

Art Association of Australia and New Zealand Survey 2016 – Report to Executive

By Giles Fielke and Carol Que

In March 2016, past and present members of the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ) as well as subscribers to the Association’s mailing list were invited to take part in an online survey.¹ The survey, which consisted of 15 questions, received over 100 responses. The AAANZ seeks to use the survey to gather feedback on the current impact of the Association, and to understand if any changes could be introduced to serve stakeholders more effectively.

The mission of the AAANZ is to promote, provide for, foster, and encourage study and research into art; it does this by sustaining standards of criticism and scholarship in art.² The AAANZ operates as a not-for-profit association that focusses on returning all benefits to the community and its members.³ The AAANZ achieves its mission in two primary ways throughout the cycle of the year: by publishing the bi-annual journal, *The Australia and New Zealand Journal of Art* (ANZJA)—in co-operation with the Power Institute and through an agreement with Taylor and Francis—and by overseeing the committee running the annual AAANZ conference in different cities of the region, including managing the prizes announced at the conference.

The survey responses reveal that the Association is highly valued by past and present members as well as by subscribers to its mailing list, particularly for the ways in which it fosters a scholarly community. However, the survey responses also demonstrate that the AAANZ can do more to create collegiality among and between the disciplines that it represents, by advocating for the arts, and by creating further platforms for discussion and collaboration across the region. The survey has also revealed new and emerging member cohorts which can be more effectively served and expanded through new communication strategies. In what follows the survey responses are summarised and analysed and a number of recommendations are made for the future direction of the Association.

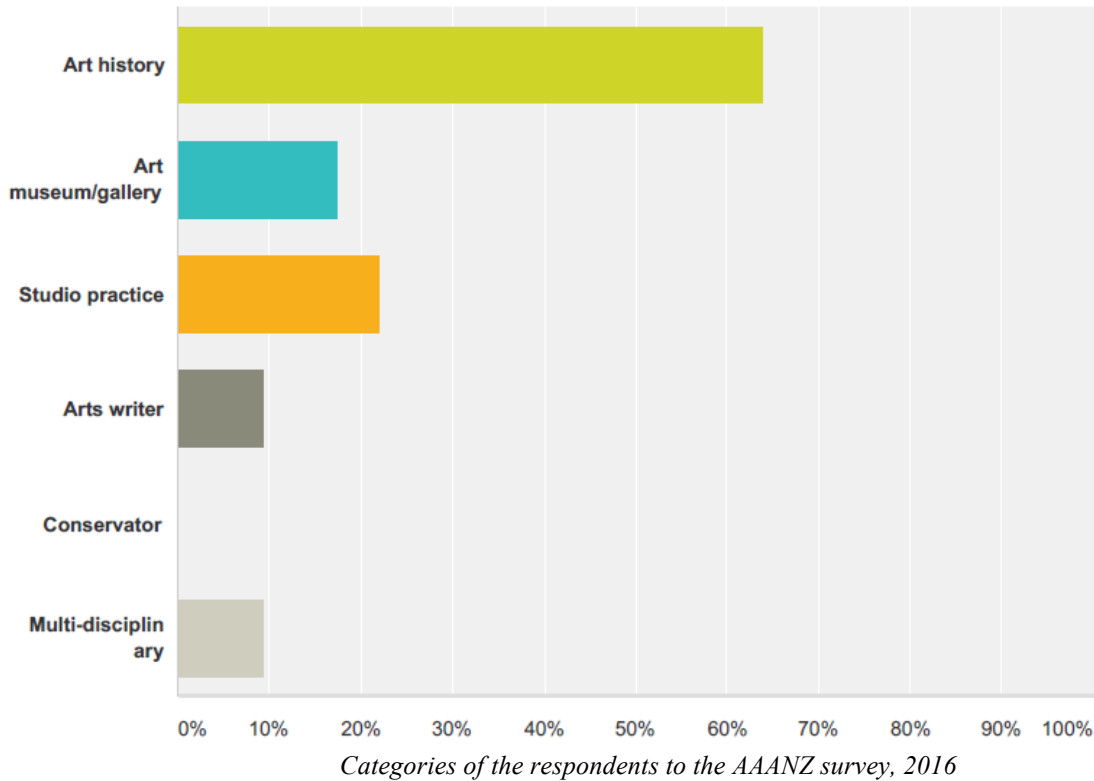
1. The authors would like to thank Katrina Grant, Grace McQuilten, and Anthony White for their assistance with developing, promoting and reporting the survey.

