

August, 2020

REPORT

Who is going
to look this
way?

A GLIMPSE OF
LATIN AUSTRALIAN
CONTEMPORARY
ARTISTS IN
MELBOURNE
TOWARDS
THE
2020s

MUSIC
VISUAL ARTS
PERFORMING ARTS
HYBRID ARTS



By
EL TARRO
arts project

We acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which EL TARRO has taken place. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present.



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EL TARRO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“In its beginnings, EL TARRO was as an experimental creative space inclusive of all art forms and open to any artist interested in trying out ideas with an audience.”

This report presents the results of a series of consultations conducted in 2018 by the artistic directors of EL TARRO community arts project with a group of active Latin Australian contemporary artists based in Melbourne. It was to identify gaps, barriers and the needs faced by the artists in developing their professional careers when working in the Australian cultural landscape, as well as providing information for the future development of EL TARRO and the sector. We believe this piece of action research can be utilised by Australian arts organisations interested in local contemporary art, Latin Australian artists and those interested in supporting diversity in programming and audience development in the contemporary arts field.

EL TARRO was born in Melbourne in 2008. It was created by Colombian-Australian artists and educators Claudia Escobar-Vega and Jorge Leiva who arrived in Australia in 2007 to study theatre and music respectively. In its beginnings, EL TARRO was an experimental creative space inclusive of all art forms and open to any artist interested in trying out ideas with an audience. Initially, several Australian artists studying performance arts creation, puppetry and dance choreography at the former Victorian College of the Arts (The University of

Melbourne) and contemporary music at Box Hill TAFE, explored their ideas at EL TARRO.

With time, as more young artists from Latin America migrated to Australia during the 2010's, EL TARRO gradually became a platform where Latin contemporary artists would first showcase their art upon arriving in Melbourne. Later, EL TARRO was approached by arts organisations such as Melbourne Fringe Festival, to program Latin themed art events to ensure greater diversity for the Festival. Organically, between 2008 and 2018, EL TARRO became a platform for contemporary artists, including those from Latin America, or with interest in Latin America, to meet, share and develop creative ideas, projects and events.

For its 10th anniversary in 2018, supported by City of Yarra and Schoolhouse Studios, EL TARRO presented a series of events celebrating a decade of work. The events included an art party, a historical visual art exhibition presented in partnership with visual arts project, La Niña Project, and the release of a music compilation album consolidating ten years of original music by the community of artists. Simultaneously, EL TARRO ran a series of artist consultations supported by

non-for-profit organisation Casa Cultura to identify needs, opportunities, barriers and strengths perceived by the Latin American arts community.

This report presents the results of the consultations. It also includes EL TARRO's response to some of the issues raised by the community of artists, as well as research developed by academics looking at the Latin-Australian cultural landscape in the last decade. Besides providing strategic vision to EL TARRO project, this report also provides the arts community with a resource to support future conversations for the development of the creative industries in Victoria as well as the development of Latin American arts in the creative industries in Australia.

EL TARRO is proud to produce this report and contribute a vision for the development of Latin Australian art. EL TARRO has identified that more research needs to be conducted to further understand the current situation and develop viable strategies for engagement of Australians of a Latin American heritage in the wider arts sector. ■

Claudia Escobar-Vega & Jorge Leiva
EL TARRO Artistic Directors

This report was developed in consultation with a group of Melbourne based artists, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. We anticipate that the thoughts captured here still expose the pressing needs of the Latin Australian contemporary artists. Furthermore, EL TARRO believes that the overall devastating impact of the outbreak over Australia's cultural and creative sector, further enhances the notions gathered in this research. ■

EL TARRO BACKGROUND

EL TARRO (translates the *tin-can* in Spanish), was born in Melbourne in 2008 as an experimental creative space inclusive of all art forms and open to any artist interested in trying out ideas with an audience. This open laboratory gradually became a cultural programmer that showcased contemporary art made by Latin born artists who had recently arrived in Melbourne, and Australian artists with interest in Latin American contemporary art.

During its laboratory phase in early 2010s, EL TARRO presented experimental sessions in other cities, as their creators toured to perform in festivals, or as artists in residency. During this phase, EL TARRO ran sessions in Melbourne, Sydney, Buenos Aires, Mexico, Berlin, Bogota, San Francisco, Cesena and Venice. Later on, between 2015 and 2017, EL TARRO partnered with Melbourne Fringe Festival programming a Latin themed Festival Club Night. During this period, EL TARRO also partnered with other organisations such as Multicultural Arts Victoria, Brunswick Music Festival, Schoolhouse Studios, Samba Cine Club, and Melbourne Filmoteca presenting events across Melbourne. Over its history, EL TARRO presented 40 sessions that engaged more than 300 artists across disciplines and audiences of over 10,000. It brought together an artistic, age diverse and culturally diverse community where 50% of the community was from Latin American or Spanish background and the other 50% was from other backgrounds, mostly Anglo and some African, Asian, Pacific Islander, European and North American.

EL TARRO's work was widely recognised across its history. In 2010, it was officially selected as a *Leading Project across the Southern Hemisphere* by The South Project Inc, and also featured in the exhibition *From Latin American Stories to Victorian History: Building Bridges* (2018) by Latin Stories Australia. Additionally, it received a *City of Yarra Grant* (2018)



Public artist Julian Clavijo, *EL TARRO en la casa*, 2 August 2011, Kew. Pic by Sebastian Avila

and the *Pozible Gigs Prize* (2013) for the gig with most supporters.

In 2018, EL TARRO celebrated its ten years with an arts event and a historic visual art exhibition supported by City of Yarra and Schoolhouse Studios. It also released a music compilation album consolidating ten years of music by EL TARRO artists and ran a series of artist consultations supported by Casa Cultura to identify community needs and objectives that could help determine the future of EL TARRO.

