa to respond to and harness this. The benefits of doing so are not only economic, but sociocultural: being able to access a range of work from across Asia keeps us connected to a global conversation and deepens our ability to understand one another's cultural worldviews, something that benefits us at home in our increasingly multicultural society as well as abroad. Through creating multifaceted and meaningful access to different types of work — both from Asia and by our Asian diaspora artists in Aotearoa — we strengthen individual and collective wellbeing by fostering a deeper sense of social cohesion, community and belonging.

How do we reap these benefits? By starting with a long-term vision that creates opportunities to not only keep up with the vital, thrilling and complex conversations taking place across Asia, but to be part of them too. This means prioritising relationship building with artists and practitioners, underpinned by a culturally informed approach that doesn't underestimate — but instead journeys alongside — our audiences, providing opportunities to deepen our collective intercultural fluencies.

There are more philosophical questions for us to consider, too. What images of 'Asia' are being presented, and what 'Asia' is being defined in our public consciousness based on the flows of cultural products reaching our shores? How do unequal power relations across nations — shaped by differences in sociopolitical and economic stability and access to resources for artists — become mediated, understood and challenged through this exchange? And what implications does that have for us here in Aotearoa?





To unlock the significant sociocultural, political, and economic benefits of investing in the creative sector, it's important we are investing in a long-term vision: in ambitious programmes that build intercultural fluencies, encourage experimentation and risk-taking, and allow for the development of meaningful, long-lasting relationships at an individual, institutional and governmental level.

INVEST IN THE FUTURE

Recommendations for policy makers

We've seen what happens elsewhere when long-term investments are made in the creative sector, centred around developing strategic and enduring partnerships. They unlock the development of meaningful work with international resonance: each gravity-tilting moment of wonder building deeper intercultural fluencies and greater social cohesion and wellbeing.

With this in mind, it's important that we invest in ambitious long-term programmes that build cultural fluencies, enable experimentation, and allow for the development of meaningful, long-lasting relationships at an individual, institutional and governmental level.

As a starting point, this means building strategic collaborative relationships across the relevant ministries, country representatives, council bodies, sponsors and institutions — and listening to arts practitioners both here and in Asia to find the pathways for investment that will have the greatest impact.

These pathways may take a variety of forms but will need to weave together three key threads:

Previous page:

Octopus Garden
from *So long, and thank
you for all the fish*, 2023

Anne Duk Hee Jordan.

Courtesy of the artist.

Commissioned by and
presented as part of the
14th Gwangju Biennale,
South Korea, 2023.

Supported by Yanghyun
Foundation. Image courtesy of
Gwangju Biennale Foundation.

Photo by glimworkers.

1

Invest in the development of intercultural fluency

It's essential that we work within the multidimensional framework of 'culture' as we invest in this sector. This includes creating opportunities for arts practitioners to spend time across Asia and vice versa: to deepen their cultural, sociopolitical and artistic understanding for collaborations and partnerships, and to share their experiences back home. These might include residencies, guided research tours and attendance at arts markets and conferences — but it might also include the development of cultural guidelines and advisory, including the creation of simple practical resources like an up-to-date list of contacts and funding avenues.

2

Invest in strategic incubators for the development of Aotearoa-specific work

We are already seeing similar initiatives across Asia, and we know that a point of connection for Aotearoa is not only our significant diaspora communities, but key explorations such as how tangata Tiriti artists are thinking about their relationship to Indigenous communities and colonisation. Could there be an incubator or a residency programme for artists to explore and create work together specifically for presentation to an Aotearoa audience — co-funded with institutions across Australia, for example? Perhaps an initiative that is itself based in Asia, with an aim towards presentation here? Might there be seed funding to enable institutions and festivals to immediately start working more effectively with Asian artists, recognising that investing in work might mean commissioning projects that are not as market ready as work from countries with more resourced public arts funding?

3

Support deeper approaches to the presentation of work

This point ties back to how we then continue to deepen intercultural fluency across Aotearoa. Art and culture present rich opportunities to deepen engagement with, and understanding of, different contemporary cultural contexts. Too often, this becomes a missed opportunity. Examine ways to support the cultural sector to invest in the marketing, public programming and media coverage surrounding a work in order to capitalise on the opportunities that these presentations offer.

Recommendations for art institutions and their programmers, curators and artistic directors

Institutions are frequently under-resourced or stretched to capacity, and do not have the time to invest in themselves. These best-practice guidelines are written with this context in mind, and with the recognition that many institutions would already be working in this way if they were equipped to do so.

There is a shared understanding across the sector that creating time and space to invest in more robust approaches to international collaboration will have significant benefits: not only for the institutions and their collaborators and partners, but for everybody who has the opportunity to experience and engage with the ideas and conversations each work is having.

1

Create and prioritise the time needed to keep deepening cultural fluency

In other words, invest in a long-term vision that places people and relationships at the heart. If you are able to travel, travel to Asia. Meet artists, experience their work, and do that work justice by learning about and sitting with the contexts in which the work has been made.

2

Invest in artists you believe in

The first step to doing this is understanding the context that artists are operating in and the way their work is evolving as a result. This is not simply about understanding their cultural worldviews and protocols, but understanding the sociopolitical and arts-production contexts that artists are navigating in their process.

Because of the different funding ecologies in which work is being made, consider ways in which active and equitable collaborations might take place. Consider ways in which artists might also be connected with diaspora communities in Aotearoa, and whether there is room for artistic collaborations and responses grounded in this place.

3

Invest in developing the collective cultural fluency needed to enable the work to soar

This includes developing clear processes so you can embark on a collaboration with a mutual understanding of one another and the different ways of working. Critically, this is a multi-directional dialogue, because it involves all collaborators being able to understand each other's ways of doing and ways of knowing.

4

Understand the Asia you're presenting — and give your audiences the opportunity to understand that too

This consideration sits at the heart of decision-making and flows on from the collective cultural fluency that guides the process of commissioning and development. It might mean allocating resources to ensure the work is effectively presented: ensuring the marketing and public programming team has the ability to understand not only how to reach a work's many potential audiences but how that work can be a gateway to deepening engagement and understanding of the sophisticated and nuanced conversations that the work itself is presenting.



FROM TĀMAKI MAKAURAU TO GHAMGIMOM

1

There are countless stories like this, but here's one we love: how a group of friends met, bonded over a mutual love of K-pop, and were invited to South Korea to perform for 30,000 people.



In 2019 Bryce Saavedra, a mechanical engineer, received a phone call while he was at work in Ellerslie. It was from a number he didn't recognise. "Good news," said the voice on the other end, "you're going to Korea." He assumed it was a prank until he started getting messages from the other members of MDC, the K-pop dance crew he's part of. "I realised then," he said, "that this was really happening."

That phone call was part of a journey that had started three years earlier, when a group of high schoolers and university students met at an after-school dance class on Queen Street. The more regular attendees got to know one another and eventually started hanging out outside of class. Bonded by their love for K-pop, they formed a crew and named it MDC.

Each member can recall their love-at-first-sight moment. All of them were teenagers: Virginia Moresi was at her cousin's house ("We watched the music video for [Big Bang's 'Haru Haru' \[하루하루\]](#). I fell in love"); Emma Weber was scrolling Vine ("One of the people I followed had done a K-pop edit to a new group called Seventeen, and I immediately started googling"); Gabe Nito came across an AOA 'Miniskirt' reaction video ("It was the first time I'd seen an Asian music video with that level of production quality"); and Bryce came to K-pop almost by accident. "I knew nothing about Korean culture or K-pop," he says, "but I had an older sister. She was already in high school, and one day she said, 'Do you want to learn this dance with me? It's really cool.'" It was [MBLAQ's 'Mona Lisa'](#). "I was 13 years old. I had no idea what K-pop was, but I watched the music video and said to myself: This is not too bad. Things took off from there."

The group have become close friends over the years. They spend their weekends learning new choreo, entering competitions and attending every K-pop event they can find. "We are always excited when something's happening," says Emma. "Because, honestly? There are very few events for us to go to."

But the ones that have taken place have kept them going. "One thing I've always loved," Emma adds, "is that even when we were brand new and nobody knew us, people knew the songs we were performing." It's simple: people go to K-pop events because they love K-pop. "When they hear a song, they start screaming. They're cheering because they're already excited that one of their favourite songs is getting played, but it makes you feel good, too. I've done a few other dance performances before, and I've never experienced that kind of warmth from an audience."

In 2019 the group entered a dance competition at the K-Culture Festival in Wellington. "It was actually the preliminary round for the [Changwon K-POP World Festival](#)," Emma explains. They won first place.



The annual Changwon K-POP World Festival brings together Hallyu (Korean Wave) fans from across the world. It's a diplomatic initiative led by South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2019, crews from 13 countries were invited to compete — from Canada to Madagascar to Kazakhstan to Cambodia — performing to crowds of about 30,000 people alongside names like [TXT](#), [Monsta X](#), [Red Velvet](#) and [Itzy](#).

"We had two weeks over [in South Korea], getting to experience the culture and travel around the country. We also got to meet the K-pop group whose song we covered. That's definitely been a highlight," says Emma. Bryce nods: "It's going to be a hard moment to beat, in terms of — well, life."



I'd be interested in seeing an art exhibition focusing on local Asian artists. But I hardly ever see advertising for shows featuring Asian artists, despite our huge community in Auckland.

Beyond experiences like this, the crew discuss the unexpected ways K-pop has expanded and deepened their world. For Atheena Rose, it's been through food. "At this point, I cook mostly Korean food at home, more than my own culture. I didn't really get taught a lot of Filipino food when I was young. So even learning how to cook Korean food was a gateway to me learning to cook my own food as well."

"K-pop got me really deep into Korean culture and Korean humour," adds Gabe. "I started watching all kinds of broadcasts and comedy shows, food shows, dramas." He talks about the way those dramas have parallels to other Asian countries, particularly in terms of the types of familial and social relationships depicted, and the kinds of experiences young Asian characters go through. "I think, for a lot of people," he says, "it offers a lot of comfort, because although we're from different parts of the world, different cultures, you see that there's so many things we can connect over."

K-pop has also opened him up to conversations around self-care, Eastern medicine and skin care. "Oh my gosh," he laughs. "Guys learning about personal hygiene?" He also sees the way it's shaped the city. "It feels like fashion in New Zealand has changed a lot because of K-pop and K-dramas," he says. "It's birthed its own kind of fashion style."

More than anything, he speaks about the confidence it's given him. "It's brought me into a whole new state of cultural awareness. I understand that we don't need to have so many boundaries between cultures and genders — all those standards we've been so used to over the years. K-pop has broken a lot of those things." Being able to dance is a key shift in that mindset for him. "In the early 2000s, there was this huge stereotype that dancing wasn't for guys. But that's changed now. And that's been huge for me." He's now trying to make a career in dance. "And that started with learning a K-pop cover and getting into the culture and connecting with people."

"For me," says Emma, "had I not met all my friends through K-pop, I'd have a significantly smaller understanding of Asian cultures." MDC brings together friends who are German, Sāmoan, Filipino, Thai and Chinese. "Having something in common like K-pop helps you bond. Without that, you'd probably just naturally gravitate towards people from your own culture. But I've loved learning about everyone's cultures, as well as Korean culture."

Given their hunger for K-pop events, and the way this interest has led them to seek out K-dramas and films, it's surprising to hear that this hasn't led to other types of live arts experiences. "I'm definitely interested in theatre and comedy," says Gabe. "And I'd be interested in seeing an art exhibition focusing on local Asian artists. But I hardly ever see advertising for shows featuring Asian artists, despite our huge community in Auckland."

The group mention other barriers that have prevented them from attending the events they have come across: the cost of parking, the cost of tickets. But some of it is psychological, too. "My main barrier," comments Emma, "is wondering what the crowd will be like. If an event or a show is centred around a certain culture, does the promo make clear that it's an event for all, or would it be weird for other cultures to attend?" She laughs. "One of the reasons K-pop events are great is because there's an understanding that there'll be a diverse crowd with great music and food, and you won't end up in a room with people wondering what you — a young blonde girl — are doing there. I'd love to explore more cultures in a similar environment."





Across Aotearoa, we are seeing significant, unmet demand for Asian arts and cultural experiences — with, for instance, 1.6 million people interested in attending an art exhibition of Asian artists for the first time. There are generational differences, too, with people under 30 much more culturally fluent and fluid, consuming across different cultural contexts and art forms with ease.

Meeting this growing demand means understanding what work will resonate with these different audiences — and, consequently, unlocking the sociocultural, wellbeing and economic benefits of doing so, including a stronger sense of community cohesion and a multifaceted intercultural fluency that is critical to operating not only in Aotearoa but abroad.

A HUGE UNTAPPED, AUDIENCE IN AOTEAROA



1. **Asian arts** in this research focuses on attendance at event-based experiences of art, culture and creativity and is defined as work created by Asian artists across film, theatre, visual arts, dance, music events (listening to music on a device is not included in this definition) and literary events (reading a book by an Asian author is not included in this definition). Asian cultural festivals or other Asian art and cultural events or celebrations are also included in this definition.
2. **Asia-related entertainment** can include content about Asia or Asian peoples, content set in or produced in Asia, or content produced by people self-identifying as being of Asian ethnicity. Content may come in a variety of forms (e.g., film, television, streaming services, music, gaming and social media).
3. The **culture market** is defined as all adults in Aotearoa aged 16 or over who've engaged with at least one arts, cultural or heritage activity within the past three years.

FOR A COMPLETE SET OF DATA FOR ASIAN ARTS IN AOTEAROA PLEASE REFER TO THE APPENDIX ON PAGE 102

The journey of K-pop dance crew MDC — as well as their hesitation around expanding into live arts and events — speaks to the still-untapped potential for Asian arts in Aotearoa despite the occasional bursts of work being presented across the country. This is shown in Creative New Zealand's longitudinal project [Audience Atlas Aotearoa 2020](#) which highlights the rapid growth in active audiences for Asian arts¹ over the past decade — more so than for any other art form — with audiences more than doubling from 24 percent of the culture market in 2011 to 49 percent in 2020. This represents approximately 1.9 million people currently engaging in Asian arts, a cohort who are overall younger, more urban and culturally diverse.

This figure is significantly higher when you include media like TV and video games. The Asia New Zealand Foundation's most recent [New Zealanders' Perceptions of Asia and Asian Peoples 2022](#) report, for example, found that 65 percent of New Zealanders had consumed Asia-related entertainment² in the past year — the same as in 2021, but with the frequency of this consumption increasing year on year to a quarter (26 percent) of New Zealanders consuming Asia-related entertainment at least once every three weeks (up from 24 percent in 2021 and 19 percent in 2020).

Also important is the size of the untapped market. In 2020, the potential market for Asian arts made up 23 percent of the culture market.³ That's 890,000 people in Aotearoa interested in engaging with Asian arts for the first time. Strikingly, while a significant proportion of this market lives in Tāmaki Makaurau (106,000 people), this appetite most noticeably lies in the regions.

Drilling deeper, that untapped potential spans every type of Asian art form mentioned, with the largest untapped market being the visual arts (with 1.7 million people interested in attending a craft or object exhibition for the first time and 1.6 million interested in an Asian art exhibition of any medium).

Performance was also highly ranked, with 1.6 million people interested in seeing Asian theatre or dance for the first time — something particularly worth noting given the smaller sizes of these active markets, suggesting this is an issue of what's actually available on our stages.

What's driving this growth? Part of it is — of course — the changing nature of our demographic make-up as a nation, with our own Asian communities more than doubling in size over the last two decades, growing from 6.6 percent of the population in 2001 (or 238,179 people) to 15 percent in 2018 (or 707,598 people), with this projected to rise to 22 percent by 2033 (or 1,254,200 people). While this community is represented in these figures, however, the growing interest we are seeing extends beyond our Asian communities to all our communities in Aotearoa — with our Pacific communities most likely to be already engaging in Asian arts experiences (69 percent), followed by Māori (49 percent) and other ethnic groups (53 percent), and with a quarter of Māori and Pākehā communities interested in doing so for the first time.

Given the digital and online reach of Asian work, it is unsurprising that we are also seeing stark generational differences emerge. In *Perceptions of Asia 2022*, under-30s were the largest consumers of Asian art and culture, with nearly half consuming Asia-related entertainment at least once every three weeks (45 percent, compared to 19 percent for those over 30). We see similar trends when we look at the *Audience Atlas* data, with younger audiences more likely to have engaged in Asian arts in the past three years (61 percent of under-25s compared to 32 percent of over-65s) — though with older audiences significantly interested in engaging for the first time as a result.

Previous page:
Loop, 2023
Abbas Akhavan.
 Courtesy of the artist,
 The Third Line and Catriona
 Jeffries Gallery. Commissioned
 by and presented as part of
 the 14th Gwangju Biennale,
 South Korea, 2023. Supported
 by Yanghyun Foundation.
 Image courtesy of Gwangju
 Biennale Foundation.
 Photo by glimworkers.

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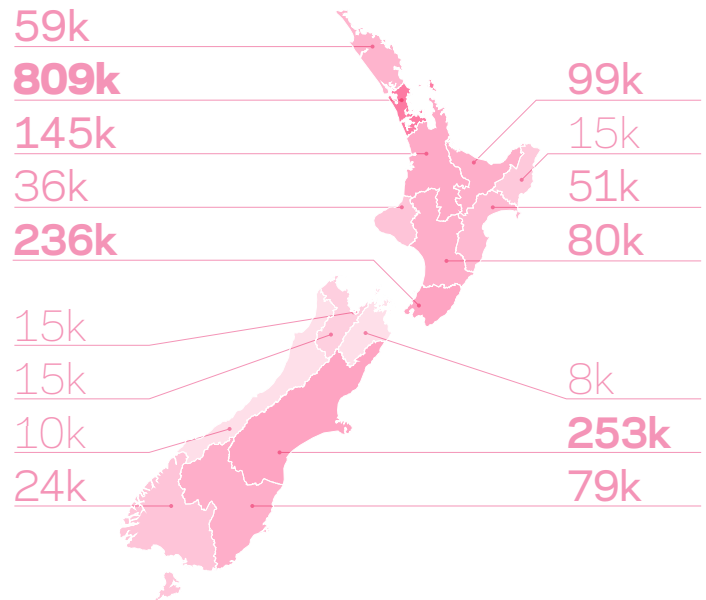
In 2020, the potential market for Asian arts made up 23% of the culture market. That's 890,000 people in Aotearoa interested in engaging with Asian arts for the first time.



