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Cover image: Local artist, Damien Kamholtz working on his first large-scale wall painting.

Photograph by Tim Caraco, 40/40 creative.

OVERVIEW

STATS AND STORIES: THE IMPACT OF THE ARTS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

Stats and Stories: The Impact of the Arts in Regional Australia is a ground breaking project funded by Regional Arts Australia and Australia Council for the Arts that calls for new ways to identify and respond to Australia's vast land, diversity and differences, including its challenges and opportunities in regional Australia, using the arts as the vehicle.

The Stats and Stories project covers five themes and five case studies. The five themes were developed from the literature on the regional impact of the arts. One case study is written on each of the five themes.

The five themes are:

- 1. Community connectedness
- 2. Economic regeneration
- 3. Social inclusion
- 4. Civic pride and community identity
- 5. Regional development

The five case studies are:

- 1. Animating Spaces
- 2. Silver Ball Screening Festival
- 3. In the Saddle; On the Wall
- 4. BighArt
- First Coat

The research project was undertaken by academic staff at Deakin University in the Business School. The project was led by Professor Ruth Rentschler, and Dr Kerrie Bridson at Deakin University, as well as Associate Professor Jody Evans at Melbourne Business School. Research support was provided by Claudia Escobar, Emma Winston and Nick Cooke.

For more information about the project please contact John Oster, Executive Director, Regional Arts Australia john.oster@regionalarts.com.au

Regional Development: Reinventing public spaces and boosting tourism through graffiti art, thus bringing attention to the Toowoomba region.

INTRODUCTION

First Coat, a street art festival, was presented by Toowoomba Regional Council and GraffitiSTOP, in partnership with Toowoomba Youth Service and Kontraband Studios in 2014.¹

The street art festival was held over three days in the Toowoomba CBD, Queensland, where 17 large scale outdoor murals were painted by national and international artists². It was launched at local screen-printing studio and graffiti store Kontraband Studios with an official launch party.³

The festival also opened the Australian print house StupidKrap exhibition at Kontraband's No Comply Gallery and presented artist talks by Analogue Digital and The Strand Cinemas⁴. The festival offered free entry for the public to most of the events.⁵

The walls for the murals were selected as they had a history of being targeted for vandalism in Toowoomba. First Coat Coordinator, Grace Dewar says: 'What had been dingy, badly tagged back alleys, are now filled with colourful, creative energy.'6