The 10th anniversary event involved 52 artists, including musicians, theatre, dance and spoken word artists, puppeteers, and visual artists. It also attracted 300+ audiences over the evening including art buyers who purchased works of art on the night. The consultations attracted eighteen artists including community leaders from diverse cultural backgrounds.

During 2019, EL TARRO analysed the data gathered in the consultations, revised research on the Latin-Australian cultural landscape, and reflected on its future direction as a community arts project. In 2020, it releases the results of the analysis and position towards the future. ■

CONSULTATIONS

EL TARRO consultations, conducted as part of *EL TARRO 10th Anniversary Celebration* in 2018, collected the perceptions of Melbourne based creatives on the opportunities and barriers they faced, and their needs as contemporary artists living and working in Australia.

The consultations were divided into three groups: 1. Musicians and sound artists, 2. Visual artists (including photography, video and film artists) and 3. Performing artists, puppeteers, poets, writers, hybrid artists and other arts.

These consultations were developed in partnership with Casa Cultura, a non-for-profit cultural organisation based on Latin-American cultural values, and were advertised through EL TARRO and Casa Cultura social media, and through direct marketing via EL TARRO database. They were held at diverse in-kind locations around the Fitzroy area.

Attendance. The consultations attracted eighteen artists who reside in Metropolitan Melbourne, from diverse backgrounds including Colombia, Argentina, Venezuela, Cuba, Chile, Brazil, Canada, New Zealand, USA and South Sudan. Some artists came to more than one consultation. ■

CONSULTATION ATTENDANCE

| |  Musicians |  Visual artists (including photography, video and film artists) |  Performing artists, puppeteers, poets, writers, hybrid artists and other arts. |
|--------------|--|---|---|
| MALE | 7 | 4 | 4 |
| FEMALE | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 9 | 9 | 6 |

RESULTS

COMMON THEMES

EL TARRO identified recurring themes brought up by the artists across the three groups and sessions. In this report, these themes have been structured into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and barriers for the artistic development of this community and are presented below. In some cases, where relevant, EL TARRO has developed a reflection or response to some of the issues to further consider the ideas.



Pigsy by Gonzalo Varela, Magic Lantern Studio, EL TARRO 10th Anniversary Celebration, 2018, Schoolhouse Studios, Collingwood. Pic by Gianna Rizzo

STRENGTHS:

The community recognises the following strengths within the Latin-Australian community of artists:

Leading projects

The artists recognise the hard work done so far by diverse artists who lead independent projects that are recognised amongst the artistic community and/or the Latin community. They believe these projects hold key knowledge and networks that have been developed over the years and could support future developments and initiatives. Some artists believe that collaborations amongst such projects can bring further opportunities for everyone.

The projects or initiatives mentioned in the consultations included:

EL TARRO: Founded in 2008 and currently perceived as a multi-art community platform

Casa Cultura: Established in 2014. Non-for-profit cultural organisation based on Latin-American cultural values

4Diverse: Created in 2013, community arts organisation

Vibrating Planet: Created in 2013, music production initiative and event producer

Cumbia Massive: Established in 2014, sound system DJ collective

Casablanca Events: Established in 2011, event programmer

Samba Cine Club: Brazilian cultural project

La Niña Project: Visual arts initiative

“The artists believe these projects hold key knowledge and networks that have been developed over the years and could support future developments and initiatives.”

EL TARRO view: other projects

Besides the projects mentioned in the consultations, EL TARRO would like to include three strong initiatives that could provide support to this community of artists.

[Latin Stories Australia](#)

Since 2014, this initiative shares inspiring stories of Latin American immigrants living in Australia. It also holds events such as workshops, exhibitions and public programs to support the general Latin community and also, celebrate the contribution of Latin American people to the state of Victoria.

This initiative's leadership has produced successful projects developed in partnership with key government, media and non-for-profit organisations. Subsequently its ethos and networks are valuable for the community of artists.

[A Voz Limpia](#)

This poetry collective and independent publisher founded in 2015, has proven to be a successful community platform where storytellers and writers of all persuasions, mostly from Latin America, gather to read work mostly in Spanish, but also in English. A Voz Limpia has published 6 books (3 anthologies featuring 80+ poets in total, and 3 author books). And even though it's focused on literature, its core objective was to bring diverse artistic practices together. The success of this project can support spread the voice of some of its members' initiatives and actions.

[Convocatoria de artistas Latinos en Australia](#)

The other initiative is the Facebook group Convocatoria de artistas Latinos en Australia, created in 2011. With over 460 members, this online community includes many Latin Australian artists, including some who identify themselves as contemporary. In this social platform, the community shares a common space to communicate with each other and keep everyone else informed of what they are up to. It has also become a centralised space that tells the story of how the community of Latin Australian artists has grown and developed over the last ten years. ■

WEAKNESSES:

Additionally, the community recognises the following weaknesses within the Latin-Australian community of contemporary artists:

Market understanding

The artists feel they need to understand better the local market to be able to develop effective strategies to connect to new audiences and niches and expand their reach. The artists reported that they don't really know where to access information or resources to improve their knowledge of the market. However, some of the artists recognise that several members of the community have developed key knowledge and relationships with festivals, journalists and financial supporters over the years. Nevertheless, according to the artists, these contacts are held individually, and there is not a common space to share this knowledge.