SMER SMER(스멀스멀), 2018
Hanna Shim.
From the group show at
Corban Estate Art Centre,
Give me Space
Image courtesy of the artist

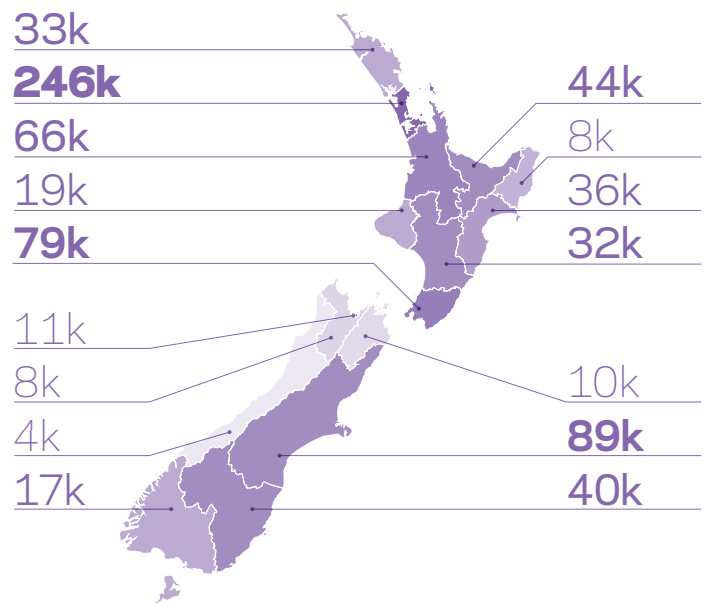
Size of the **current** Asian arts markets across New Zealand*

Real figures estimates. The **current market** refers to those who have engaged in or experienced that art form in the past three years. For example, looking at the table below, 41% of people in Northland are in the current market for Asian arts.



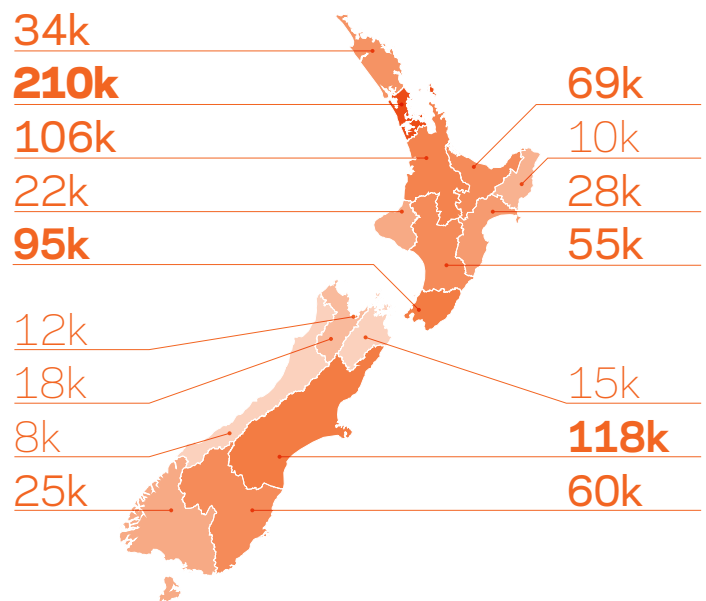
Size of the **lapsed** Asian arts markets across New Zealand*

Real figures estimates. The **lapsed market** refers to those who last engaged in or experienced that art form more than three years ago but would be interested in re-engaging.



Size of the **potential** Asian arts markets across New Zealand*

Real figures estimates. The **potential market** refers to those who are interested in engaging with or experiencing that art form for the first time.



As we start to think about meeting this demand, it's worth remembering that the value of doing so is not only economic, but sociocultural:

4. See Cultural Learning Alliance's Briefing Paper No. 3 'The Arts, Health & Wellbeing' for a summary of this research.

- The **health benefits** of arts and cultural experiences are well documented, with studies showing that access to arts, culture and creativity is one of the most important determinants of wellbeing, [over factors such as occupation, age, income and education](#), and is positively correlated with better mental and physical health.⁴
- [Recent research by Creative Waikato](#) (2022) also shows that the more engaged people are in arts, culture and creativity, the higher their wellbeing is likely to be, which in turn is linked to a range of **social benefits**, including having a stronger sense of community and belonging, feeling free to be oneself, higher emotional intelligence, and feeling more connected to land and place.
- With [New Zealanders and the Arts](#) (2020) highlighting that two-thirds of people in Aotearoa agree that the arts help define who we are as New Zealanders and that they learn about different cultures through art experiences (66 percent), there are strong **cultural benefits** to creating equitable access to work that reflects the diversity of Asian experiences and perspectives both in Aotearoa and abroad. These experiences [deepen intercultural fluency](#), [strengthen community cohesion](#) and [increase civic participation](#), factors that are crucial in a country as diverse as Aotearoa, as well as ensuring the success of our country on the global stage.
- There are also both direct and indirect **economic benefits** to presenting work grounded in different Asian perspectives, including a multi-faceted intercultural fluency that is critical to operating not only in Aotearoa but internationally. In addition, engagement with the arts is known to [foster and develop creativity](#) and [entrepreneurship](#), traits critical for the continued growth of our economy through their relationship to strategic [innovation](#) within [increasingly complex environments](#).⁵

5. As an example, see IBM's *Capitalizing on Complexity* (2010) report which summarises key findings from interviews with more than 1,500 CEOs, general managers and senior public sector leaders.

To truly reap these benefits, creating opportunities to engage with Asian arts and culture needs to be multifaceted and meaningful, something that cannot be achieved through occasional presentation. By creating access to a nuanced range of resonant Asian art experiences — reflecting the experiences of both our diaspora in Aotearoa and international perspectives — we unlock the opportunity to strengthen wellbeing, community cohesion and civic participation, not only for our Asian communities in Aotearoa, but for everybody.

GASE STUDY. A DEEPER CURRENT: KIA MAU

For Hone Kouka (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Kahungunu, Rongowhakaata, Kāi Tahu) and Mīria George (Te Arawa, Ngāti Awa, Tumutevarovaro, Enuamanu) of Kia Mau Festival — a biennial celebration in Te Whanganui-a-Tara of mana whenua, tangata whenua, tangata moana and Indigenous artists from around the globe — their relationship with Asia starts at home. “As Māori, we see our role as kaitiaki,” Hone explains. “And it’s the same with Kia Mau. We’re here to create space for other voices. It’s really simple.”

It feels like an important place to start any conversation about Asia. “Aotearoa has very old relationships with Asian communities,” says Mīria. “We’re not talking two decades. We’re talking two centuries. There are very old communities here. And I think that there is a real gap in acknowledging and further investing in what those relationships are, and what that identity is here in Aotearoa.”

Maetu
Shanaia Boutsady
Presented as part of Kia Mau
Festival, Aotearoa, 2021.
Photo by ROC+ Photography.

Over the years, the pair have worked with long-time friends and theatre artists such as Ahi Karunaharan, Sarita So, Karnan Saba and Shanaia Boutsady. "Our connection with Asia hasn't come with us connecting with artists in other countries," Hone says. "It's the other way around." It's through these relationships with artists in Aotearoa — and the networks of friendships that come from these — that they have a deeper and more personal understanding of what's happening elsewhere.

"Karnan was just recently sharing with us about his father trying to get back into Sri Lanka," says Mīria, "and the civil unrest there, and the huge obstacles to living there at the moment." Because their cultural understanding is grounded in personal relationships, it is not only personal but intrinsically centred in the lived experiences of artists. "You know, this is what artists are having to deal with, what's there, and what's not there," says Hone. "And also what organisations are there, or what aren't, how theatre works in these different countries."

That's not to say they're not interested in working with international artists who whakapapa to Asia, but that they understand the importance of doing so meaningfully — and that starts with a process of reconnection as countries emerge from the pandemic. "You know," says Hone. "Where are you standing now? How are you? Because the art scene has changed dramatically everywhere." He sees the positive in this, and the potential for the arts and cultural sector more broadly to move from its transactional approach to working with artists. "Let's not get on this treadmill thing again. Let's not talk like we did before. Let's start with: 'How are you?'"

"I actually want to connect with people. I don't want to just [sell or buy a show], where there's no real relationship building or interconnectedness or culture sharing. The longer I've been in this industry, the more I'm going, 'This is a sugar hit.' That's what it feels like. I'm going, 'No, we wanna have a banquet together. And share our kai with you, and you share your kai with us.' And then we find the interconnectedness from there." He shakes his head. "It's got to be a win-win for everyone. It has to be — otherwise, why are you doing it? It becomes shallow." And to invest all that time and energy and resource into a sugar hit? "It doesn't make sense to me."







The longer I've been in this industry, the more I'm going, 'This is a sugar hit.' That's what it feels like. I'm going, 'No, we wanna have a banquet together. And share our kai with you, and you share your kai with us.'

The Mourning After
Ahi Karunaharan
Presented as part of Kia Mau
Festival, Aotearoa, 2021.
Photo by ROC+ Photography.

They know their central focus on relationships is at odds with how many other institutions work, and how to ensure these relationships endure is something they're considering as they start to think of the organisation as one that will continue long after they step away. "If Asian artists are represented in our programme, we need the Asian community as part of our board," Miria offers as an example. "We need to ensure that as deep as our relationships are, that organisationally they're represented at a governance level. That's a huge priority for us, and I think we have a responsibility to those relationships."

In terms of Kia Mau Festival itself, there are other ambitions they're continuing to pursue. An ongoing priority for them is the multiplicity of perspectives that bringing artists together allows. "There are different ways of being Indigenous," says Hone, "and that's the reason we bring these people here, to show that you can be what you want to be." There are also complex questions that sit behind their decision making. "The understanding of what voice are you bringing towards you, and what voice are you taking outwards, and why are you taking that voice out there," says Hone. "And what does it mean when that voice lands on that whenua there and emanates outwards?"





The growing appetite for Asian arts and culture we are seeing in Aotearoa is being driven in large part by the range of work being produced and exported from across the Asia region. In many countries, this has been led by governments, who have prioritised investment in local cultural production, recognising the economic, social and political value of investing in their creative economies. Countries such as Korea and Japan were early adopters of this focus, while other places such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand are more recently recognising and investing in cultural production.

AMEM ASIA

3



The fact that the cultural sector in Southeast Asia is still developing is one of the driving forces for interest in this part of the world. There's a lot of experimentation that is based on the local Southeast Asian culture and context, and that's what makes it exciting.

There are several factors driving the growing demand for art from across Asia: our changing demographic and greater accessibility through online channels are two key factors, but so too is the fact that many countries across Asia have heavily invested in their cultural industries, seeking to position themselves as cultural leaders on a global stage.

Much of this took place at the turn of the 21st century, when a number of countries across Asia began responding to a period of rapid deindustrialisation by focusing on a new kind of development model — top-down cultural policies inspired by the types of futures that cultural economies represent — not only as a driver of the economy but as a branding exercise towards a national identity.

Critically, this was taking place in a period of intensified globalisation, rapid technological innovation, profound social and economic changes, and a focus, in some cases, on 'catching up' with the West. It was a reframing of 'Asia', with [journalist Yoichi Funabashi describing](#) the period as "the social awakening of a flourishing middle class and the moxie of technocrats... the spirit of these times is predominantly affirmative and forward-thinking, not reactionary or nostalgic" (*The Asianization of Asia*, *Foreign Affairs*, Dec 1993).

Governments deliberately prioritised developing local cultural production and media institutions and infrastructure, often concentrated in urban environments reframed as post-industrial 'creative cities'. In part, this was in response to the risk of American cultural imperialism and represented an approach distinct from the neoliberal free-market model seen in the United States or the public-good model seen in Europe.

These state-led investments underpin the cultural export growth we've witnessed over the past decades, although differences in economic position, government stability, and cultural policy development have meant the creative sectors across Asia have evolved at different rates. China, Singapore, Japan and Korea were some of the earliest to invest heavily in infrastructure for local cultural production and its export to the world, while other countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, developed clearly defined cultural policies that remain largely aspirational due to a lack of investment in their strategies.

More recently, however, we have seen more concentrated investment into the creative sectors. Hong Kong, for example, has directed its energy into establishing itself as a visual arts hub. "Sixteen years ago," says Tobias Berger, former Head of Art at Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong, "there were almost no commercial galleries, which is something one cannot imagine now." But then Art Basel arrived, then the auction houses significantly stepped up their game — which demonstrated the market viability of being based in Hong Kong — and then public institutions like M+ and Tai Kwun were established, which he feels will dramatically change how we look at and understand Asian art.

"If you want to talk about Asia," he adds, "we saw this happening in Korea about 20 years ago. We saw it happening in Japan 30 years ago, and we currently see it happening in Hong Kong, in Taiwan, and we slowly see it happening in Southeast Asia. That's where it's starting now, where it's getting really interesting."

International arts consultant and policy researcher Grey Yeoh agrees. "The fact that the cultural sector in Southeast Asia is still developing is one of the driving forces for interest in this part of the world. There's a lot of experimentation that is based on the local Southeast Asian culture and context, and that's what makes it exciting. That's what made [Jakarta-based arts collective] ruangrupa such a hit at Documenta — initially, at least, before all the controversies started — because the way ruangrupa gather and distribute power doesn't fit into the Western framework of the arts. This kind of non-conventional yet not unwieldy approach is one of the things that this region can offer."

Previous page:
Parasite (2019)
Original title: *GISAENGCHUNG*,
directed by Bong Joon-ho.
Credit: CJ ENTERTAINMENT /
Album / Alamy Stock Photo

Postproduction, 2018
Kosuke Nagata
Presented as part of the
Aichi Triennale, Japan, 2019.
Photo courtesy of the artist.

“The funny thing,” says Tobias, “is that [the growth in art ecologies is] not happening in China. We still have almost no contemporary [public] art museums in China.” China’s development is, again, different from the rest of Asia — primarily due to its sheer size and potential to sustain itself without relying on exports, as well as the censorship rules that curtail artistic expression. The country’s Covid-19 response has also presented challenges to the sector’s recovery, with Pan Baohui, Director of Magician Space, [commenting in *The Art Newspaper*](#) that “Covid-19 policies in China have weakened the relationship between China’s art market and international art markets... The Chinese economy has had a really big impact on business for many galleries.”

These individual differences expand across Asia; it is impossible to flatten this conversation into a singular trend, given how vastly different each country is. What is clear, however, is that this top-down focus we have seen across parts of Asia on cultural production has taken place against a backdrop of sophisticated technological and digital innovation, accelerating the global distribution and reach of the work being produced. The impact of this is only going to strengthen and grow over time as more countries across Asia attempt to capitalise on the economic, social and political benefits of investing in their creative economies.

What follows are three case studies, looking at Japan, South Korea and India. Each country has emerged as a cultural power in a distinctly different way, often with unexpected mediating factors. These different possible pathways and their unpredictabilities illustrate that it may not be possible to predict the next big centres for cultural production in Asia — but that, when they do emerge, they will shape cultural consumption in Aotearoa in the same way previous waves have, and are likely to do so at a speed that surpasses the previous waves, supported by continuous and rapid advances in technology and distribution. The question is: will we be prepared to catch these waves, or will we completely miss the moment these tides reach our shores?



After World War II, Japan renounced its right to military force and turned its attention to building its cultural and economic power. The subsequent rise in the popularity of anime, manga and video games rapidly established the country's immense global cultural influence, with many arguing that this happened despite — rather than because of — the significant investment the country has made into their creative industries.

Japan made itself rich in its industrial era by selling things like cars, TVs and VCRs, but it made itself loved in those Lost Decades by selling fantasies. Hello Kitty, comics, anime, and Nintendo games were the first wave — “the big can-opener,” as the game designer Keiichi Yano put it. Now those childhood dreams have given way to a more sophisticated vision of a Japanese lifestyle, exemplified in the detached cool of Haruki Murakami novels, the defiantly girly pink feminism of kawaii culture, the stripped-down simplicity of Uniqlo, the “unbranded” products of Muji, and the Japanese “life-changing magic” of Marie Kondo.

—
'The United States of Japan',
Matt Alt for [The New Yorker](#)

A COUNTRY SHIFTING FOCUS

When Japan surrendered in World War II — after a period of aggressive expansion in which it had taken much of East and Southeast Asia at various points — it renounced its right to a military force and the right to engage in war. This was the foundation upon which it turned its attention to establishing itself as a global cultural and economic power.

The government's cultural policy initially focused on nation-building internally, prioritising traditional arts like *sadō*, pottery and *ikebana*, while its export industry sought to enhance the country's national image and to address the anti-Japanese sentiment across East and Southeast Asia in particular, but this quickly expanded as it recognised the value of investing more broadly in its creative industries.

THE RISE OF ANIME AND MANGA

Although the evolution of manga dates back to 12th-century scrolls — and anime to street-theatre practices like *kamishibai* and *bunraku* — it wasn't until after World War II that manga and anime entered a new evolutionary phase, supported, in part, by the prohibition on censorship that allowed artists to shift away from propaganda work.

Manga were first included in newspapers as comic strips before eventually being published as magazines and full-length books. Early works like Osamu Tezuka's *Mighty Atom* (*Astro Boy* in the United States) and Machiko Hasegawa's *Sazae-san* took hold, both locally and abroad, and paved the way for work like *Golgo 13* (1968), *Doraemon* (1969) and *Dragon Ball* (1984). The form also morphed through movements such as Year 24 Group's development of *shōjo* manga, which explicitly catered to a female audience. More emotionally and psychologically complex, while experimenting and innovating with the form, this movement not only grew an audience but added a new branch alongside *shōnen* manga — manga for boys and young men — which had historically focused on science fiction and action-adventure stories.

During this post-war period, a number of animation studios were established. These included Japan Animated Films (later bought and renamed *Tōei Dōga*) — who created *Sailor Moon*, *Dragon Ball* and *Digimon* — and Mushi Production, who made *Astro Boy* and *Kimba the White Lion*. Japan's unique anime style — large-eyed, big-mouthed, large-headed characters — started to become seared into an international consciousness, and by the 1980s, storytelling had become more nuanced, complex and experimental, with the emergence of the home-video market creating an opportunity for the industry to further build an international audience. Films such as *Akira* (1988) and TV shows such as *Pokémon* (1996) and *Cowboy Bebop* (1998) built cult followings worldwide, not only for the works themselves but for anime more generally. This not only boosted sales but spawned a fandom that enabled mass events and gatherings to take place across the world.

Recognising both the economic and political value of exporting their cultural production, the government established organisations such as the Japan Foundation (1972) to promote Japanese arts and culture internationally — with 25 branches now established overseas — and the Japan Media Communication Center (1991) to subsidise the export of television programmes.

