



**Dead Puppet Society**  
**Limited**

**Annual Report**  
**2023**

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# Acknowledgement of Country

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Dead Puppet Society is honoured to be working on the Traditional Lands of the *Yuggera and Turrbal* Peoples of the Brisbane region and pay respect to their Elders, past and present.

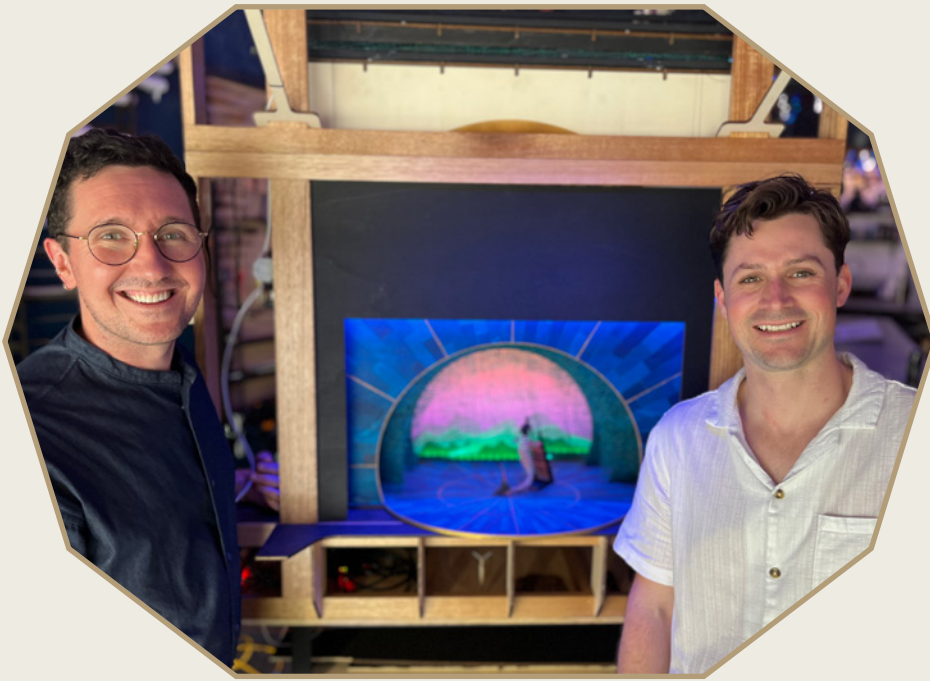
We acknowledge that this *Country* is sacred and respect the continuous living cultures of all First Nations Queenslanders who live here.

We acknowledge First Nations peoples' sacred connection to *Country*, and their deep relationship and responsibility to land, sea and sky, knowing that it is integral to First Nations identity and central to culture and being. We pay respects to the many and diverse language groups, their customs, traditions, and knowledge systems.

Dead Puppet Society is honoured to be in a Land where First Nations peoples continue to: speak to *Country*; listen to *Country*; sing up *Country*; dance up *Country*; understand *Country*; and continue to long for the *Country* they have lost.

*Colleen Wall, a Dauwa-Kaubvai senior woman from the Mary River Watershed of Queensland's South East and Wide Bay Burnett region, assisted Dead Puppet Society to develop a meaningful Acknowledgment to Country, in line with the Queensland Government's Department of Environment and Science, Acknowledgement to Country Statement within The Gurra Gurra Framework 2020-2026.*

This Acknowledgement will guide our future processes in engaging with First Nations peoples in a respectful and responsive manner to develop strong and meaningful working relationships.



## Creative Director and Executive Producer Report

2023 saw us reimagine existing works for new audiences, kick off creative development on several new major productions, as well as take a rare opportunity to recalibrate a little to ensure we're fit for the many rather big things coming our way.

We started the year by remounting *Holding Achilles* with *Legs On The Wall* at Carriageworks for Sydney Festival. The Festival was one of the original commissioning partners of the production, alongside Brisbane Festival and Glass Half Full Productions with Bristol Old Vic and Northampton Royal and Derngate in the UK, so it was wonderful to have the opportunity to have them present the work. We enjoyed five almost sold out shows and have garnered new interest for the production nationally and internationally.

One of Dead Puppet Society's strengths is to build relationships with partners to invest in new works that go on to have long lives on stages across the world, so it was fantastic to have the opportunity in 2023 to return to *Ishmael*, the box office hit we produced in partnership with Brisbane Festival and Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) in 2021. We presented a return season in the Cremorne Theatre, and with the support from the Arts Queensland Touring Queensland

fund, took this production to the regions for the first time - visiting Cairns, Townsville and Bundaberg. As part of this tour we ran workshops with young artists as a way to further our reach and fulfil our commitment to offer professional development for emerging artists across the country.

2023 saw us return to *The Riddle of Washpool Gully* with our dear friends at Terrapin Theatre Company. This is a work that has toured Tasmania before and this time we toured to schools across both Term 3 and 4, reaching more than 13,000 young people.

Having secured the rights from Disney Theatrical Group, we also started development on our major work for 2024 and 2025, *Peter and the Starcatcher*. We dreamed up new concepts for the puppets, undertook a one-week movement development and two-week staging development for Act 1, and thanks to QPAC, spent a week in the Playhouse to test technical design elements. We continued development on the play we commissioned Maddie Nixon to write, *We're All Gonna Die*, as well as some other new projects that we can't talk about just yet.

Activation and Collection also continued to be a core part of the company's offerings.

*The Bee Lantern* returned for Bee Month, illuminating West Village with a spectrum of colours and patterns inspired by the plethora of Queensland bee species. We were artist in residence at the Museum of Brisbane, creating a brand new Activation called *I Know A Place*. This piece invited audiences to celebrate the regions they call home. Our other highlight was *Flamingos*, a new roving puppet offering commissioned by us and Cairns Festival, featuring a flappy-footed flamboyance of full-size light up flamingos. We also launched DPS Social, a new series of after-hours making workshops, and continued to sell our Collection pieces to donors, retailers and collectors.

Finally, our Education program saw us deliver more workshops than ever. We continued our partnership with QPAC to make our productions and workshops available digitally via Digital Stage. We once again partnered with Queensland Theatre to deliver a new residency offering with the Butter Factory working with young artists across Logan. The DPS Academy took place with a new partner, The Princess Theatre, mentoring Esther Dougherty, Emmy Moore and Lunch Friend to create three bite-sized new productions that were presented as part of *THE DPS LAB* - an evening of wonder and theatrical exploration. Thanks to The Jelley Family Foundation for your support and continued commitment to this program, as well as Arts Queensland through the Queensland Arts Showcase Program. We also sent our training puppets to a school in the USA for the first time.