2. See “The Rules of the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand”.

3. While the elected executive of the AAANZ works on a voluntary basis, the Business Manager of the association, a paid position within the AAANZ’s current organisational structure, carries out the majority of the AAANZ’s administrative tasks.

Questions and Responses

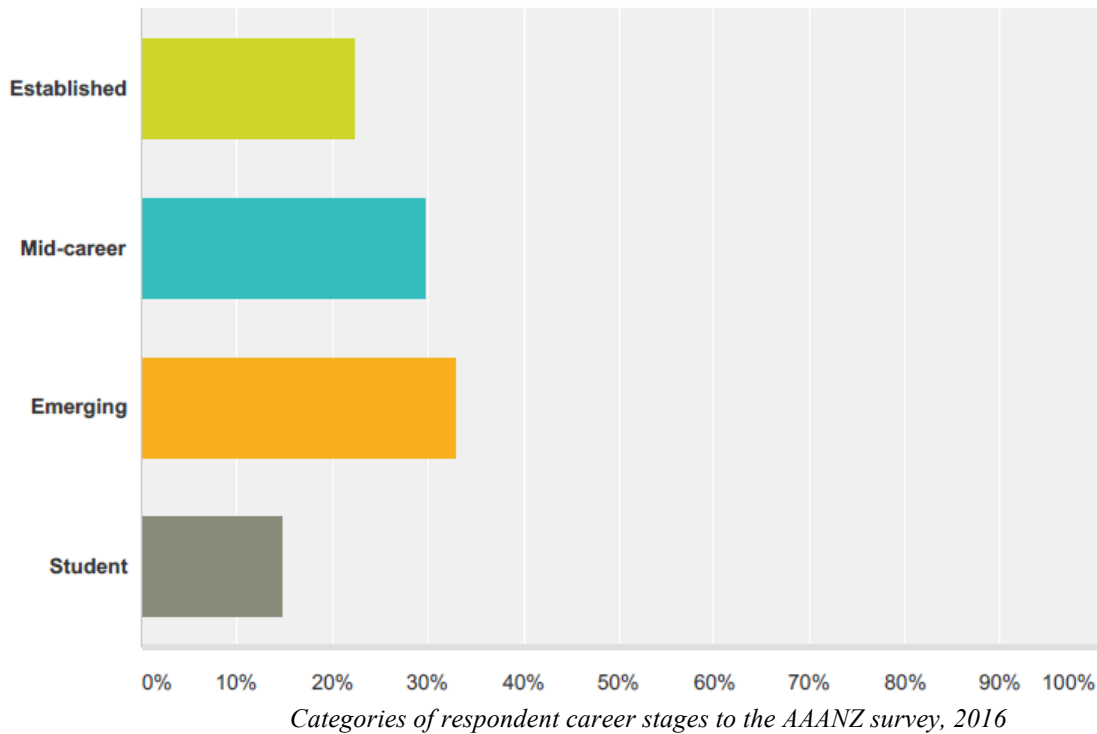
Q.1 – What is your main profession/field?



Respondents to the AAANZ survey predominantly identified their professional field as the discipline of art history. The identification ranking second, with more than a fifth of survey respondents, was those with a studio practice. Museum and gallery professional members also make up almost a fifth of respondents.

Respondents who identified as within the category 'Arts writer' and 'Multi-disciplinary practitioners' were significant, yet appear to be an under-represented category of Association members. These last categories are understood by the AAANZ to consist of members and subscribers who are largely independent, inter-disciplinary, and frontier practitioners in the arts, and may represent a potential new horizon for attracting members to the Association. Other identities given by respondents outside of the given categories who may also represent a future cohort to be targeted for membership included researcher, workers in the cultural collections and art markets.

Q. 2 – Where do you consider you are in your career?



The spread of respondents across the four categories 'Established', 'Mid-Career', 'Emerging', 'Student' suggests that the membership of the AAANZ is made up of a range of people from different generations working in the arts in the region.

The respondents that identified as students were the lowest category of the four. This suggests that there is an opportunity to appeal further to students in the broader arts community and institutions, and to encourage and develop more opportunities in order to create a greater student involvement in the AAANZ.

Q. 3 – What are the main issues facing your field?

'I'm concerned that an increased focus on contemporary art, both in universities and in galleries is pushing aside research into art history. More exposure for art history as a discipline is needed, more awareness of it as a discipline outside of the universities.'

