

METRO ARTS ON THE MOVE

In 2020, Metro Arts will celebrate 40 years of creating, developing and presenting new Australian work across performance and exhibitions with a major festival and a planned move to new premises.

Metro Arts' new vision for the next 40 years was unveiled at a public meeting on Monday night and promises to be as bold, brave and daring as its artists and audiences.

As CEO and Creative Director Jo Thomas said: "Metro Arts is not just a building, it's a dynamic multi-arts organisation and suite of creative services deserving of an inspiring, well-maintained, inclusive and accessible home.

"It's time for a bold new direction and a new, modern, fit-for-purpose home will allow us to refocus our priorities on supporting more artists, developing more new work, invigorating Brisbane's cultural scene and providing exceptional experiences to audiences."

In recent years it has become clear that the 129-year-old building at 109 Edward Street, which the organisation has called home since 1980, is no longer the most suitable venue for the innovative arts organisation.

A limited scope to adapt the State Heritage-listed building to meet Metro Arts' specialised requirements and a challenging financial situation within the sector did not support the future vision of Metro Arts, its artists and audiences, Ms Thomas said.

The Metro Arts Board has been approached by several prospective buyers and will work closely with property firm JLL to carefully consider each offer and secure Metro Arts' future, including creating a vibrant new home.

Chair of the Board John Dunleavy said: "Metro Arts has a long history of re-inventing itself in response to the community's needs. This is our next step.

"We have spent many months carefully researching our options and working closely with the State Government and Brisbane City Council."

Ms Thomas said Metro Arts planned to stay at 109 Edward Street until mid-2020.

"We are currently developing a major festival for February 2020 as a 40th birthday celebration, a joyous recognition of our past and a commitment to the future of Metro Arts," she said.

"The actual timing of our move will depend on our property negotiations and may vary from the mid-2020 current estimate."

"Our discussions surrounding a new home for Metro Arts are in their early stages, but I can say options are under serious investigation and more information regarding these will be released in due course."

The net proceeds from the sale of the building, after meeting authorised transition costs, combined with savings from building upkeep and maintenance, will be reinvested in accordance with Metro Arts' Constitution.

Reinvestment priorities will focus on commissioning new and larger-scale art work, artist endowments, low and no-interest loans and creative developments to build the capacity of the entire arts sector.

Metro Arts also plans to establish a Public Ancillary Fund with the sale proceeds retained as a preserved principal from which interest and dividend payments on ethical investment strategies will fund arts projects and initiatives for decades into the future.

“Money spent on Heritage maintenance is money not spent on artists and art programs,” Ms Thomas said.

She reiterated the importance of maintaining Heritage in Brisbane’s built environment but championed a new custodian for the building allowing Metro Arts to better serve its core charter and vision: to develop the future of contemporary arts practice, now.

“We have appreciated calling this building home for the past 40 years, but the organisation’s needs have grown beyond what its walls can contain, and the building’s needs have grown beyond the organisation’s financial capacity,” Mr Dunleavy added.

“It is time for a more suitable custodian of the building.

“The nature of contemporary arts continues to shift and change in terms of scale, technology, interdisciplinary and multimedia requirements and we need to foster that digital connectivity and innovation.”

“Brisbane needs affordable, accessible, fit-for-purpose space to retain independent artists and creatives and inspire them to develop and premiere new work,” Ms Thomas said.

“Metro Arts’ vision for the future is to deliver that space and seize the opportunity to invest in and build Brisbane’s arts sector. This can be a true game-changer for Queensland artists and audiences.”

Helping shape this vision will be Metro Arts’ community of artists, audiences, donors, tenants and staff who are called upon to contribute ideas, suggestions and feedback and become involved and engaged in the decision-making process.

“We want to hear what you love about Metro Arts as well as what we can do better,” Ms Thomas said.

“Metro Arts, like many small-to-medium organisations, balances on a tightrope to ensure good business and corporate governance principles.

“At the heart of this is a drive to best serve our community and deliver our mission to create brilliant contemporary art and we are asking our community to help us answer the question: ‘How can we best sustain ourselves as a business, to allow us to get on with our business of making art?’

The Board has worked hard to make 109 Edward Street a financially sustainable home for Metro Arts and its community for 40 years and its Directors have not taken the decision to relocate lightly.

“The time has come, and after extensive consideration, consultation, modelling and trial and error,

this is our plan to move forward,” Mr Dunleavy said.

Metro Arts Board will continue to liaise with JLL regarding the sale of 109 Edward Street and will provide regular updates at metroarts.com.au/metro-on-the-move and [facebook.com.au/metroartsbrisbane](https://www.facebook.com/metroartsbrisbane).

Members of the public are invited to contribute their ideas via this [survey](#) or fill out a hardcopy survey at Metro Arts, 109 Edward Street, Brisbane before December 8, 2018.

