

**Amber Cronin:** AICSA was founded in 1990 - the year that I was born - making it 30 years old. It's legacy is a literal lifetime of commitment to the industry, serving institutions, large organisations, the small-to-medium sector and advocating for independents. AICSA has been there through three decades of evolution for our industry..

Over 30 years a lot can change... the way people earn an income is different, leadership looks different, and the way we communicate, mobilize and advocate is different. In celebrating 30 years, we can look back from where we've come as well as celebrate what lies ahead for the next 30 years.

I am a long term member of AICSA, I joined as a budding creative because the Council contained role models and leaders who *for me* were powerful examples for change, bridging conversation between government and industry. When I felt I had something to give back I joined the committee which I have sat on through these last years. I am a member because I believe in the power of groups united, I believe it is possible to make big changes through policy/legislation and believe deeply in communicating the value of what we all do as creatives based in South Australia. My commitment to AICSA is to work to tell the stories of grass-roots, independent and artist-led initiatives within the council and within our industry.

I grew up in an arts centered family with artists as parents, so my pathway in the arts didn't involve convincing parents that this career was possible. Growing up I learnt to sew at seven years old to help mum with her textile creations, and watched my dad's costume changes as a children's theatre maker and clown, who at times also drove taxis to make ends meet. Life was colourful and musical. I was exposed to many ways of living a creative life as well the skills that went part and parcel with this path: agility, resourcefulness, laughter and joy. As a fledgling artist in my teens and early twenties I started grass-roots spaces and events of my own alongside my practice and developed networks and peers as I grew up within this industry here in Adelaide. As I grew my projects grew with me and started The Mill at 21, over the next years I worked to develop a program of national and internationally reaching development opportunities for artists adjacent to studios, rehearsal space and a venue. The Mill was aimed at serving the young artists around me who were looking for outcomes and activity for them here in SA without moving away. The Mill now gains sight of a decade long service to a community of hundreds of artists and creatives.

Here in SA, I've studied at every South Australian tertiary institution, I have three (and a half) degrees and the HECS debts that go with them, I have done a move to Melbourne, lived overseas but now Adelaide is my home-base full-time. What that means is I have a

studio here in Adelaide (at The Mill) where I try to practice three days a week, as well as working 3 different jobs in order to subsidise my practice. The reality of being dedicated to my practice is that I (usually) travel interstate regularly to make my arts career viable, I pick up contracts and project work, I freelance in other fields, I have worked at many of our major festivals, I've started festivals and initiatives of my own - all the while developing a loving community around my career here in SA.

There is no box to tick on forms that sufficiently summarises what a patchwork career looks like for me as a young artist + creative committed to working and contributing to this industry and no polite-conversation-version of summarising what I do and how I survive to strangers in a bar.

I receive national recognition and awards for my commitment to the arts industry and for my own work, but often struggle to keep treading water financially. I fantasise about having savings and living in a more comfortable home. While I am thought to be an emerging leader, the reality of the glass ceiling here in SA is there aren't a lot of leadership opportunities that become available unless you create them working for yourself. Let alone exhibition and development opportunities in my home-town. Just this week I bid farewell to a writer friend who moved to Melbourne despite the pandemic, and discussed work horizons with an actor friend who is living out of their suitcase between Adelaide and Sydney. The reality of chasing work has huge impacts on the lives and stability of young creative people around me. Like lots of creatives my age, I think about moving away from SA regularly for lots of reasons: for inspiration, to be in the thick of critical conversation, for fairer pay, for more work opportunities - but I decide to stay for lots of other reasons: my lifestyle, the ease of and quality of life, the pace, the nature at my fingertips, and the community that I feel embedded within.

**Nescha Jelk:** When AICSA was founded, I was 3 years old and my brother Antoine was six months old. Like Amber, my parents were both working artists and we had just moved to Gumeracha from my Dad's homeland in Geneva. I have distinct memories of watching my parents work: Dad making intricate sculptural jewellery by hand in his home studio; my Mum painting in our back garden with my baby brother strapped to her back. My memories of this time are idyllic, but the reality for my parents was tough. Putting food on the table was hard. A few years later they had to sell the house and my Mum stopped practicing art to find work that would pay the rent and feed our family.

I always knew I wanted to be an artist like my parents, and for whatever reason I knew I would work in theatre. I trained fulltime for 4 years at Flinders Drama Centre and became a director. I have directed for small grassroots collectives and major performing arts companies; from a backyard shed in Croydon to mainstage theatres around

Australia. I was extremely fortunate to be a resident director at STCSA for 4 years through my mid 20's, When casting shows and holding auditions, I got to see just how many amazing talented actors we have in SA, and how few jobs we had for them.

When I left State Theatre, I co-founded RUMPUS, an artist run organisation that was formed to address issues that independent artists had been struggling with: in particular a lack of resources and organisational support. It didn't make sense that we should struggle with these things in isolation, and so as a community we decided to use our creativity and resourcefulness to tackle them together. Since opening the doors to our venue in Bowden in 2019, we have launched 2 curated seasons of independent work by local artists in our black box theatre, including 9 plays and 7 creative developments. Our 2020 main season alone, when completed, will have showcased the work of 41 SA artists.