Among the issues facing the field identified by respondents to the survey are:

- The dearth of publishing and employment opportunities;
- evaporating funds;
- a fading emphasis on the discipline of art history by a public environment which encourages research into STEM subjects more so than cultural histories;
- the challenge of ratifying a productive accord between cultural studies and art history as competing disciplines in the arts.

The challenges identified by respondents to the survey included professional threats—institutional uncertainty and re-structuring, casualisation, precarity—alongside potential opportunities to address core problems within the discipline: the canon and its inability to respond to artworks outside of the narrow terms set historically by dominant methodologies; the increasing focus on contemporary art and new media in the history of art.

The Association may be able to address both concerns by advocating further for the disciplines represented by the membership in the broader public sphere, while also working harder to ensure a more equitable balance between traditional disciplinary concerns and the innovative work of members who seek to broaden the boundaries of art and art history.

Q. 4 – How might AAANZ help in addressing these issues?

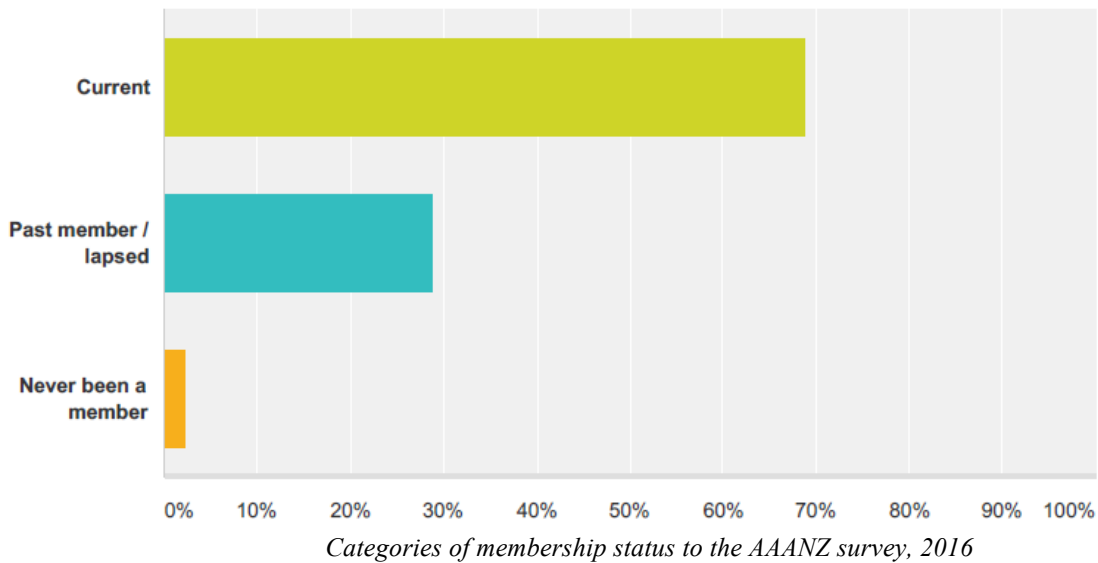
'What we need: Advocacy for art history as a discipline and profession. Encouragement of emerging scholars. A consideration of how to raise the public profile of art history and the visual arts.'

Respondents approached this question with great enthusiasm. 43% of respondents proposed that the Association could play an important part in lobbying for better funding models, fairer remuneration rates and more job opportunities within the arts industry. 53% of respondents suggested diversifying either in regards to cultural and generational representation, or through new career-focussed initiatives such as mentoring, workshops, and via the provision of grants. Comments included:

- 'Perhaps have a forum at the next conference with strong arguments from inside and outside the discipline to show how greater generosity in assessments benefits the discipline as a whole. We don't just compete against each other, but against all other disciplines. We need to get smarter.'
- 'Solidarity is always helpful, as is profiling concerns and advocating for culture generally.'
- 'Keep providing ways for emerging academics to publish and present their research, and opportunities to meet others in their field.'
- 'Perhaps have some sort of project that evaluates the institutional programs of art history in Australia/NZ at this moment in time, and what can be done to stop the perpetual hollowing out of humanities-based approaches.'
- 'We need to encourage and constantly renew viewers, readers, buyers, investors, philanthropists, politicians etc. encouraging them to engage with ideas presented by both professional members and the organisation.'