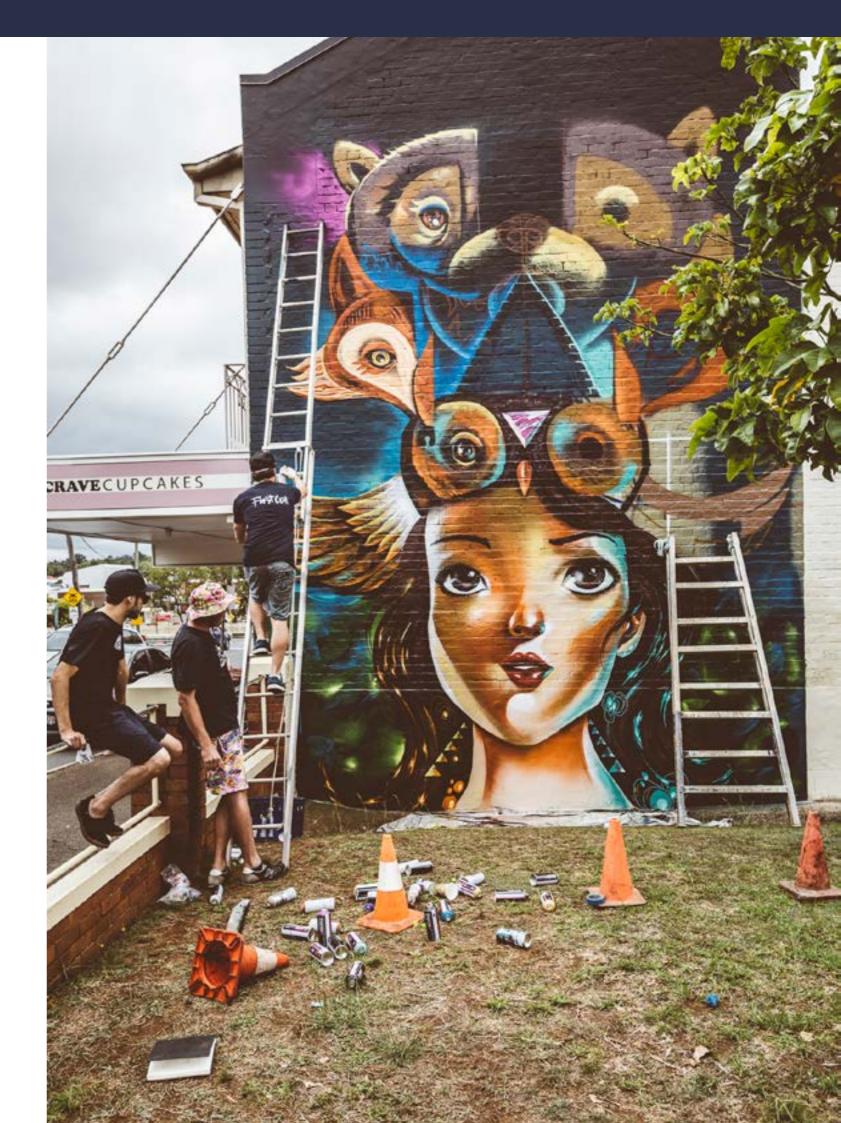
The festival raised awareness to reduce vandalism and to promote graffiti and street art as legitimate art forms.

'Projects like this have huge potential to reshape our community' says Dewar.⁷ The street art festival 'made an impact' on the Toowoomba region, says Ben Tupas from ABC Open.⁸ Tupas goes on to say:

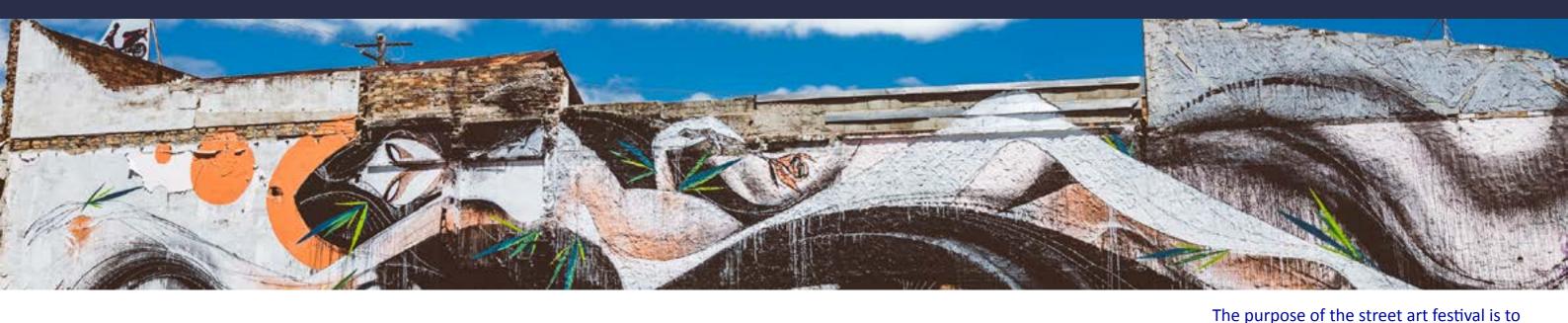
Sometimes, it takes one-off events like these to shift community thinking about how we think about urban spaces and address issues like tagging and graffiti. The end product is a document that shows a regional town changing its colours.⁹

First Coat is the first street art festival to be held in Queensland and only one of four held nationally.¹⁰

The festival contributed to the development of Toowoomba by bringing the region to national and international attention, increasing tourism and changing the image of the CBD.



