

# VULCANA

## ANNUAL REPORT 2023





**VULCANA CIRCUS ACKNOWLEDGES THE  
TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LANDS  
ON WHICH WE WORK, STUDY AND  
CREATE, THE JAGERA AND TURRBAL  
PEOPLES. WE PAY OUR RESPECTS TO  
ELDERS PAST, PRESENT, AND EMERGING,  
AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SOVEREIGNTY  
WAS NEVER CEDED.**

Artwork created by artist Viki Mana for IMPACT  
Image captured by Jade Ellis

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# 2023 Overview

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## WELCOMED

810 Audience Members  
2,375 Workshop and Project  
Participants

## EMPLOYED

95 Artists / Arts workers

## SUPPORTED

150 Independent Artists  
27 Artists through Vacant Room  
Residencies

## SUPPORTED BY

34 Volunteers

## DELIVERED

12 Programs  
10 Performances  
72 Full Term Workshops  
31 Holiday Programs  
39 Circus Deliveries  
21 New Works

 6,100 FOLLOWERS

 3,136 FOLLOWERS

 2,209 SUBSCRIBERS



# Chair's Message

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## Bena Brown

The 2023 calendar year for Vulcana Circus has been solidifying and settling. We created a program of Vulcademy classes, workshops, performances that were challenging, fun, brave and as always for Vulcana—daring. Our financial position remains stable and secure. Our income increased over the 2023 year, and as a not-for-profit organisation, that means we invest that income back into the organisation. A reflection of the strength, passion and generosity of our Vulcana community, we saw donations increase by 177%. Thanks to everyone who has supported the work of Vulcana—we would not exist without all your love, kindness and support.

In 2023, two major performance pieces were a highlight for Vulcana Circus. The continued growth in our Youth Program, both in numbers and experience of students over several years of consistent training, allowed us to partner with Circus Ipswich to deliver our first youth performance, “Come to our House”. Throughout 2023, we also developed and delivered IMPACT—a huge-scale, outdoor, community performance about climate change, and our response to it. What set this show apart were the fabulous First Nations writers, artists, story-tellers and performers who created incredible imagery over which physical performance of ground-based and aerial circus were overlaid.

Circus Exchange for Diverse Artists welcomed artists with disabilities, their support workers, a number of Vulcana staff and guest artists to explore circus, art, and creative writing in a supportive, expansive and creative environment. Participating artists created work to show, and developed collaborative artwork, that is on display at the Vulcana Circus studios. A huge number of emerging and professional artists, with the creative support of Celia White and guest artists, created Agitate Incubator and presented their performance pieces over 2 nights at the Vulcana Circus Arts Hub.



In 2023, our staff have worked tirelessly to program classes and workshops; deliver classes to more students than ever; develop, create and deliver performance pieces from small-scale to huge; support and expand our partnerships with other arts organisations and community groups; share the stories of our students, trainers, and artists; and turn up living and breathing the Vulcana values. Thank you to the unstoppable Celia White (Artistic Director), the generous and tireless Angela Willock (Program Manager), the planned, organised and committed Harlen (Operations Manager), and the creative Latonya Wigginton (Marketing Manager). To our expanding group of dedicated, highly-skilled and talented trainers—thank you for the hours you put in to planning and delivering amazing, supportive and challenging classes—you put the brave, strong and daring into Vulcana and we love you for it.

Finally, thank you to the Vulcana Board who volunteer hours and hours of their time to do the behind the scenes work that allows us to open to doors at Vulcana Circus each week. Thanks so much to Ashleigh Jones (Secretary), Brooke Sinclair (Treasurer), and Shona McKenzie for their years of dedication to Vulcana, their expertise, time and advice. We also welcome Denise Hookey, our first First Nations board member, and Megan Jarvis to the Board. Both these powerhouse women bring skills, experience and knowledge that will contribute to the future strength of Vulcana Circus as Queensland's longest feminist arts organisation.

# Artistic Director's Message

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## Celia White

2023 was an important year for Vulcana. We regained our rhythm with our programming, with our classes, our students, participants, artists and partners.