The AAANZ was asked to complement its activities in publishing and conference organising with an augmented program. Many of the responses demonstrated that there is a felt need for more spaces for networking, collaboration and intellectual exchange at a basic structural level, a way to foster the association and continue to grow the disciplines it represents. The need for further advocacy for the discipline was identified as a priority.

Qs 5 & 6 – Are you a current or past member of the AAANZ? How long have you been a member of the Association?

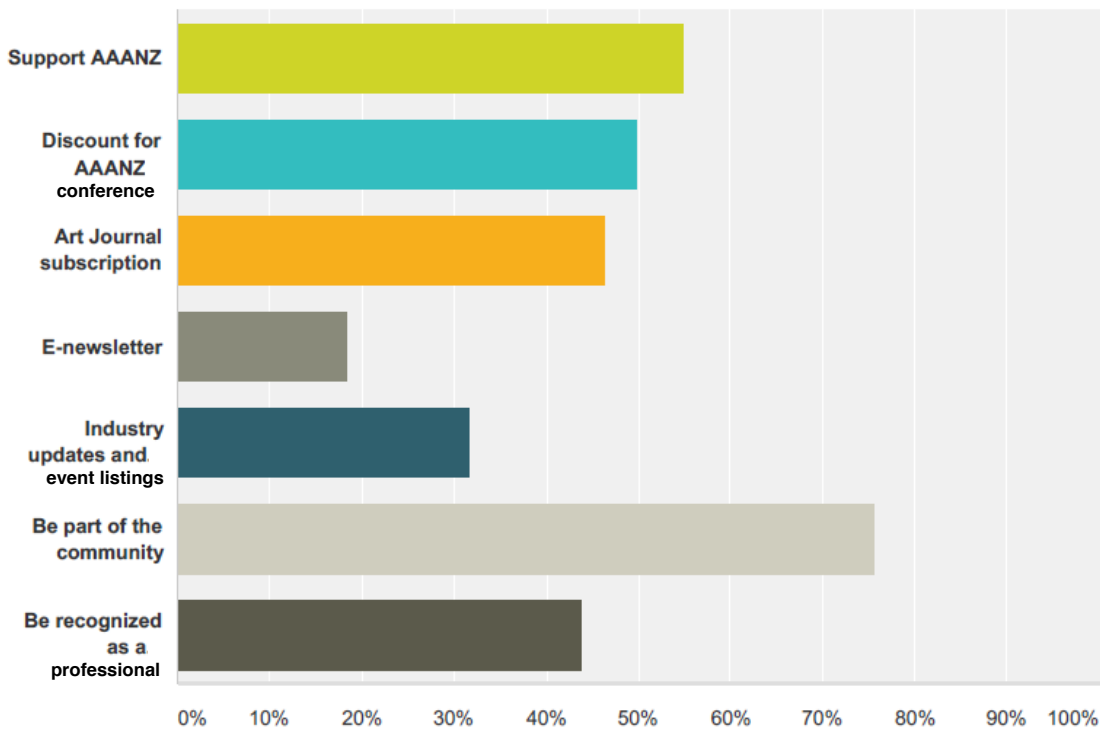


While a clear majority of respondents to the 2016 survey were current members of the AAANZ, nearly a third responded as past or lapsed members. The small percentage of respondents who have never been members of the AAANZ contributed the perspective of subscribers to the AAANZ who remain outside the Association, adding a further dimension to the responses.

On the other hand, 74% of respondents have been members of the association for more than two years, with 26% having recently joined as members. Notably, 33% of respondents have been members of the Association for over ten years. This gave the responses a diversity of sentiment in terms of how our members viewed the Association over different periods.

The respondents reporting as past, lapsed, or never having been members may be a potential cohort to be better targeted during membership drives.