For more visit the Metro Arts Website - <https://www.metroarts.com.au/metro-on-the-move>

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METRO ARTS

Championing all contemporary art forms, the two core activities of the organisation are developing and co-presenting contemporary arts. Within five stories of a heritage building in the heart of the Brisbane CBD, there are artists taking risks, creating, developing, experimenting, and presenting ambitious contemporary art. Step inside and take a closer look at our artists pushing boundaries and creating exciting contemporary exhibitions and performance for you to see and experience.

Metro Arts on the Move **Frequently Asked Questions**

Q. Why does Metro Arts need a new venue?

A. We have appreciated calling 109 Edward Street home for the past 40 years, but the organisation's needs have grown beyond what its walls can contain. It's time for Metro Arts to fly the nest and look for a new home where artists can create, communities can be engaged, and innovation can thrive. The building is home to 34 creative tenants and we welcome more than 300 artists, hundreds of hirers and more than 20,000 patrons every year and we are obligated to provide them with affordable space and accessible infrastructure.

Q. Why sell the building? Why not just lease or sub-lease it to someone?

A. With the sale of the building, Metro Arts has the opportunity to create a new and sustainable financial model. Through careful and long-term investments with solid returns, Metro Arts can support contemporary and independent artists to survive and thrive into the future. Metro Arts' vision doesn't change but our capacity to deliver it does. The Board has been approached with several offers to purchase the 109 Edward Street building and it is only more recently that these have come under any serious consideration. The Board and Management have done months of due diligence but will only sell when all circumstances are right.

Q. Where will Metro Arts' new location be?

A. Location options are under serious investigation for the new home of Metro Arts and more information regarding these will be released in due course. Our ideal location is within the metropolitan urban inner-core of Brisbane (within a 3km radius of the CBD) to best capitalise on public transport, pedestrian access and street visibility.

Q. What do you mean by "fit-for-purpose"?

A. The nature of contemporary arts has undergone a seismic shift in the past 40 years to reflect advances in technology as well as interdisciplinary and multimedia capabilities. As arts stakeholders, we need to become fluid and foster digital connectivity in arts spaces and the innovation that it invariably breeds. This can include supplying WIFI, upgrading sound systems and digitising lighting requirements through to offering multi-use spaces and studios that can be adapted to an artist's or performance's needs. Creating a green-space and fully accessible spaces are also priorities. A highly significant cash investment would be required to repurpose 109 Edward Street, given the needs of artists and the building's Heritage listing. Partnerships have been investigated over many years but have not been delivered upon. A new location would allow Metro Arts the freedom to select a site and develop a venue that best suits the requirements of emerging and established artists accustomed to operating in a dynamic space. Such a venue would secure and drive Metro Arts' future for the next 40 years and beyond and change the face of the independent sector in Brisbane, Queensland and further afield.

Q. Who owns 109 Edward Street?

A. The Brisbane Community Arts Centre was established at 109 Edward Street in 1980. It evolved over time to become Metro Arts and, keeping with its mission to support contemporary art and artists, secured full ownership of the iconic building in 2000 through a federal Centenary of Federation grant.

Q. How much money do you expect to get from the sale of the building?

A. We are working closely with JLL to secure a competitive price with market forces shaping the sale. The Board will not sell unless all required conditions are met.

Q. Who decides where the money will be spent?

A. The Metro Arts Board is responsible for the financial administration of the organisation in accordance with Metro's Constitution. We are still in the process of determining how the net proceeds from the sale of 109 Edward Street will be invested and dispersed for the benefit of the artistic community. Financial transparency is valued by all who work at Metro Arts with annual reports, including financial data, readily available on our website.

Q. Who can access funds from the sale of 109 Edward Street? Will it only be for local artists or can anyone apply?

A. As with our current programs we accept applications from local and national artists and find the mix valuable to the development of the local sector. It is not envisaged this will change. Another layer of governance will be put in place to safeguard the investments long-term.

Q. If you're setting up a Foundation what is the financial modelling and what are the constraints/rules around investment?

A. Metro Arts plans to use the net proceeds from the sale of the building to set up what's termed a Public Ancillary Fund, after covering the necessary relocation and start-up costs involved with moving to a new venue. The organisation will retain a major portion of the sale proceeds as a preserved principal from which investment income from ethical investment strategies will fund our program. It also allows potential donors, from both the philanthropic and private sectors, to make significant investments in the organisation and provide a lasting legacy as these investments exist in perpetuity. This means a donation made today can provide for artists, audiences and communities in one year, 10 years or even over another 40 years.

State and federal legislation comprehensively regulates the management of Public Ancillary Funds and we will work with leaders in this field to ensure we meet these requirements. Metro Arts values social and environmental wellbeing and we will engage consultants to develop policies and procedures around Ethical Investment Strategies.

Funding strategies have changed significantly in the past 10 years with matched funding and diversification of revenue streams now a significant underpinning of policy consideration on a state and federal level. This is an opportunity for Metro Arts to embrace the changing landscape of funding and ensure financial sustainability for our organisation. A Public Ancillary Fund will meet the requirements of matched funding models and enable our organisation to become more self-sufficient whilst working with Government to further encourage private sector and philanthropic investment.