Lack of strategy

The artists also reported the lack of strategy, from their end, to tackle the absence of support networks, resources and enthusiasm within the Australian arts industry. The artists feel that they don't have the know-how to shine in a market that is oversaturated and lack partners that can work collaboratively with them to both develop, and address an effective strategy. This issue is very vivid in the lack of presence and representation of their creative output and projects across media outlets such as radio, printed media and on-line, including both main-stream as well as community outlets in English language. One example about this brought up in the consultations is that there is currently *'not even a 'Latin' show on English spoken community radio.'*

Lack of grant writing knowledge

Some of the artists report that they lack skills in grant writing and sometimes find it hard to identify the grants available that they can be eligible for. Additionally, when taking the initiative to apply for a grant, they find difficulty addressing all the requirements, specially because 'the arts grants focus extensively on arts management and marketing outcomes, even beyond the quality of creative and artistic expression'. In other words, they feel they are missing out for not holding expertise in management and marketing skills.

EL TARRO view: Free arts grants writing workshops

Weaknesses in lack of grant writing knowledge, market understanding, and strategy can be addressed by working alongside key arts organisations that often offer grant-writing workshops or offer advice to artists such as Multicultural Arts Victoria. Additionally, some local councils also offer advice to artists in this area.

On the other hand, [Audience Atlas Victoria](#), which maps out the profile of the culture market in Victoria, is a tool available for artists to further understand the local market (Audience Atlas Victoria, 2019). Nevertheless, this report does not include data on culturally diverse artistic offer, such as world live music, or market niches based on preferences for specific cultural themed offers. ■

“The artists feel they don't have the know-how to shine in a market that is oversaturated and lack partners that can work collaboratively with them to both develop, and address an effective strategy.”



WEAKNESSES:

Competition within the community

Competition amongst the community is described as a negative aspect of community development. There is a sense that *'everyone is pulling to their own side'*, as described by one artist. The consensus is that working together could benefit community building and further its development. Several artists mentioned the need to get to know each other more, to be able to collaborate.

EL TARRO view: Working together

EL TARRO recognises that competition can be beneficial. It increases artistic quality, and expands artistic offer, giving audiences more options. Nevertheless, EL TARRO is convinced that working together will be highly beneficial for the community, specially, during this early developmental phase. Working collaboratively in an environment with low support networks and resources, can increase the probability for accessing funds and expanding the impact of the artistic offer. It also creates a stronger voice that can increase visibility within the Australian arts industry and arts audiences.

Studies on community development have found that the essence of community building is sharing (Mahoney, 1994). EL TARRO strongly believes that sharing efforts, knowledge, networks and creativity is critical for the advancement of the community of Latin-Australian contemporary artists. Hence, it would be necessary to open spaces for two way and reciprocal communication between its members. However, this initiative may be hard to implement since it would require leadership, time commitment, resources and also, because the community of artists is very diverse, and somehow divided by migration waves, age differences, education, religion and country of origin.

“The essence of community building is sharing”
Mahoney, 1994

Lack of shared community language or community identity

The artists recognise that there is a lack of shared community purpose, language, and subsequently, there is not a clear message going out to the wider arts community. They consider this a barrier. During the consultations, EL TARRO found that the artists hold a desire to identify a common message, that would unite their artistic practice and endeavour. However, the consultations uncovered two main distinctive approaches to their artistic practice and ethos, which prevent a common message, since each approach lies in deep reflections on how each artist wants to be recognised and perceived by society.

On one hand, some artists believe that their arts practice must embrace the 'Latin' culture and identify themselves as Latin-Australian artists. On the other hand, others believe this approach can bring stigmatisation, and they prefer to

be viewed as artists, in a general sense, without a specific cultural association. This group is particularly worry of being associated with the Latin stereotypes and being trapped under the 'multicultural' stigma.

In connection, some artists have strong positions about what language their artwork should use, particularly musicians. Some musicians believe the music they create should be only in Spanish and others are open to also making music in English. This raises other key questions: who is the art for? Is it for the Latin-Australian community? Is it for the Australian community?

Some of the artists who believe their practice should be associated with their Latin identity, pointed out the importance to challenge the Latin stereotypes and even use them to increase positive associations that can be utilised towards recognition of their practice. One artist gave an

example to positively take leverage on Latin creative power through what was called deep culture, such as building recognition from the lasting artistic merit of Latin literature.

In conclusion, the issue of diverse philosophies, according to the artists, minimises visibility and can confuse the wider market. So there is a common interest to determine what they want to say or not say as a community, and whether there is a shared vision that can ignite common language to talk about what they want to talk e.g. their culture, their new culture, or common human experience.

EL TARRO view: Sub-communities

Shared language enhances collaboration between community members and across the wider arts community and audiences. In a nutshell, shared language can help communities thrive (Thomas & McDonagh, 2013). The duality of artistic philosophies is a key community feature that must be addressed in future planning. It ignites deep questions, such as how artists want to be treated by society: equally or different? In this particular community of artists, where philosophies are intrinsically divergent, there are sub-communities that don't necessarily need to work together, since each would define their own message, depending on their artistic ethos. Furthermore, there are artists that may wish to develop their practice independently, with no association to a specific group. This report may bring more insight to those who want to be artistically associated with their Latin identity, with a contemporary focus and want to work alongside other artists, as a community.

These deep philosophies of artistic practice could be the starting point for developing a shared language for a sub-community of contemporary Latin Australian artists. Shared language means that the group of artists develops an understanding amongst themselves, so they can communicate more effectively. According to Thomas and McDonagh (2013), this is a process that requires intention, increased awareness and education. With time, the community develops a sphere of influence that understands the message and carries it forward (Thomas & McDonagh, 2013).



WEAKNESSES:

Leading festivals

The most recognised Latin American themed festivals in Melbourne and Victoria, focus, from the artists point of view, mostly on the traditions of Hispanic America and are thought to not have the necessary structure and expertise to portray these artists' *'hybrid, quality focused and contemporary arts practice'*. In some cases, the artists also feel that these festivals are not receptive to their work. However, some of them have been involved in these festivals, even though they believe the audiences are not there to experience high quality artistic product, but rather to celebrate independence days, folkloric expression, or Latin stereotyped music or dance showcases.