Q. 7 – Why did you become a member of the AAANZ?

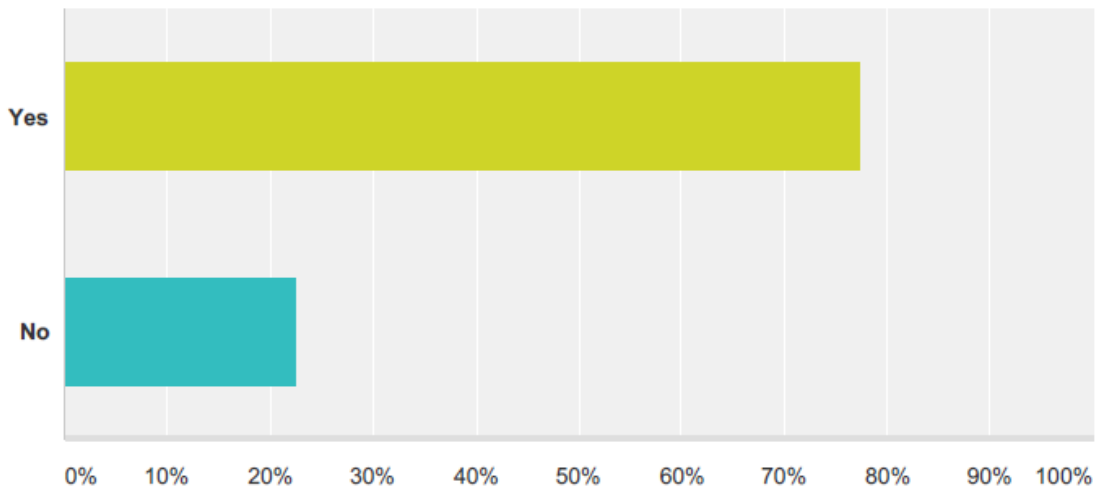


Categories of motivations to join as member to the AAANZ survey, 2016

In answer to the question for their motivations in joining the Association, 76% of respondents reported that they did so to become part of a wider arts community. To a slightly lesser extent, respondents were also predisposed to join in support of the Association, to gain membership benefits as well as to broaden professional networks in the art historical field.

The above motivations are satisfied at least in part at the annual AAANZ conferences, where members can seek academic and professional recognition while building a sense of collegiality in the region. The responses demonstrate that the reasons for joining the Association are a mixture of material and intangible perceived benefits.

Qs 8 & 12 – Are you happy with your AAANZ membership? Do you have suggestions for how AAANZ could improve the membership?



Categories of membership satisfaction to the AAANZ survey, 2016

The survey feedback indicated that over 77% of respondents are pleased with their AAANZ membership experience. However, two key areas were viewed as requiring further attention: representation in broader art historical fields, and sustaining an active community beyond the conference.

Some respondents also reported that they did not always receive the publication when they thought they should have. Other feedback on membership raised the difficulties experienced in renewing memberships, and the necessity for the AAANZ to communicate timely reminders for returning members at the beginning of the each membership cycle.

The survey also identified a growing interest in new membership from postgraduate students, emerging scholars and practitioners—many of whom seek to participate in the conference as presenters or general attendees, and to connect with their peers and prospective supervisors.

Qs 9 & 10 – Overall, how well does the website suit your needs? Would you be interested in a members-only news section on the website?

86% of respondents found that their online needs are well served. This may reflect the fact that the AAANZ has recently updated the website to feature a more contemporary design interface and smoother navigation functionality.

Respondents did not appear to support the notion that a members-only news section of the AAANZ website should be established. Almost 60% of respondents did not think this initiative would be a worthy addition to member benefits and the AAANZ's website.

In addition, some respondents suggested making available resources such as a list of links to local and international scholarships, grants and fellowships.

Q.11 – How could AAANZ improve communications with members?

Respondents to this question overwhelmingly preferred regular email correspondences as the primary form of communication.

13 – How would you rate the AAANZ conferences on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent)?

‘The Brisbane conference was excellent (great sessions, venue, etc.) but the last few have had far too many concurrent sessions, making it difficult to get to all the sessions I wanted to.’

Respondents were asked to rank the AAANZ conference on a scale of 1-5, from poor to excellent, and invited to make comments. More than 60% of respondents found the conference experience to be either good (52%) or excellent (11%), while a quarter of respondents rated it as average. This demonstrates that overall the conference is appreciated by the members and delegates who responded to the question. A number of constructive suggestions were also made to help further improve the conference, including:

- the circulation of abstracts prior to the conference;
- the publication of conference proceedings;
- addressing scheduling of sessions to allow for more discussion before and afterwards;
- a more thoroughly art historical focus, beyond modern and contemporary art.

Q. 14 – How would you rate the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent)?



Journal

'It would be refreshing to read articles that extend arts writing beyond more traditional art historical approaches to be inclusive of practice led /studio research.'