We'd like to make a special mention of our donors who make up The Society, our group of private supporters, who help us continue to do what we do and impact people's lives through providing high quality design-led theatre. We sincerely thank you all for your generous contributions to making our vision a reality.

Our most sincere thanks to our inimitable management committee, who have continued to provide advice on how to steer the company through both the challenges and gains, as well as our team - the beating heart of Dead Puppet Society.

<b>Dr David Morton</b>	<b>Nicholas Paine</b>
Creative Director, Dead Puppet Society Meanjin/Brisbane	Executive Producer, Dead Puppet Society Meanjin/Brisbane

IMAGE CREDIT: DAVID AND NICHOLAS WITH THE DEVELOPMENT THEATRE MODEL BOX FOR *PETER AND THE STARCATCHER*, PHOTO SCOTT BARTON

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# Chair's Report

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Dead Puppet Society continues to cement itself as a leading producer of performance in Australia. While the company is Brisbane-based, it has a global outlook. Dead Puppet Society continues to be inspired by large stories that interrogate the complexity of human connection, wicked problems such as threatened species and environmental matters, and above all stories that speak to hope and beauty. This intentional focus drives the company toward ground-breaking delivery of the performance forms where any object can become a puppet, and any narrative can be one of transformation.

Across 2023 Dead Puppet Society delivered in its key pillars of Production, Education, Activation and Collection.

*Holding Achilles* , a large-scale work in collaboration with Sydney's Legs On The Wall, played Sydney Festival following the Australian Brisbane Festival premiere in 2022. This was the first time Dead Puppet Society played at Carriageworks for five sold out shows in the iconic Sydney venue.

*Ishmael* , an intergalactic retelling of Moby Dick, made a return season at QPAC and progressed on a regional tour (Cairns, Townsville, Bundaberg) with support from Arts Queensland's Touring Queensland fund.

*The Riddle of Washpool Gully* , developed and delivered with Terrapin Puppet Company, completed a school tour across terms 3 and 4 in Tasmania.

As I write, Dead Puppet Society has six new signature works in development, including  *Peter and the Starcatcher*  (premiering in October 2024 followed by an Australian tour),  *Night on the Milky Way Train* ,  *Biw A Githalay*  (with Ilbijerri Theatre Company), and  *We're All Gonna Die* . Significantly  *Biw A Githalay*  is a collaboration with First Nations artists from Saibai Island and the Torres Strait Islands. This work will be a learning journey through story and song that brings together Indigenous ways of knowing and being that are millennia old with the ingenuity of the puppet mastery from Dead Puppet Society.

The Activation program continued in 2023 with highlights including a residency with Museum of Brisbane,  *The Bee Lantern*  at West Village and fabulous neon-lit  *Flamingos*  premiere at Cairns Festival and Brisbane Festival. Collection saw new sculptures in residential homes but also retail expansion with various partners.

Dead Puppet Society is committed to building the creative pool and legacy of our development of design-led theatre by continuing to invest in Queensland artists through professional development, employment, and international skills exchange with individuals across a wide range of disciplines and career stages. Part of the Education pillar of the company is DPS Academy and  *THE DPS LAB* . This program is an opportunity for the company to support emerging artists with an interest in design-led and visual performance forms. DPS Academy and  *THE DPS LAB*  supported by our presenting partner The Princess Theatre went from strength to strength with continued financial investment from The Jelley Family Foundation who, like Dead Puppet Society, have a deep interest in supporting young artists and collectives.



In 2023 DPS Social delivered a full year of activities after the successful pilot at the end of 2022. DPS Social is an opportunity for both dedicated audience members and those new to Dead Puppet Society to sneak behind the magic and get hands-on in the workshop at the company's Woolloongabba HQ. Part of the remit of Dead Puppet Society is to share insights into the design and construction processes with audiences without taking away the magic. This program has been a runaway success.

In mid 2023 the management committee, Creative Director David Morton and Executive Producer Nicholas Paine recognised that the ambitions of the company needed additional support. This resulted in staff growth for the company. In August we welcomed Kathryn (Kat) O'Halloran as Associate Producer. Kat has worked in both national and international contexts as a stage manager and is highly respected. The company is currently recruiting a Marketing Associate with a particular focus on the new work  *Peter and the Starcatcher*  that is in development for an Australian premiere in October 2024. This production will be one not to miss.

On behalf of the management committee, I thank David and Nick for their continued creative leadership of the company. As David and Nick lead the company the Dead Puppet Society team – Matt, Helen, Jodie, Scott, Kat, Savannah, Tash, and Ace - the new dog recruit – make sure the company realises its creative visions. I wish to acknowledge the continued engagement of The Society - the donor group who assist in making the aspirations of the company achievable. The Society joins David, Nick, company staff and members of the management committee at opening nights and special events. The Society is part of the extended family of Dead Puppet Society. We thank them for their support, wisdom and trust.

The productions, activations and workshops delivered by Dead Puppet Society serve to be an inspiration to artists, audiences and communities alike. I hope that you continue to engage and be challenged by the stories presented by the company.

## Professor Sandra Gattenhof

Chair, Dead Puppet Society Management Committee  
Yuggera and Turrbal Country  
Meanjin/Brisbane



# Treasurer's Report

It is a pleasure to present the fourth annual Dead Puppet Society Ltd Treasurer's report.

2023 has seen the company shift focus into the development of a major new work, *Peter and the Starcatcher*. As budgeted, the development phase has pushed the company into a loss position, with the new work due to start recouping in late 2024. The company continues to make strong progress in adopting best practice governance procedures.

The financial statements detail the company's financial position, encompassing its cash reserves. With the waning impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts sector, the industry now contends with the cost-of-living crisis, influencing consumer discretionary spending patterns. Despite the ongoing challenges posed by the current economic and arts funding landscape, there is a sense of cautious optimism within the company's operational sphere.

During the reporting period, the organisation's total revenue was \$1,645,941.60, while the total expenses incurred were \$1,784,031.90. As a result, the organisation had a net deficit of \$138,072.30. The deficit was well planned for, and the organisation's financial position has remained stable during this period.

The organisation has six major sources of income. These are described with a percentage change comparison to the previous year in the following table. It is pleasing to see positive gains in Education, Activation and Collection sectors, as well as in donations. The expected reduction in the Production and grant sectors reflects the focus on the development of *Peter and the Starcatcher*.