Since this community of artists focus their practice on contemporary expression, which, according to them, goes beyond traditional or ethnic showcases of culture, these festivals are not perceived as artistic platforms, but rather 'folkloric' or 'stereotypical' platforms. Nevertheless, since these are often the only platforms available to showcase their artistic product, they decide to showcase their artwork here, even though, according to them, most of the audiences are not arts audiences and in some cases, the production quality and performing conditions are of low standards. Furthermore, some visual and performing artists reported feeling excluded from these festivals with no space for the presentation of their artwork or are simply, not interested in being associated with these platforms. The festivals mentioned in the consultations included the [Johnston St Fiesta](#), the [Chilean Latin American September Festival](#) and the [Melbourne Latin Summer Festival](#).

“Since this community of artists focus their practice on contemporary expression, these festivals are not perceived as artistic platforms, but rather ‘folkloric’ or ‘stereotypical’ platforms.”

EL TARRO view: Festivals can be a strength

EL TARRO believes that the festivals mentioned in the consultations have a history, recognition and experience that is valuable. So, it is worth beginning a dialogue with these established platforms, to discuss opportunities for these artists and determine if these Latin festivals would be interested and equipped to support this community's artistic development. Also, if the audiences are the right fit for contemporary art? It is crucial that these dialogues involve the new generation of cultural and arts managers with interest in Latin Australian contemporary art, that have experience working in the Australian arts industry, as well as artists representing diverse artforms. This process could potentially result in the development of a platform that aids these artists to connect with the Australian cultural market.

EL TARRO has been informed of the conversations held during 2018 and 2019, between the Latin American musicians in Melbourne community and one of these key festivals. Such dialogues were initiated and led by two recognised musicians and community leaders, following ongoing discomfort in the community of musicians, specifically performance fees, agreements and conditions. After a long negotiation, the festival agreed to curate the music content and improve the festival-artist engagement, agreements and conditions. These changes are to be implemented in 2020. This example shows the importance of leadership, unity and communication between artists and festivals.

In the light of these discussions, EL TARRO put forward recommendations both for the future development of such festival as well as for future agreements between the festival and the community. These recommendations apply to all the festivals mentioned in the consultations.

1. The Festival should develop a vision and a series of objectives responding to the needs of the community that it represents. These objectives should be open to the public and communicated thoroughly.
2. Each year, after each Festival, its management should present a report of the results in response to the objectives, including a financial report. This transparency is necessary for the governance and healthy functioning of a cultural entity.



João Oliveira, *EL TARRO Fiesta Loca*, 28 September 2017, Fringe Club, North Melbourne Town Hall. Pic by Gianna Rizzo

3. It would be beneficial for each festival to develop a five-year strategic plan informed by consultations with artists and communities including musicians as well as dancers, performing artists and visual artists.

EL TARRO view: other festivals

Besides the projects mentioned in the consultations, EL TARRO would like to include other Festivals that can provide support to this community of artists.

[Hola Melbourne!](#)

EL TARRO considers it is worth mentioning a new Festival called [Hola Melbourne!](#), which evolved from a Latin American Art Exhibition presented in 2018 led by Port Phillip community organisation 4Diverse. [Hola Melbourne!](#) was launched in 2019 supported by City of Port Phillip, the Victorian Multicultural Commission and RMIT University. It was held in St Kilda over two weeks, and presented an ambitious program including a wide array of Latin Australian artists including some from the contemporary arts community. The Festival presented artistic showcase, talks, and workshops. According to its director, who participated in the consultations, this festival was mostly possible thanks to the interest held by the

local council of Port Phillip to support this initiative. So, he pointed to the importance of developing close relations with local councils elsewhere.

Amongst all the festivals mentioned in the consultations, EL TARRO believes this new Festival can provide, more than other, a platform for the community of Latin Australian contemporary artists to showcase their work to arts audiences. This is because it is developed with an art focus rather than a folkloric or sole-cultural emphasis. Additionally, its ethos expands beyond showcasing art only. By including talks and workshops in the program, it ignites dialogue and reflection about issues faced by Latin Australians as well as about their contemporary expression. Furthermore, by being supported by a tertiary institution such as RMIT it has the potential to develop wider networks and educate audiences.

Perhaps its weakness lies in that its focus is on artists based in the City of Port Phillip and would be ideal to be inclusive of artists living across Melbourne's suburbs. Additionally, EL TARRO believes that it would greatly benefit from further strategic planning, marketing expertise and curatorial inclusion. This can be done by inviting experts in these areas to provide advice during



WEAKNESSES:

its planning stages. Nevertheless, it shows potential for growth, and in conversations with its director in 2020, EL TARRO was informed that a second version of the Festival is planned for 2021.

Ventana Fiesta

Ventana Fiesta is a very popular and successful Festival run by the Frankston City Council. It showcases Latin American, Portuguese and Spanish cultures (Tatman, 2017). It runs over 30 activities including dance, music, food, art, crafts, film, poetry and educational workshops. Even though this festival has a strong multicultural focus, it has developed close relationships with some of the contemporary artists consulted in this report over the years, thanks to the director's strong interest (who is of Argentinian background) in developing and presenting new cutting edge contemporary arts projects with dancers, painters and musicians from Latin and Portuguese backgrounds. However, since the festival is a celebration of Latin American, Portuguese and Spanish cultures, it has a strong component of heritage and folkloric art. So, it attracts both audiences who are arts focused, and audiences who are mostly interested in folkloric and cultural experiences. It would be ideal to see a dedicated scenario for the contemporary work and an augmented visibility of the work produced by these group of artists. Also, the fact that it is located in Frankston, 41 km away from Melbourne city centre, makes it an experience more accessible to audiences from this specific geographical area.