Almost seventy percent of respondents rated their experience of the *Journal* as good (54%) or excellent (14%), with a quarter rating it as average on the 1-5 scale. Following a transition to the publishing of the journal through Taylor and Francis in 2014, the journal has now become accessible online in digital forms to all members, including back issues. Nevertheless many members are choosing to sign-up for full membership in order to receive the journal in hard copy.

A sentiment that the *Journal* could publish on a wider range of topics related to art and writing appears to be felt across the overwhelmingly positive response. The editorial team, currently located at the Power Institute Foundation for Art and Visual Culture, may wish to explore the possibility of encouraging a broader range of submissions to the *Journal*.

Q. 15 – Any further comments?

'Get stronger, more public, we need you'

The recommendations that follow attempt to incorporate, to the benefit of the association as a whole, all responses and comments made to the survey by our members and subscribers, past and present.

Recommendations

The responses to the survey point to a number of recommendations for future action on the part of the Association in order to address the issues raised by the members and subscribers.

1) Increase Inclusivity

To ensure that our activities are accessible to a younger generation of artists and thinkers, it is recommended that the AAANZ explore options for more attractive fee structures for students, as well as the allocation of funding towards new grants for student conference attendance. A scholarship for early career researchers could be linked to publishing research while funding for publishing could be supported through the AAANZ and institutional partnerships. A number of unfunded and emerging journals edited by students and emerging researchers have emerged in recent years in the region. It is recommended that the Association look to foster these publishing initiatives. It is also recommended that student representatives be appointed to the executive committee.

Museum and gallery professional members made up almost a fifth of respondents to the survey. There are a number of major galleries and museums who are long-time, institutional members of the AAANZ but there is still major scope for greatly increasing institutional memberships of the Association. It is recommended that a campaign be initiated to achieve this. In return for membership, institutions are eligible to enter their publications in the annual book prizes, receive reports and news from members, reports, and attend the annual conference.

In order to increase the cultural inclusivity of the Association it is recommended that a program be developed for encouraging and serving a more diverse membership base, including appointing appropriate representatives to the executive committee.

2) Foster Community

The AAANZ's focus on community should remain a priority—through initiating spaces for networking, collaboration and intellectual exchange as an organic way to foster the association and continue to grow the member base. In order to provide greater visibility to and a greater sense of

cohesion among and between the various disciplines represented by the Association it is recommended that the Association work to develop an online directory of members, including their research and contact details, and to create an online forum for interaction, sharing of research and advice between the membership. The members themselves, who would contribute their profiles and information through the website maintained and moderated by the Association, would generate this database and forum.

It is also recommended that the Association foster further interaction with international art associations, and allow correspondence between these associations to occur, sharing member directories and research opportunities.

While the conference and Journal provide valuable platforms for discussion amongst professionals, more effort could be applied to making the activities of the Association publicly visible and accessible. Following a policy adopted since early 2016, in which the Association has sent a regular digest of news on Friday mornings and diversified its social media engagements, it is recommended that members and the executive in particular are strongly encouraged to contribute across both platforms news on publications, books, and events that may be of interest to the wider AAANZ community.

3) Cultivate Advocacy

It is recommended that the AAANZ present a framework for advocacy for the important role played by art and art historical research in social and intellectual life across the region to be opted into by members to work within their community. This can take place in person but also online—through the AAANZ website. Specifically, it is recommended that the executive communicate a plan by the end of 2016, in time for the December conference, in seeking to establish and support an operative advocacy group in 2017.

Conclusion

These survey responses have greatly assisted the AAANZ executive in reviewing existing organisational processes and our task in building solidarity within the Australian and New Zealand art community. This survey brings to light academic, industry, and policy concerns in a way that is reflective of the strained circumstances of our regional creative landscape today. In turn, these responses draw attention to the Association's inherent potentiality for arts advocacy—our role in generating a communal willingness to share, affirm and defend the intellectual work and conversation surrounding an ever-evolving, global art history.

In many responses to the survey, questions of community and advocacy emerged as immediate priorities (perceived as an organic way to foster the association and grow the member base) and there was a desire, collectively voiced by respondents to the survey, for activities initiated by the AAANZ to address this. Our members will be essential to any initiatives such as the ones suggested here to address this. We therefore ask and encourage institutions, organisations and individuals to engage in our upcoming activities, and to help us respond to the needs of the arts community.

The AAANZ would like to acknowledge its past and present members and subscribers who have so generously contributed their time to answering our questions, and for their ongoing interest and support.