Trading Income	2023	2022	% Change YoY
Education Income	72,600.42	39,454.89	84.01%
Production Income	705,296.71	1,129,190.90	-37.54%
Donations Revenue	96,622.72	93,606.41	3.22%
Government Grants	573,282.51	847,984.67	-32.39%
Activation	153,727.21	91,775.00	67.50%
Collection	40,953.35	36,958.99	10.81%
<b>Total Trading Income</b>	<b>1,642,482.92</b>	<b>2,238,970.86</b>	<b>-26.64%</b>

Particularly pleasing is the robust growth in Education and Activation revenue. These revenue streams not only bolster financial stability for the organisation's future, but also enhance brand awareness and reinforce the company's position as a premier contemporary arts entity.

The major cost centres of the entity are described in the table below. The development of the major work is driven by the wages cost centre. The increase in rent expenditure is also reflective of extra expenditure on *Peter and the Starcatcher*. Full time equivalent staff increased from 7 in 2022 to 7.8 in 2023.

Cost Centres	2023	2022	% Change YoY
Production Costs	390,527.60	814,573.65	-52.06%
Rent	57,518.39	38,939.45	47.71%
Wages & Salaries	856,787.50	811,065.29	5.64%



IMAGE CREDIT: ISHMAEL, DAVID KELLY

The organisation exceeded budgeted income targets by a significant margin. These funds were absorbed by larger than budgeted expenditure on salaries and wages. Overall, the 2023 budget estimated a deficit of \$152,111.00. The realised deficit was \$14,038.70 smaller, representing a favourable variance of 9.23%.

The organisation's cash position at the end of the reporting period was \$295,751.32. While liquidity is strong, it requires continuous oversight by both the Board and management committee.

Having regard to the above, and after making enquiries, the Directors have a reasonable expectation that the company will have adequate resources to continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. Accordingly, the Directors continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the financial report.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Dead Puppet Society management team, led by Nicholas Paine and David Morton, as well as to all staff and supporters. Your tireless dedication and hard work throughout 2023 has been instrumental in delivering remarkable artistic achievements and maintaining robust administrative operations. I thank the Chairperson, Professor Sandra Gattenhof, and the other committee members for their dedication, hard work and support.

## Tim Hall

Treasurer, Dead Puppet Society Management Committee  
Chartered Accountant, Registered Tax Agent, Registered ASIC Agent  
Yuggera and Turrbal Country

# Goals and Strategies – Achievements to date

In 2023 Dead Puppet Society undertook activities to align with the goals and strategies of the 2022-25 Strategic Plan. The company and management committee will continue to work towards achieving all goals and monitoring Key Performance Indicators over the remaining funding period.

Below is a summary of the company goals and what activities or strategies have been implemented to date to meet them, and intent towards continuing to do so during the continued funding period.

## Cement a new brand of design-led theatre.

We will create and present relevant, world-class productions and experiences by:

Stated Goal	Activity to date
1. Developing our productions with rigour and a commitment to excellence through long-term, sustained creative development.	The world premiere outing for <i> Holding Achilles </i> continued with the Sydney Festival at Carriageworks from 19 to 22 January. We also redeveloped <i> Ishmael </i> and undertook a return season at QPAC and a regional Queensland tour to three locations. The company ended the year with six productions in development.
2. Investing in Queensland artists and creatives through employment opportunities and ongoing professional development including artists from diverse backgrounds.	Over 200 Queensland actors, creatives and crew were employed to deliver all company activities. We started development on a new work with Ilbijerri Theatre Company, <i> Biw A Githalay </i> , a culturally significant story that is shared across the diaspora of Saibai communities in Cairns, Brisbane, Bamaga and Thursday Island.
3. Creating socially engaged entertainment that tells diverse stories, with a focus on innovative design-led productions.	<i> Ishmael </i> focused on the importance of looking after our planet and <i> The Riddle of Washpool Gully </i> on creatures that might still live in the uncharted corners of our vast country.
4. Taking our work into the public realm and private collections through diversifying our creative output.	Our creative ventures, Activation and Collection, saw the creation and delivery of 15 presentations and the sale of 15 sculptures.
5. Engaging with emerging artists to inspire the next generation of visual-theatre makers.	We ran the DPS Academy with three emerging artists / collectives that resulted in the presentation of <i> THE DPS LAB </i> with The Princess Theatre on 24 October.
6. Delivering an integrated education program.	We delivered 78 in-school workshops, teacher professional development workshops and digital workshops throughout Brisbane and regional Queensland.



IMAGE CREDIT:  *ISHMAEL* , DAVID KELLY,  *HOLDING ACHILLES* , DEAN HANSON





IMAGE CREDIT: *HOLDING ACHILLES*, ROBERT CATTO

### Forge and maintain quality relationships.

We will seek out artistic and corporate partners that are values-aligned and engage with a mix of public, private and philanthropic organisations by:

Stated Goal	Activity to date
1. Making Queensland the epicentre of our work, which will remain borderless, while focussing on premium partners regardless of geography.	We continued to make our work at DPS HQ, our fabrication studio, gallery and office space next to The Princess Theatre. We also expanded our reach further into regional Queensland.
2. Entering co-production arrangements with subsidised partners and seeking government funding.	<i> Holding Achilles </i> was co-produced with Legs On The Wall, Brisbane Festival, Sydney Festival and QPAC, with commercial investment from Glass Half Full Productions and support from Bristol Old Vic and Northampton Royal and Derngate in the UK.
3. Raising commercial investment and working in partnership with commercial producers.	We continued our first look agreement for our next five projects with producer Glass Half Full Productions, to grow the international life of our work and also started development on new titles with Michael Cassel Group and Disney Theatrical Group. <i> Peter and the Starcatcher </i> also attracted commercial investment from Glass Half Full Productions, JONES Theatrical Group, Damien Hewitt, Canberra Theatre Centre, Nancy Gibbs, Neil Gooding Productions, Bryan McCaffrey, PowerArts, Queensland Performing Arts Centre and Woodward Productions.
4. Fostering relationships with leading international technology partners.	We partnered again with Christie, our technology partner, along with QUT on the presentation of <i> Ishmael </i> and the delivery of a free skills and technology exchange workshop for emerging artists and technicians.
5. Nurturing corporate partnerships through the delivery of our out-of-theatre work.	We partnered with West Village Brisbane and the Museum of Brisbane on the delivery of Activation projects.
6. Welcoming the support of our philanthropic circle and embedding these individuals in the company's processes and values.	The company secured DGR status. We continued to run The Society, our donor circle, raising \$85,200 in the year. We have an ongoing commitment with these donors until 2024 and will continue to raise additional philanthropic support through individual donations.