Running alongside this was the development of the Japanese video-game industry. This industry pioneered arcade culture internationally with the introduction of Sega's *Periscope* in 1966, a submarine shooting simulator (and the first arcade game to introduce the payment of a quarter [25c] to play). This was followed by other pioneering games, such as Atari's *Pong* (1972), *Space Invaders* (1978), *Pac-Man* (1980) and *Donkey Kong* (1981), and, critically, the launch and evolution of consoles by companies such as Nintendo, Sega and Sony, which quickly eclipsed consoles made elsewhere.

THE LOST DECADE AND A COOL JAPAN

Economic growth slowed considerably when Japan's real estate and stock market bubbles crashed in the 1990s. Through this period, the government continued investing in its creative industries, launching the Strategic Council on Intellectual Property in 2002 — which sought to promote the growth of everything from video-game software to films to design — and eventually its 'Cool Japan' strategy in 2010.

This strategy sought to solidify Japan's position as a global creative hub, acting as both an economic strategy and a nation-building exercise. Strikingly, however, it took some time for the cultural products coming out of Japan to become recognisably Japanese. Media and cultural studies professor Kōichi Iwabuchi describes this "invisible and odourless cultural presence in the world" as [mukokuseki](#). "The propensity of Japanese animators to make their products non-Japanese," he adds, in *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (2022), "points to how a Western-dominated cultural hierarchy governs transnational cultural flows in the world." Over time, however, as the middle class grew throughout Asia, so too did a market seeking non-Western cultural products, leading to a more 'Asian' pop culture.

Japan's investment in the creative industries has continued over the years. The government's investments in Cool Japan initiatives — focused on the promotion, distribution, expansion and translation of Japanese cultural businesses and products worldwide — increased from an annual budget of [¥20 billion in 2011 \(NZ\\$225 million\)](#) to [¥55 billion by 2020 \(NZ\\$619 million\)](#). A separate Cool Japan Fund, launched in 2013, has invested [¥106.6 billion as at March 2022 \(NZ\\$1.2 billion\)](#). In addition to these investments by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) drew on [¥131.1 billion \(NZ\\$1.5 billion\) in its 2022 budget](#) — as well as private investment funds and foundations focused on the arts.

It's worth noting, however, that many consider the Cool Japan investments to have been a failure, not only financially — reporting a cumulative debt of ¥30.9 billion in 2021 (NZ\$348 million) — but strategically, with many feeling that inadequate attention has been paid to the markets being exported to, and that the focus on smaller businesses, betting on what might be 'the next big thing', has been at the expense of supporting what was already succeeding. "The growth of J-pop culture," says Dr Rumi Sakamoto, Senior Lecturer in Asian Studies at the University of Auckland, "is more likely due to globalisation and expansion of the internet." As Honda Shinō wrote in 1994 in the now-defunct *Japan Echo*, the spread of Japanese pop culture across Asia "occurred with virtually no effort on the Japanese side: the East Asian middle class took note of Japanese popular culture and chose to embrace it of its own accord."

Therefore, it is perhaps alongside, but not solely because of, the government's hefty investment that we have seen the continued growth and success of Japanese culture on the international stage — not only in terms of popular culture but in our contemporary art spheres as well.

Today, Japan is one of the world's leading exporters of arts and culture and has become globally synonymous with its cultural products, which in turn have driven a [¥27.9 trillion \(NZ\\$313.7 billion\) tourism industry](#). In some cases, we are seeing the international market overtake the domestic market, with international anime profits, for example, overtaking domestic profits for the first time in 2020. Critically, the impact of this success is framed not only in terms of economic growth, but of rebranding the country — both nationally and on the international stage.

Digimon: The Movie, 2000
Courtesy of Moviestore
Collection Ltd /
Alamy Stock Photo.





Driven first by a desire for economic growth and second by wanting to develop a uniquely Korean voice on an international stage, Korea's approach to investment in its creative industries has been so successful that many other countries are now trying to emulate its strategy. Accelerated by the country's significant investment into its creative infrastructure — including having the highest broadband penetration at the turn of the 21st century — these foundations have set the scene for artists who are deeply online, highly polished and socially engaged.

THE BIRTH OF A TIGER

Until the mid-20th century, South Korea was predominantly an agricultural country with a small economy. After World War II, the country underwent a period of rapid industrialisation, with chaebol — large-scale industrial conglomerates run by family-controlled corporate groups — dominating the landscape. Featuring names that are still prominent today, such as Hyundai, LG, CJ and Samsung, chaebol played a major role in the economic growth that began in the early 1960s — and which, in turn, led to South Korea becoming one of the 'Asian Tigers': a cluster of economies including Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, named for their shared focus on aggressive economic growth, which extended to their approach to arts and culture.

Recognising the economic value of working within Asia, a number of American film studios set up distribution offices in South Korea in the late '80s and early '90s, resulting in Hollywood films taking about 80 percent of revenue in the local box-office market. President Kim Young-sam is said to have been converted to the cultural agenda when, in 1994, it was pointed out that the global revenue generated by *Jurassic Park* was more than the export value of 1.5 million Hyundai vehicles. This led to the establishment of the Cultural Industries Directorate in 1994, which focused on developing the arts and entertainment sector both nationally and abroad.

It was during this period that a visual-arts infrastructure started to form, with a number of curatorial roles established by private and corporate museums, and augmented by the establishment of alternative art spaces. Government attention started to turn towards how it could invest in the country's arts sector, with 1995 heralded as the Year of Art, a cultural initiative extending from the government's *seggyehwa* (globalisation) policy of 1993. This was the year of the first Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. In the same year, the Gwangju Biennale was established (the first biennale to be held in Northeast Asia), followed by the Busan Biennale in 1998 and Seoul Mediacity Biennale in 2000 — which, as Keith B. Wagner and Sunjung Kim write in *Korean Art from 1953: Collision, Innovation, Interaction*, “put Asia on the curatorial map”, even suggesting that “the reinvention of the biennale has happened with great curatorial acumen, in large part if not entirely, in Korea.”

Alongside this, other changes brought about by South Korea's democratisation in the late 1980s were contributing to the transformation and growth of the arts and entertainment sector. These included the lifting of the [ban on overseas travel for Korean residents](#) in 1988, and the disestablishment of the censorship laws in theatre (1988), music (1996) and film (1997).

Investments into the sector were further amplified during the Asian financial crisis of 1997, when many investors shifted their funds from manufacturing to entertainment. From 1998, the country also started lifting its ban on cultural imports from Japan. Knowing this would also mean an influx in anime, manga and J-pop, the Ministry of Culture established 300 cultural-industry departments in universities nationwide to support the development of Korean talent. In 1999, the Basic Law for Cultural Industries' Promotion was passed, making investing and supporting the cultural industries a “state responsibility”.

This was against a backdrop of accelerated investment in technology, with high-speed telecommunications infrastructure prioritised as essential to building a knowledge-based society. By 2001, [Korea had the highest penetration of broadband internationally](#), at 13.9 percent, and more than half of the country was using the internet regularly, nearly five times as much as the US, who had the second-highest usage. This effectively gave Korea a head-start in creating for online and international audiences, amplified by its investment in supporting infrastructure such as Sangam Digital Media City, the world's first high-tech complex and a centre for innovative digital and media industries.

These factors all led to an industry uniquely placed to not only lead but redefine the sector. “Unlike other Tigers,” writes Kim-Marie Spence in *Creative Seoul*, “there is no reference in [Korean cultural policy documents] to Western creative industries literature... Korea charted its own path in creative industries discourse.” Importantly, Korea's definition of the creative industries was far more inclusive than in typical Western conceptualisations of art, pulling in media, games and technology, an intertwining that was critical to Korea's success.

These decisions were driven by a desire to recover and grow economically, but were also a way to develop and maintain soft power: a concept talked about as far back as the '40s, when political leader Kim Gu wrote in his autobiography, *Baekbeom Ilji*, “I want our nation to be the most beautiful in the world. By this, I do not mean the most powerful nation. Because I have felt the pain of being invaded by another nation. I do not want my nation to invade others... The only thing I desire in infinite quantity is the power of a noble culture. This is because the power of culture both makes us happy and gives happiness to others.”

This created an environment highly conducive for artists: a potent mix of deregulation and infrastructural support that enabled and encouraged the growth of the creative industries.

HALLYU, OR THE 'KOREAN WAVE'

In 1999, the high-octane, big-budget film blockbuster *Swiri* won a place in hearts across East and Southeast Asia. From here, cult followings grew for K-dramas such as *What is Love All About* (1997), *Autumn in My Heart* (2000) and *Winter Sonata* (2002), and films like *My Sassy Girl* (2001) and *Old Boy* (2003), which won the Grand Prix award at Cannes and continued to catapult Korean art-making to the world stage. At the same time, we saw the first overseas performance of a K-pop artist — H.O.T. — to a sold-out audience in Beijing in 2000, and in 2002 BoA's *Listen to My Heart* became the first album to sell a million copies in Japan.

This growth of visibility and consumption overseas became known as ‘Hallyu’, a term coined by Chinese media that roughly translates to ‘Korean Wave’. In this early phase spanning the first decade of the 21st century, much of this transmission was happening across the Asia region, with breakthrough moments happening throughout the Western world.

Writing in 2009, academic [Woongjae Ryoo](#) noted: “Before the Korean Wave, many neighbouring Asians either did not know much about South Korea or knew only a few simple, often stereotypical things about South Korea. The images Asians traditionally have associated with the country were generally negative and limited to such events as the Korean War and the vicious cycle of poverty, political instability and violent student demonstrations that typified the 1980s, along with the longer-term issues connected to the demilitarised zone and national division.” But with the spread of Korean art, entertainment and beauty products, Korea effectively began to rebrand itself overseas.

Hallyu 2.0 — the ‘New Korean Wave’ — began around 2007, running in parallel with Web 2.0 and its emphasis on creating a participatory user-generated culture. YouTube in particular was critical to artists reaching a much larger audience beyond Asia, and Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’ (2012) was a key part of this movement, making history as the first YouTube video to break 1 billion views, eventually breaking the play counter when it exceeded the (then maximum) view count of 2.14 billion. Psy’s success heightened investment in the Korean Wave, and by 2015, the Cultural Industries Division’s budget had increased to ₩500 billion or NZ\$619 million (up from ₩5.4 billion or NZ\$6.7 million when it was established in 1994). Psy also made history in Aotearoa, with his song ‘Gangnam Style’ becoming the first Asian-language song to reach #1 in the charts.

Alongside this was the rise of Korea’s art market through the 2000s, with a significant number of mid-sized commercial galleries established alongside a new wave of biennales, museums, and a suite of artistic spaces established through Seoul’s creative-space campaign, in which public buildings were repurposed as exhibition sites, with many offering residency opportunities for new and established artists.

HALLYU 3.0

Beginning in the mid-2010s, the third generation of the Korean Wave has seen content continue to evolve and spread online. K-dramas, K-pop, films and [mukbang](#) (먹방; meokbang) videos are key components of this wave, with idols and influencers creating a market for fashion, skincare and tourism.

*Squid Game, 2021
Season 1.
Credit: Siren Pictures /
Album. Courtesy of Album /
Alamy Stock Photo.*





It's during this third generation that we've seen sustained growth of audiences for K-pop in Aotearoa. In 2019, BTS's *Map of the Soul: Persona* became the first Asian-language album to reach #1, quickly followed by a suite of chart-topping albums in 2020: BTS's *Map of the Soul: 7* (July 2020), Blackpink's *The Album* (October 2020) and BTS's *BE* (November 2020).

In March 2023 [a report released by the Korea Foundation](#) stated that the number of Hallyu fans worldwide had hit 179 million, up from 9 million in 2012, and artists that balance their perceived moral integrity with their commercial capability sit at the centre of this. "South Korea's soft power has been heavily relying on the artistic talents of these content creators who have been personally and professionally engaging with sociopolitical and economic changes of the nation," says Dr Hee-seung Irene Lee, Lecturer in Korean Studies at the University of Auckland. "Their attentive observations of prevailing social issues such as inequalities and injustice have often led them to create films and drama series that are clearly conscious of those problems. Never hiding behind their work, these content creators have been actively raising their collective voices in alignment with the public, too."

This is evident not only in the work of writer-directors such as Bong Joon-ho and Hwang Dong-hyuk, who have been deftly critical of inequality within Korea, but in the way K-pop fandom has been harnessed to address international matters. In 2020, for example, BTS tweeted in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and donated US\$1 million to the cause, with their fans matching this donation within a day.

The success of pop-culture figures has also raised the profile of the art world — with RM from BTS, for example, becoming one of the world's most visible art patrons, notably collecting and working with Korean artists, donating to institutions such as the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art "[to reissue out-of-print art books and distribute them to libraries](#)", and documenting his visits, with his [vlog about visiting Art Basel](#) attracting more than 6.4 million views.

This is against the backdrop of an already flourishing commercial art market, with [younger generations driving this boom](#); the result of a tax system that incentivises investment in works by living artists priced under a certain threshold. In 2022, Seoul welcomed the first Asian edition of international art fair Frieze. At an event honouring the fair, Mayor Oh Se-hoon reinforced the city's [commitment to the sector](#). "It was my master plan to make us the cultural hub of Asia by 2030," he said in an address, "but we have already seen this come to light."



This blending of technology with art — where the boundaries between our physical, digital and biological worlds become increasingly blurred — is a trend that South Korea is strategically placed to lead.

In 2022, the culture ministry's budget rose to [₩7.15 trillion](#) (NZ\$8.9 billion). But it's not just governmental policy driving this growth — chaebol are also investing significantly in Korean art internationally. In 2022, Samsung sponsored Park Dae Sung at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); Hyundai supported *The Space Between: The Modern in Korean Art* at LACMA (along with Samsung); and LG Electronics announced a five-year partnership with the Guggenheim and was a major sponsor of *Hallyu! The Korean Wave* at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (along with Hyundai).

More locally, growth in the visual and performing arts has been driven in part by the significant public funding made available to the sector. Assistant Curator for the 14th Gwangju Biennale, Sooyoung Leam, describes this funding as ranging from research to curating to exhibition making to artwork production. "It shows a growing concern for a more balanced support system," she says. Due to this, Korea has also seen an explosion of small artist-run spaces.

"They serve as an important platform for not only introducing young and emerging artists but also collectivising them. These spaces may have a short life-span, but that's what makes the art scene all the more dynamic and competitive."

She also observes the continued evolution of art forms. "We are witnessing a rapid expansion of digital platforms specifically tailored towards AR and VR content. This new tendency also means frequent collaborations between artists and tech companies or engineers."

"Arts and techno-science has become a strategic trend in Korean governmental policy," agrees Kyu Choi, Artistic Director of Seoul Performing Arts Festival, who describes a recent commission: a collaboration between a choreographer and a technology developer creating a work in the metaverse. "I think it's going to be five years before we start seeing the really great work, so long-term support is essential." This blending of technology with art — where the boundaries between our physical, digital and biological worlds become increasingly blurred — is a trend that will explode in the Fourth Industrial Revolution — and it's one that South Korea is strategically placed to lead.

In 2021, the survival drama *Squid Game* further entrenched South Korea as a storytelling powerhouse. To even Netflix's surprise, the series quickly became the most watched series in the streaming platform's history, beaming into more than 142 million households in its first four weeks of release. The series was also New Zealanders' most consumed piece of Asia-related entertainment in 2021.

Its unprecedented success has since led competitors such as Disney, Apple TV and Paramount to invest heavily in productions across Asia, particularly in Korea — with [Netflix committing USD\\$2.5 billion](#) (NZ\$4.1 billion) to Korean productions over four years, starting in 2023.

Importantly, the success of programmes like this does not exist in a vacuum. Instead, they are a gateway, and the ripple effect of Korean work on Netflix was demonstrated clearly in a recent report by Deloitte which found that 42 percent of viewers went on to consume related content in other forms, including featured albums and related books.

The Korea Foundation has found that between 2020 and 2021, [exports of Korean cosmetics to Aotearoa grew 86.2 percent](#) and fashion exports grew 71.3 percent. This makes Aotearoa one of the fastest-growing markets for Korean fashion and beauty products — industries that in turn are heavily influenced by K-pop and K-dramas, and that have the potential to expand out to a broader arts consumption as well.

Certain similarities between Aotearoa and Korea are likely to enhance the sense of resonance between the two countries. "Korean media has been tackling the country's colonial past under the rule of the Japanese Empire from 1910 to 1945, and the deep scar of Cold War politics in the division between the South and the North," says Dr Lee, explaining that many artists have confronted the legacy of these events and their ongoing impact head-on in their work as well as in the surrounding press. "For an Aotearoa audience, this inseparable combination of history and culture in the Korean Wave appears to shed a hopeful light on a new face of the global mediascape, where marginalised peripheries can advance to its centre stage."





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South Korea's soft power has been heavily relying on the artistic talents of these content creators who have been personally and professionally engaging with sociopolitical and economic changes of the nation.

BTS perform on "Good Morning America's Summer Concert Series"
Erik Pendzich / Alamy Stock Photo

Unlike Korea and Japan, the global success of India's filmmaking industries has been attributable to the lack of government support, with the industry itself driving its growth. As the country recovers from the pandemic — and as the world's largest young working population gains access to high-speed internet — we're likely to see the growing international reach of India's other creative sectors, in particular its handloom, handicraft and gaming industries.

One of the largest creative industries in the world, India is home to some of the world's oldest surviving art forms, as well as thriving artisan, fashion and film sectors, and a rapidly growing gaming sector. Until now, however, much of the activity has been self-regulated, with the lack of government strategy meaning that the success of these industries has largely been led from the ground up.

FROM MUMBAI'S BOLLYWOOD TO A MULTI-CITY EXPLOSION

Perhaps one of the more successful exports from India has been its film industry. Unlike the state-led approaches seen elsewhere, the rise and success of Bollywood — India's Hindi-language film industry — has largely been attributed to the *lack* of government support or interference. Its rise first gained momentum in the early '90s, when filmmakers were able to gain greater access to digital and online technologies, and media deregulation saw a shift from single-screen cinemas to multiplexes.

In 1998 the Indian government officially granted the film sector 'industry' status — a moment that Aswin Punathambekar, Professor of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, describes in *From Bombay to Bollywood: The Making of a Global Media Industry* as a "remarkable decision, given the history of the state's relationship with popular cinema... the Indian state did not regard filmmaking as an important industrial activity or as central to the project of defining national culture." While many see this as an attempt to assert authority over a growing industry and to regulate film financing, it nevertheless unlocked access to global distribution networks, further increasing the audience. This shift took place alongside a growing middle-class audience in India, who were more globally connected than ever before.