Drapl & Treas, a collaboration in progress. Photograph by Tim Caraco, 40/40 creative.



BACKGROUND

TOOWOOMBA, QLD

Toowoomba is Southern Queensland's biggest inland regional city (ERP 160,297), located 127km north of Brisbane. ¹¹ The estimated resident population has increased by 13.6% between 2003-2013. ¹²

The town was established in 1827 when Allan Cunningham, an English explorer, discovered farming land which he named the 'Darling Downs' after then Governor of New South Wales, Sir Ralph Darling.¹³

The town was established around an agricultural sector and has grown its economy to become the service centre for south-west Queensland and north-west New South Wales and the second largest inland city in Australia.¹⁴

Offering more than 150 parks and gardens, Toowoomba is known as Queensland's Garden City.¹⁵ In 2013 the town of Toowoomba was heading towards the 'most important boom periods in its history.'¹⁶ 'Vital infrastructure in Toowoomba and the Darling Downs would promote a major influx of people moving to the "Garden City" explains Professor John Cole from the University of Southern Queensland.¹⁷

In 2014 infrastructure development was thriving in Toowoomba. 'No other regional city, nor capital city for that matter, will be able to boast the amount of infrastructure development occurring' said TSBE chief executive officer Shane Charles in an interview with *The Chronicle*. ¹⁸

Major infrastructure developments include Brisbane West Wellcamp Airport and the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing (TSRC).¹⁹ The Queensland Government has called the TSRC project 'the largest Commonwealth Government commitment to a single regional road project in Queensland history.'²⁰ **ORIGIN OF**

FIRST COAT STREET ART FESTIVAL

First Coat is a part of the GraffitiSTOP Queensland initiative to help eliminate illegal graffiti in Toowoomba.²¹ Graffiti is a challenge nationally and for all local governments in Queensland.²²Graffiti makes public spaces look 'unloved' says Local Government Minister David Crisafulli.²³

The Australian Institute of Criminology has estimated the total cost of graffiti to be \$1.5 billion per year Australia-wide.²⁴ The Queensland government has committed to \$8 million over four years for the GraffitiSTOP hotline.

Dewar explains the purpose of the street art festival is 'to get people re-engaging with the streets.' Dewar goes on to explain the festival aims to encourage 'more pride and ownership' and 'respect of these public spaces.' As for inspiration to make it happen, beyond our own passion, Toowoomba Regional Council is the driving force behind getting the project off the ground' says Dewar. Dewar.

Darryl Bates from Toowoomba Regional Council says the council wanted to offer 'support and stimulation' around the event to 'make it happen.' 'It made sense for the utilisation of Toowoomba's back alleyways that were being tagged. This was a great project to utilise that space' says Bates.

get people re-engaging with the streets.

Dewar considers Toowoomba to be a great place for artists. She explains how the First Coat street art festival has contributed to the arts scene of Toowoomba, saying: 'It's a really good time for artists in Toowoomba, and things like First Coat really shine a light on the fact that we have a strong arts scene here.' ²⁸

She explains there is 'a lot going on under the surface' in Toowoomba which is 'creative' and 'exciting'. 'There are so many creative people coming out of Toowoomba with the University of Southern Queensland having an arts faculty as well as a TAFE offering in visual arts and across creative industries' says Dewar.

Dewar is also involved in community art projects developed within Toowoomba such as Kontraband Studios at The Grid, a support space for artists in the community.²⁹

Kontraband Studios was involved in the developmental stages of First Coat, Dewar explains: 'First Coat certainly didn't just come out of nowhere — there had been a couple of murals which were self-driven by the boys here at Kontraband Studios, and then we worked on another project called Animating Spaces which got some well-known artists to come into town.³⁰

Finished mural by Shida. Photograph by Tim Caraco, 40/40 creative.