After the post COVID boom Vulcademy class participation settled back down a notch, while the Vulcana Youth program continues to grow. This year we produced our first youth performance show, *Come to Our House*, in partnership with Circus Ipswich which was a major milestone in Vulcana's history as our youth program develops and comes into line with our Vulcademy programming, including performance opportunities, partnerships and producing trainees supported to become trainers.

We produced a massive community show, *IMPACT*, in collaboration with many artists and performers. We built a venue on Maiwar, the Brisbane River, in Morningside, and presented a work about the impact of climate change on the performers with dance, music, sound, circus and projections.

We supported a wide range of artists through many programs in 2023-artists with disabilities in Circus Exchange for Diverse Artists, through poetry, visual arts and circus; emerging and experienced performers through the Agitate Incubator that supported 27 artists to create and present small new works; artists with disabilities and other emerging, experienced, and professional artists engaged for *Impact*; and many new performers creating group works for the Showcases.



The year was capped with the exciting announcement that the organisation secured organisational funding through Creative Australia, another milestone for Vulcana, to regain this level of funding to make the organisation more robust and able to produce great community engagement and community processes and performance.

*Celia White*  
**Celia White**

# About Vulcana

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## Home of the Brave, Strong & Daring

Vulcana Circus is a not-for-profit arts and recreation organisation that works with the circus traditions of inclusiveness, strength, excitement and courage to transform and empower individuals and communities.

From our independent Arts Hub in Brisbane, we create a safe space where children, women, trans and non-binary students and participants can overcome barriers to participation due to gender assumptions, accessibility concerns, prohibitive costs, or the need for a clear invitation, and develop strength and confidence through training in, and performance of, circus skills. Through risk and the subsequent self-trust inherent in circus, Vulcana promotes courage in the expansion of one's own ability and fosters healthy relationships in a respectful environment.

We advocate that all underrepresented voices belong at the heart of social change, and therefore inclusivity is a core value of Vulcana, where we endeavour to involve diverse stories, cultures, bodies and abilities throughout the creation of our programs. We create supported pathways for new, emerging and professional artists to learn, create and produce new work.

Vulcana's Arts Hub invites cross-cultural and cross-artform collaborations and presentations to create dialogues between circus and other influences that produce dynamic performance and learning opportunities. We aim to create a welcome space for creative expression and community building. Vulcana delivers circus-based arts programs to disadvantaged sectors who otherwise may not have access, so that participants are provided with opportunities to thrive as individuals and community members, collectively progressing the fundamental human right of gender equality through the arts.

**Vulcana's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 is driven by three strategic priorities:**

### **1. Artistic Ambition**

Creating artistically ambitious experiences to deliver diverse and distinctive storytelling.

### **2. Impactful Partnerships**

Connecting diverse communities through artistic and cultural exchange.

### **3. Sustainability**

Growing a sustainable Arts Precinct and contributing to the vibrancy of Queensland's performing arts sector.

# Workshops Program

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Our Vulcademy workshops are open to women, trans and non-binary adults, and our Vulcana Youth workshops are open to all genders and range from fun and fitness, through to skill development for emerging and professional artists. We also deliver community workshops through our Circus Exchange program, and workshops in the community, corporate workshops and in schools' workshops through our Circus Delivery program that allow people to build confidence, trust, body awareness and spark creativity. In 2023 we welcomed a range of new students across our various programs sparking a new love for circus in students beginning their circus journey, as well as continuing to build skills and confidence with our returning and long-term students. We delivered a range of workshops across the year including hosting guest trainers to deliver specialty courses for both youth and adults, and provided performance opportunities for the emerging artists from within these classes. We also employed a range of circus teachers, and trainee teachers across the year.