Beyond this, however, very little government intervention has supported its growth. Anubha Sarkar, Lecturer in Global Creative Industries at the City University of London, attributes this to the country's post-colonial identity. In "[Behind the Scenes](#)" of Mumbai's Hollywood, she states: "There has been a misappropriation of India's history and a destruction of India's artisan sector under colonial rule. In order for India to revamp its national identity, it was imperative to create an image of a superior 'ancient and spiritual civilisation' to carve an impression of a culture distinct from Western modernity."

As a result, much of the government's energy and, eventually, its limited cultural policies and investment were focused more on supporting traditional art practices — an extension of the [Swadeshi movement](#), which focuses on self-sufficiency through the promotion of Indigenous products and a rejection of products imported under colonisation. This includes initiatives such as Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Make in India and Startup India, which have largely focused on creative entrepreneurs, as well as the introduction of online labour platforms that have created flexibility in ways of working. This focus largely continues today, with the limited arts funding available focusing primarily on both the development of traditional craft and its promotion overseas. Furthermore, there is currently no coherent cultural policy guiding a strategic approach. "At present," says Prateek Kukreja, a former Fellow at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), "there are 14 to 16 different ministries that manage the sector in India and that makes the process extremely cumbersome, limiting growth of the sector."

Despite this, India has become the eighth largest exporter of creative products globally. Around [8.3 percent of the country is employed in the creative sector](#), with 200 million people working in the handloom and handicraft sector — the second largest employment provider in India after agriculture — and with its online gaming sector experiencing significant growth over the last three years. As the [country with the largest young working population in the world](#), India is also seeing a new generation of creators emerge onto the global stage, enabled largely by online social marketing and commerce platforms reducing barriers to entry. Critically, this has been facilitated by the country's increasing access to high-speed internet: in 2011, only 10.1 percent of the country had access to the internet, with this rising to 47 percent of the country's 1.4 billion population in 2021.

Due to limited government support, India's creative industries were particularly affected by the pandemic. "They were the first to shut their doors in response to the pandemic and were also among the last to reopen," says Prateek. In a [survey of its creative economy](#), 49 percent had not been able to keep creative businesses and artistic programmes running in 2021. "On a brighter side," he adds, "we've seen a pandemic-induced emergence of technology and innovation within the creative industries through the rise of [streaming TV] and social media platforms like YouTube and Instagram."

The country's creative industries continue to regain traction: "It is expected that these industries will in fact drive the next wave of growth." He imagines this taking place alongside changes that many are now lobbying for, including an integrated policy-making approach, stronger intellectual property rights frameworks, and better access to training, education and financial support.

It's important to recognise that 'creative industries' means different things in different countries. Film, for example, remains within the purview of both the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry rather than the Ministry of Culture, a delineation that highlights the continued perception of film as primarily an economic contributor rather than a form that sits within arts, culture and creativity — or one that contributes to a national identity.

Ironically, it's film that has travelled and has contributed significantly to perceptions of India in Aotearoa. Over the past decade, in addition to Bollywood, we've seen the growth of films in the Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam languages, with Telugu cinema (or Tollywood) now overtaking Bollywood at the box office. *RRR* (2022), for example — director S. S. Rajamouli's dance-and-action-packed film loosely based on the revolutionaries that fought British colonialism — became the most popular Indian film to have been presented on Netflix, as well as reaching #2 in box offices in Aotearoa in its opening weekend.

Another film that reached this spot in box offices was Hindi action film *Pathaan* (2023), which became the highest-grossing Indian film in Aotearoa history (and one of the all-time highest-grossing Hindi films internationally). The success of films like this highlights the need to create opportunities that allow audiences in Aotearoa to critically engage with the films we are importing, and to be given pathways to understanding the sociopolitical conversations that surround the art experiences we are given access to. *Pathaan* is an interesting example, with lead actor Shah Rukh Khan having been “[indirectly targeted](#)” by the Hindu nationalist ruling party for being a proud Muslim and the film itself written as a response to his situation. On Vox, Film critic Rahul Desai [observes](#) that the film doesn’t “take potshots at Hinduism, the way a lot of Hindu nationalist films have been taking potshots at Islam for the last 10 years. Instead, what it does is put forward a very different idea of Islam. That’s the more human and more dignified way to make a statement, rather than running down one community to glorify another.”

This is in contrast to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) endorsed *Kashmir Files* (2022), which was one of the highest-grossing Hindi-language films in 2022. The film’s [rating was revised to R18 in Aotearoa after the chief censor spoke with a range of community representatives](#), who expressed concern about its centring of Hindutva ideology — and, within this, its Islamophobic positioning — and “the nature and intensity of the violence and cruelty depicted.”

“Even as a large number of critics found *The Kashmir Files* filled with factual inaccuracies, propagandist, and frightening in its relentless targeting of every Muslim represented on screen, the film continued its blitz across the box office in India,” [wrote documentary filmmaker Sanjay Kak for Al Jazeera](#) at the time. “Screenings frequently ended amid sloganeering and speeches, with people competing in their provocations, with brazen calls for violence against all Muslims, not just Kashmiri Muslims.”

Having access to the critical dialogue taking place around films like these — as well as all our cultural imports — is vital to ensuring we can appreciate the nuance of the stories we are receiving, and to allow that considered dialogue to inform the flow-on interest in other art forms. In Aotearoa, for example, the popularity of Indian cinema has fuelled the growth of Indian music and dance schools, with many academies offering introductory ‘Diwali’ or ‘Bollywood-style’ classes alongside more classical forms like Kathak and Bharatanatyam. “Indian dance is more popular than ever,” observes Monisha Kumar, Head of Department of Dance at One Tree Hill College and Artistic Director of Monisha Kumar Dance Company. She notes that this interest spans Indian and non-Indian communities, with both interested in engaging more deeply with Indian culture. “Both are fascinated by Indian mythology and the rich culture and heritage,” she observes, and within this, too, is an opportunity to take part in the more contemporary conversations Indian communities are having globally.

RRR: NAATU NAATU, 2022
directed by Prem Rakshith.
Album / Alamy Stock Photo.





ACROSS OCEANS: AUSTRALIA

As these cultural waves reached Australia from Asia, Australia established a range of flagship festivals and venues to present contemporary visual arts and performance from across Asia. Driven by excitement in the work being produced, these were designed with the understanding that there was an audience for this work beyond an 'Asian' audience. The value of this approach has been demonstrated in the continued success of festivals such as the Asia Pacific Triennial, Asia TOPA and OzAsia Festival. The parallel rise of pop culture has seen a new generation of interculturally competent audiences who consume a wide range of culture, both in terms of art form and country of origin.





I was really sick to death of the Australian attitude to our region — which was ‘we are the centre of the universe’, and ‘Asia is an export market’. To me that seemed like a really puerile response to the evidence of how complex and dynamic our relationships are.

Over the past decades, we’ve watched momentum build in Australia, as the arts sector recognised the appetite for work from across Asia and where — since the ‘90s — a number of flagship events, venues and organisations have been established to showcase both international and local Asian visual arts and performance. These include more focused initiatives such as the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT), the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts (Asia TOPA), OzAsia Festival, and the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, while other organisations have a broader remit with a particular focus in Asia, including the Sydney Biennale and the National Gallery of Victoria.

Not only have these become key platforms for leading artists from across Asia and Australia to present work, but they also present vital opportunities for international collaboration, and for Australian audiences to deepen their understanding of contemporary Asia.

Stephen Armstrong, founding Creative Director of Asia TOPA, describes how the festival emerged out of a mutual desire to be strategically coordinated in the investment that was going into presenting works. “Historically,” he explains, “it was a string of isolated single projects in short seasons. This was very expensive and struggled to achieve impact. Each project needed a separate marketing strategy and, when you work for a generic arts centre, presenting culturally specific work is definitely not playing to strength. They have huge departments targeting high-profile and commercial works — niche marketing and community building was not something they were good at.” He’s quick to clarify that niche marketing wasn’t the primary aim of the festival. “I was also really critical of the idea of exclusive community marketing — as though the only people who would be interested in a performance from Indonesia were the diaspora Indonesian community. To me that is patently stupid.”

He’s also critical of the way Asia had historically been conceptualised in Australia. “I was really sick to death of the Australian attitude to our region — which was ‘we are the centre of the universe’, and ‘Asia is an export market’. To me that seemed like a really puerile response to the evidence of how complex and dynamic our relationships are.” For Stephen, the fundamental principle of Asia TOPA was reciprocity. “To make it sophisticated,” he adds. “To actually respect our collaborating artists from Asia in the same way we would expect to be respected here.”

Asia TOPA presented its second festival in 2020, a three-month-long festival riding the crest of the pandemic. Despite the interruptions to their programming and its eventual cancellation, more than 920,000 people attended its events, with more than a third of its programming being newly created or commissioned for the festival. Those attending were also ‘diverse’, with similar proportions of the audience seeking to connect with a culture that is meaningful to them (28 percent) or to learn more about Asia and Asian arts in general (26 percent).

Similarly, the Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) at the Queensland Art Gallery — which in 2022 presented its 10th iteration — has become a landmark event not only in Australia but on an international stage. Former director Doug Hall, [reflecting on its inception in 1993](#) on the QAGOMA blog, clarifies it was “not simply about a cultural project”

Previous page:
Dragon Ladies Don't Weep
Margaret Leng Tan.
Presented at AsiaTOPA,
Australia, 2020.
Photo by Pia Johnson.

or “cultural diplomacy”, but was an attempt by the gallery “to avoid becoming a pale reflection of other Australian curatorial conduct.” He reflects: “In Australian collections, Asian art was largely art history. The more Asia changed and became interested in ideas beyond its traditional cultures, there was a corresponding decreasing interest in what Asian artists produced — and they weren’t collected. Internationalism was seemingly the prerogative of the West’s alone.” He rejected this idea that “the West changes, effortlessly internationalises, and that Asian cultures must be true to their heritage and fodder for the West.”

The Asia Pacific Triennial was conceived in response to this, with a range of international collaborators and advisors at the table. “It was relationship-based,” he continues, “where local voices were heard; local cultural politics somewhat understood; and where the APT didn’t brazenly invoke its Western-dominated imprimatur... we sought to engage people directly and had a substantial budget for curatorial travel to each of the participating countries, so that unofficial and interdependent connections could be established. Above all, we wanted to connect the ideas and the institution to people in a collegial sense.”

More recently, Thomas Baudinette, Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies and International Studies at Macquarie University, has studied how the rise of popular culture from across Asia has deepened intercultural competence, “adding nuance to existing ‘monocultural’ understandings of Asia that are prevalent in Australia” — what he describes as “food court multiculturalism: where we have all the choices, but deep understanding is limited.”

He observes there are still deep misunderstandings about these fandoms. “There’s still that idea that East Asian popular culture is predominantly for our diasporic communities and that the large consumer base that has emerged within our country is due to diasporic consumption. It’s a factor. Of course it is. But it’s not the only factor.”

The misconception that borders drive taste also persists. “No one really consumes just one national culture anymore because they’re so interrelated. You’re more likely to have someone who listens to K-pop, watches Thai television shows, reads Japanese manga, and engages with Chinese novels.” This extends to a fluidity in cultural interest. “The fans who consume K-pop or Japanese anime are not just interested in those media forms, they have built a broader attraction to Asian culture, whatever that is. It is also an understanding of the presence of this already within Australia and an aspiration towards closer ties.”

Thomas observes there is also often an assumption that ‘Asian media culture’ is more conservative due to the perception that ‘Asian culture’ is more conservative, yet — for example — so many queer Asian works are progressive in their diversity of storytelling, particularly in terms of offering positive stories rather than negative ones. “I remember when [LGBTQ+ teen drama] *Heartstopper* went viral earlier this year. My immediate response to all of the ‘It’s so great to finally see a queer rom-com with teenagers being happy’ was that Thailand has been making shows like this since 2014.”

CASE STUDY: STAYING HUNGRY: THE GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY

In 2009 the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in Ngāmotu New Plymouth dedicated its entire year to contemporary art in China. “It is timely to see new Chinese art,” wrote [Richard Dale in the *New Zealand Herald*](#) at the time, noting that it had been five years since the last presentation in Aotearoa of contemporary art from China, even though “it is hard to ignore a country that has become so dominant in our economy.” More than merely transplanting work, however, the programme at the Govett-Brewster sought to facilitate an intercultural dialogue through extended residencies and commissions that invited artists to also make work in and about Aotearoa. “This series not only gives us a chance to get insiders’ views about their own society,” wrote Richard. “These artists are engaging with New Zealand society and culture.”

The gallery has a long history of presenting artists from across Asia. While it does not have an explicit focus on Asian artists — “our priorities are fundamentally about mana whenua and what we might call the contemporary Pacific,” says Director Zara Stanhope — its programming demonstrates a clear commitment to representing work from across the region. “I guess that’s something that I implicitly bring through my curatorial interests and connections with artists.”

It’s something that previous directors brought, too. “During the 2000s, the gallery’s director was Greg Burke, and he had a more aggressive interest in the Pacific Rim,” says former Len Lye Curator Paul Brobbel. “That started an era where we really focused on big projects in collaboration with partners in Asia.” The best example of this was *Mediarena: Contemporary Art from Japan* (2004), the largest exhibition of contemporary Japanese art to have been presented in Aotearoa. Co-curated with Fumio Nanjo (then Deputy Director, Mori Art Museum) and Roger McDonald (then Deputy Director, Arts Initiative Tokyo), the exhibition presented three generations of artists in an attempt to move beyond a ‘superflat’ reading of Japanese art, and sought to “place the work in an art historical framework, rather than simply interpreting it against recent changes in Asian pop-culture and technology.”

This exhibition was followed by *Activating Korea: Tides of Collective Action* (2007), which sought to capture “the complex and contradictory meanings of collectivism in South Korean contemporary art practices within a society where traditional values coexist with today’s multifaceted changes.” Curated by Mercedes Vicente (then Curator at the Govett-Brewster) and Beck Jee-sock (then Director at ARKO Art Center), it continued building on the format the gallery had established of large-scale surveys of contemporary art from across Asia.

After Rhana Devenport took over as director in 2007, the gallery presented the year-long major series, *China in Four Seasons* (2009), with the gallery fully dedicated to four exhibitions and residencies focused on artists working in China. “A 12-month commitment to one country in provincial New Zealand?” says Paul Brobbel. “That’s a hell of a thing.” He adds, “Parallel to that was Rhana’s interest in expanding what we thought of as Asia. Rhana brought in a very big interest in South Asia and established a legacy for us in working with artists from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.”

Many of these exhibitions were made possible not only through an existing curatorial interest but through the deep relationships the directors brought with them into the gallery. For others, it was a process of creating these as part of their practice. In 2017, curator Sarah Wall was selected to be part of the Asia New Zealand Foundation curators’ programme, which involved taking three curators around museums, galleries and artist spaces in Taiwan and Japan. “When she came back in 2018,” says Paul, “we had a change in directorship, so we had 18 months where we didn’t have a director, and Sarah became acting Contemporary Art Curator.” She proposed working with Yuichiro Tamura as part of her programming, whom she’d met on a studio visit during the curators’ programme.

The gallery offered him an artist’s residency so he could spend time in Taranaki, researching and exploring what work he might develop. “We made that commitment without knowing exactly what he would do,” says Paul. It became *Milky Mountain / 裏返りの山* (2019), a gallery-wide show stitching together a realm of public and private narratives ranging from the filming of *The Last Samurai* to the history of the Govett-Brewster building to the city’s links with Japan.

This was followed by *Triple Vista Nestings*, an extensive survey show of South Korean artist Hague Yang, in 2019. “Working with Yang had been an ambition for the gallery over the last decade,” says Paul, who had first pitched the artist in 2012. Developed with the Institute of Modern Art (IMA) in Brisbane and curated by Wall, the show “signalled a commitment to collaborative curating with institutional partners around the Pacific, to ensure the leading artists of their generation were part of the Govett-Brewster’s purview.”

Currently, the team is working with a group of Indigenous Taiwanese artists — with the group having visited in 2023 for a residency ahead of an exhibition being developed for 2024. Creating a process like this that resists the transactional nature that artist programming can sometimes default to — instead allowing for relationship building, cross-cultural dialogue and research ahead of a presentation — involves many moving parts. Funding has been secured through the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office. “The Asia New Zealand Foundation wouldn’t fund something like a residency [for artists from Asia in New Zealand] as it has to be a more public-facing engagement,” explains Zara. “So there’s a bit of a gap, because those residencies that curators do are fantastic, and everyone usually comes back with new connections and networks.” But how do you support that next step, where you create opportunities to explore where those relationships could lead?

BUILDING AN AUDIENCE

These projects have had a profound impact on the gallery's audiences. "They made a big impression on our more intimate audience," says Paul. "The Friends of the Gallery, people that come to see everything, people who have a historical perspective on what we've done. I think they see these exhibitions as landmarks. Whether that's because they signalled a fundamental change in the type of art they started seeing at a certain point or because it kicked us into a different sense of internationalism."

"Recently," he continues, "we were out at Parihaka, and they referenced artists that had come here for an exhibition called [Sub-Topical Heat: New art from South Asia \(2012\)](#), which at the time was ['the most extensive and in-depth exhibition of art from South Asia presented to date in Aotearoa New Zealand'](#). And their engagement with the gallery has been amplified and intensified through their engagement with artists from Asia, to the point where it's their most memorable collaboration with us. So maybe it's a bit surprising, but I think the impact that art from Asia has had in this gallery has been as much, if not greater, than some of the other international art that has been shown."

The team firmly believes in creating a continual programme of presentation. "Building up familiarity for audiences is a way of reducing some of those barriers," says Zara, "whether it's about fear of the unknown or a lack of experience." It's an attitude that draws on her experience at Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), where she was Curatorial Manager, Asian and Pacific Art. "We broke the audience records with the Asia Pacific Triennial," she says. "There were 619,000 people who came to see that show, and the visitor surveys showed that many people had been to an APT before, so they wanted to come and see this one."

They acknowledge that this also involves a continual commitment to the artists you're working with. "It's not just about going [to Asia] once," Zara says. "You have to keep investing in those relationships and be open to conversations and where they might lead you." Her advice? "Know that you won't understand everything, and you're not an expert in those countries or those artists — or the changes in contemporary culture. But be open to doing whatever you can to keep those relationships and to work with people in [their] country."