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Public art contributes to the development of regional towns and encourages regeneration of public spaces.

ACHIEVEMENTS

REINVENTING PUBLIC SPACES

Commitment to public art from local authorities promotes their desire to develop areas in new and innovative ways.³¹ Landi (2012) explains the benefits of public art for regional development, saying:

A politician, planner or businessperson may view public art as an image maker that may bring attention to the community as a destination, boost its competitive economic posture or contribute to its representation in the world. ³²(p.2)

The murals for the First Coat festival encouraged residents to 'find a new appreciation for the township' says Sydney-based artist, Fintan Magee.³³ Similarly, local artist Damien Kamholtz describes the project as: 'Animating public spaces that would otherwise be dreary, drab walls'.³⁴

Commissioning public art for regional areas has been successful for public spaces in Australian regional towns.³⁵ Ashley Frost from the Kiama Municipal Council, NSW comments on the impact that public art, in particular commissioned 'street art', has on public art programs with a focus on using the arts to prevent graffiti in the Kiama Municipality and Shellharbour City areas of NSW.

Frost explains the need for public art in regional areas, saying:

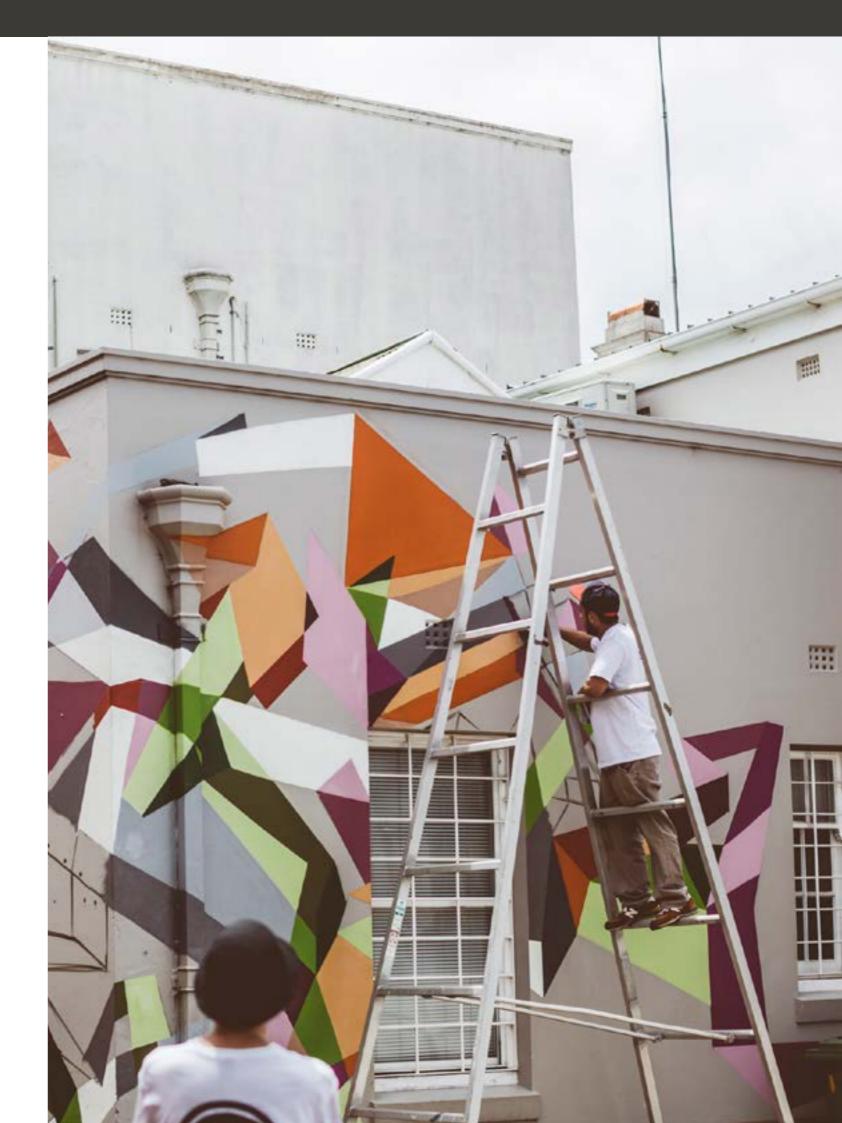
A valid reason for the growing desire for public art and for that matter graffiti art in public spaces is the need for contemplative and recognisable spaces in our hectic public spaces and lifestyles so we may become more aware of our local area, history and people.³⁶