## Build a dedicated audience-base.

We will build a program that is accessible to a broad audience and engages them across a range of activities by:

Stated Goal	Activity to date
1. Creating productions that are suitable for a broad audience.	A contemporary take on one the ancient world's greatest legends, with queer heroes at its heart, <i> Holding Achilles </i> attracted a diverse audience at its Sydney Festival season in January. We gained new audiences, with many ticket buyers not having seen a Dead Puppet Society production before, growing our interstate audience base. <i> THE DPS LAB </i> also garnered new audiences for Dead Puppet Society and participating DPS Academy artists, especially with the exposure to new partner The Princess Theatre's audience. Our new and free outdoor Activation, <i> Flamingos </i> , was extremely popular with crowds of all ages gathering in delight at Brisbane Festival and Cairns Festival. The launch of our DPS Social public workshop events attracted new audiences, as well as rewarded super fans with another offering. The launch of <i> Peter and the Starcatcher </i> on 6 December signalled our entry into the commercial theatre market with an offering of broad appeal.
2. Delivering high-impact education activities around landmark productions.	Schools tickets for the <i> Ishmael </i> Brisbane season sold out, and the downloadable Education Notes including associated classroom activities were well received. Our Education Brochure 2023 was distributed digitally throughout the year, and in print to teachers attending the Drama Queensland conference in 2023, helping to generate lots of expressions of interest and bookings. Terrapin's Tasmanian schools tour of <i> The Riddle of Washpool Gully </i> during Terms 3 and 4 was very popular, with 13,338 students engaging with 109 performances across 89 schools. <i> Holding Achilles </i> became available for schools to rent via QPAC's on-demand arts content platform Digital Stage from 3 April, and <i> Ishmael </i> after our Brisbane and regional tour. Our box office hit <i> The Wider Earth </i> is also available to rent, alongside DPS Digital Workshops.
3. Running a public facing fabrication workshop to showcase our process and contribute to creative placemaking.	We launched our new DPS Social workshop events to the public with three successful workshop series. The inaugural public facing, ticketed DPS Social workshop occurred as part of Brisbane Art Design with a focus on <i> Ishmael </i> in May. The two September DPS Social workshops involved making a mechanical bird puppet, and the third DPS Social was a series of hands-on Christmas wreath making workshops in December. We also ran a private wreath making workshop for The Princess Theatre, and for our donor circle, The Society.
4. Maintaining a strong brand presence on all public-facing activity.	Strategic marketing and publicity plans were implemented for our Sydney Festival season of <i> Holding Achilles </i> , leveraging the opportunity to raise awareness of our brand and offerings nationally. We increased awareness regionally through publicity and marketing opportunities during the Regional Queensland Tour for <i> Ishmael </i> . Awareness and audience growth and engagement occurred during the QPAC <i> Ishmael </i> season, and with the introduction of our new DPS Social events. Regular brand building continued with year-round activations including <i> Flamingos </i> at Brisbane Festival and Cairns Festival, <i> The Bee Lantern </i> at West Village and <i> Megafauna </i> at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. The announcement of <i> Peter and the Starcatcher </i> in December was a huge moment for the brand, signalling our international intentions and partnership with Disney Theatrical Group.
5. Adopting a proactive, year-round marketing strategy to keep our audience abreast of the ongoing life and activities of the company.	Our monthly enews, DPS POST, saw a month-on-month increase in subscribers from opt-in data from ticket buyers and organic sign up from people we connect with through our programs. A quarterly Education enews was distributed to a consolidated and increased Education enews database. A content and social media strategy was rolled out consistently, and a combination of organic and paid social content resulted in an increase in followers on Facebook and Instagram. Website development occurred that enabled enhanced storytelling, and investment continued in producing creative behind the scenes and branding content for storytelling purposes across owned and earned platforms.
6. Consolidating this data into an audience database.	Data sharing provisions continued to be included in presenter contracts, segmentation of the enews database occurred and audience data is gathered post show/event through surveys and insights from our partners. Post-show surveys went to <i> Holding Achilles </i> Sydney Festival audience and <i> THE DPS LAB </i> , as well as DPS Social attendees. Our social media followers grew with 369 new Facebook page followers and 525 new Instagram followers.





### Ensure the sustainability of the company.

We will maintain a nimble organisation capable of adapting to changes and seizing opportunities by:

Stated Goal	Activity to date
1. Engaging strong governance through a connected and committed management committee with diverse skillsets.	Our management committee remained very active, providing strong governance to the organisation.
2. Formalising internal processes surrounding administration, project management and human resources to facilitate smooth day-to-day operation.	We established new administration software, implemented more robust systems and processes, as well as receiving 100% satisfaction from our audit and generation of our first Annual Report.
3. Growing and nurturing our staff pool through the creation of new roles and providing advancement opportunities for existing team members.	We hired an Associate Producer, ultimately growing our administrative and touring capacity. We offered professional development to staff where possible.
4. Pursuing diverse revenue streams.	We continued to seek and secure government funding, investment from commercial producers and income from retail, corporate partners, and the education sector.
5. Building company reserves in order to take risks.	We established a reserve of \$132,000 which we'll continue to grow in the coming years to make space for appropriate risk taking.
6. Pursuing ecological sustainability across all organisational and creative processes.	We have continued to build our environmental goals to look at minimising waste and carbon footprint and were featured as a leading arts organisation who is responding to the global environmental crisis in Griffith University's journal article <i>Culture for Climate</i> .

IMAGE CREDIT: BLUE MORPHO BUTTERFLIES, DAVID KELLY; ISHMAEL REHEARSALS, DEAN HANSON; FLAMINGOS, JARED VETHAAK



## Production

### HOLDING ACHILLES

BY DAVID MORTON

A DEAD PUPPET SOCIETY, LEGS ON THE WALL, BRISBANE FESTIVAL, SYDNEY FESTIVAL AND GLASS HALF FULL PRODUCTIONS PRODUCTION.

19 - 22 JANUARY 2023

VENUE: CARRIAGEWORKS, SYDNEY FESTIVAL

DURATION: TWO AND A HALF HOURS INCLUDING 20 MINUTE INTERVAL

ATTENDEES: 3,149

Set against the epic violence of the Trojan War, *Holding Achilles* by David Morton is a refreshing take on one of the ancient world's best-known heroes, and his relationship with Patroclus, his not so well-known lover. As a young exile taken in by Achilles' father, Patroclus faces hostility from the young hero until they are thrust together to train under the centaur Chiron, and the two form an unlikely friendship. As Achilles doggedly seeks to fulfil his mother's prophecy to become a legend,

their relationship becomes something more. But war with Troy is brewing, and the two young men find themselves caught between their hopes for a future together and the brutal realities of the world that faces them.