Like AICSA, RUMPUS is an organisation run by volunteers. We have an amazing membership of 52 professional theatre makers, technicians and arts workers, who all donate their time to help run the organisation. Like AICSA, without this generous donation, RUMPUS would not be possible. While we volunteer this time because we believe that this work is absolutely vital to our community, both organisations are working towards becoming better resourced, so that we will no longer be dependent on our volunteers.

I continue to direct for STCSA and independent companies today. I am one of the lucky ones in my profession and seen as established, 'successful' or someone who has 'cracked the industry' by my peers and the public. However, the reality is that I still need to supplement my income to make a living by working in hospitality - in fact, I just finished my shift about an hour ago.

I would say just about every other established freelance director and actor in Adelaide has to supplement their income in some way. This is not because we are missing out on opportunities, or are yet to prove ourselves, it is because there just aren't enough arts companies to employ us all throughout the year. This is an issue across Australia, but can be particularly harder in Adelaide, which is partly why we can lose so many actors and directors interstate and abroad.

Being in my thirties now, I understand why many artists shift onto other careers at this age, my Mum included. Being an artist becomes less whimsical after 30 - it is when the realities of what you are giving up to pursue your career start to hit home: a stable income to raise a family, owning a home, travel, free time. I love working as an artist, but it is a lot to sacrifice; continuing this career path is a decision that I reassess regularly.

I am deeply worried for the newest generation of young artists-to-be, for whom everything will be even harder, particularly given the alarming state of our tertiary arts education system.

I became an AICSA committee member because I could see that the powerful work they are doing was actively changing our industry for the better. By advocating for more resources and opportunities in the arts, AICSA has further enabled South Australian artists and arts organisations to continue doing the invaluable work that they do for our state.

**AC:** Today Nescha and I wanted to give insight to what a perceived 'successful' or 'emerging leader's' life looks like in reality here in Adelaide.

This life can be tough. We do this because we love it, and we believe in the power of what we do for real societal change - but that doesn't mean we don't think it could work better. As people who run organisations, mentor up-and-coming creatives and contribute to what the industry is becoming, we feel lucky to live in a place where life is affordable, community is at the forefront and networking is a given when you are out in the world. While it can be incredibly challenging we both feel an overwhelming sense of privilege to feel dedicated to this industry.

While we work hard (often underpaid and under recognised), we are enriched by the things taking shape around us. The arts, particularly emerging and grass-roots, find and demonstrate new paths forward, new ways of responding to the shifts and changes present in our society. Diversity, representation, first nations leadership and flexibility are present and inherent in our networks and organisations at these levels.

We see far less silo-ing of art forms and a deep centering of collaboration. It has been artists and Artist-Run-Initiatives that have led these changes and now we see it start to infiltrate our institutions and policies - trickling UP not DOWN. Artists in Music, Dance, Visual Arts and theatre are more connected than ever.

**NJ:** COVID-19 hit Adelaide's theatre industry hard and fast in March last year when every project for the year was either cancelled or postponed. I was very fortunate to get jobkeeper, which meant my part time hospitality job became a full time job in 2020, forcing my other arts work to be delegated to weekends, evenings and the odd day off.

**AC:** Within the Visual Arts COVID-19 measures through 2020 resulted in the closures, program halts or scaling down of many of our galleries, collections and programs from

artist-run organisations to large institutions. On a personal level, every activity that I had confirmed through 2020 was cancelled or delayed within one week in March, leaving me reliant on my part-time casual work outside the arts- the only way I could access JobKeeper to maintain a living wage. I was studying within an institution and my supervisors were unsure of their futures- leading to unstable working and studying conditions.

We're not on the other side of this yet, as 2021 dawns our local industry, festivals and companies continue to navigate ever more challenging pathways to sustainability and security. We attempt to understand our diverse communities' immediate and long term needs as we shape our collective response to effects that are still coming to the surface. The conversations of young artists struggling around us shifted up a gear, as the sacrifices it takes to live a creative life were amplified by the necessary changes to our industry; all this right at a time when it seemed more important than ever for artists to tell the diverse stories that they represent.

**NJ:** COVID-19 has demonstrated just how resilient and resourceful artists are. From the early stages of lockdown, artists around the world were quickly adapting to create and present work online; work that contended with this strange new world we find ourselves in.

The prompt response from our state government, in particular from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, gave many South Australian artists hope for the future during a very bleak time. For this, we are sincerely grateful.

**NJ:** After millions have worked from home this past year, COVID-19 has globally shifted the way we think about work; about how much we work, where we work, and how we value our time and wellbeing.

I think the same is true for artists, signalled by a huge increase in union membership in 2020 and an increase in artists working collectively in ensembles and cooperatives. From my conversations with my peers and collaborators, many artists are making wellbeing, health, and work/life balance a stronger priority.

Despite COVID, there have been big positive changes in the arts industry these past few years: including safer work practices and greater diversity on our stages, pages, galleries, offices and boardrooms. It's worth noting here the recent appointment of Yasmin Gurreeboo as the new Artistic Director of Act Now theatre - as a sign of good things to come.

We are proud to be AICSA members, and to be a part of the great legacy that entails.

Over the next 30 of AICSA, we hope to see many more changes in our industry

We hope that there will be more jobs for artists

We hope that all artists will be paid fairly for their work

We hope there will be far greater diversity in our arts leadership

We hope that the work involved in making art will be valued and respected

And in 30 years, we hope that work by Australian artists, in particular First Nations artists, will be an integral part of everyday life for all Australians.