Bates explains councillors from Toowoomba Regional Council are really 'proud' of what the festival has done for Toowoomba. 'The public art created through First Coat has beatified our alleyways' says Bates. He explains public art 'challenges people's idea of what constitutes art'. He goes on to say: 'Sometimes you don't know what it is you like until you see it. It may not be what you think you will enjoy but you enjoy seeing it around your town. There is an education aspect around it.'

First Coat was successful in addressing the issue of tagging and graffiti in Toowoomba says Bates. He explains: 'The spaces chosen for the murals were where tagging and graffiti had occurred. They haven't been hit again. The festival has met its targets to reduce vandalism.'

Local artist, Twolaks on day two of the festival.

Photograph by Tim Caraco, 40/40 creative.







The First Coat street art festival has had a 'huge impact' on Toowoomba and with future festivals planned this will further develop the region's 'potential for tourism' says Bates. '

Fifteen walls over one weekend is going to change the cityscape. I think that will attract people to come and have a look at it' says local artist Damien Kamholtz.³⁷ Sydney-based artist Fintan Magee agreed, saying: 'It's great for the vibrancy of the town and it will bring people from the city here to see it.'³⁸

Public art has been found to attract tourism and encourage economic growth within regional areas.³⁹ The 2014 Toowoomba Regional Council Economic Profile states that the total output estimate for the Toowoomba region is \$16,465.197 million, with tourism contributing \$450.744 million.⁴⁰ The profile also states that 'for each dollar spent by a tourist in Toowoomba, it is estimated that \$0.33 is spent on accommodation and food services, \$0.16 on transport, postal and warehousing and \$0.15 on retail trade.'⁴¹

Bates explains First Coat has made Toowoomba's CBD 'a cool place to be again' as 'you can walk through the city'. He goes on to say:

The mentality here is that you drive to the big shopping centres, you do your shopping and you go. First Coat was about saying "no lets walk through town", while people are doing this people stop for a drink and something to eat.

Bates goes on to explain local businesses are 'seeing benefits' from being involved in the festival. 'Businesses that have been involved have seen increased trade. They are seen as good corporate citizens and they are seeing an economic benefit' says Bates.

Local business Crave Cupcakes had a large mural painted on the side of their shop as part of the festival. Heather Woodcraft, the owner of Crave Cupcakes says she 'loves the mural.' She goes on to say the festival is 'such a positive and beautiful thing that drew people from all age groups, with the end result of making our city more vibrant and unique.'42

The community of Toowoomba gave 'really positive' feedback about the First Coat project says Bates.

Similarly, a study of 732 Sunshine Coast, Queensland residents found 88.6% of residents believe tourism attracts more investment in the community, with 90.9% agreeing that this investment would include support for small businesses and local people.⁴³

Bates goes on to say: 'I underestimated the scale of the work that was being produced. People were interested in the art work.' 'The feedback we received was 99% positive' says Dewar.

Finished mural by Drapl & Treas.

Photograph by Tim Caraco, 40/40 creative.



CRAVECUPCAKES



BRINGING ATTENTION TO TOOWOOMBA

The First Coat artist team included international artists, including artists from Italy, New Zealand and the United States.