This breathtaking new production from visual theatre masterminds Dead Puppet Society and physical theatre virtuosos Legs On The Wall reclaims the queer aspects of *The Iliad*. Set to a haunting new score composed by Tony Buchen and Chris Bear with Montaigne, and a live performance by Montaigne, this innovative new work blends daring aerial work, puppetry and visual storytelling with an ensemble cast to weave a legend of mythic proportions. A tale of trials, grief and love - *Holding Achilles* is an epic tale about a fearless bond forged in the toughest of times.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government's Major Festivals Initiative, managed by the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, in association with the Confederation of Australian International Arts Festivals Inc., commissioned by Brisbane Festival, Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Sydney Festival and Glass Half Full Productions together with Bristol Old Vic and Northampton Royal and Derngate in the UK.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. It is also supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

“...almost ridiculously spectacular in every way, from staging, choreography, design, costumes and lighting, it is all often breathtakingly epic.”

City Hub Sydney

“One of the most inventive shows I have ever seen.”

Australian Stage

“Holding Achilles charts a new theatrical landscape.”

The Australian



## Production

### ISHMAEL

BY DAVID MORTON

A DEAD PUPPET SOCIETY PRODUCTION.

BRISBANE SEASON

19 - 27 MAY 2023

VENUE: CREMORNE THEATRE QPAC

QUEENSLAND REGIONAL TOUR 2023

31 MAY, MONCRIEFF ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE,  
BUNDABERG

7 JULY, CAIRNS PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE

16 AUGUST, TOWNSVILLE CIVIC THEATRE

DURATION: 75 MINUTES

TOTAL ATTENDEES ACROSS BRISBANE AND  
REGIONAL QUEENSLAND TOUR: 2,732

\*SCHOOL TICKETS IN BRISBANE SOLD OUT

Set on a futuristic version of earth that has suffered a catastrophic environmental collapse, the box office hit *Ishmael* by David Morton is a modern version of Herman Melville's classic *Moby Dick*, reimagined for a new millennium as a contemporary space saga.

This boundary pushing production melds live film making with live action, miniature sets, models and cutting-edge camera technology, puppetry and an original score to tell a captivating story about individual hope and collective redemption. Known for exposing the illusion of their work, Dead Puppet Society's *Ishmael* takes it to the next level. Featuring an incredible cast, dozens of miniature spacecraft models operated and projected at enormous scale in front of your eyes with live film making, a heart-racing original soundtrack from avant-pop artist Bec Sandridge this is a story of individual hope.

The *Ishmael* script was commissioned by Dead Puppet Society.

The production was commissioned by Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Dead Puppet Society, and Brisbane Festival in association with Screen Queensland.

Additional support was provided by Glass Half Full Productions.

This project is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body. It is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland and by Creative Sparks, a joint initiative of Brisbane City Council and the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland.

*Ishmael* is supported by our Technology Supporter, Christie.

***This multimedia, audiovisual extravaganza is clever and compelling, and it has (a) killer original music soundtrack by Bec Sandridge.***

*The Courier-Mail*

***In terms of technology, the production is on its own planet.***

*The Australian*

***A new kind of theatrical storytelling.***

*Limelight*





AT GOULBURN STREET PRIMARY SCHOOL  
IMAGE CREDIT: PETER MATHEW

## Production

### THE RIDDLE OF WASHPOOL GULLY

A DEAD PUPPET SOCIETY AND TERRAPIN PUPPET THEATRE PRODUCTION.

TASMANIAN SCHOOLS TOUR TERMS 3 AND 4 2023

ATTENDEES: 13,338  
TOTAL NUMBER OF PERFORMANCES: 109  
TOTAL NUMBER OF SCHOOLS VISITED: 89  
DISADVANTAGED SCHOOLS VISITED: 62  
REGIONAL/REMOTE SCHOOLS VISITED: 54

Far beyond the outskirts of the big city, near a tiny town that nearly everyone forgot, lay a dry creek bed of no special significance. Once upon a time it had been called Washpool Gully. But the world had moved on from insignificant things, and no one had time for dry creek beds. Except in Washpool Gully something was stirring. Shaken by the rumble of engines and darkening of the sky, something long asleep had decided to wake up.

Combining old-fashioned storytelling with contemporary puppetry and miniature sets, *The Riddle of Washpool Gully* by Terrapin and Dead Puppet Society is a reimagined tale of Australian mythology about the incredible creatures that might still live in the uncharted corners of our vast country.

*Vividly imagined and meticulously realised with beauty, wit and immense heart.*

*The Mercury*



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# Activation

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Our Activation and Collection offerings were very popular in 2023, growing Dead Puppet Society's exposure in unexpected places and aiding new audience growth.

Our Activation offerings transform locations and captivate crowds with one-of-a-kind public artworks, laser-cut artefacts or open-air performances. From awe-inspiring puppet creature encounters to light and sound installations and public-facing artisan-led workshops, we create bespoke experiences that blend our timeless approach to craftsmanship with cutting-edge technology.

## I KNOW A PLACE

7 AUGUST - 1 SEPTEMBER 2023 | ARTIST IN RESIDENCE, MUSEUM OF BRISBANE

4 NOVEMBER - 27 NOVEMBER | POP-UP INSTALLATION, QUEEN STREET MALL

As artist in residence at Museum of Brisbane the installation responded to the themes explored in the exhibition *Making Place: 100 Views of Brisbane* through a participatory project involving the wider Brisbane community.

*I Know A Place* invites audiences to celebrate the regions they call home, by recognising special places. Designed for museums, galleries, and other community hubs, this participatory installation combines quiet contemplation with a hands-on crafting activity; a unique and rewarding interaction for locals and visitors alike. Our team spoke with visitors about important memories of Brisbane locations. Responses were collected through our custom-made centrepiece designed and assembled using our computer and machine assisted approach. Crafted in our signature style, this beautiful centrepiece artwork deepens our connections to our local places and, ultimately, to each other.

### AUDIENCE :

- From 9 August – 31 Dec 2023, 157,871 visitors through *Making Place: 100 Views of Brisbane*, and therefore viewers of the installation.
- For SpaceCube, the pop-up in Queen Street Mall, there were 1,498 over the 20 days it was open.



IMAGE CREDIT: KATIE BENNETT

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## STARLIGHT CHILDREN'S FOUNDATION

We collaborated with Starlight Children's Foundation to create The Department of Bright Ideas; a high-tech laboratory on Planet Starlight where Captains conduct inspired (and sometimes ill-fated) experiments.

We applied our design-led methodologies to craft the story and interactive experience, as well as props and costumes including robotic limbs, communications visors and utility belts with illuminated circuit boards. Children were able to interact with the Starlight Captains and explore the fun-filled physical space via a fully functional telepresence robot.

