

Safdar Ahmed
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4/3/2024

Creative Australia
Re: Arts Projects for Organisations Round 2024

Dear Creative Australia Assessment Panel,

I write this letter in support of Arts & Cultural Exchange's (ACE) application for the Capabilities and Leadership Skills in Community Arts and Cultural Development For Emerging Producers in Western Sydney.

Refugee Art Project is a volunteer-run, not for profit community art and cultural development organisation that supports people of a refugee background on Gadigal and Wangal land in Sydney. The organisation began in 2011 through regular art workshops conducted in Sydney's Villawood detention centre that ran until 2020. The community also expanding to community-based studios in 2011, first in North Parramatta (2011-2018) and then in Ashfield (2019 to the present). The collective aims to foster the creative self expression and cultural agency of people of a refugee background through art workshops, creative collaborations and community events. That work is then presented to the public in curated exhibitions, online forums, art journals, anthology publications and self-published zines, to enhance the agency of refugees in the public sphere and potentially educate the broader Australian community to the political issues facing refugees. At the time of writing, most participants have lived for years in the community on various temporary visas, without access to permanent protection or family reunion. There are clear connections between our mission and practice and that of Arts & Cultural Exchange.

Arts & Cultural Exchange (ACE) is a cultural organisation working on Dharug Country in Western Sydney. ACE has a longstanding reputation being committed to social justice, using creativity to reverse disadvantage and produce ground breaking interdisciplinary, intergenerational collaborative projects co-devised with diverse communities. ACE is passionately committed to Western Sydney and its diversity, uniqueness and spirit, and the opportunities to unleash its creative capacities.

Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) is a practice that involves artists working collaboratively with communities for the purpose of social change through art and culture. This practice is embedded in ACE's core programs by engaging diverse communities to express themselves and share their stories on their terms while deepening their cultural understanding and artistic skills.

This application comes at a timely moment for Western Sydney where there is a shortage of CACD trained producers, working in an ethical and meaningful way with diverse communities. This opportunity will provide much needed professional skills development and increase the capacity building of young people from Western Sydney.

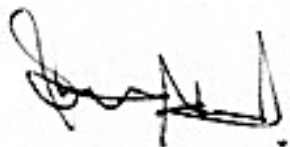
This will in turn revitalise the arts sector in Western Sydney as the training will be inclusive and involve most arts organisations in Western Sydney. ACE sees this project as a whole sector development opportunity and we are supportive of this vision.

I am fully supportive of ACE's application as I believe ACE is a key arts and cultural organisation in Western Sydney and beyond. I have been involved with ACE over many years and through many projects. The first of those was a group exhibition Refugee Art Project held with ACE in September 2011, called 'Villawood: Survival and Resistance'. The most recent was a film screening, Sobhiye (brunch) and public panel held in association with the S WANA film festival in 2023 which included a series of short films made by women of a r efugee background in our community.

As an artist and cultural practitioner, I am very happy to be part of this project and to share my knowledge and expertise in CACD by presenting a Master Class to the emerging producers.

I hope you look favourably to this application.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Safdar Ahmed', written in a cursive style.

Safdar Ahmed.

Director and volunteer with Refugee Art Project.

Dr Safdar Ahmed

Shortened Curriculum Vitae

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Safdar Ahmed is an artist, writer, and community and cultural development practitioner who lives and works on Dharug country. His art practice and research interests range widely across topics related to community based art practices, underground comics, Islamophobia and zine-making. Safdar is a founding member of not-for-profit community art organisation Refugee Art Project, for which he conducts regular art workshops with people of a refugee background in the community studio at Thirning Villa, Ashfield. He is the author of *Reform and Modernity in Islam* (2013) and the graphic novel *Still Alive* (2021). *Still Alive*, a documentary work that addresses Australia's refugee detention system, won the Multicultural Award and Book of the Year in the 2022 NSW Premier's Literary Awards, as well as the Eve Pownall Award for the Children's Book Council of Australia. Safdar is a member of *eleven*: a collective of contemporary Muslim Australian artists, curators and writers.

Relevant group exhibitions and creative projects:

2023, *Dominion*, Arts West Gallery, University of Melbourne.

2023, *Border Farce*, Video installation, Mona Foma, Launceston.