In addition to this list, many of the Australian artists involved are recognised internationally. 'It's great for the town and it lifts the cultural image of the place,' Sydney-based artist Fintan Magee said. 'A445 Magee's work is recognised internationally with the artist moving away from traditional graffiti in recent years to embody a mixture of surreal and figurative imagery. 'A6

Dewar explains it was a 'novelty' for the international artists involved to paint in a regional town in Queensland.

The festival was supported by Australia's leading aerosol company Ironlak which has an international creative network, including two of the international artists involved in the project.

Dewar spoke about the interest they received from international artists, saying: 'In the lead up to the festival there were a lot of artists from New Zealand contacting us wanting to be involved, which was really great.' She goes on to say: 'It's great to know that there are people all over the world that are interested.' Dewar explains the impact this has on local artists living in Toowoomba, saying:

Having local artists in the same line-up as international artists who have international and national acclaim, really elevates their artwork. It is really exciting to be able to offer this opportunity to local Toowoomba artists with a massive festival in our local area.

The festival was followed online both nationally and internationally. 'The flow on effect through phone calls and social media was unexpected' says Bates.

First Coat has 1,614 likes on Facebook and received many positive comments online. Comments on Facebook called the festival 'fantastic'⁴⁷, 'exciting'⁴⁸ and 'impressive'⁴⁹, with other comments saying 'bring it to Brissy'⁵⁰ and 'absolutely awesome stuff! We need more of this.'⁵¹ Another commented on the festival, saying: 'It is this kind of creativeness and thinking outside the box that will help Toowoomba be an inspiration for the future.'⁵²

In the development stages of the project Dewar was hopeful that the reputation of the artists involved would draw attention, saying: 'What I would love is having crowds of people watching these guys paint. They are world-class artists. They've dedicated decades to the practice.'53

During the three-day street art festival Toowoomba's CBD was 'alive with onlookers'.⁵⁴ Dewar was astounded with the depth of interest the festival created, saying: 'We had people travelling from everywhere to see the artists paint the city, two of whom had never been to Australia before.'55

The concept of First Coat was 'different' says Bates. He goes on to say: 'When you look at the quality of artists that contributed to First Coat, it is a testament to Grace Dewar's ability to draw these people together.'

Bates was surprised with how far the word had spread and the attention First Coat brought to Toowoomba, saying: 'I spoke to people in Freemantle, Western Australia who associated Toowoomba with the project. They would say "Toowoomba, that's First Coat".

Photograph by Tim Caraco, 40/40 creative.

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First Coat has further developed the arts scene in Toowoomba.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

First Coat has been renewed for a second First Coat festival in 2015. Since this announcement they have received a lot of interest from international artists wanting to be involved. 'Having this response leading up to the second festival is great. Obviously the word is getting out there' says Dewar.

Moving on to developing the second First Coat festival, both Dewar and the Toowoomba Regional Council would like to develop components of the event. 'There were some really exciting youth engagement elements to the project including a partnership with the Toowoomba youth service' says Dewar. She explains: 'They have a youth crew that put together footage of interviews with the mayor, tourists, artists and people involved in the festival.' She goes on to say: 'They shot this footage themselves and did documentation workshops in film and photography with Ben Tupas from ABC Open.' Dewar says she would like to develop this element of the festival next year. She would also like to provide training for the kids to be facilitators at the festival. 'We want to take it to that next level' says Dewar.