AUDIENCE : 97

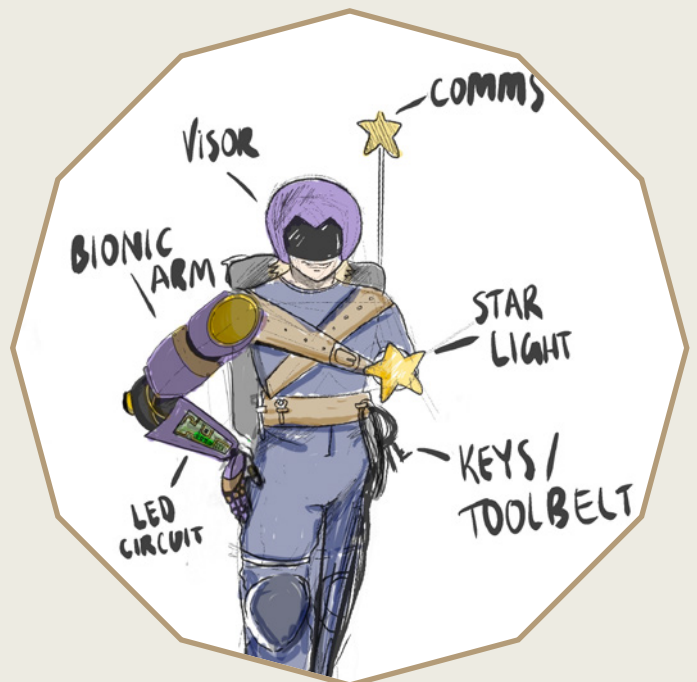


IMAGE CREDIT: SAVANNAH MOJIDI, DEAD PUPPET SOCIETY

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# Activation

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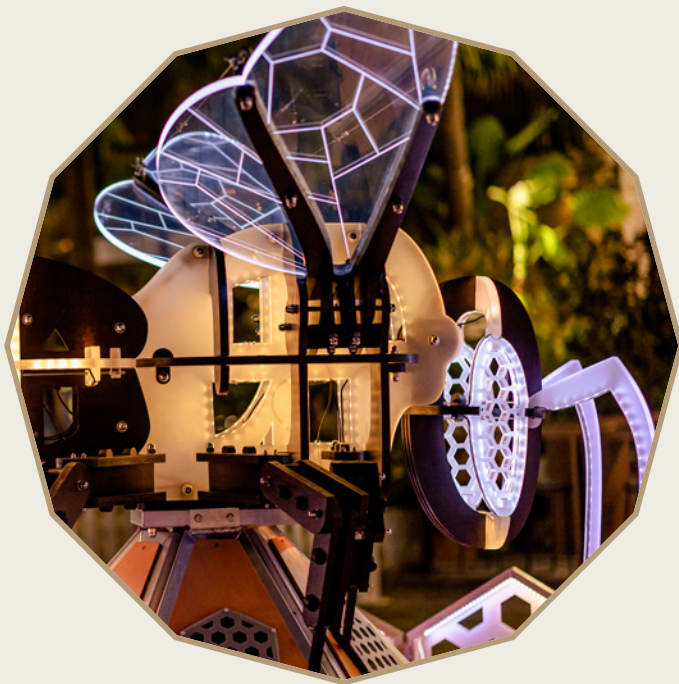


IMAGE CREDIT: JARED VETHAAK

## THE BEE LANTERN

WEST VILLAGE, BRISBANE  
1 - 30 MAY 2023

*The Bee Lantern* was installed at West Village during Village Bees month, a celebration of bees and the critical role they play in pollinating our food supply.

*The Bee Lantern* is a homage to our tiny pollinators and was designed especially for West Village. By day *The Bee Lantern* is black stained ply and frosted acrylic, providing an opportunity for the community and visitors to get up close, encouraging an examination of the sculpture and its fascinating insect anatomy on an enormous scale. After dark the artwork illuminates with colours and patterns inspired by Queensland bee species.

### AUDIENCE :

- Average foot traffic through West Village for May 2023 was 98,938.

Composer and Sound Designer Brady Watkins.

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## OPEN STUDIO

BRISBANE ART DESIGN'S OPEN STUDIO  
27 MAY 2023, DPS HQ

We were delighted to take part in Brisbane Art Design's Open Studio program, opening the doors to our Fabrication Workshop and Gallery space at DPS HQ in Woolloongabba. Visitors were able to drop by between 10am and 2pm, explore the space, meet artisans and see where we make the creatures and objects for the worlds we dream up.

AUDIENCE: 90



ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR MATT SEERY  
IMAGE CREDIT: LOUIS LIM

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# Activation

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IMAGE CREDIT: AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS,  
PARKS AUSTRALIA.

## MEGAFaUNA

TWEED REGIONAL MUSEUM  
29 OCTOBER 2022 - 29 JANUARY 2023

Installed as part of *Capturing Nature* exhibition and roved as part of Up Late event on Saturday 28 January 2023.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS, CANBERRA

FRIDAY 30 JUNE 2023  
Performance and rove at Media/VIP event.

1 JULY - 6 AUGUST 2023  
Exhibition: *Megafauna* took up residence in a prehistoric Australia installation when not roving through the Gardens.

1 - 7 JULY 2023  
Roving: Following their migratory route down river to their seasonal feeding grounds, three ancient diprotodons become lost in the city and find their way to the Australian National Botanic Gardens. These prehistoric *Megafauna* are based on the grass-eating diprotodon, a giant wombat-like creature that was the largest known marsupial that used to walk this land. A rare opportunity to come face to face with these ancient giants as they stop to feed and interact with passersby as they journey through the Gardens at night, and to reflect on how humans have altered the creatures and landscape we share this island with.

1, 3, 5, 6 AND 7 JULY 2023  
*MEGafauna afterDARK*: An immersive, illuminated and cultural open air ticketed performance. Held during NAIDOC Week (2 - 9 July) in celebration and recognition of the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

TUESDAY 4 JULY 2023  
Creature Design and Puppet Construction workshop. Participants created and designed their own ancient-inspired puppet character, learned simple hinging and building techniques, and were guided in our three principles of puppetry to bring their character to life.

### AUDIENCE :

- Over 51,000 visitors for day and night events across July which is an increase of 19.6% from 2021 and 7% increase from 2022.
- Surveys indicated 95% satisfaction rating for daytime and 93% satisfaction for nighttime events.
- While the majority of attendee were local (70%) there was an increase in interstate (28%) and international (2%) travellers with overnight stays in Canberra.