This includes researching and understanding as much context as possible before you go. "Sometimes there is no infrastructure at all, or your exhibition could get shut down by the police or censors. So just check your expectations and understand that things may not be the same as they might be in your place." Understanding different cultural protocols and spirituality is part of this, too. "You know, you might understand you are going to a Buddhist country or an Islamic country and that this plays out in many different ways. But make sure before you go that you understand what this really means. How that impacts people's daily lives, and what you should or should not expect people to be able to do if they are practising those beliefs."

"I've had a couple of trips to Seoul," mentions Paul, "and they were the hardest weeks of my life, just engaging in this new culture without any previous experience." He describes finding it overwhelming and, at times, exhausting. "The learning curve is just phenomenally hard," he says. "And then you get back home, and you want to do it all over again." And doing it again is essential. "Just continuously engaging and building on the previous experience keeps that hunger going."

Star, 2000 (Installation view)
Hiroyuki Matsukage.
Presented as part of
*Mediarena: contemporary
art from Japan (2004)*
at Govett-Brewster
Art Gallery, Aotearoa.

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You have to keep investing in those relationships and be open to conversations and where they might lead you.





Nations, 2012 (Installation view)
 N S Harsha
 Presented as part of
*Sub-Tropical Heat: New art from
 South Asia*, Govett-Brewster
 Art Gallery, Aotearoa, 2012.
 Photo by Bryan James.

Feral Clowns, 2021,
*Those who were killed in
 the caves*, 2021 and
Sermon on the Mount III,
 2020 (Installation view)
 Khadim Ali.
 Govett-Brewster
 Art Gallery, Aotearoa.
 Photo by Samuel Hartnett



The Garden of Love Is Green Without Limit, 2019
(Installation view)
Aisha Khalid.
Govett-Brewster
Art Gallery, Aotearoa, 2023.
Photo by Cheska Brown.

The Garden of Love Is Green Without Limit, 2019
(Detail)
Aisha Khalid.
Govett-Brewster
Art Gallery, Aotearoa, 2023.
Photo by Cheska Brown.



Weapon, 2003-07
(Installation view)
Yin Xiuzhen.
Govett-Brewster
Art Gallery, Aotearoa, 2010.
Photo by Bryan James.







Unlike Australia, there have been no large-scale or long-term coordinated initiatives focused on contemporary Asian arts and culture in Aotearoa, and work that is presented tends to form part of larger programmes. While this has its own advantages, including cross-pollination of audiences, it poses a challenge when it comes to ensuring work can be programmed, marketed and received to its full potential.

This is, in part, driven by factors including perceived audience interest, the lack of cross-sector collaboration, and the one-off shorter-term funding that is largely available to the sector. While both Creative New Zealand and the Asia New Zealand Foundation recognise the importance of building and maintaining relationships, there is limited support available and presentation of Asian artists and their work across Aotearoa remains patchy and unpredictable, making it hard for audiences to find what they might be looking for.

ACROSS OCEANIA: AOTEAROA

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People now are more interested in genuine stories, authentic stories in an appropriate language told by the people that are empowered to tell them, and people are connecting with that wherever they are in the world. Subtitles are no longer the handbrake they used to be for many viewers.

In Aotearoa, we've seen a range of initiatives focused on connecting with Asia, though these have been more disparate in nature, with little coordination across the industry and funding often being smaller in scope — focusing on one-off projects or collaborations or exchanges rather than larger or more long-term investments.

One of the key bodies supporting exchange is the Asia New Zealand Foundation, which focuses on New Zealanders building connections with Asia. Its dedicated arts programme has included grants, residencies and programmers' tours, with each initiative seeking to strike a balance in artists travelling both to and from Asia. The Foundation also initiated a partnership with Auckland Council to deliver the annual city-wide Lantern Festival in 2000, followed by the Diwali Festival in 2002. These now sit alongside similar festivals across the country celebrating Lunar New Year and [Diwali](#), as well as festivals funded and delivered by the Korean Consulate, including K-Festival (Auckland), K-Culture Festival (Wellington) and its programme of Korean film festivals.

Other bodies such as NZ On Air have developed [hyper-targeted programmes and grants that focus on the development of local Asian storytelling](#), contributing to a richer tapestry of work that audiences in Aotearoa are able to have access to.

Running alongside these activities is Creative New Zealand's international programme. In 2014, CNZ's international arm launched its Focus on Asia programme, an initiative focused on building stronger artistic and cultural connections with North East Asia and Singapore, including co-commissioning opportunities, residencies, travel grants, delegate tours and practitioner exchanges. "Our key goal when we launched," says Catherine George, former Senior Adviser in International Services and Initiatives at CNZ, "was to essentially establish relationships in Asia. We want New Zealand artists to operate confidently and skilfully in the region. Rather than hop in and hop out, we wanted them to really feel they could understand the context there."

As an example of how they strive to work, she mentions choreographer Moss Patterson. In 2015, when he was the Artistic Director of Atamira Dance Company, he travelled with CNZ to the performing arts market in Seoul. "While he was there, he developed a strong working relationship with Chang Mu Dance Festival's Founder and Arts Director. That was the beginning of things." He applied for the now-defunct Asia Artform Exchange programme, which supported him to work with Chang Mu Dance Company. "He went back to Korea a few times, and together they developed a work about the moon from both a Māori and Korean perspective." From there, he was funded by a programme focused on presentations in Asia. "Through all those offerings, he was able to establish relationships, work in Korea, and as part of that funding, those artists were able to come to New Zealand and show the work they created together. That was a nice circle of opportunities to engage, develop relationships and create work together."

The CNZ team recognises that this long-term, relationship-focused approach is vital, and have been working to centre this in their strategy. Eleanor Congreve, another former Senior Adviser in International Services and Initiatives at CNZ, observes that, historically, "Funding has often been more outcomes focused, around invitations to present, or be part of festivals or events." In an attempt to shift this focus, they've developed programmes like their Karangarua Global Wayfinding Programme, which includes initiatives such as Artist Tautoko, in which artists can receive mentoring or advice from international practitioners, and the long-running Te Manu Ka Tau international visitors' programme, where international festival directors, curators, programmers and potential partners or collaborators have a chance to visit and establish relationships with artists. "In response to what artists have told us would support the sustainability of their careers, we're really wanting to be flexible enough to provide opportunities for artists to have richer and deeper engagements internationally and to develop strong, lasting networks of colleagues and advocates," she says.

Previous page:
變化與恆常
Change and Constancy, 2016
Kuik Swee Boon.
Presented as part of Te Ahurei
Toi o Tāmaki Auckland Arts
Festival, Aotearoa, 2016.

It's worth noting that much of the focus at CNZ is on equipping artists in Aotearoa to travel to Asia, rather than a more reciprocal focus in which equal attention is paid to artists from across Asia travelling here. While the broader relationship-building focus builds a strong foundation for this to happen, at this stage it is not a core focus for our national arts agency.

Like CNZ, the Music Commission and Film Commission have dedicated international programmes combining grants, initiatives and delegation tours. Whereas the Music Commission is focused largely on outbound exchange, the Film Commission's model focuses more on co-production, as well as industry delegations and professional development opportunities — including co-investing with NZ On Air in the Pan-Asian Screen Collective (PASC). Its China Co-Production Development Fund (CCDF), launched in 2014, initially sought to support filmmakers working with Chinese partners on feature films and TV shows. This fund was rebranded in 2019 as the International Co-Development Fund, and expanded to cover co-productions that utilise any of New Zealand's 18 co-production arrangements — including treaties with China, Taiwan, India, Singapore and South Korea. Three co-productions — one series and two feature films — are now in the pipeline with Taiwan.

Examples of work that has come out of this are Feng Xiaogang's [Only Cloud Knows \(2019\)](#), in which a Chinese widower living in Aotearoa reflects on his relationship with his late wife, and the low-budget web-series [Korban \(2021\)](#), which follows a Singaporean sous chef trying to make it in Aotearoa. Produced during the Covid-19 pandemic, *Korban* was an unofficial co-production between Singapore and Aotearoa, and the first Mediacorp production to use remote directing for a drama series, with the Singapore team directing filming from Singapore via a digital connection.

"Prior to my arrival at the Film Commission," says Chris Payne, Head of International Relations at the New Zealand Film Commission, "the industry and the agency had largely been focused on Europe, the UK, North America and Australia. There had been some exceptions over the years, but by and large the Film Commission hadn't been particularly active in Asia." Given his background working in film and TV in Japan, this was an area he saw as important to focus on.

"It's really about trying to locate the New Zealand screen industry in the Asia Pacific," he says, especially as we are now seeing a shifting of global power. "The world, including Hollywood, has really pivoted to look at Asia as both a huge and growing box office for American content in particular, but also as a major source of talent and finance for screen production activity. We only have to look at the streamers like Netflix, Amazon, Hulu. They're all actively developing operations in Asia Pacific, creating catalogues of new local-language content within Korea, within India, within Japan." He sees that not only because of the audiences within the country, but because of their potential to travel. "The idea of linguistic specificity is no longer the kind of obstacle to an international audience that it used to be," he says. "People now are more interested in genuine stories, authentic stories in an appropriate language told by the people that are empowered to tell them, and people are connecting with that wherever they are in the world. Subtitles are no longer the handbrake they used to be for many viewers."

"I think the challenge for New Zealand is to continue to stay relevant and attractive to Asia," he says. "From a sector point of view, that's about showing producers that New Zealand is a country famous for *Lord of the Rings* and everything that entails. But it's equally celebrated for the depth of creative talent, technical innovation and storytelling that similarly attracts people as much as our locations have."

CASE STUDY. EVOLVING THE CONVERSATION: TE TUHI

As we came out of the most severe stages of the pandemic, Te Tuhi presented an exhibition called *Elsewhere and nowhere else* (2022). Curated by the gallery's International Director, Vera Mey, it called into question our definitions of 'local' and 'international', and reminded us how multiplicitous our connections to the world have become:

The closed borders during the global pandemic asserted the geographic distance and isolation of New Zealand. While the strategy of restricting who could come on and off the islands was hailed as a success in containing a public health crisis, it was conversely accompanied by heated conversations around those who chose to stay and those who left. Headlines in local newspapers reverted to disturbing dichotomies between being local or international as if they were different sides of different coins. Despite this simplistic binary in positioning, our entanglement with an 'out there' is much more complicated.

We're told: "What binds the artists in this exhibition together is everything and nothing." Featuring work by artists Kah Bee Chow, Li-Ming Hu and Yuk King Tan, Vera talks about the diaspora of New Zealanders who no longer live in the country. "I thought about Asian New Zealanders and the way that when they leave New Zealand, there is this kind of awkwardness around how they position themselves.

"They don't sit comfortably as someone more entrenched in a 'New Zealand' framework and they may have lived away from Asia for a long time. So I was interested in bringing together three artists who are quite active internationally and still have connections to both Asia and New Zealand. That, for me, was an attempt to destabilise this awkward division between the international and the local, and to do that really consciously by looking at three Asian New Zealand artists and how they don't necessarily fit comfortably within either of those terminologies, but should also be considered on both terms."

Vera also consciously avoided using the word 'Asian' in this exhibition. "It was so obvious, anyway," she says. "But I also wanted to think about a maturing of that conversation. Sometimes these terminologies can be quite restrictive in terms of how we're expected to perform within them. I wanted to open that up and toy with those ideas a bit."



Te Tuhi describes itself as a platform for contemporary art. Executive Director Hiraani Himona (Ngāi Te Whatuiāpiti, Ngāti Rangiwahakāewa, Ngāti Hikarara) says, "One of the things we've always focused on is whose voices are not being heard elsewhere, as well as who is around us."

Located in Pakuranga, the gallery sits in an area that is home to the largest Asian population in the country. "When James McCarthy and I were working on the programme at Te Tuhi," reflects former Senior Curator Bruce E. Phillips, "we had been really aware that the southeast of Auckland was becoming increasingly of an Asian demographic."

In 2014, Bruce was selected — along with Jamie Hanton and Charlotte Huddleston — to be part of an Asia New Zealand Foundation curators' tour, which would take them through Korea, Japan and Taiwan. "There's kind of no hope for an organisation the scale of Te Tuhi to be able to fund a research trip like that," he says. "It just wouldn't happen. The stakes would be a lot higher as well, whereas with this the pressure was off slightly."

As a direct result of the tour, the three curators developed an exhibition featuring artists from Taiwan and Aotearoa, building on research exploring the genetic links between Māori and the Indigenous people of Taiwan. *These stories began before we arrived* (2015) was presented first in Taipei and then in Tāmaki Makaurau. "The opportunity came up through a meeting we had with the New Zealand Commerce and Industry Office," he recalls. "They informed us New Zealand was the country of honour that year for the Taipei International Book Exhibition, which is the largest book fair in Asia. But there was no visual art component for that." They were invited to develop an exhibition to fill this gap.

Without the tour, the exhibition would not have happened — not simply for the conversations that would have never taken place, but because of their newfound familiarity with Taiwan. "We had met so many great artists that we could easily put an exhibition together within a short space of time. I think it was five months, maybe less, even. So we worked with artists that we had met through that tour, and we had support from some of the galleries we had met in terms of overcoming some language barriers."

A DIFFERENT WAY OF WORKING

Bruce's advice for those embarking on a similar project for the first time is not to underestimate the amount of time you might need to communicate with one another, and to ensure you're all on the same page.

“There can be really big cultural differences as well,” adds Vera. “Without essentialising, things are done really differently in Asia.” She mentions a number of projects she is currently working on. “All the communication is via WhatsApp. There’s no emailing involved. So the terms of engagement change a lot. So does the pace. Nothing happens for a long period, and then all of a sudden it happens all at once.”

Channels of communication can also be hierarchical within institutions. “You might meet someone over Instagram and build a relationship that way, rather than asserting yourself from a particular institution — that institutional leverage can be a hindrance, because if you want to communicate on a more grounded level, suddenly your job title might mean you can’t talk to a specific person, or you have to go through the official channels.” There are other everyday examples where hierarchy needs to be considered. “Sometimes what seems benign, like not copying the right people into an email, can become a problem.”

There are also differences when it comes to engaging with institutions that are worth keeping in mind. “The institutions that are critically reputable are not necessarily governmental or public,” she says. “The most interesting work is often happening at a grassroots level and through independent initiatives, so assumptions that we might revert to in terms of standards of taste or validation are also askew. It takes a while to get used to that difference.”

She also speaks about how fundamental good relationships are in enabling these projects to succeed. “A lot of it is reliant on relations of loyalty and commitment that can only be fostered through being there and carving out the time,” she observes. “It’s much harder to build that trust via distance, without the decorum of hospitality that’s important in a lot of Asian cultures — you know, showing up, being hospitable back.” But it’s through building these relationships that the conversations become more complex, more nuanced and more exciting.

“It just so happens that there has been a more recent focus in the contemporary art world on Asia, particularly Southeast Asia,” says Vera. She sees it as a maturing of the discourse. “It’s moving away from this 2000s focus on China, Japan and Korea and thinking through other models in the region, and other sorts of exhibition formats that are more collectively focused and interested in ideas around reparation and social justice, and a destabilising of the institutional format of museums and galleries. They are quite different to what we’ve been experiencing in the art world for the past 20 or 30 years,” she says. “And the art world? They’re seeing that as a new mode to engage with.”

Becoming a different person,
2011 (Installation view)
Teng Chao-Ming.
Photo by David Straight.





Nine mountains, 2019
Yuk King Tan.
Photo by Sam Hartnett.



“

Sometimes these terminologies can be quite restrictive in terms of how we're expected to perform within them. I wanted to open that up and toy with those ideas a bit.

CASE STUDY. CHALLENGING ASSUMPTIONS: AUCKLAND ARTS FESTIVAL

Over the past two decades — since its inception in 2003 — Auckland Arts Festival has presented 41 works from Asian countries, with these spanning a range of genres. “The Asia Pacific region is of intense relevance to us,” says its Artistic Director, Shona McCullagh. This is partly due to the demographic, but also due to a desire to create strong intellectual and cultural connections between Aotearoa and Asia.

“Asia is becoming a much more relevant territory, politically and economically, and it is continuing to expand its cultural footprint in the transition from traditional art forms to the melding of contemporary and traditional to the extremely contemporary.” Sustainability is also a factor in this thinking. “Because of climate change, [Asia] is going to become even more important,” she says. “I think we’re going to see a real shift from the Eurocentric model of international festival presentation to a more localised and proximal presentation.”

CATERING TO TĀMAKI MAKĀURAU

As one of the most multicultural cities in the world, with a significant Asian population, creating a festival for Tāmaki Makaurau is no small undertaking. “I’ve been really fascinated with what Auckland audiences are interested in,” says Shona. “I think one of the most interesting challenges — but also opportunities — is not to assume that because you’re putting on Asian work, that you’re going to attract a particular Asian audience. It’s been proven time and time again that it takes a lot more than that.”

“In this most recent [2023] Festival,” she offers as an example, “I presented *Samulnori!*, a Korean singing and drumming group, and the audience was predominantly Pākehā.” Reflecting on this, she says it might be due to “many New Zealanders’ perceptions of Asia — we still tend to think of it as traditional forms.” Finding ways to challenge these perceptions through the presentation of contemporary voices is something she is interested in, though she also speaks to the challenges in finding that work. Regardless, “It’s really rewarding to introduce New Zealand audiences to high-quality work from across Asia.”

TAKING THE FIRST STEP

While travelling and meeting people is important, it's not always possible — but there are many other ways to start. "One of the most powerful programming tools is word of mouth," says Shona. While it's not always necessary to see the work in person, she emphasises that it helps. Shona received an Asia New Zealand Foundation travel grant that allowed her to travel for two and a half weeks through Taiwan. "To actually go and meet people in situ was a totally different experience and hugely valuable — to see the way they were in their own territories and their own art spaces, and the relationship between the architecture of the art spaces and the art that was being put in it."

She's also learned from the mistakes of others, inheriting the experiences of the ghosts of Festivals past. "There was a project where two choreographers were brought together," she recalls, "one from Singapore and one from New Zealand. And it wasn't an easy fit. I think I learned a lot from observing that it can be a really treacherous pathway to just assume two artists are going to present a double bill together and everything is going to be tickety boo." As a result, she's less likely to do the same. "If I am looking at any kind of collaborative process, I hope that it would come from the artists themselves or a producer might come and bring a project to me, because that relationship is already authentic rather than superimposed."

How artists are hosted is important, too. "I think the manaakitanga of a festival and a venue is really, really important," she says. "It's the process of the pōwhiri, the sharing of kai, ensuring they have a driver who is warm and friendly, and finding connections for them." One of the most valuable lessons she's learned through her work is not assuming the existence of a relationship. "If you, as a Kiwi, go to Japan, you don't know about all the networks of New Zealanders there. So not making assumptions that a Korean artist will know the Korean community, you know, they're starting from scratch, and you want to ensure there's more time given in that space."