# Workshop Program Highlights

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## Vulcademy Adults 2023

- Workshop participants adults: 1,235
- Full term programs adults & youth: 72
- Holiday programs adults & youth: 31
- Offering expansions: 6
- Classes participated in showcase: 11
- See Saw Circus supported places: 5
- Trainers employed: 24
- Internships supported and employed: 3
- Professional development programs delivered to trainers/trainees: 1

## Vulcana Youth 2023

- Workshop participants youth: 410
- FairPlay Vouchers: for 6 months of records-18
- Class expansions: Another aerial class added, performance stream added.
- Partnerships: Youth circus partnership with Circus Ipswich which lead to a public season of 'Come To Our House'
- Circus trainers employed: 12
- Internships supported and employed: 2



# Workshop Programs in Detail

## Youth Performance Troupe

The Vulcana Youth Performance Troupe was launched in 2023 focused on building confidence and creativity for participants. As with all Vulcana classes we use a 'challenge by choice' methodology which encourages everyone to participate to the best of their personal ability. This first troupe comprised of 7 of students from ages 12–17. Throughout 2023 they worked in partnership with Circus Ipswich with exchanges and shared devising, visiting each other's workshops. Together they created *Come to our House*, a shared performance that was presented at Ipswich and the Vulcana Arts Hub.

*“Vulcana is such a fantastic opportunity for kids and adults of all ages & abilities to be creative, be physical, learn new ways to move & create outside “the box” in an open, accepting and non-competitive environment. The staff and instructors are wonderful and have the great ability to build confidence and pride in each of their students. It’s such a supportive and collaborative space.*

*-Parent of troupe member 2023*

”

## Circus Delivery

In 2023 we delivered to 39 new communities, bringing circus to a range of councils, workplaces, schools and community groups. We hosted a 20-week circus workshop and performance devising series for Citipointe Christian College that culminated in 2 performances at the Vulcana Arts Hub for the school community, family and friends.



# Workshop Programs Cont.

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## Showcase 2023

This year's showcase was held over 2 days, with Adults presenting a program of new acts developed across term 4 from the skills they had worked on cross the year. This was an opportunity for students to try their hand at or refine their performing skills, and to share what they have learned with friends, family, and the broader community. Our Youth showcase was a double bill, with all of the youth classes performing, as well as the full length show 'Come to our house' by our youth troupe. This is the first year the youth showcase has sold out, with a waitlist for tickets.

## See Saw Circus

See Saw Circus provided 5 sponsored places across Vulcademy and Vulcana Youth programs. See Saw Circus students can access Vulcana classes free of charge making access for their families and support organisations achievable. See Saw Circus allows full participation across the four terms of workshops. Vulcana invites participants from community workshop and performance programs and offers places to adults who self-refer or are invited. We did see a drop in numbers in this program based on the previous year. We believe this can be partially explained by more people accessing fair play vouchers for their children. We have looked at new ways of information sharing across our community over the next 12 months, to ensure as many people take advantage of this offering as possible



# ARTISTIC PROGRAM 2023



# IMPACT

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Vulcana devised, rehearsal and presented a large-scale outdoor performance event, IMPACT, set on the banks of Maiwar (the Brisbane River) in collaboration with members of the Vulcana community, First Nations writers, local Pasifika consultants, musicians and dancers, and a range of guest artists, about the impact of climate disaster on a community level. It expressed how we can imagine and enact our own change through community connection, and was a development on community conversations, engagement, and creative development in 2022.

Creating IMPACT involved 32 community and experienced performers, with a diverse range of perspectives and performance experience, including the perspective of younger artists and artists with disabilities. It involved musicians and writers, and was supported by a highly experienced creative team. Together they collaborated, imaged, devised and created this open air experience for audiences. Foundational texts by the writers provided a framework from which the developing work by predominantly settler performers was built. Using circus, dance, prose, and music—abstract artforms that convey sensations, emotions, risk, and effort, and communicate viscerally to audiences, the texts, exploring theme of treading lightly, time running out, stories of loss and stories of hope supported the power of physical imagery to express the collective sense of urgency.



# IMPACT Cont.

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Performers reflected on their own experience and the release provided by creative engagement with other artists in real time and across shared physical space that created a bond between all contributors.

“The showcasing of such a diversity of voices all affected by the climate crisis is what made IMPACT special. The entire event felt like a community getting together to share stories and find comfort in shared experience. The professional circus performance of Vulcana was enriched through the shared dialogue with music, dance, and poetry.”