In conclusion, EL TARRO considers that, to move forward, there needs to be further conversations between the existing Festivals and the community of Latin Australian contemporary artists. These conversations would aim to find out if these festivals are 'the right fit' to support their exposure and development. Additionally, some of the current festivals need to also invest in strategic planning and good governance, improve their communication with the artists, communities and audiences to better respond to their needs and expectations, as well as becoming more transparent. Future improvement in festival quality, curation, audience development and programming, will reflect cultural and artistic diversity and expression, including the traditional and the contemporary.

Quality of the artwork

According to the artists, some of the artistic work developed within the community can improve in quality. One of the artists said: *'We need to work towards being polished.'*

EL TARRO view: community engagement

Part of working together means there are avenues for mentoring and engaging new and emerging artists and arts managers in the community to work with professional and established artists. This can improve the quality of the work as well as strengthening networks and collaboration. Also, engaging with recognised contemporary artists from Latin backgrounds living in Australia such as Chilean-Australian artist Juan Davila, Melbourne based, represented in major collections throughout Australia, as well as New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo in Spain. And also, Colombian-Australian artist Maria Fernanda Cardoso, Sydney based, recognised in the international contemporary arts scene and named the recipient of the 2019–20 New Dimensions Fellowship. ■

“Part of working together means there are avenues for mentoring and engaging new and emerging artists and arts managers in the community to work with professional and established artists.”

OPPORTUNITIES:

Additionally, the artists identify opportunities given by characteristics in the environment where they are practicing their work.

Growing community

Some artists recognise the on-going migration of new artists and Latin people to Australia as an opportunity to augment the voice and presence of their artistic practice towards the future.

Related research: Growing population (Research by Kath, 2018)

According to Dr. Elizabeth Kath, social scientist and author of *Australian-Latin American Relations: New Links in a Changing Global Landscape*, the 2016 Australian Census recorded more than 30,000 Latin American-born people living in the state of Victoria, of whom more than one third arrived in the last decade. Additionally, new diplomatic relations between Australia and Latin America have emerged over the past decade. On one hand, Australian universities have turned to the Latin American market and "Victoria alone has seen a 400 per cent increase in a decade to over 15,000 students" (Kath, 2018). Additionally, there has been investment in mining and expansion in some business sectors (Kath, 2018).

A new identity

Some of the artists believe it is an exciting time when they are forging a new Latin–Australian identity, which can open new opportunities for their arts practice and expression. Favoretto (2016) has described such identity as hybrid 'constructed locally, but incorporating diverse influences from elsewhere, including from countries of origin (such as Argentinean, Chilean, Colombian, and so forth) but also incorporating the construction of a 'Latino' emerging from the United States'.

Melbourne trends

The artists believe Melbourne's artistic and cultural trends are an opportunity. This was noted specifically in the visual arts, where growing street art commissions, interest in urban feels and bold figurative arts, according to one of the artists 'open opportunities for the expression of different

backgrounds. Additionally, according to the artists, there is a growing trend in Melbourne where new art spaces are being opened and are interested in new artwork and new artists. Another opportunity can be found in Melbourne's music community growing interest in Latin American music including history and diverse genres. Old cumbia has specifically ignited a strong interest in radio playing in English spoken community radio. Additionally, Australians are film lovers (Audience Atlas 2019) and film festivals attract arts audiences in wide scale, so festivals such as Cine Latino Film Festival could potentially provide some avenues to reach interested audiences.

New and old generations

Related research: Generations working together (Research by Del Rio, 2014)

According to Victor Del Rio (2014), both the first- and second-wave Latino communities are generally well integrated into Australian society, but still have more to offer. They each have advantages and disadvantages that can be worked with to build stronger communities, which contribute more fully to the wider Australian society. The first-wave communities are savvy, with strong networks, and the second-wave communities are smart, with strong qualifications. Working together and with the right government policies, these groups can help to develop a stronger Australia internally, but also to develop stronger external ties with the growing economic powerhouses of the Latin American region.

This is a side of the multicultural agenda that has not been fully explored. All the pieces of the puzzle are now on the table: it is time to bring them together so that Latinos can contribute to Australia's bigger picture. (Del Rio, 2014).

EL TARRO view: new project

Latin Stories Australia has launched the *Nuestras Voces* project addressing this need, increasing participation and engagement between different generations of Spanish speaking Victorians. The project can engage this new wave of Latin contemporary artists. (Currently on hold due to COVID-19)

Australians interested in the Latin culture

Related research: Growing fascination (Research by Kath, 2018)

Additionally, Dr Elizabeth Kath (2018) reports a growing fascination amongst Australians for Latin American food, music, dance, language, culture, and travel to the region. 'Across diverse sectors and industries – music, dance, art, literature, gastronomy, festivals, volunteering, education, science, business, sports, and the public sector – we are fortunate for the enriching presence and input of Latin American people in Victoria' (2018). ■

"The first-wave communities are savvy, with strong networks, and the second-wave communities are smart, with strong qualifications. Working together and with the right government policies these groups can help to develop a stronger Australia internally, but also to develop stronger external ties with the growing economic powerhouses of the Latin American region."

Del Rio, 2014



BARRIERS:

Oversaturation of the market

The artists perceive the Melbourne market is oversaturated across all creative expressions. Oversaturated in the music, oversaturated in the performing arts and oversaturated in the visual arts. This situation, according to the artists, causes a feeling of invisibility that risks the survival of their arts practice. One of the artists recalled the Australian audience as being a *'dead audience [towards their work] and we're going to die here.'* Specific to visual artists, it was reported that the mainstream art scene in Melbourne is tough, with one of the artists describing it as *'hesitant to their art'*, where sales are not consistent, and one that *'prioritises men with wealth'*. The artists believe this situation causes feelings of *'artistic loneliness'* and for some of them, it has led to depression.

