
ABOUT THE PROJECT – QUEER PHOTO EXHIBITION



Midsumma, Trocadero Projects / Trocadero Arts Space (based in the West), and Photo Australia (PHOTO Festival) are partnering together on the development of a major project that involves the commission and development of new artworks throughout 2023, culminating in the presentation of a multi-pronged event spanning two months across the dates of Midsumma and PHOTO festival in Feb - March 2024.

Developed collaboratively across these organisations, the Festival of Queer Photography combines artist commissions of large-scale outdoor artworks, local artist mentoring, gallery exhibitions and an events program that spans two months incorporated into the programs of Midsumma and PHOTO 2024. Footscray Community Arts Centre, Substation and Scienceworks are confirmed as additional venue partners for the project – incorporating the use of both indoor and outdoor sites at their locations (among other sites across the region) for exhibitions/workshops and forums, and site-specific work from this project.

A core component of PHOTO 2022 and PHOTO 2021 has been their highly successful series of large-scale public artworks and activations – Building facades, free-standing sculptural installations in streets, parks and unexpected sites, transformed with the very best photography of our time – reaching audiences over 160,000. To date, these large-scale projects have taken place exclusively in the CBD. In 2024, we now have an opportunity to transform the streets of the West into an open-air gallery of accessible and highly visible/visual artworks from LGBTQIA+ voices, in a project developed specifically for this region and its communities, whilst also attracting great interest and visitation from broader areas. The curatorial team for the project consists of: Karen Bryant & Brendan Cooney (Midsumma Festival), Andrée Ruggeri & one other Artist Rep. (Trocadero) and Elias Redstone & Brendan McCleary (PHOTO Festival).

Artists will be selected for their geographic and cultural connection to communities in the West and presented alongside leading international LGBTQIA+ artists to create new networks and mentoring opportunities for the local art community. A selection of emerging, mid-career and established artists will be presented together, elevating emerging artists' practices and celebrating the strength of creative practice being made in, and inspired by, the West.

Artists selected in early 2023 will be commissioned to respond to ideas of the future in relation to queer identity and community.

Artists will come together in a celebration of diverse queer communities and consider the ways in which stories are passed down, how lives are remembered, and what we can do now to reshape the past to discover new and better worlds for our collective queer experience into the future. This selection of artworks will delve into the collective knowledge of each of the artists and be led through a journey of self-determination by artists and communities alike.

Recognising that it is important that Victorian LGBTQIA+ artists and communities can develop work within a broader context, a component of international collaborations has been incorporated into this project, with emerging local artists mentored through the creation of their work by international artists and connecting the experience of Melbourne's West with a global creative, queer network. This ensures that the development of new skills, profile, and the seeding of longer-term opportunities for new collaborations, and potential touring of artworks, has been embedded into this project from the outset.

Diverse artistic representation and community development/expression is central to the project. The multicultural and multi-generational nature of the West will be central to the artistic brief. What does it mean to be queer in Australia today – comparing & contrasting the experience of those whose families have come to start new lives here in Australia with the stories of queer/gender-diverse first nations and other queer Victorians of all ages living and working in Melbourne's West. The lived experience and engagement of Disabled, Deaf and Hearing-impaired LGBTQIA+ individuals are also central to every project undertaken by Midsumma.

It is the aim of this project that the activities produced will have long-term cultural and arts industry impact beyond the quite sizable immediate outcomes of economic and social impacts, audience experience and artists' development.

The festival is focused on activating sites in Footscray and in/around Substation in Newport, with a concentration of outdoor exhibitions in each suburb connected via the pedestrian/cycle route along Maribyrnong River and Yarra River (with works presented along the route at Scienceworks and Spotswood Jetty). Installations will also be focused on train stations as a point of entry to the suburbs and to encourage travel via public transport. The artworks will be curated in response to the sites, creating engaging installations and transforming audiences' understanding of place and connection in Melbourne's West. Each artwork will be complemented with an audio description and contextual guide by the artist, to make the work even more accessible.

Collaborating with Midsumma and Photo Festival on the Go West initiative will allow Trocadero Projects to reactivate and reaffirm its presence in the west. The collaboration will welcome back their loyal community of artists and art lovers with a rich and vibrant co-curated program, reflective of Trocadero's well-established history of creating platforms for LGBTQIA+ artists in Footscray. This collaboration will provide opportunities for community outreach, allowing artists to create site-specific artworks and programs that engage and reflect their community, in particular its marginalised groups, enhancing an already strong sense of place. Importantly, this strategic partnership will also allow Trocadero to expand its audience through new visitation to the area from surrounding Melbourne and regional Victoria.

Placemaking lies at the heart of this project – with artworks developed for a range of outdoor sites and driving community ownership/activation of public space.

As Trocadero takes a step forward in its new home, this will be a crucial element in the organisation's post-COVID recovery in central Footscray. As part of the project, Trocadero aims to activate the public space in and around Maddern Square (behind their new gallery) to foster creative collaborations and expressions with the area's diverse community groups. Commissioned art will encourage sustainable community engagement at a local level, through use of this and other sites, both via small-scale interventions with local small businesses.

An events program of talks, workshops, forums and performative elements will respond to the artist commissions, and to local communities' stories, to connect with diverse communities across multiple language/cultural groups throughout the 2 months of the project. Midsumma has significant proven experience in partnership with a wide range of artists, communities, and organisations in the West as does Trocadero Projects, and a wide range of public programming will provide significant community engagement opportunities and energy/pace/freshness to the 2-month program.

Leveraging the marketing and community cultural development power of a range of organisations working together, the project will engage a wide age range of local communities both creatively and as audiences, as well as bringing in large attendances from across Melbourne, and from across the State and elsewhere nationally.

All of the confirmed partner organisations involved in this project have successful track records with strategic focuses that include community-led/lived experience-led, capacity-building arts projects, with intersectional communities such as LGBTQIA+, First Nations, disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and engagement with communities across all age ranges (including diverse families, and seniors), broad cultural demographics and identities – truly representing inclusion and diversity in all its forms. For example: *30% of current Midsumma audiences identify as having a disability and 24% of attendees to the 2022 Midsumma Festival self-identified as a person living with a mental illness. 11% of 2022 audiences identified as transgender/Gender Diverse. 17% of 2022 audiences identified as culturally diverse or a person of colour.*

Midsumma and PHOTO Festivals also both have a strong track record in producing projects that generate economic and social impact for the communities in which they take place. The project has a strong focus on bringing communities/audiences and artists together – based upon strong capacity from the involved partner organisations in these areas. In the past six years, Midsumma has **increased the scale and number of new works and events commissioned**, developed and presented each year by **80%** and **audiences have grown by more than 55% despite covid impacts**.

Midsumma Festival is Victoria's premier queer cultural festival, for and by communities who live with shared experiences around diverse gender and sexuality (DGS or LGBTQIA+). We are a champion of queer cultures, conversations and events. Although the primary festival is held in summer each year, Midsumma works nationally year-round to provide artists, social-changers and culture-makers with support and tools to create, present and promote their work.