

“Nice staff, well hung”*

How finding out what people think of you can do wonders for your relationships

A SURVEY OF VISITORS TO THE 2005

Archibald Prize Exhibition at Cowra Art Gallery late last year has opened up a range of potential new marketing and audience development opportunities for the gallery and local businesses.

The survey – which has produced a nationally important data set on a regional arts audience – was undertaken as part of a larger research project about audiences for the arts in rural and regional New South Wales as part of the Audience Development Project at Regional Arts NSW.

A key finding of the survey is the tremendous value of a ‘blockbuster’ show to a regional community. The exhibition attracted over 4,500 visitors to the Gallery, including a significant number of tourists. It also provided a much appreciated opportunity for local audiences to access a major exhibition. Locals and tourists alike were very clear about the benefits of being able to see The Archibald Prize in a country gallery.

The survey has also pointed the way forward for both the Gallery and local businesses to develop their audiences/ market.

Over 250 names and addresses have been added to the Gallery’s mailing list as a result of the inclusion of a tear-off section in the survey. The Gallery is now looking at how it will continue to build its database, including a membership and ‘frequent visitor’ set for ongoing relationship marketing. The possibility of a mentorship from a State or National gallery with an existing best practice membership management program is also being explored.

The survey has uncovered the potential for the Gallery to build partnerships with local food and drink providers to meet a demand for accessible refreshments among the

gallery visitors. Collaborative marketing with local businesses will benefit the entire community.

There are also plans to work with tourism bodies to market future exhibitions to ACT audiences. The research showed that although there were a high number of visitors from Sydney, the number from Canberra was lower than expected. (Look out for an ‘Archie in the Country’ campaign in the capital in the next few years).

Some of the findings from the survey were:

- A visitor to the Archibald Prize at the Cowra Art Gallery was likely to be a working or retired woman, 45 years or older, earning more than \$36,400 per annum. She was visiting Cowra Art Gallery for the first time and attends art galleries, cinemas, libraries, museums and theatre.
- 30% of the audience had travelled more than 280 kilometres to visit Cowra with the majority of these (74%) staying in the area two to three nights (48%) or longer (26%).
- 67% of visitors to the region were staying in paid accommodation.
- Time spent at the Gallery was likely to be between a half to one hour, but 12% of visitors stayed longer than an hour. Some made return visits during the run of the exhibition.
- Visitors were most likely to have heard about the exhibition through advertising (especially newspaper ads), media stories or reviews, brochures/fliers (both in the post or picked up and through tourist information) or publications.
- The quality of visitor experience was extremely positive. Responses

to categories such as ‘accessibility around the venue’, ‘helpfulness of staff and volunteers’, ‘the quality of today’s exhibition’ and ‘your overall experience’ were very enthusiastic, with over 95% of patrons giving them an ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ rating.

- More than 50% of respondents took the time to write something about what they had enjoyed about their visit. Most commented on the quality and variety of the artworks. Many appreciated having access to a quality exhibition in a local, ‘country’ venue so they did not have travel or ‘go to Sydney’. Visitors also praised the layout of the exhibition, the helpfulness of staff, the pleasant atmosphere, the child-friendly environment and the lack of crowds.

But perhaps best of all:

- 59% of visitors were attending the Gallery for the first time and 99% said they would visit again. ■

The ‘Archie in the Country’ study was produced in a partnership between Arts OutWest, Cowra Art Gallery and Regional Arts NSW.

A similar survey has been conducted for the New England Regional Arts Museum and Manning Regional Gallery is currently undertaking a survey.

For a copy of the preliminary report, contact Lisa Andersen Tel 02 9270 2508 Email lisa@regionalartsnsw.com.au.

Lisa Andersen and Cowra Art Gallery Director, Jacque Schultze, will be presenting the results of the study at the RAA National Conference, The Pacific Edge, in Mackay in September.

The NSW Regional Audience Development Project is funded by the Australia Council for the Arts.

*** One of more than 600 comments made by survey respondents.**

April

6 April Youth Week

 Youth Expo Film launch and exhibition. Goanna Manor, **CONDOBOLIN** Tel 0427 954 555

6 – 7 & 11 – 12 April

 Page 8 Acclaimed one man show + coming of age story by David Page. NORPA. **LISMORE & ORANGE** Civic Theatre

7 April Youth Week

 Rock Up 06 Battle of the bands competition. **BATHURST** Panthers Tel 02 6333 6180

7 April Youth Week

 Crescendo Annual youth concert in Federal Park, **TEMORA** Tel 02 6977 1099