EL TARRO view: Latin-Australian relationships

Further to oversaturation, EL TARRO believes that wider Latin-Australian relationships in the cultural area may contribute to these feelings of invisibility in the artists based in Melbourne. According to Belém Lopes (2018), Australia is not looking towards Latin America and this is reflected in its Foreign Policy. This lack of engagement affects the local creative drive by Latin-Australian artists who can't find support networks, resources or enthusiasm in the local Australian arts industry. Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper, which reviews Australia's international engagement for 14 years (DFAT, 2017), barely mentions Latin America as a zone for concern and/or opportunities (Belém Lopes, 2018). EL TARRO believes the minimal international artistic rotation from Latin America to Australia, adds to the lack of visibility of the many local Latin related initiatives in the Australian cultural sector.

"The artists also report constantly 'bumping onto the industry's huge walls'."

EL TARRO *Fiesta Loca*, 28 September 2017, Fringe Club, North Melbourne Town Hall. Pic by Gianna Rizzo

Strong boundaries for the professional development and presentation of work in Australia

The artists also report constantly *'bumping into the industry's huge walls.'* They report feeling that, no matter how hard they try to produce high quality art, which is developed mostly with artists' funds or community raised funds, they always reach a *'dead end or a dark hole,'* with no possibility for further professional development or market reach.

EL TARRO view: No industry?

Several examples demonstrate that the cultural product offered by Latin Australian artists evolves up to a certain point, and eventually finds itself blocked, somehow incapable of reaching a new stage of development. For example, Magic Lantern Studio, winner of a *Green Room Award 2018* (Puppetry) in partnership with Sanctum Theatre, has not experienced increased demand for its creative produce since then. In the music, Watussi band (Sydney based) nominated for Best World Music Album in the *ARIA Awards 2008*, was later put on hiatus in 2015. Madre Monte (Melbourne based) supported *The Cat Empire National Australian Tour* in 2014 and still performs, though quite sporadically. Another example is Miss Colombia (Melbourne based) whose song *Tropical Snow* featured BONDS iconic underwear brand 2018 Australia and New Zealand Christmas campaign and was awarded Special Prize *"City of Annecy Award"* in the Festival international du film d'animation d'Annecy, 2018, and is now on hiatus.

EL TARRO believes that the absence of stepping stones that help take these artists further in the development of their professional career, is caused by both internal and external factors. On one hand, the artistic product has strong cultural roots and, in many cases, is presented in Spanish, or Portuguese language, which may be seen as a barrier, if trying to connect to English speaking audiences. However, Australia has shown that this is not always the case. For example, *Despacito* by Luis Fonsi & Daddy Yankee Feat. Justin Bieber, sang in Spanish, made it to #1 on the ARIA Singles Chart for more than twelve weeks straight (ARIA, 2017). On the other hand, as far as EL TARRO is aware, Australia does not have a record label that is interested in releasing the new music by Latin Australian artists, furthermore, there are no full-time dedicated producers or managers connected nor committed to supporting these new wave of artists. This lack of key 'players' who are necessary to support a network of artists and in conjunction, conform an industry, leaves these artists 'out of the game', and out of the industry. ■



NEEDS:

From the artists' point of view, there are pressing needs to move further into the development of this community of artists.

1. Get to know each other

The artists believe that to move forward, it is important to get to know each other. One artist suggested the creation of a laboratory to facilitate creative dialogue.

2. Develop skills, learning and knowledge

To address this point, the artists believe they need to learn about support platforms, grants available, develop grant-writing skills, crowdfunding skills and access basic marketing and management advice from professionals who know and understand the market.

The artists would also like to know if there are on-line resources available to access research on the Melbourne market for a specific art form and support platforms. For example, publications on 'The business of emerging artists in Melbourne', 'Selling work in Melbourne', 'Making a living from the art in Melbourne' and 'How to get your work out there?' Another point mentioned was the importance of getting training or contextual information on *'Adaptation: how to be and look professional as an artist in Melbourne'*.

3. Become visible

One of the most recurring needs brought up by the group of artists was to get recognition in the Australian cultural market. There is a feeling within the group, that the Australian market appears to lack knowledge about the Latin American artistic produce both being done locally and internationally, perhaps due to the lack of content across media, art and cultural programming. There are key questions that are still to be answered though it is a big step to consolidate them in this report:

- What is the point of difference? What can these artists offer that is not currently being offered?
- How can these artists get the wider art audiences to access what they do?
- How to educate the market? ■



IDEAS:

There are several ideas brought up by the group of artists to tackle the invisibility including:

Collaborate

There is an interest in collaboration on many fronts:

Collaborations between artists and projects

Some artists suggested working together to increase visibility. Tangible ideas on how to do this included: music compilations, collective exhibitions or group shows. Some of the projects mentioned under strengths in page 9 already collaborate occasionally. Furthermore, there are different projects and project leaders who have developed a network of organisations (corporate, government and NGOs), journalists, festival and venue bookers, art galleries, visual art buyers, etc that are interested in the work being made by some of the artists who participated in the consultations. These contacts make up local (Melbourne and suburbs), regional, interstate and international networks that could be shared amongst the community to build a centralised database of supporters and interested parties in the work. This could include touring/exhibition circuits.