Asia is a place that excites her, and it's a place that she's found to be increasingly accessible. "In terms of scale," she adds, "there's just such a huge range, from intimate solo works to larger companies. And a lot of it really is very affordable, particularly with the Asia New Zealand Foundation being a supportive partner." She encourages other programmers to continue to recognise and challenge any biases they might unconsciously have, too. "It's important that there isn't an assumption that New Zealanders don't want to see Asian work," she says. "They're really curious."

A BRIGHTER FUTURE

"We still have a long way to go," Shona says, pointing to initiatives like OzAsia Festival and Asia TOPA in Australia. "They've spent years doing labs and developing relationships between Australian artists and Asian artists, and giving them time to magnetise together, creating the right dynamic and genuine interest between artists."

It's something she'd love to see more of here, and she considers it a responsibility that the sector at large should hold. "I really feel that festivals here in New Zealand could create more opportunities for visiting Asian artists to come and make work, and start to develop relationships with local community and local artists." It's also important that these aren't one-offs. "I think that in order to continue to meet the appetite for contemporary work from Asia, it's not enough just once a year. I think there are myriad ways, when we look at it, of how we continue to bring really interesting work to New Zealand."

À Ố Làng Phố
Tuấn Lê.
Presented as part of
Te Ahurei Toi o Tāmaki
Auckland Arts Festival,
Aotearoa, 2018.





CASE STUDY. THE OPEN DOOR: SCAPE PUBLIC ART

"It was really those curatorial tours," says Jamie Hanton, former Managing Curator at SCAPE (2020–22). He's talking about the Asia New Zealand Foundation tours. "They were such an amazing thing. Everybody wanted to go on those tours."

For Jamie, they were the stepping stone to a deeper relationship with Asia. "Everything was so well planned and programmed," he says. "And it made such a difference having a local in every country we went to, a guide who was au fait with the scene there. They gave us a really excellent overview of the ecology and the systems and all of those sociopolitical things that you need to be briefed on — funding and private–public partnerships, for example, but also just having someone on the ground to answer all of those questions and make introductions really easily." He pauses. "That was the door. That was the open door."

As Managing Curator at SCAPE through the most intensive pandemic years, Jamie attributes his success and his ability to work with a range of artists from across Asia to opportunities such as the curators' tour, which he attended in 2014. "It felt like anything was possible during that tour," he says. A big part of that was because there was no expected outcome beyond immersing yourself in the country and building new relationships. "There was never an emphasis on making it transactional," he says. "It was really an orientation into the whole environment. And it was also really great to spend a concentrated amount of time with your own colleagues as well, looking at things through their eyes and their perspectives."

As part of the tour, they visited the Gwangju Biennale, and when Jamie returned to Aotearoa he made plans to go back for the next one. "So I applied to the Asia New Zealand Foundation to do a shorter research trip." At that point, he was the Director of The Physics Room, and they had established an exchange with a studio in Seoul that he wanted to visit. But he also found he was able to tie into those networks he had built on the previous visit, and those networks introduced him to new people, and new spaces. "I also know Yona [Lee] quite well," he adds, "and she happened to be in one of the adjacent studios, so it was a really lovely serendipity."

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

During his time at SCAPE, Jamie commissioned a new work by Korean artist Bona Park, *The Circular Ruins* (2021). "It was a non-visual, sensory exploration of urban environments," he says, "so I thought it was a perfect match for Christchurch, post-quake."

He also organised the presentation of three other works, *Nabuqi's Destination* (2021) and YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES' *THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES* and *CHANGE YOUR CAREER!* (2022), which he encountered at the Venice Biennale and Seoul Mediacity respectively.

There were certain challenges inherent in working with international artists while the borders were closed, but he reflects on the fact that both YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES and Bona Park had travelled to Aotearoa previously. "There had already been these fruitful connections that made it so much easier to work with them, because they knew a little bit about the context and practice that was going on here. And they knew those keystone organisations, and other artists, and that made cross-cultural understanding a lot smoother."

He found this essential to building trust, particularly as he was delivering each project on the artist's behalf. Having visited himself was also key to this. "You do need to understand the context in which something is being made in order to be able to exhibit it and present it in another place. You also need to understand what it means to the artists. You have to make sure that you understand where they're coming from." He acknowledges that you can do this without going there physically, but that it can be harder.

"I was mindful of assuring them that there was resourcing," he adds. "I know that, especially in South Korea, you can make anything happen. You can make things happen in a week, things are done incredibly quickly. Things are a lot slower in Aotearoa, and more expensive. And the resourcing and the planning needs to reflect that."

He gives the example of being shown around by Yona in Seoul. "She walked me through the steelworker district, and it was just like, you could get different parts from any one of 10 shops that were right next to one another. It was like, oh my gosh. You just can't do that here. It's a lot slower and harder."

THE DESTINATION, THE PAYOFF

"I don't know if it was a combination of the post-Covid-19 environment, or that people's exposure to international work had been reduced," says Jamie, reflecting on the presentations that took place in 2021 and 2022, "but I found that people were really hungry for international work, and especially work from Asia."

For his generation — those who grew up in the '80s and '90s — he observes there is an existing affinity and connection that is easy to build on. "It feels like a very natural extension of the conversations we're having in Aotearoa, but from fresh perspectives — same same, but different." Describing the audience, he says there was excitement and enthusiasm, but also reflection: "Thinking about those connections, and how materials travel, and — more than anything — how ideals travel. And," he says, "how they change."



“

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Destination, 2018
Nabuqi.
Image courtesy of the artist
and SCAPE Public Art.



THE OPPORTUNITIES

Aotearoa has the chance to harness this growing interest in Asian arts and culture. The key? A long-term vision that allows us to not only keep up with the multiplicity of nuanced conversations taking place across Asia, but to be part of them too. This means prioritising relationship-building with artists and arts organisations, and developing a culturally informed approach that doesn't underestimate — but instead journeys alongside — audiences, providing opportunities to deepen our collective intercultural fluencies.

69



Invest in a long-term vision that places relationships at the heart

When events like the Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) and the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts (Asia TOPA) were set up in Australia, they were built on a shared belief in the importance of the works they were presenting: works that sought to capture contemporary conversations across Asia for a broad Australian audience, keeping citizens connected to the region through artistic experience.

"It's a snapshot that gives our audiences an idea of what is exciting and new in Asia," says Annette Shun Wah, Artistic Director of [OzAsia Festival](#). "In terms of arts practice, but also the things that people are concerned about and really affected by. What are the works that show their particular way of exploring or interrogating those things? I think that's really interesting because that gives Australian audiences an insight into what is different, or what is the same, in our neighbouring countries."

To invest in this vision is to invest in those relationships. This includes investing in people travelling to Asia to meet and spend time with practitioners and see their work — which in turn may develop into commissioning work, developing collaborative models, or working with artists in a more meaningful way that extends beyond a financial transaction.

Critically, a parachute approach does not work in this context. "If someone is coming for an exhibition for three days and flies away, it makes no sense," says Tobias Berger, former Head of Arts at Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong. "That doesn't establish connections and friendships long term." He points [towards a three-month residency they ran last year in partnership with the Asia Society Switzerland](#), embedding a young Swiss curator at Tai Kwun. "She met everybody, she went to all the openings, and then she went back and the first thing she did was to invite the Hong Kong participant for Venice to talk at her institution. And she invited one of the people that ran one of those small artist-run spaces to give a talk, she actually gave them a platform they would never have had in Hong Kong. It's about friendships and connections."

"You need time to get to know each other," agrees Kyu Choi, Artistic Director of Seoul Performing Arts Festival. "Understanding each other, building up relationships, and researching local contexts are important. If you skip these parts, you're always in trouble."

Within this vision is an opportunity to recognise the connections we have within our own borders, too. "You need both," says Annette. "[OzAsia Festival] is framed by the cultural engagement of Australia and Asia. Its purpose is to look at those connections and to do something meaningful with the way those two geographical areas connect." At the core of this? "Connecting with Asian thinking — and artists within Australia are very much part of that." It's a shift in mindset that expands what we mean when we say 'Asia'. "Chinese Australian work, for example, will reflect something of your reality as an Australian audience member that an imported Chinese work will not. It's a different perspective. It comes from a different place. And I think you need both for a festival like mine."

"Engagement with the diaspora is really, really important," agrees international arts consultant and cultural policy researcher Grey Yeoh. "If there is a festival that really wants to present Asian art, gone are the days where we think about presenting an Asian work and when it arrives at your shore, it's still your really stereotypical, you know, Bunraku from Japan, or other classical drumming troupes from East Asia. That's not what the younger diasporic community wants to see. That's what people at the top think we want to see."

“New Zealand has this amazing number of Asian [art] students coming in and then leaving again,” adds Tobias. “I know a lot of these students, and I’m sure most of them are now back in Asia. Is there a way for universities and curators to make sure that these ties that are already existing don’t get lost? Because if they’re studying at Elam, we know already that they’re ambitious, smart, creative — otherwise they wouldn’t be from somewhere in Asia, coming to one of the best art schools in the world.”

In addition to building relationships with artists and local communities, building relationships with people whose recommendations you trust is critical as well. “Find the artistic curators and leaders whose vision is bigger than their own practice,” says Stephen Armstrong, founding Creative Director of the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts (Asia TOPA), “who have a relationship with the world. And I don’t mean the West, but internationally.” He talks about his experience with Indonesia, which he considers the most ‘exciting’ site for collaboration for him. “The Indonesian artists I’ve worked with have been really passionate about putting a more pluralist vision of contemporary Indonesia into the international mindset. When you’re working with people like that, they’re not pushing their own practice. They have a deeply layered and complex relationship with their territory and their culture.”

This deeper approach to working with artists has always existed but is increasingly considered the preferred way of working. Reflecting this are initiatives that are increasingly savvy to an international audience. Two recent examples, both launched in 2021, are [the NEW BUND 31 Young Creator Program](#) — a funding initiative supporting the development of new work, presented by NEW BUND 31 (Shanghai) in partnership with the Edinburgh Fringe — and the trans-cultural [Asia Connection: Producers Camp \(ACPC\)](#), an incubator for producers from across Asia that features workshops, presentations and funding. In its first year, producers were supported by international leaders such as Farooq Chaudhry (Akram Khan Company), Ong Ken Sen (Maxim Gorki Theater), Alistair Spalding (Sadler’s Wells) and Annette Shun Wah (OzAsia Festival), culminating in a pitch session where [four projects were selected for development or co-production](#) for presentation in 2023 with the founding partners, Taiwan’s National Theater and Concert Hall (NTCH), Singapore’s Esplanade — Theatres on the Bay, South Korea’s National Theater of Korea, and Japan’s Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre.

The driving force underpinning ACPC hasn’t been to simply create work for audiences across Asia, but to support work reaching a Western audience. “National Theater started this platform not just because they wanted to themselves,” says artist and producer Betsy Lan, who acted as an observer on the programme, “but because they were getting demands from their European partners for Asian work.”

This approach means artists and producers in Asia are proactively grappling with ideas such as [“using Asian curatorial concepts and ideas at European arts festivals”](#) and [“How to deal with colonial frameworks like ‘Theater’ or ‘Asia?’”](#) at the point of conception, while centring and developing a strong and uncompromising voice: one that, based on the commissioned works, seeks to advance an emerging language for contemporary performance.



IBUIBU BELU:
Bodies of Borders
Ekosdance Company.
Photo by David Gesuri.

At the same time, there is still room for partnership rather than focusing on tour-ready works. "I would encourage festival directors to not just pick up shows that are ready to tour, but to actively collaborate," says Grey. Many of the arts sectors across Southeast Asia are still growing. "It's exciting because of all its experimentation, because it is deeply political, deeply meaningful, and deeply community based. It's also really ripe for collaboration with international artists to add layers and a global perspective, making the work much richer, with the work then going on to be presented in both countries and beyond."

His advice? "Come to Asia. Come to Southeast Asia." He laughs. "I say this in jest, but also do it while the exchange rate is good, and while the cost is still relatively cheap." He cites a reciprocal visual arts residency Creative Australia have funded from Australia for AU\$15,000 (NZ\$16,000) per artist. "We were talking about doing residences in Australia, and how that amount of money might buy you about three or four weeks' worth of time in Australia. And when we talked to one of the reciprocal host organisations in Thailand, the host's eyes just went completely big, and they said that AU\$15,000, when converted into Thai baht, was a year's salary for their arts manager, and, for that much, the artist could stay there for six months." He emphasises the rising strengths of different Asian currencies. "Costs might still be quite low, but in the next 10 or 15 years, it won't be as cost-efficient anymore. So if there's an opportunity to actually come and see work and collaborate with artists? Now is the time."

START TO WHERE

If you're looking to work with an artist in an Asian country for the first time, knowing where to start can feel daunting, laden with questions you may not necessarily be aware of, let alone have the answers to.

For a broader overview, arts markets are a good place to start, particularly if you're interested in performance — places such as the [Yokohama Performing Arts Market \(YPAM\)](#), [Performing Arts Market Seoul \(PAMS\)](#) and [China Shanghai International Arts Festival Performing Arts Fair \(ChinaSPAF\)](#). For visual arts, there are major art fairs such as [Frieze Seoul](#) and [Art Basel Hong Kong](#), which can give you an introductory overview of the more prominent artists operating across the region, but many find the major biennials and triennials across the region more valuable, including the [Kochi-Muziris Biennale](#), [Gwangju Biennale](#) and [Taipei Biennial](#).

"If you want to discover a young artist, it's good to go to YPAM," says Yoshiji Yokoyama, Dramaturg and Programmer of SPAC-Shizuoka Performing Arts Center and Tokyo Festival. "Or Tokyo Festival. Kyoto Experiment is a festival focused on experimental artists, so if you are interested in that, go there. Kyoto Experiment and Tokyo Festival are in October and November, and Toyooka Festival is on in this period as well, so coming at this time means you can visit three festivals in the same period. It's a good season in Japan. And if you can stay till December, you can come for YPAM."

"Each of those markets is a particular kind of event where you can see work and meet producers, as well as fellow presenters, and really get a sense of what's available, what people are into," says OzAsia Festival's Annette Shun Wah. She suggests taking part in some of their online events to start. "By attending some of those, you'll get to see what the trends are, and what people are thinking and talking about, and you'll meet some people too." From there, she suggests choosing "a couple of venues or a couple of festivals that are most like what you want to be doing with your programming."

It's also worth noting their differences compared to their Western counterparts. "With the exception of China, the performing arts festivals in Asia still tend to be smaller, in numbers as well as performances, compared to the Edinburghs and the Avignons," says international arts consultant and policy researcher Grey Yeoh. This can mean they are less overwhelming, and offer a slower pace in which to meet people. The works are often at a different stage in their presentation readiness, too. "A lot of the work is usually not tour-ready yet, so festival directors and presenters need to be able to think about how this interesting work that you're seeing in Asia can work contextually back at your festival, perhaps with some slight dramaturgical support. And more often than not, these artists are also very open to changing some of the forms or the formats in order to tour to international festivals."

Another question worth asking yourself, suggests Seoul Performing Arts Festival's Kyu Choi, is how safe you want to be. "Do you want to connect with humans, or do you want to connect with infrastructure?" He sees a move away from reliance simply on these mega-events, with smaller platforms framed about different themes coming to the fore, exploring ideas around disability, queerness and feminism.

"We've seen a lot of non-profit spaces coming back [to Hong Kong]," adds Tobias Berger, former Head of Art at Tai Kwun Contemporary. "I think it has to do with the National Security Law. There are 10 [non-profit spaces] now, all opened in the last 18 months, all in places you wouldn't expect." He sees it as a network to move into. "They are the next generation. They are who will be running the institutions in the future. You won't see them in art fairs, or in magazines. But it changes the way that we in Hong Kong navigate contemporary art. It changes not only how we communicate, but also curate."

It's worth recognising that not all countries have markets, though there are events and festivals that showcase a wide expanse of work. In Indonesia, there are the biennales, and art centres such as Salihara. In Taiwan, Betsy Lan recommends festivals such as the [Taipei Arts Festival](#) and [Taiwan International Festival of Arts](#), as well as specialised programmes such as the [Weiwuying Circus Platform](#) and the [Taiwan Dance Platform](#), and awards such as the [Taishin Art Award](#). "This is one of the very few arts awards in Taiwan," she says. "They only give three awards. One is the Visual Arts Award, the other is the Performing Arts Award, and the third is the Annual Grand Prize — the best of the year. So it could be performing arts, visual arts, or interdisciplinary works." In Singapore, there is the [Singapore International Festival of Arts](#) and its [Biennale](#) (in 2022 named 'Natasha'). In Thailand, there is the [Bangkok Theatre Festival](#), the [Bangkok Art Biennale](#), [Bangkok International Children's Theatre Festival](#) and the [Thai Theatre Foundation](#).

Grey recommends the biennial Indonesian Dance Festival (IDF) in particular. "The reason why I say it is interesting is that while they will feature up to four international works to be presented on their main stage, IDF also has a separate component to highlight up-and-coming Southeast Asian dancer-choreographers called the Kampana project... this is where you can go and see not just established headliners, but the experimental bright young ones."

Understand the worldviews and sociopolitical contexts in which artists are working — and consider the way you might collaborate with them accordingly

The greatest opportunity we have in Aotearoa is to build international relationships, informed by cultural context, in order to develop meaningful exchange. Key to this is deepening our intercultural fluency, our ability to understand different world views, different ways of doing, and the different sociopolitical and arts funding contexts that artists are working within. This foundation isn't always built. "In some cases," reflects artist and producer Betsy Lan, "[presenters and collaborators] have not been familiar with the country, or the cultural context, or even the arts production context of that country."

Reflecting on partnerships he has seen work, Grey Yeoh observes that successful partnerships tend to be longer collaborative processes, starting with collective cultural training for all parties and with a shared commitment to flexibility. "There's a lot of learning and sharing. It breaks away a lot of stereotypes that people have about each other's country or each other's art practices. And when it's brought to the audience as well, then you can see audience members also realising that, oh, [for example], Indian contemporary art isn't what we thought it would be."

Deepening cultural fluency might start with creating ongoing space to understand one another's worldviews and ways of doing. "Things like filial piety, removing your shoes when entering someone's home. The fact that most Asian business conversations take place around food, so even if you're going to a business meeting, you can expect to be served tea or cakes and snacks. Or really practical things, like if you're in a country that's predominantly Muslim, don't start your show at 7.30pm because that's prayer time. In Indonesia, and in Malaysia, there's this thing called rubber timing, so don't get offended when things don't start on time. Or in Indonesia, if you're at a grand local exhibition opening, don't be surprised if the artists choose to sit on the floor, that's what they're comfortable with."