2023, *Border Farce-Sovereign Murders-Alien Citizen*, Video installation, *Hazeen* album, zine + 4 short films made with Refugee Art Project, Pop Gallery, Brisbane.

2022, *Border Farce-Sovereign Murders-Alien Citizen*, Video installation, *Hazeen* album, zine + 4 short films made with Refugee Art Project, documenta fifteen, Kassel Germany.

2022, *Hazeen - Sovereign Murders*, Piranha Records, Germany.

2022, *Destiny Disrupted*, Granville Centre Art Gallery.

2020, *Vigil for the smooth handfish*, with The Parallel Effect (online).

2018, *Hazeen* concert and cake-eating performance, Cement Fondu gallery, Sydney.

2018, *Warm Bodies*, Cement Fondu gallery, Sydney.

2018, *Enough: Khalas*, UNSW gallery, Sydney.

2018, *Waqf al-Tagheer: Time of Change* (with the Eleven collective), ACE Open gallery, Adelaide.

2017, *Hazeen* concert and zombie-cake eating performance, Shh Centre for Hybrid Arts, Paramatta.

2016, *Hazeen "Halal Zalat"*. Music and Shadow Puppet Performance in collaboration with the artist Jumaadi at ARTBAR MCA (28 October 2016).

2015, *Hazeen "Muslim Zombies"*, music performance as part of "Winter Wonderland", O'Neill's Adventureland.

Books

2021, *Still Alive: Notes from Australia's immigration detention system*, Twelve Panels Press.

2013, *Reform and Modernity in Islam: The Philosophical, cultural and political discourses among Muslim reformers*, IB Tauris, London.

Relevant articles and book chapters

2023, 'Fragmenting Australian Art: The Problem of Labelling 'Refugee Art' with Izabella Antoniou, published in *Variations: A more diverse picture of contemporary art*, Monash University Press.

2022, 'Notebooking' in *A to Z of Creative Writing Methods*, Deborah Wardle, Julienne van Loon, Stayci Taylor, Francesca Rendle-Short, Peta Murray, David Carlin (Eds.), Bloomsbury.

2021, *Graphic confessions and the vulnerability hangover from hell*, Graphic Medicine, edited by Erin La Cour and Anna Poletti, University of Hawai'i Press.

2019, *Aesthetics of Racism in the Editorial Cartoon*, Un Magazine 13.1

2019, *Our long history of cartoons demonising foreigners*, SBS Online.

2019, "Creeping Sharia – An extreme response to Islamophobia", with Can Yalcinkaya, in *Australian Metal Music: Identities, Scenes & Cultures* (ed Catherine Hoad), Emerald Publishing, pp. 111-127.

2018, "Convergences - Spiritual and Political: The art of Khaled Sabsabi", *Art Monthly*, 310.

2018, "Secular time and the poetics of re-enchantment", exhibition catalogue essay in *eleven – Waqt al-Tagheer: Time of change*, Ace Open gallery, 80-83.

2016, "Refugee Art Project – Borderless voices: Art from the Villawood detention centre", exhibition catalogue essay in *Telling Tales: Excursions in Narrative Form*, MCA Australia, 70-79.

2013, *Eulogy for Ahmad Ali Jafari*, *Overland* (website).

Awards:

2022, Finalist YA category, Prime Ministers Literary Awards for *Still Alive: Notes from Australia's immigration detention system*.

2022 Winner Eve Pownell Award in the Australian Children's Book Awards for *Still Alive: Notes from Australia's immigration detention system*.

2022 Winner NSW Premier's Literary Awards, Multicultural Award & Book of the Year for *Still Alive: Notes from Australia's immigration detention system*.

2022 Winner Gold Ledger Award - Acknowledging excellence in Australian Comics and Graphic Novels, for *Still Alive: Notes from Australia's immigration detention system*.

2015 Winner Walkley Award - Artwork category for online web-comic: *Villawood: Notes from an immigration detention centre*.

Educational Background

Cert IV Arts Administration - Community Arts & Cultural Development, St George TAFE, 2014

PhD., Arabic and Islamic Studies Department, University of Sydney, (conferred 30 April 2010)

Complex Modernity: Re-examining Discourses of Islamic Reform

Bachelor of Arts, First Class Honours (History), University of Sydney, 2004

Bachelor of Fine Arts (majoring in Printmaking), National Art School, 1999