Collaborate with organisation and venues

Other ideas of collaboration were focused on developing work in partnership with other organisations or venues. Some of the organisations mentioned included local councils such as City of Port Philip, who has supported the Hola Melbourne! Festival 2019 and prior initiatives led by 4Diverse (cultural organisation). The idea is to build reputation in the Government to attract more funding. The artists also mentioned the need to approach and attract partner sponsors, as well as maintain those who are already supporting some of the long standing festivals.

There was also reference to potential collaborations with other local communities who may have synergy with these artists and potentially share similar community needs, one example brought up by the artists was the African community of musicians. There was also an interest in collaborating with

international Latin American communities of artists such as the one in New York, who could potentially mentor the community in Melbourne.

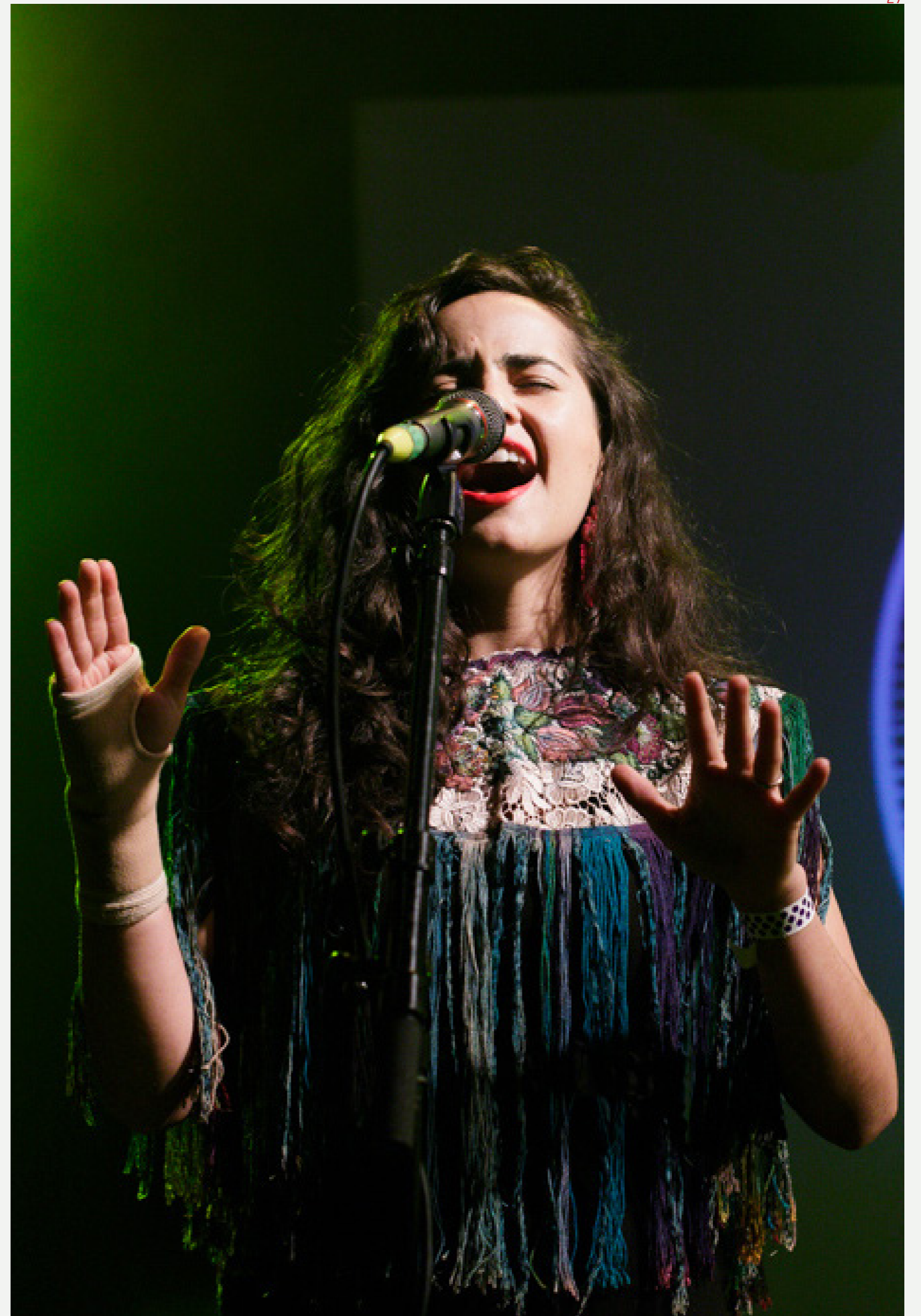
Musicians specifically named key music labels such as Northside Records and venues such as The Night Cat who have expressed their interest towards supporting a compilation album of Melbourne's Latin music. There was also an interest in media outlets, for example, Beat magazine, who in the past, included a Latin editorial section. The possibility of establishing collaborations with growing venues which may have programming needs that can be fulfilled by this group of artists was also mentioned, for example: residencies.

Collaborate with Centres for Latin American Studies and researchers

Another kind of key collaboration noted in the consultations, focused on alliances with researchers in universities for the development of new knowledge on the history of Latin American contemporary expression in Australia. The artists believe researchers can provide detailed data that can support strategically these artists by providing evidence of the lack of support, presence and avenues for artistic development. Additionally, centralised data about the initiatives being held by the community (including quantitative and qualitative data) can help record statistics that can help measure the artistic and social impact of the efforts made by the group of artists. Furthermore, researchers can help this community to better understand the Australian arts market and avenues for the expansion of a Latin contemporary market.

Network

The artists believe the community needs a wide support network including arts reviewers, journalists, buyers, lobbyists, marketers, dedicated producers and influencers. One example was in regard to media such as Beat, The Music and online outlets such as Arts Hub. To be able to do this, they suggested approaching writers and journalists aiming to develop closer relationships that can enhance an interest in the art being made by the community. ■



IDEAS:

During the consultations, the artists mentioned some ideas to tackle the needs discussed.