## FLAMINGOS

CAIRNS FESTIVAL

25 AUGUST - 27 AUGUST

VENUES: THE ESPLANADE, CAIRNS | TANKS ARTS CENTRE  
CAIRNS PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE | COURT HOUSE GALLERY

BRISBANE FESTIVAL

8, 9, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23 SEPTEMBER 2023

VENUES: WEST VILLAGE, WEST END | KING STREET,  
BOWEN HILLS (80S STREET PARTY) | FESTIVAL GARDENS,  
SOUTH BANK | ALL TOGETHER NOW, VICTORIA PARK ROAD

This outrageous outdoor Activation features a flappy-footed flamboyance of full-size flamingos. These brightly-coloured, bendy-necked, leg-balancing birds are universally recognised as nature's most ridiculous thing. Croquet club of choice and heroes of front lawn decor; these absurd animals can't help but create a scene.

A sudden rush of light heralds their arrival, as the obnoxious hot pink flock explore their peculiar new environment, charming passersby with equal parts silliness and sincerity. With their bodies bobbing and feathers flapping to a disco dance beat, these unexpected visitors will be the undisputed life of the party.

*Flamingos* was co-commissioned by Dead Puppet Society and Cairns Festival.

### AUDIENCE :

- Cairns Festival: 3,000
- Brisbane Festival: 19,162
  - Festival Gardens: 3,300
  - King Street Party: 4,500
  - All Together Now: 8,362
  - West Village: approximately 200 - 300 each rove

Choreographer Liesel Zink.



IMAGE CREDIT: *FLAMINGOS*  
AT BRISBANE FESTIVAL, DEAN HANSON

## DPS SOCIAL

In 2023 we launched our DPS Social events, a series of after-hours making parties designed to provide participants with unique experiences that share our love of combining timeless craftsmanship with cutting-edge technology.

LOCATION: DPS HQ FABRICATION WORKSHOP

*ISHAMEL* DPS SOCIAL | 26 MAY 2023

Our first DPS Social was part of BAD (Brisbane Art Design). Participants were guided in assembling their own handmade, intricate miniature display model version of the "Hopper Pod" spacecrafts used in our sci-fi epic *Ishmael* to 'fish' for resources in deep space.

WINGED WONDERS | 21 AND 22 SEPTEMBER 2023

Our second DPS Social celebrated the colour and beauty of Australian native birds. Participants were guided in laser cutting and assembly of a unique, mechanical bird sculpture.

CHRISTMAS WREATH MAKING | 30 NOVEMBER, 8, 14 AND 15 DECEMBER 2023

Our final DPS Social series for the year invited participants to celebrate the festival season with Dead Puppet Society and design and assemble a Christmas wreath inspired by native fauna.

IMAGE CREDIT: WINGED WONDERS, DEAN HANSON







## Collection

Our handcrafted sculptures, inspired by our stage productions and the natural world, are fashioned from semi-precious metals and employ contemporary design methods including 3D modelling and laser-cutting techniques before being assembled by hand. We enjoyed working with museums, hotels and galleries on retail partnerships including Tweed Regional Museum, Institute of Modern Art, Museum of Brisbane and Calile's M.O.S.T shop; as well as private collectors including Steve and Jane Wilson on a custom School Shark commission for the architecturally renowned House at Lizard Island.

Sculptures sold and commissioned in 2023 include:

- Blue Skimmer Dragonfly - brass hovering
- School Shark #02 - large copper
- Pelican #05
- Ornate Eagle Ray #01
- Blue Skimmer Dragonfly - mixed
- Wedge Tail Eagle (custom)
- Blue Morpho Butterfly Centrepiece #11
- Blue Morpho Butterfly
- Tawny Frogmouth Flying #03
- Blue Skimmer Dragonfly - copper
- Blue Skimmer Dragonfly - brass
- Olive Branch Laurel #11
- Olive Branch Laurel #12
- Olive Branch Laurel #13



IMAGE CREDIT: DAVID KELLY

# Education

It's been an exciting year. From residencies in Redland Bay to Rockhampton, to delivering 78 puppetry and visual theatre workshops in primary and secondary schools across Brisbane and Queensland, we have engaged with 770 students and teachers across Australia, as well as digitally and internationally through digital workshops and our free online educational resources. We also helped with the staging of school and community musicals, spent full day residencies focussing on the conventions of visual theatre and how to directly apply them, built table-top sized puppets in galleries, and offered teachers professional development opportunities. Our flagship artist training program, DPS Academy, delivered with our new partner The Princess Theatre, was a huge success, enabling emerging artists unique access to our artisans and creative methodologies and an opportunity to perform new work in front of a live, ticketed audience. We also expanded our puppetry workshop offerings to include object and shadow puppetry workshops.

## Highlights include:

### DPS Academy / THE DPS LAB

COMMENCEMENT: 21 AUGUST 2023  
THE DPS LAB: 24 OCTOBER 2023  
THE PRINCESS THEATRE

Now in its sixth year, our flagship artist training program offers a unique professional development opportunity for emerging artists working in the form of visual theatre. Over a revamped 8-week masterclass series our artists helped three artist collectives develop their original ideas into three short works presented during *THE DPS LAB* at The Princess Theatre.

In 2023, DPS Academy was delivered as part of a brand new partnership with The Princess Theatre, marking a fresh chapter for our highly sought-after artist training program. In addition to a new masterclass format, artists had unprecedented access to the beautifully-restored contemporary performance space, with Dead Puppet Society's HQ and Fabrication Workshop just a few steps away. This program is generously supported by The Jelley Family Foundation.



- 12 artist applications received
- Three participating artists/artist groups, made up of 14 early career artists
- 170+ hours of artist-led creative development and rehearsal
- 296 attendees at *THE DPS LAB 2023*, including 259 paying patrons

#### ARTIST SATISFACTION

- 8.75/10 average artist satisfaction rating
- 87.5% of artists reported that DPS Academy effectively shared relevant insight into visual theatre-making practice
- 75% of artists reported feeling more connected to the professional performing arts industry
- 100% of artists reported that "the right amount" of creative, technical and marketing support was provided by Dead Puppet Society and The Princess Theatre in order for them to succeed

#### AUDIENCE SATISFACTION

- Audience insights suggest a mix of first-time attendees to *THE DPS LAB*, and an appreciation of being able to gain further insight into the creative process by viewing works in development.
- Audiences described *THE DPS LAB 2023* as:  
"The future of creation"  
"Inventive, exciting, captivating"  
"Innovative and fresh"  
"Experimental, creative"  
"The Academy offered so much insight into how a professional independent company operates and was an incredible development opportunity. Incredible platform and amazing skills building - so grateful!"