At a practical level, this also includes understanding the funding environment, including the timing of funding cycles, as well as censorship regulations in which artists are operating. All these factors need to be taken into account when building relationships. "You have to recognise the uneven resources and the different power dynamics," says Betsy.

Even when a country may appear to have funding, understanding how those funds operate on the ground is critical. The funding system in China is a good example. "If you are a big organisation, state-owned or strongly backed by the government," explains independent curator and producer Lynn Fu, "you'll receive money from the government every year... they'll also separately apply for the China National Arts Fund, and a lot of projects that do apply are for propaganda-related projects. I personally don't know anyone who is an independent artist who has ever received money from that fund."

Similarly, there is only limited funding in Indonesia. "Last year, there were some funds that were specifically targeting women and other marginalised groups in society," says independent curator Sadiyah Boonstra. "The issue with the government is that the funds are not that big, and the communication about them is not always super clear. It's also not really transparent." It's worth noting, too, that a dedicated government agency for arts and culture was only formed in 2015.

South Korea, by contrast, has a more established funding system but international funding is offered only once a year, with applications submitted in October and decisions as late as February. "This inevitably shapes ways of working," says Kyu Choi.

Understanding and addressing these financial inequalities in a co-production or commissioning context is just the first step: it's also about how those power dynamics have the potential to flow into every aspect of the relationship. "There are conversations that people are reluctant to have because they're being polite, because they are not speaking their first language, because they're intimidated, because they're fearful of losing the opportunity," says Stephen Armstrong. "You have to be really sensitive to the fact that it's rarely an even playing field."

"It's super common for Thai people to avoid debates," says Sasapin Siriwanij, Artistic Director of Bangkok International Performing Arts Meeting (BIPAM). This avoidance is a cultural value common across many Southeast and East Asian countries, in particular. "People don't feel they can just engage in a conversation anytime. You have to invite them."

"How do we create mechanisms that enable efficient communication," asks Betsy, "and not make them feel like they're on a different level, or being looked down on because of these different dynamics?"

These different ways of working can surface unpredictably at every step of the relationship. "Generally, I think artists who are accustomed to touring know Western ways of working," says Yoshiji Yokoyama. "Often the issue is that we work so much. Especially during an international tour — if necessary — we work from 10am to 10pm. But sometimes it's not so easy to have enough technical staff for those hours. You have two shifts of staff to cover it."

Being cognisant of the different settings in which art is produced and consumed is also important. "Sometimes the work is just so far removed from the lived reality in which we create," adds Sadiah. "The dancers that we worked with in Belu — which is on the border of Indonesia and Timor Leste — we never practised in a theatre. There is no theatre. We would practice outside, under a roof, or in a big conference building. So when we first came to Jakarta, to Salihara for a residency, that was the first time the girls were in an actual theatre. They've been performing their whole lives, but never in a theatre. In that world, the theatre is very artificial, and that's something that's hard to grasp for people who work in professional theatre settings... So every step of the way needs to be negotiated."

Annette Shun Wah describes a collaboration in Australia that had been very successful but had been compromised by conflict "between creatives from two very different artistic cultures." The crux? "The idea of who had the final say. Questions of authorship had been in contention throughout the entire process. The director came from a place where the director has the final say over everything. But the playwright came from a place where the playwright is contractually protected and you cannot change their play without their consent."

Details as small as food are also important. "Indonesian people need to eat rice," Sadiah laughs. "Sometimes they can't eat anything else. So there needs to be a rice cooker or access to rice." She notes that while this may seem minor, it can have a huge impact. "Once the dancers feel uncomfortable in the setting in which they're supposed to be performing, it throws them off their game."



Parhelion, 2021.
(Installation view)
Syagini Ratna Wulan.
Presented as part of
QAGOMA — The 10th Asia
Pacific Triennial of
Contemporary Art (APT10),
Australia, 2021-2022.
Photo by Joe Ruckli.

Ultimately, the issue can be as fundamental as understanding what we mean when we use words such as 'arts' or 'creativity'. "The issue of taxonomy is extremely significant," says Prateek Kukreja, a former Fellow at the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER). "Occupations and industries that are generally deemed as 'creative' for New Zealand or any other country for that matter may not be as 'creative' for India, and vice versa."

There are even questions within this of who gets to define art. "There's no arts policy in Thailand," says Sasapin. "And what the government thinks and calls arts are only traditional arts, and the arts they can sell for tourism. That's been the case for as long as I can remember, and it's not changing."

The way in which cultural tourism is shaping pathways to sustainable careers is having a significant impact, not only on artists but in how visitors might understand their work. Across Southeast Asia, many cultural practices are often used in tourism campaigns. "We see artists and their performances being used on billboards or promotional videos," says Grey, "But when you come and see it in situ, it can be quite different. So whether it's authentic or not is an issue a lot of arts and culture workers in these countries are grappling with right now: What does it mean to sanitise your performance and your traditional art for the sake of tourists?"

While there are challenges, navigating these collaborations has immense rewards. "Collaboration is never neat, and I think that's the beauty of it," says Grey. "It's messy, and you find the beauty in the messiness."

CONSIDER THE CONVERSATIONS THAT ARTISTS ACROSS ASIA ARE HAVING — OR NOT HAVING

There are so many urgent conversations taking place across Asia — some more visible from across the ocean than others. “It’s also why Asia is still so interesting,” says Tobias Berger, “because of the transformation. Transformation always brings out some kind of energy and some kind of discussion.”

“Hong Kong was always a very critical place to discuss freedom of speech,” he adds. “The artists took that as far as they liked. But with the new rules and regulations, we have changes. You have limits on what’s possible or not.” He recognises that’s true in every country, “but the challenge at the moment for artists and curators is the change, and how we accommodate that change.”

In Thailand, we’ve seen a change since the latest coup d’état of the military. “The country has dimmed,” says Sasapin Siriwanij, Artistic Director of Bangkok International Performing Arts Meeting (BIPAM). “It’s changing because we have harsher policies, there’s more censorship — it isn’t in the law, but you’ll be visited if you talk about some things.”

In Japan, public investment from the ‘90s has significantly shaped the work being presented, leading to what Yoshiji Yokoyama, Dramaturg and Programmer of SPAC-Shizuoka Performing Arts Center and Tokyo Festival, describes as ‘public-sector natives’ who have grown accustomed to work being publicly funded. “This influences a lot of the work,” he observes. “Until the ‘80s, the fundamental position of the artist was anti-governmental. But our young artists are very conscious of the public-ness of their work, and sometimes it looks somehow safer than previous generations.” While, officially, freedom of expression is respected, “We know the governmental funding doesn’t want to support artistic works that explore certain politically controversial issues.”

Some artists still do make work like this, but he recognises that it is complicated and delicate. “At the Aichi Triennale, there were works that dealt with the issue of the Japanese Emperor as well as people treated as ‘comfort women’ during the wartime.” He’s referring here to Kim Seo-kyung and Kim Eun-sung’s *Statue of a Girl of Peace* (2011), a life-size sculpture representing the *ianfu* or ‘comfort women’: the approximately 200,000 women in Korea, China, and across Asia who were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II — controversial because, while the Japanese government has issued several apologies, including monetary compensation, it has also subsequently disputed the scale and nature of the allegations.

Presented at the Aichi Prefecture Museum of Art under the banner *After ‘Freedom of Expression’?* — bringing together a range of works that had previously been censored — it received more than 700 complaints on the day the show opened, including a threat that the Museum would be burned down. “There were many attempts to stop this exhibition,” says Yoshiji. Takashi Kawamura, the Mayor of Nagoya, stood behind this, saying the work “tramples on the feelings of Japanese citizens.” The exhibition closed down after three days.

“There are some Japanese people,” reflects Yoshiji, “who don’t want public money to support artistic works that provoke political issues.” As the Mayor himself stated at the time: “Freedom of expression has a certain limit.”

In Indonesia, art is still very political, though curator Sadiyah Boonstra notes that after the fall of Suharto in 1998 “there’s less necessity for artists to criticise the current regime,” but there is still a lot of work, “for example, against the colonisation of West Papua, the remembrance of the mass violence of 1965 against alleged communists, and the anti-Chinese violence that erupted here during the 1998 transition of power.” While these matters are high on the agenda, she also notes that many artists are connecting to global discourses, around issues like sustainability, climate change and the fight for equality.

Perhaps most interesting in an Asia-Aotearoa context is the exploration of Indigeneity. “It’s a common artistic language that is shared between Taiwan and New Zealand,” says Betsy Lan, and one that spans across other places in Asia, to different degrees of visibility.

“Korea is very different,” says Kyu Choi, Artistic Director of Seoul Performing Arts Festival. “In Australia and New Zealand, there were Indigenous people before Western people invaded. But though Korea was colonised by Japan for a certain time, Korea is now very homogenous, and there is a strong desire to preserve Korean traditional culture. This creates a conflict in how we preserve and how we develop — and what does that mean for contemporary work?” He describes a collaboration with a group of *pansori* singers who took part in a creative residency called <Sound+: Pansori> 15 years ago. “They were really afraid to change or transform the original approach, either because they thought it would get them in trouble with their masters and professors, or they felt it should be preserved as it was.”

“But in the last 10 years, there has been a big development in traditional art forms, especially music and the performing arts, where tradition is reinterpreted and deconstructed into contemporary art forms.” He sees this as a place where collaborations between First Nations artists and Korean traditional artists feel especially exciting.

Arts consultant and policy researcher Grey Yeoh is already seeing this happen in Australia. He reflects on his former work at the Australia Council for the Arts. “We have spoken to a lot of First Nations artists and First Nations elders who really want to see what’s going on with Indigenous arts and Indigenous culture in Southeast Asia — in Borneo, in the Philippines, in Thailand, in Cambodia — and to potentially collaborate as well.” He notes, however, that a lot of Southeast Asian Indigenous communities have been historically minoritised, “and we don’t see a lot of funding and support given to these communities, making it difficult for these Indigenous cultures to be sustained — preventing the people from being given a voice and self-determination when compared to the Australian First Peoples.”

This is a point echoed by Yoshiji. “One issue in Japan at the moment is that Indigenous cultures are not so visible. Ainu or Okinawan people’s issues are not discussed so much in the contemporary art field.” It’s starting to change, though not without controversy. In 2020, the Upopoy National Ainu Museum in Hokkaido opened: the first national museum in Japan to centre the Indigenous Ainu people. This comes after more than a century of colonial assimilation policies, leading to the recent passing of the 2019 Ainu Recognition Bill, the first legal acknowledgement of the Ainu as the Indigenous people of Japan.

“It’s very problematic,” he continues. “In Japan, still, many Ainu people don’t speak about their origin.” He hesitates. “This atmosphere is changing. There have been many movements against the discrimination of Ainu people. The Japanese government tried to really... incorporate the Ainu people into the Japanese people. They became more or less invisible, at the time. And now we are rediscovering a bit about this culture.”

“It is reasonable to say that promoting diversity has not been much considered in Japan’s policy discussion,” writes Koichi Iwabuchi in [the discussion paper ‘Cool Japan, Creative Industries and Diversity’](#). “The Cool Japan initiatives even suppress existing cultural diversity... Cool Japan’s pursuit of narrow national interests propagates the idea that the nation functions as a unit of cultural diversity in the world, but does not seriously engage with socio-cultural democratisation of the kind that does justice to hitherto marginalised voices and differences in society.”

Yet it’s through artistic experience that many of these conversations can be had most powerfully. “Existing vitally in the world involves being acutely aware of ever-shifting perspectives, where [our] views and beliefs are challenged all the time,” says Natalie Henedige, Festival Director of Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA) 2022-24. These channels are our most electric: the space where world-expanding ideas are first planted, where they are then carried by audiences until they eventually bloom.



Statue of Peace, 2011
Kim Seo-kyung and
Kim Eun-sung.
Presented as part of
the exhibition *After
'Non-Freedom of Expression',
Japan, 2022.*
BJ Warnick / Newscom /
Alamy Stock Photo

Understand the 'Asia' you're presenting — and give your audiences the opportunity to understand that too

A deeper question that sits at the heart of programming decisions — and one that is constantly evolving — is what it means when we present 'Asia' in Aotearoa. By virtue of our limited resources, no presentation can or should ever attempt to be comprehensive. It's important, then, to consider the types of conversations we are offering to our audiences.

"Are you showing Asia in its classics?" asks artist and producer Betsy Lan. "Or in its contemporary forms? Or are you seeing Asia in connection with an Asian New Zealand cultural context? The presenter needs to be very aware of that." Zooming out further, we also have to question what we mean when we refer to 'Asia' as a region. "We have to question that," says curator Sadiyah Boonstra. "We have to realise Asia is a colonial construction."

There is also a question of 'whose' Asia you are presenting, and the complexities of recognising the inherent diversity across countries, but also within them. "Just as with any other culture," says Sooyoung Leam, Assistant Curator for the 14th Gwangju Biennale, "it's important to remember that Korea and the Korean diaspora [for example] cannot be essentialised into a singular, identifiable community. This means a complex and layered understanding of the artists in and from Korea. But, to be very frank, Korea is at the forefront of assigning easily graspable, essentialised cultural value through the promotion of so-called 'K-culture'. One of the ways artists and curators can complicate the homogenised representation of Korea would be to acknowledge that diversity and to shed light on complex layers of Korean society." This might be as basic as defining what we mean by 'Korea', but also encompass how we think about time. "Concepts such as 'modern' and 'contemporary' cannot be neatly translated into Korean, as its art history operates on a different geo-temporal scale from that of the West."

The second part of this is how we support the gap between the conversation an artist is having and the way an audience receives the work. "I do notice in my work that there is a disconnect in the understanding of what we're doing as a dance company and how it should be interpreted," says Sadiyah. "It's still very much through a somewhat colonial gaze that our work is being received and represented or sold to audiences, so that is always a struggle." This requires a consideration of different audiences. "There's definitely still a challenge in reaching audiences that cultural organisations — whose audiences are traditionally white — don't have the staff and the networks to be able to reach out to, let alone understand what those audiences want or need, or even know how to talk to them."

"There is often a real lack of understanding from presenters," observes Annette Shun Wah, Artistic Director of OzAsia Festival. The impact this has on how a work is talked about and marketed can be disastrous. "That's where a lot of stuff falls down." She's seen complex, nuanced work become reduced to stereotypical thematics or, in worst-case scenarios, exoticised. "It doesn't recognise anything that's specific and particular to the work. It shows a lack of understanding and it compromises the integrity of that artist."

"You need to give your audience context," says Annette. "If it's a work that comes from a village, in a remote part of a small country, from a culture that your audience doesn't necessarily know about, you need to give your audience — as well as the artists — much more information and context so that [everyone gets] the best out of it."

“It’s not actually just communication,” adds Sadiyah. “It really involves a paradigm shift to be able to understand what the lived experience of Asian people or Indigenous people is and to know how to communicate and connect with them. It’s fighting the cultural hierarchy that coloniality has created. There always needs to be some sort of interpretation — what are we actually looking at? What does this mean, if these young women tell us about their lives, and Belu? And how their families are still weavers and how their family stories and histories are being woven into the textiles? How do you present that as something equal?”

It asks for a significant commitment from the presenters. “To actually accept that responsibility of supporting the work — not just by paying the performance fee, or putting you up in a nice hotel, but, actually, by engaging audiences in a really intelligent and sophisticated way,” says Sadiyah. “So that they have the best contexts within which they can experience that work. And that’s not easy. I know. But it’s very important.”

It’s also important that this work is not done in a vacuum. Just as artists differ, so, too, do audiences. A consideration of the sociopolitical context in which audiences in Aotearoa might receive work is equally critical. Presenting a work by an Indian artist requires consideration of what India you are presenting, and to whom. In this case, it might mean an examination of the work’s relationship to Hindu nationalism and whether it is reinforcing or challenging the Hindutva ideology. It might involve understanding how much your audiences will be aware of these issues, and how much you might want to create space to enhance that awareness. In other cases, presenting work by Chinese artists might involve understanding the ways in which they are in dialogue with issues related to their government, and the types of conversations they may be unable to have. Being able to approach work through this lens ensures stronger connections and more nuanced conversations, by virtue of allowing a work to meet its audience in its most powerful way.

The challenges in getting there are not insignificant, but they are exciting because they represent the carving of pathways that are enduring, meaningful and nourishing. By investing in the long-term development of relationships, and ensuring collaborations are conducted with deep and mutual cultural understanding, these steps present a vision for exchange that not only benefits but advances our artists and audiences, keeping us deeply connected to — and active participants in — conversations around the globe.



NEW ILLUSION
Toshiki Okada/chelfitsch.
Presented as part of Singapore
International Festival of Arts,
Singapore, 2023.
Photo by Ryohei Tomita.



HOW WE DID THIS RESEARCH

Conducted in 2022, this research draws on existing literature examining the evolution of the creative industries across the Asia region as well as a number of interviews with practitioners and experts across the region and in Aotearoa. Ngā mihi nui Annette Shun Wah, Atheena Rose, Betsy Lan, Bryce Saavedra, Catherine George, Chris Payne, Craig Cooper, Eleanor Congreve, Emma Weber, Gabe Nito, Grey Yeoh, Hee-seung Irene Lee, Kyu Choi, Lynn Fu, Monisha Kumar, Natalie Henedige, Prateek Kukreja, Rumi Sakamoto, Sadiyah Boonstra, Sasapin Siriwanij, Selina Huang, Sooyoung Leam, Stephen Armstrong, Thomas Baudinette, Tobias Berger, Virginia Moresi, and Yoshiji Yokoyama.

Thank you also to Jordan King and Balamohan Shingade, who gave valuable feedback on this report.

AUDIENCE ATLAS DATA

The data presented about audiences in Aotearoa represents new analysis from data collected by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre for Creative New Zealand. While much of this data has been presented by the *Audience Atlas Aotearoa* research, much of the analysis in this report has not been presented before.

This *Audience Atlas* data is based on 6,743 responses collected between 11 December 2020 and 21 January 2021, from people aged 16 years and over.

The target market for this research was the culture market for Aotearoa; that is, anybody who has participated in an arts or cultural event in the past three years.

Respondents were recruited by Consumer Link, Pureprofile, Prime Research and Panelbase. Responses were collected online via a survey and were weighted according to age, gender, ethnicity, educational attainment and location in order to be representative of the population, based on Census data.