-Kaylee Vera, Nothing Ever Happens in Brisbane



# Agitate

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Agitate for 2023 was kickstarted by the exuberant and generous artist Emma Maye Gibson aka Betty Grumble based in Sydney. She welcomed 29 artists to a 5-days intensive workshop to explore creativity and strategies for devising new work. Participants were drawn from the Vulcana community as well as artists representing a diversity of artforms from across South East Qld, and beyond to as far away as Perth and Melbourne. This was followed by an Incubator process over 2 months facilitated by experience artists Celia White and Leah Shelton to continue to support 28 artists to create short new works. These were presented over 2 cabarets of unique programming to full houses in the Vulcana Arts Hub, including circus, dance, text-based work, comedy and film.



*“Participating in Emma Maye/Betty Grumble's workshops as part of Vulcana's Incubator has enriched my world so much, and I feel that it has unlocked creativity inside me. Emma Maye and Celia both created such a sense of safety and respect, of play, joy, exploration, and a container in which to commence a process of excavating what is held in our bodies.”*

-Agitate Incubator participating artist



# Circus Exchange for Diverse Artists

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Vulcana partnered with Brotherhood for the Wordless, local Morningside organisation Art for your Heart, and Wesley Mission's Art from the Margins to deliver this project over 9 weeks of workshops covering circus, visual arts and poetry for artist with disabilities and their support workers. The project, and support workers, supported 12 artists to participate in and to create exchanges between artists leading to a showing for friends and families. This cultural exchange through physical and creative activities that included poetry and visual arts, built confidence, connection between participants and explored new physical opportunities for people who have limited access to supported activities that safely embrace risk and daring. The project aimed to undo assumptions about who has access to the sensations, challenges and benefits of shared circus activity. The reflection on these experiences was expressed through writings, mural painting and performance.

**“This body sits in a constant fight  
Against gravity  
Against energy  
Against expectations of performance**

**This is a fight I have won and lost  
Won and lost  
Across years  
Across continents**

**What a relief then  
To pause the fight  
Simply to play  
To be  
To share**

**In fellowship with others  
Taking a break from  
Their own eternal  
Fights”**

**Poem by Exchange Participant, Tobi**





# Come to Our House

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This partnership opportunity for Vulcana's young students keen to learn how to create circus performance, was with Circus Ipswich who have the experience of delivering a performance program for many years. This gave energy and inspiration to our students to find their creative voice and assistance to Vulcana to launch and deliver our own youth performance program.

Together they created a half-hour show that played with household settings and sharing household tasks and allowed performers to showcase their new skills in a theatrical setting. They developed this performance over the year, starting with online sharing of ideas and then visits to each other's workshop venues for skills development and creative development, and finally rehearsals. Parents and friends flocked to see their two performances, travelling between Ipswich and Morningside to support these new performers. Come to our House was directed by Louise Deleur from Circus Ipswich and supported by choreography and facilitation from Vulcana trainer, Emma Aitchison, and trainers from Circus Ipswich.



# Climate Scapes - Part 2

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This practice-led research collaboration between researchers from the Creative Arts Research Institute at Griffith University, and performers and consulting director from Vulcana started in 2022, and continued in 2023 to work towards documentation of this work in two configurations, one using aerial imagery in the Vulcana Arts Hub and another on site in the parkland near the Brisbane airport, where migrating birds have insufficient and segmented pockets of protected habitat amongst the port industry. The research aimed to unite scientist/scholars/creative artists to explore how physical theatre and circus can communicate climate conversations about climate challenges faced by the broader community. Based in scientific discourse and drawing on previous theoretical investigation by Linda Hassall, Samid Suliman and Kaya Barry, the project utilised film, writing, performance and circus, in response to escalating climate change experiences such as eco-anxiety and/or climate migration. In 2023 it culminated in a short video as a summary of the project and an invitation to further development.

One of the videos created played on loop at the Climate Ready Australia National Summit, co-hosted by Griffith's Climate Action Beacon, at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre on 22 November 2023. It attracted delegates interested in creative arts and climate projects.