Toowoomba Regional Council would like to undertake an evaluation of the event in 2015. Bates explains how the public interest in the First Coat street art festival exceeded the expectations of the council, saying:

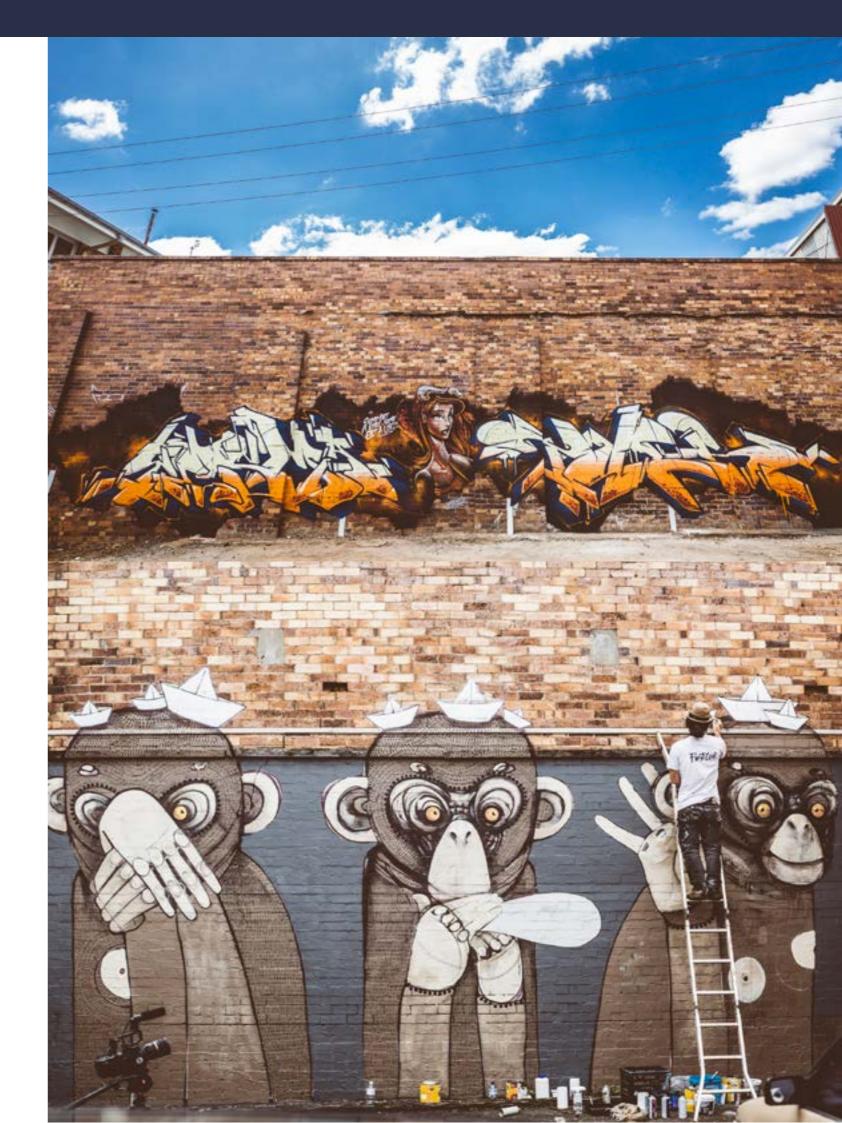
After the festival had begun the word spread. By Sunday afternoon there were hundreds and hundreds of people in the CBD for the festival, from little ones to their grandparents, all taking photos and commenting on how good it was. The flow-on of this was amazing. In the future we would like to track where people came to and from. We would like to capture the flow through at the end of the festival.

First Coat has further developed the arts scene in Toowoomba. Dewar explains: 'It is important for local creative people to know these types of events can exist outside metropolitan areas.

She goes on to say: 'Being able to have this festival in Toowoomba is really exciting and makes me want to keep living here. She explains:

We are seeing a lot of artists are coming back here. What's happening in Toowoomba isn't happening anywhere else. This project opened up my eyes to the possibilities for the arts in regional areas.'

> Top: Finished mural by Tues & Yesma. Bottom: Damien Kamholtz putting on the final touches. Photographs by Tim Caraco, 40/40 creative.





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Fintan Magee's work in progress. Photograph by Tim Caraco, 40/40 creative.

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