For more information on the methodology and the margins of error, refer to the *Audience Atlas* report available on Creative New Zealand's website.



Sugung-ga: The Other Side of the World, 2023
Theatre Moksung.
Presented as part of
Te Ahurei Toi o Tāmaki
Auckland Arts Festival,
Aotearoa, 2023.

Annette Shun Wah is Artistic Director of Adelaide Festival Centre's OzAsia Festival, Australia's largest annual festival engaging with Asia. She was formerly Artistic Director of Contemporary Asian Australian Performance, and serves on the board of Sydney Theatre Company.

Atheena Rose is the loveliest cottage core grandma in the body of a girl in her 20s. She's a plant and cat-mum who crochets and cooks dishes from all types of cuisines.

Balamohan Shingade is a doctoral candidate in philosophy at the University of Auckland. Most recently, he's been a researcher with the Center for Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE), Massey University, and curator at St Paul St Gallery, Auckland University of Technology. He is also a singer of Hindustani music.

Betsy Lan is an actor, independent producer, and arts educator in Taiwan. She was a member of the planning team for the Asian Producers' Platform from 2016 to 2023.

Bruce E. Phillips is an Edinburgh-based independent arts practitioner often working as a project manager, writer, curator and artwork producer. He holds a PhD from Massey University focusing on cooperative exhibition-making and curatorial practice in Aotearoa.

Bryce Saavedra is an energetic and fun-loving boy who listens excessively to KRNB and NewJeans. Will be your best friend eating chicken nuggets while looking at Piha sunsets.

Catherine George is a former Senior Adviser, International for Creative New Zealand, where she managed their Focus on Asia programme. Prior to joining the organisation, Catherine was based in Singapore as Senior Production Manager for IFA Media, where she production managed programming for international broadcasters including National Geographic, Discovery Channel, PTS Taiwan, Al Jazeera and Channel NewsAsia. Catherine worked with production teams across offices in Taiwan, China, Thailand and Singapore who filmed extensively throughout Asia and around the globe.

Chris Payne is Head of International Relations at the New Zealand Film Commission, where he connects filmmakers and industry with international partners, projects and business/ career development opportunities. He has a focus on facilitating official film and television co-productions under Aotearoa's 18 bilateral official co-production treaties and agreements.

Eleanor Congreve is an arts manager who has worked across a range of arts and funding bodies, festivals and philanthropic initiatives in Aotearoa and the UK, most recently as Senior Adviser (International) at Creative New Zealand. Before that she was Associate Director at the Auckland Writers Festival and Patrons Manager at Tate Galleries in the UK.

Emma Weber is a Kiwi-born German who's navigating Tāmaki Makaurau corporate life while maintaining her sunshine passion for all things creative. When she's not dancing, Emma is also the videographer and editor for MDC.

Gabe Nito is your little brother who uses your favourite hoodie without asking your permission first. He loves Korean fashion and getting groovy dancing house and breaking.

Grey Yeoh is an international arts and culture manager and producer, specialising in performing arts and visual arts. His vast arts network extends to North, South and Southeast Asia, Australia and Europe.

Dr Hee-seung Irene Lee holds a PhD in Film, Television and Media Studies and is a Korea Foundation Lecturer teaching in Korean Studies at the University of Auckland. Her research and teaching areas include contemporary Korean media, East Asian popular culture, globalisation and transnationalism in media, art-house cinema, screen adaptation and critical theory.

Hiraani Himona (Ngāi Te Whatuiāpiti, Ngāti Rangiwahakāewa, Ngāti Hikarara) has been Executive Director of Te Tuhi since 2015 and was previously Deputy Director of the South London Gallery. After gaining a science degree from Massey University she established a career in arts administration through a background of providing opportunities for diverse communities. This includes working in Māori development (Te Puni Kōkiri and the Ministry of Education), disability (Mental Health Media), gender and sexuality (York Lesbian Arts Festival; Samesame but Different) and youth at risk (Hi8us South).

Hone Kouka (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Kahungunu, Rongowhakaata, Kāi Tahu) MNZM (Arts Laureate 2022) is a writer for stage and screen. He is Co-Director (with Miria George) of Tawata Productions and Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Kia Mau Festival

Dr Ian Fookes is a Lecturer in the School of Cultures, Languages and Linguistics at the University of Auckland. In this role, he coordinates a course on Aotearoa's relationships with Asia, while researching and teaching in Asian studies and comparative literature. As Deputy Editor of the journal *Ekistics and the New Habitat* he is involved in the publication of research into urban design, architecture and planning, while researching the role that aesthetics plays in place making and identity construction across cultures. His most recent work examines the role of Japan in the construction of Pākehā identities.

Born and raised in Ōtautahi, **Jamie Hanton** is currently a Community Arts Advisor at Christchurch City Council. He has previously worked as Managing Curator at SCAPE Public Art, Director of The Physics Room Contemporary Art Space, Kaitiaki Taonga Toi Curator of Art Collections, at the University of Canterbury and Director of the Blue Oyster Art Project Space.

Kyu Choi is a festival director, producer and researcher, currently working as Artistic Director of Seoul Performing Arts Festival (SPAF) from 2022 to 2026. He has previously worked as Creative Director at Performing Arts Market in Seoul (PAMS) and has a particular focus on new narratives, technology and science innovation, and locality and translocality.

Lynn Fu, based in Shanghai and New York, is an independent curator and producer, working primarily in international touring and collaboration among China, Asia and rest of the world. Her interest lies in exploring new possibilities of connecting people through the performing arts.

Miria George (Te Arawa, Ngāti Awa [Aotearoa] / Tumutevarovaro, Enuamanu [Kūki 'Āirani]) is a writer and director for stage and screen, a Co-Director of creative company Tawata Productions and co-founder and Executive Director of Kia Mau Festival.

Monisha Kumar works as Curriculum Leader for Dance at One Tree Hill College, is the Artistic Director of her dance company Monisha Kumar Dance Company, and also an Events Coordinator for Rhythm House Film and Events.

Appointed as the Festival Director for Singapore International Festival of the Arts 2022-24, **Natalie Henedige** is the Artistic Director of Cake, a contemporary performance company presenting progressive works at the intersection of theatre and a range of disciplines. Natalie is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award (2007) and the JCCI Singapore Foundation Culture Award (2010).

Paul Brobbel is Director at Uxbridge Arts and Culture in Tāmaki Makaurau. He has worked in curatorial, conservation and collection management roles in museums and galleries throughout Aotearoa, including the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery | Len Lye Centre, Puke Ariki Museum and Libraries, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and Auckland Museum.

Prateek Kukreja is working as a G20 Policy Specialist in India, specialising in the area of creative economy. He was formerly affiliated with one of India's leading think tanks: the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), as Fellow. His recent study, 'Creative India: Tapping the Full Potential' provides the first-ever reliable estimates on the size and contribution of India's creative economy.

Rumi Sakamoto is a Senior Lecturer in Japanese at the University of Auckland. She has published widely on Japanese popular culture, war memories and nationalism

Dr Sadiyah Boonstra is a historian and curator based in Jakarta, Indonesia. She is Collection Management and Curatorial Specialist at the Indonesian Heritage Agency, Director and Founder of CultureLab Consultancy, Indonesia, Post-Doctoral Researcher at VU University Amsterdam, and Honorary Fellow at Melbourne University. Sadiyah has curated a growing number of exhibitions around the world and has previously been, among others, previously Asia Scholar at Melbourne University and Curator of Public Programs at Asia TOPA, Senior Manager Programs at National Gallery Singapore, and a Post-Doctoral Fellow at Royal Holloway, University of London, and The British Museum.

Sasapin Siriwanij is Artistic Director of Bangkok International Performing Arts Meeting (BIPAM), an independent producer and performing artist.

Selina Huang is a Kiwi-born, half-Thai half-Canto introverted dancer whom you'll find happiest on Discord and playing PC games (while owning all the boys, of course).

Shona McCullagh is the Artistic Director of Te Ahurei Toi o Tāmaki Auckland Arts Festival. With a background in dance, film, theatre, arts education and installation art, she leads the programming for the annual Festival held every March in Aotearoa. She is an Arts Laureate for her work in dance and film and a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit.

Sooyoung Leam is an art historian and curator based in Seoul. She specialises in modern and contemporary art with a particular focus on East Asia.

Stephen Armstrong is a commissioning producer, curator and programmer working across the performing arts, interdisciplinary arts and digital arts. He has been an executive producer for numerous independent creative houses and major performing arts organisations, frequently leading commissioning programmes and international collaborations. He was the Founding Creative Director of Asia TOPA, the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Performing Arts (2017 and 2020 editions) and is currently Director (Programming) at Arts Centre Melbourne.

Dr Thomas Baudinette is a cultural anthropologist who specialises in the fandoms of East and Southeast Asian popular culture. He has spent over a decade researching the reception of Asian media in Australia, with a particular focus on LGBTQ+ fans.

Tobias Berger is a curator in Hong Kong. He has worked as Director of Artspace in Tāmaki Makaurau, as inaugural Chief Curator at the Nam June Paik Art Centre in Korea, and at leading positions at Para Site, M+, and Tai Kwun Contemporary in Hong Kong.

Dr Vera Mey completed her PhD at SOAS, University of London. She is currently International Director of Te Tuhi as well as Co-Artistic Director for the 2024 Busan Biennale in South Korea. She works as an art historian and curator.

Virginia Moresi is your Sāmoan best big sister. She is motivated and consistent, with a passion for fitness, dance, music and, newly — performing arts!

Yoshiji Yokoyama is a Dramaturg and Programmer working for SPAC-Shizuoka Performing Arts Center and Tokyo Festival, a board member of Open Network for Performing Arts Managers, a founding member of Dramaturg / Japan, and a Lecturer at Gakushuin University, Tokyo.

Zara Stanhope is the Ringatohu | Director of Ngāmotu cultural facilities Puke Ariki Museum and Libraries and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery | Len Lye Centre. She has held leadership positions in public and university art galleries and museums in Aotearoa and Australia.

WHEN THE TITANIC SANK INTO
OCEAN IN APRIL 1912, THOUSANDS
FELL INTO THE FRIGID WATERS
DARKNESS, THE RESCUERS FOUND
CHINESE MAN CLINGING TO A
SHIVERING BUT STILL ALIVE.
FANG LANG, ONE OF SIX CHINESE

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How to read these tables

These tables are designed to be read across (from left to right). For each region, people can fall into one of the following categories:

The **current market** refers to those who have engaged in or experienced that art form in the past three years. For example, looking at the table below, 41% of people in Northland are in the current market for Asian arts.

The **lapsed market** refers to those who last engaged in or experienced that art form more than three years ago but would be interested in re-engaging.

The **potential market** refers to those who are interested in engaging with or experiencing that art form for the first time.

The rows do not add to 100% as not all people are interested in engaging. People who fall under that category have not been included in the table.

Asian arts in this research focuses on attendance at event-based experiences of art, culture and creativity, and is defined as work created by Asian artists across film, theatre, visual arts, dance, music events (listening to music on a device is not included in this definition), and literary events (reading a book by an Asian author is not included in this definition). Asian cultural festivals, or other Asian art and cultural events or celebrations, are also included in this definition.

The market for Asian arts across Aotearoa

Region	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	49%	19%	23%
Northland	41%	23%	24%
Auckland	61%	18%	16%
Waikato	39%	18%	29%
Bay of Plenty	39%	17%	28%
Gisborne	40%	21%	27%
Hawke's Bay	38%	27%	22%
Taranaki	39%	20%	24%
Manawatū-Whanganui	41%	17%	28%
Wellington	54%	18%	22%
Tasman	33%	17%	38%
Nelson	33%	25%	26%
Marlborough	21%	26%	38%
West Coast	38%	15%	34%
Canterbury	49%	17%	23%
Otago	40%	20%	30%
Southland	31%	22%	33%

Previous page:
Angel Island
Huang Ruo and
Brian Gothong Tan.
Presented as part of Singapore
International Festival of Arts,
Singapore, 2023.
Photo by Moonrise Studio.

Asian art exhibition or digital or video art event

Region	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	9%	10%	41%
Northland	7%	13%	43%
Auckland	11%	11%	41%
Waikato	8%	8%	41%
Bay of Plenty	9%	5%	39%
Gisborne	4%	14%	40%
Hawke's Bay	7%	8%	44%
Taranaki	10%	6%	45%
Manawatū-Whanganui	7%	9%	43%
Wellington	12%	11%	40%
Tasman	2%	13%	46%
Nelson	5%	13%	39%
Marlborough	3%	11%	43%
West Coast	6%	4%	40%
Canterbury	8%	10%	38%
Otago	8%	8%	44%
Southland	11%	9%	35%

Asian craft / object art exhibition

Region	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	9%	9%	43%
Northland	6%	12%	45%
Auckland	11%	11%	43%
Waikato	10%	7%	42%
Bay of Plenty	7%	4%	44%
Gisborne	4%	14%	42%
Hawke's Bay	7%	8%	47%
Taranaki	8%	6%	45%
Manawatū-Whanganui	8%	11%	42%
Wellington	12%	12%	42%
Tasman	5%	10%	49%
Nelson	7%	14%	40%
Marlborough	4%	7%	45%
West Coast	7%	7%	47%
Canterbury	8%	8%	41%
Otago	8%	9%	45%
Southland	8%	6%	41%

Asian film

Region	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	11%	14%	34%
Northland	8%	16%	29%
Auckland	13%	14%	34%
Waikato	11%	11%	33%
Bay of Plenty	9%	10%	37%
Gisborne	7%	13%	30%
Hawke's Bay	9%	15%	33%
Taranaki	12%	14%	27%
Manawatū-Whanganui	11%	12%	38%
Wellington	12%	15%	35%
Tasman	6%	11%	44%
Nelson	2%	16%	35%
Marlborough	6%	18%	39%
West Coast	10%	13%	35%
Canterbury	10%	14%	33%
Otago	10%	16%	36%
Southland	5%	14%	36%

Asian cultural festival, e.g., Diwali or a Lantern Festival

Region	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	17%	18%	30%
Northland	10%	22%	35%
Auckland	26%	21%	20%
Waikato	11%	15%	39%
Bay of Plenty	8%	12%	38%
Gisborne	10%	17%	40%
Hawke's Bay	8%	16%	42%
Taranaki	12%	17%	30%
Manawatū-Whanganui	12%	14%	37%
Wellington	18%	17%	31%
Tasman	6%	11%	42%
Nelson	12%	19%	29%
Marlborough	3%	14%	46%
West Coast	9%	11%	43%
Canterbury	19%	18%	25%
Otago	14%	18%	36%
Southland	7%	15%	47%

Asian dance

Region	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	5%	7%	41%
Northland	5%	4%	49%
Auckland	6%	8%	41%
Waikato	4%	6%	41%
Bay of Plenty	3%	4%	35%
Gisborne	6%	9%	33%
Hawke's Bay	6%	4%	40%
Taranaki	5%	8%	41%
Manawatū-Whanganui	4%	7%	41%
Wellington	5%	9%	41%
Tasman	9%	2%	49%
Nelson	2%	9%	43%
Marlborough	3%	4%	36%
West Coast	4%	1%	46%
Canterbury	4%	6%	40%
Otago	3%	5%	45%
Southland	2%	2%	44%

Asian theatre

Region	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	5%	7%	41%
Northland	3%	7%	43%
Auckland	6%	9%	41%
Waikato	4%	5%	36%
Bay of Plenty	4%	4%	34%
Gisborne	5%	9%	39%
Hawke's Bay	5%	6%	38%
Taranaki	4%	5%	37%
Manawatū-Whanganui	3%	5%	43%
Wellington	4%	9%	44%
Tasman	5%	5%	40%
Nelson	5%	6%	43%
Marlborough	6%	4%	34%
West Coast	1%	4%	41%
Canterbury	4%	5%	43%
Otago	2%	6%	43%
Southland	0%	3%	44%

Literary events with Asian writers

Region	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	3%	3%	31%
Northland	1%	3%	37%
Auckland	4%	4%	34%
Waikato	2%	4%	25%
Bay of Plenty	2%	1%	26%
Gisborne	1%	3%	28%
Hawke's Bay	7%	1%	28%
Taranaki	1%	1%	31%
Manawatū-Whanganui	1%	2%	30%
Wellington	3%	3%	33%
Tasman	0%	6%	33%
Nelson	5%	2%	28%
Marlborough	3%	0%	23%
West Coast	1%	3%	36%
Canterbury	2%	4%	30%
Otago	2%	2%	35%
Southland	4%	2%	27%

Music concert, gig or event showcasing Asian artists

Region	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	6%	8%	39%
Northland	5%	9%	41%
Auckland	8% ↑	9%	39%
Waikato	4%	8%	38%
Bay of Plenty	4%	7%	36%
Gisborne	5%	8%	31%
Hawke's Bay	7%	7%	38%
Taranaki	8%	5%	39%
Manawatū-Whanganui	4%	6%	37%
Wellington	6%	9%	41%
Tasman	9%	10%	49%
Nelson	6%	8%	41%
Marlborough	3%	6%	41%
West Coast	6%	5%	46%
Canterbury	5%	8%	39%
Otago	4%	7%	41%
Southland	2% ↓	6%	40%

The market for Asian arts broken down by different cultural groups in Aotearoa

Demographic	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	49%	19%	23%
NZ European and Other European	43%	20%	26%
Māori	49%	20%	25%
Pacific Peoples	69%	14%	14%
Asian	76%	15%	7%
Another ethnic group	53%	15%	23%

The market for Asian arts broken down by different age groups in Aotearoa

Age group	Current	Lapsed	Potential
Total	49%	19%	23%
16-24	61%	13%	16%
25-34	58%	17%	18%
35-44	55%	18%	20%
45-54	48%	20%	23%
55-64	41%	23%	24%
65+	32%	21%	33%



It's unclearly clear, as yet incomplete, 2017-21
Thasnai Sethaseree.
Commissioned by and presented as part of QAGOMA — The 10th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT10), Australia, 2021-2022.
Image courtesy of the artist.



About the Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono

The Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono is New Zealand's leading nonpartisan, non-profit authority on Asia. We were set up in 1994 to build New Zealanders' knowledge and understanding of Asia.

We provide experiences and resources to help New Zealanders build their knowledge, skills, connections and confidence to thrive in Asia. We work in partnership with influential individuals and organisations in New Zealand and Asia to provide high-level forums, cultural events, international collaborations, school programmes and professional development opportunities.

Our activities cover more than 20 countries in Asia and are delivered through programmes with a focus on arts, leadership, entrepreneurship, sports, business, media, education, research and informal 'Track II' diplomacy.

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