Q. You keep talking about community. Define your community.

A. Metro Arts is committed to growing and strengthening the Brisbane arts community while also operating within the national and international sectors. We have a focus on supporting independent and emerging artists and partnering across the sector, and across industries, for the benefit of independent artists. At a local level, our community comprises the artists who use our space, the audiences who visit us and participate in our programming, the tenants who base themselves at 109 Edward Street and our other spaces, the donors and supporters who have contributed to our needs, the community groups who hire the spaces, and the staff who drive Metro Arts. We are also fortunate to include many patrons, arts organisations, champions and various levels of government and industry in our Metro Arts community.

Q. Why did I donate money to a new elevator when you're now selling the building?

A. The recent, necessary replacement of an elevator cost more than \$230,000 and took more than 12 months to complete due in large part to complying with State Heritage restrictions. This was pressing work that needed to be carried out as a matter of priority to make 109 Edward Street an accessible space. We expect that the lift will provide valuable inclusive access to all within the building at least until 2020.

At the time of the Lift the Lift fundraising drive, the Metro Arts Board had not investigated in any detail the option to sell the premises, nor seriously considered offers from prospective purchasers. It is a matter of public record that the Board was pursuing a “stay” strategy with a modest redevelopment of the ground floor, laneway and rear of the building areas which the new lift would enhance. However, the high cost and lengthy process of the elevator repair has further highlighted the responsibilities and work involved in maintaining the State Heritage-listed building. We believe we should focus on our core business of art; not the business of maintaining a building.

Q. How will the Heritage value of 109 Edward Street be preserved after it is sold?

A. Buildings listed on the State Heritage Register, including 109 Edward Street, are protected and conserved using a framework which includes legislation, policies and guidelines. Development of Heritage-listed places is regulated through the Planning Act 2016. Most changes proposed to Heritage places are regarded as development – from altering paint, wallpaper and plaster, to removing or repairing furniture and fittings, to applying for a material change of use – and require approval before work is undertaken. Development proposals are assessed to ensure places retain their significance and the work does not diminish their Heritage value.

109 Edward Street has served us well for almost 40 years, but Metro Arts is unable to remain an effective custodian of a 129-year-old building. Many CBD Heritage-listed buildings have been reinvigorated following refurbishment that respectfully retains and preserves their history and heritage values. Local examples include the 140-year-old Elizabeth Picture Theatre at 179 Elizabeth Street, formerly Tara House, and the Doo-Bop Jazz Bar at 101 Edward St, a lovingly restored Federation-era warehouse built in 1910 that retained its unrendered brickwork, wooden beams and fine detailing.

Q. What happens if the current offers to buy 109 Edward Street fall through?

A. Metro Arts is working closely with property broker JLL to carefully consider each offer. If they prove unacceptable, Metro Arts, working with JLL, will put the building on the open market in early 2019.

Q. What will this mean for Metro Arts tenants and staff?

A. Tenants are on 12-month contracts and have been assured of a home at least until the end of 2019. They have been made aware of Metro Arts' preference to sell 109 Edward St and will continue to be informed as negotiations progress.

Staff will play a vital role in the evolution of Metro Arts and similarly have been offered their 2019 contracts. Some duties may start to shift as staff adapt to the planned changes, but we are certain our staff's passion, energy and skills will help drive this vision forward.

Q. What will this mean for artists and programming?

A. Metro Arts is dedicated to developing and co-presenting contemporary arts in Brisbane. Input from artists will be part of a new venue's selection and design process. Artists will continue to be supported and strong programming will still be scheduled while Metro Arts remains located at 109

Edward Street and beyond. It is envisioned the organisation will stay at the premises until mid-2020.

Q. How will Metro Arts' history be preserved?

A. Metro Arts is planning a major festival for January/February 2020 to celebrate and reflect on its past and signal a commitment to the future of the organisation. The Festival will include commissioned works, the return of old favourites that premiered at Metro Arts and the involvement of as many artists as we can accommodate. We acknowledge and respect the organisation's rich and important history. A documentary and research project is also planned to preserve this history.

Q. Will Metro Arts consult artists, audiences, tenants and staff before it sells the building and announces its new home?

A. The Metro Arts community and its valuable network of supporters will play a key part in shaping the next chapter in the organisation's history. Following the announcement of Metro Arts' plans for the future, all interested parties will be invited to share their ideas for the arts organisation via an online survey. Hard copies will also be available from 109 Edward Street. We welcome suggestions and ideas; facility feedback and programming wishlists; and even notes about what we do well and what we could do better. Our spaces are utilised by a wide variety of community groups and artists, from prayer groups to burlesque performers, and for a variety of uses including theatre, film nights, lectures and workshops, and Metro Arts wants to engage and energise its entire community.