**[Video can be viewed here](#)**



# Digital Fictions

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A digital sharing project initiated in response to the Vulcana Arts Hub building undergoing renovations. Members of our community including students, trainers and artists were asked to share photos and videos of the Vulcana Arts Hub and reflect on it as a space.

Taking lessons learnt in the pandemic era this project aimed to help keep our community connected over a time period where accesses to the physical space was disrupted.

“Here's to places that don't just tolerate my oddities but actually encourage them.”  
- Participant quote



# Vacant Room Residencies

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13 artists including groups and solo artists, were supported to create and/or present new performance work in 2023. They were supported with free access to rehearsal space and access to resources of the organisation including lights and sound equipment, props and costumes, rigging and storage space. Vulcana hosted artists to deliver workshops and hold rehearsals at subsidized rates to insure access to the resource of the venue

## Artists In Residence:

- OZFRANK
- See Saw Theatre
- Grace Law
- Chloe Callistemon's project
- A Little Life Theatre

## Hosting:

- Polytoxic
- Hot Brown Honey
- Anna Yen's Play Moves
- Leah Shelton

Multiple independent artists rehearsed and developed works through Open Training opportunities offered weekly.

# Auspiced Projects

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Zoe Houghton and Phoebe Manning spent 4 days plus another 8 days in the Borroloola Community in Northern Territory. They went to the different camps within the community and the kids flocked to learn and play with circus skills that included object manipulation, acro balancing, stilt walking and plenty of games. There was a lot of laughter and excitement. The project was funded by the McArthur River Mine Community Benefits Trust.



# Administration & Governance

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In 2023, the Vulcana Management Committee met on a monthly basis to review Vulcana's activities and financial position and drive strategic alignment. Building on the work commenced with Vulcana's 2022 internal strategic review, 2023 saw a focus on diversifying the range of skills and experience represented in the Management Committee to ensure sound governance and support Vulcana's future activities. Denis Hookey and Megan Jarvis were welcomed to the Management Committee, and we are very grateful for the skills and experience they bring to Vulcana.

## Financials

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### Treasurer's Report

In the 2023 financial year, Vulcana Women's Circus remains in a secure financial position. The accounts have been audited and the auditor reports that the financials demonstrate a 'true and fair' view of the incorporated associations' financial standing. This is a positive result.

	2022	2023
Income	414,268	477,379
Expenditure	392,752	469,015
Net profit	21,515	8,363

In 2023 revenue has increased and with that investment in the organisation. The most significant increase was donations (177%) attributed to the generosity of previous and present members and ongoing fundraising efforts. The largest expenditure to the organizations is employment, employment related costs, and contractor costs, which contribute approximately 80% of expenditure. Vulcana acknowledges the importance of employees and contractors to the organization's success.

# Vulcana Management Committee

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Chair - Bena Brown

Secretary - Ash Jones

Treasurer - Brooke Sinclair

Member - Shona Joyce McKenzie

Member - Ari Wright / Megan Davies

Member - Kel Robinson / Denise Hookey

## Staff Members

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Artistic Director - Celia White

Programs Manager - Angela Willock

Operations Manager - Harlen Ferguson

Marketing Manager - Victoria Barlow / Latonya Wigginton

Head Rigger - Helen Clifford



# Thank you

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All of the Vulcanistas | Our Trainers and Trainees | Volunteers  
Participants | Performers | Guest Artists and Consultants  
Parents, Partners, Caregivers and Families | Donors  
Arts Queensland | Queensland Government  
Brisbane City Council | Creative Australia  
Circus Ipswich | Art for your Heart | Brotherhood of the Wordless  
Art from the Margins | Street Arts Festival  
Councillors Lucy Collier and Lisa Attwood | Senator Di Farmer

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**Brisbane  
City Council**



**Queensland  
Government**

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Vulcana acknowledges the Jagera and Turrbal peoples, the custodians of the lands and seas on which we live and seek inspiration. We pay our respects to all Elders past, present, and emerging. We recognise that this land now called Australia always was and always will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land and the great privilege it is to create and hold community here today.



[www.vulcana.org.au](http://www.vulcana.org.au) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#)

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