IMAGE CREDIT: *THE HEARTH* BY DPS ACADEMY GROUP  
LUNCH FRIEND, DEAN HANSON



## Drama Queensland

19 AND 20 MAY

Our Head of Youth and Engagement, Helen Stephens, was at the Drama Queensland's 2023 conference, Odyssey, to inform teachers about our Education offerings. Helen delivered a hands-on 90-minute workshop *Transforming Text: A Visual Theatre Odyssey*, building skills for participants in core visual theatre making techniques, and a tool kit of exercises and processes to help students to transform existing texts in new and exciting ways.

Drama Queensland Conference participants were also invited to an exclusive, free post-show Q&A with some of the cast and creative team from *Ishmael* after a performance at the Cremorne Theatre.

IMAGE CREDIT: DEAN HANSON

## Residency Spotlight



IMAGE CREDIT: JOHN LOCH



IMAGE CREDIT: HELEN STEPHENS

### Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* Musical, Rockhampton Regional Council

FEBRUARY 2023

In February Helen worked with Rockhampton Regional Council to help them design and build custom puppets for Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods* musical. Helen also ran a puppetry and manipulation workshop and helped choreograph the puppet scenes.

*"Helen was a treat and brilliant to work with. Our Into the Woods company enjoyed working with Helen and learnt many things about developing their own characters from Helen's wise words on puppeteering."*

MARK MILLET, ROCKHAMPTON REGIONAL COUNCIL.

### Youth-led community festival collaboration Samford Valley Steiner School

JUNE - SEPTEMBER 2023

Our Head of Youth and Engagement Helen Stephens collaborated with Samford Valley Steiner School as artist in residence for their youth-led community festival. Born out of a desire for a healing gesture post pandemic, drama teacher Nicole Ostini was the driving force behind this student-led festival focused around *The Odyssey* and exploring notions of going home. Helen worked with a group of Year 10 students to design and make life-sized puppets that featured in the festival, which took place towards the end of Term 3, at the dawning of Spring.



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# Professional Development

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## Teacher professional development masterclass

9 NOVEMBER 2023, DPS HQ

Participants were guided through Dead Puppet Society's methodology of puppet manipulation, worldbuilding, puppet construction and visual performance making in this unique one-day masterclass at DPS HQ, designed to provide a foundational learning that is instantly transferable into primary and secondary classrooms.

ATTENDEES: 13

IMAGE CREDIT: DEAN HANSON



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## Skills exchange and technology workshop

21 AUGUST 2023, QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (QUT)

This unique skills exchange and panel discussion brought together AV industry professionals, technicians, recent graduates, film and theatre makers to share ideas and knowledge of using AV technology and products to enhance visual storytelling. The free workshop was hosted by Dead Puppet Society, our technology supporter and global technology solutions leader Christie and QUT.

ATTENDEES: 12

IMAGE CREDIT: DEAN HANSON

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## Artist masterclass

2 AND 3 JANUARY 2023, LA BOITE THEATRE COMPANY

This two-day artist masterclass is a unique opportunity for artists to learn more about the craft of puppetry. The program covered basic puppetry construction, manipulation techniques and devising processes for visual theatre.

ATTENDEES: 14

IMAGE CREDIT: DEAN HANSON





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# Who we worked with

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IMAGE CREDIT: DEAN HANSON

In 2023 we partnered with the following schools and organisations to deliver workshops, residences and bespoke education offerings either in person or digitally:

- All Saints Anglican School (Gold Coast)
- Alexandra Hills State High School (Redlands)
- Brisbane Boys College
- Caboolture Regional Art Gallery
- Calvary Christian College (Carbrook)
- Concordia Lutheran College (Toowoomba)
- Coolum State High School (Sunshine Coast)
- Genesis Christian College (Brisbane)
- Helensvale State High School (Gold Coast)
- Hillbrook Anglican School (Brisbane)
- Kings Christian College (Gold Coast)
- Kingston State College (Logan)
- Matthew Flinders Anglican College (Sunshine Coast)
- Moreton Bay College
- Mt St Michael's College (Brisbane)
- Narangba Valley State High School (Brisbane)
- New England Innovation Academy (Marlborough Massachusetts, USA)
- Nimimba State Primary School (Sunshine Coast)
- Redlands College
- Riverside Primary School (Tasmania)
- Rockhampton Regional Council
- Pimpama State Secondary College (Gold Coast)
- Queensland University of Technology
- Samford Steiner (Brisbane)
- Sandgate District State High School (Brisbane)
- St Peter Claver College (Riverview)
- The Condensery (Toogoolawah)
- The Gap State High School (Brisbane)
- Toowoomba Anglican School
- Trinity Lutheran College (Gold Coast)
- Where The Wild Things Are bookshop (Brisbane)
- Woodridge State High School (Logan)



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## Supporters

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Dead Puppet Society thanks members of its donor circle, The Society, for their ongoing support:

- English Family Foundation
- The Jelley Family Foundation
- Liz and Nigel Prior
- Cass and Ian George
- Susan Learmonth and Bernard Curran
- Zoë Connolly
- Denise Wadley
- John Yiannakis
- Anonymous

IMAGE CREDIT: DEAN HANSON

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## End of Year Financial campaign

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Our first external End of Year Financial Giving Campaign, 'Help us create new worlds in new ways', resulted in a total of \$8,700 in donations, enabling us to purchase items that are game-changers for us to keep breaking boundaries: an industrial sewing machine, a test and tag machine, a dedicated flammables and paint cupboard and a 3D printer.

**Help us create new  
worlds in new ways.**

End of Financial Year  
Giving Campaign







## Dead Puppet Society Team

### CREATIVE DIRECTOR

David Morton

### EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Nicholas Paine

### ASSOCIATE CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Matt Seery

### COMPANY MANAGER

Jodie Roche-Jones

### TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

Scott Barton

### ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

Kat O'Halloran

### HEAD OF YOUTH AND ENGAGEMENT

Helen Stephens

### HEAD OF FABRICATION

Savannah Mojidi

### HEAD OF MARKETING AND PR

Tash Spang

### MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Prof. Sandra Gattenhof (Chair), Katherine Hoepper (Secretary), Tim Hall (Treasurer), Adam Brunes, Laura Campbell, Kevin O'Brien, Liz Prior and Claire Styles.

### PARTNERS

Dead Puppet Society wish to acknowledge the following partners for their support:

- Creative Australia
- Arts Queensland
- Christie
- Legs On The Wall
- Glass Half Full Productions
- Queensland Performing Arts Centre
- Brisbane Festival
- Sydney Festival
- Queensland University of Technology



HEAD OF FABRICATION SAVANNAH MOJIDI,  
IMAGE CREDIT: DEAN HANSON