Radio show

Work together to create a radio show (in English) to be included in a recognised community radio station such as PBS FM 106.7FM or Triple RRR 102.7FM. The objective of the show would be to create awareness about the local Latin-Australian musicians who are making new music. It would also help profile visual artists and performing artists from the community. With its implementation, it could also help develop a shared language and educate audiences about the variety within Latin expression. To explore the idea further, EL TARRO approached Triple RRR in late 2018 supported by one of its radio presenters and found out that the process requires experience in radio broadcasts, long-standing leadership and commitment. The artists put forward some key people within the community who have experience in broadcasting and could potentially lead this initiative. These group of experts included:

- Team at Completada Bailable in 3cr radio
- Team at La Bodeguita in 3zzz radio
- Team at SBS Radio en español

Conference: Greatest Latin Artists of all time

Another idea brought up during the conversations was to run a conference on the greatest Latin Artists of all time. This could be developed in partnership with a University.

Get out of Melbourne: *Keep an open view*

Another avenue to reach new audiences, suggested by one of the artists, is to '*look outside of Melbourne*'. Some artists noted that sometimes they get too focused in the local market, ignoring opportunities in other markets regionally and also, in other countries.

Street campaign

Another idea to tackle the invisibility, proposed by one of the artists, was to run a street campaign tackling stereotypes e.g. '*El cartel de Melbourne*', in guerrilla marketing style taking audiences by surprise to increase awareness about the art being made by the community.





EL TARRO 10th Anniversary Celebration, 2018, Schoolhouse Studios, Collingwood. Pic by Blacknote Photography

EL TARRO

THE FUTURE

This report presented the results of the consultations held with artists from diverse backgrounds looking at their needs and ideas for their professional development. It also includes EL TARRO's point of view about the issues raised by the artists, as well as research developed by academics looking at the Latin-Australian cultural landscape. This report was developed to inform a future vision for EL TARRO community arts project and provide the artistic community with a resource that can support future conversations for its development. It is also useful for Australian arts organisations interested in local contemporary art and supporting diversity in the arts.

During its twelve years of history, EL TARRO played an important role in the development of a community immersed in a new wave of Latin-Australian contemporary art in Melbourne. However, as artists have settled, other side-projects have emerged and EL TARRO's organic and free-access space for the presentation of work by newly arrived Latin artists, has progressively been replaced by other platforms. EL TARRO believes that, after more than a decade of settlement, this community of artists is at a stage where they can successfully showcase their art through artist-run initiatives such as gigs, exhibitions, parties, theatre shows, etc, as well as successfully engaging in some of Australian run festivals.

Subsequently, EL TARRO is certain that its future doesn't lie in adding another event to Melbourne's and Victoria's busy artistic calendar. EL TARRO believes that efforts into the future development of this community, should be invested in continuing the conversations raised in the consultations, and congregate artists and arts managers who can work together to *'scream out loud in a creative way'* what is being done by this group of artists, so that the Australian arts industry and audiences start *'looking this way'*.

This can only be done with those who share the same

artistic ethos. EL TARRO would work with those who are interested in supporting Latin Australian contemporary art, inclusive of all backgrounds, and pursuing to develop work for wider arts audiences, not only for the Latin community. Additionally, EL TARRO will continue to work as a key partner with organisations who wish to support and engage Latin Australian contemporary art across all artforms and release new work across artforms.

EL TARRO is proud to have worked for twelve years with more than 300 artists and cultural leaders presenting 40 sessions, and engaging audiences of over 10,000, mostly in Melbourne, but also in Sydney, Buenos Aires, Mexico, Berlin, Bogota, San Francisco, Cesena and Venice. EL TARRO wishes to thank all its supporters and partners over the years, specially the Outsiders Guide to Melbourne, who was always there along the way.

For now, EL TARRO is happy to continue a conversation. You can contact us at eltarromelbourne@gmail.com

'If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.' – African Proverb

Claudia Escobar-Vega and Jorge Leiva
Melbourne, 2020

ABOUT EL TARRO

ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

“The dynamic duo of Latin American art in Melbourne” SBS



Claudia Escobar-Vega
claudiaescobarvega.com

Claudia is a multi-award Colombian-Australian artist and academic with international recognition based in Melbourne. She is currently a PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Business University of Wollongong conducting a thesis on children's thinking of leaders. Her academic work has seen her publish several research papers and present at several international conferences on leadership and arts and cultural management (ANZAM, AIMAC).

Claudia has fifteen ten years of experience in arts management and has worked as a consultant and researcher for cultural management. Between 2009 and 2014 she was Marketing and Development Officer at Multicultural Arts Victoria (Australia). She has been an appointed member of key artistic advisory committees such as Melbourne Fringe Festival Artistic Advisory Committee (2014) and Advisory Committee, School of Art, RMIT University (2014).

Claudia's artistic practice revolves around children's leadership and her Colombian background. In theatre, she has worked for nearly 20 years with children from Colombia, Australia, Italy and Afghanistan exploring play as a common ground to talk

about the issues of our time. She also has performed in theatre shows at festivals including *IN TRANSIT Festival in Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt* (Berlin); *Performance Space Liveworks*, Carriageworks (Sydney) and *Dance Massive* (Melbourne, 2011) and was Assistant Director for the Malthouse production *Blood Wedding* (2012). In music, she is one of the leaders of Miss Colombia, a renowned tropical electro funk band in Melbourne.

Claudia has received numerous awards and scholarships including Elite Editing Thesis Write-up Scholarship (2020), University of Wollongong Postgraduate Award (UPA) (2019), Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship (Australia, 2011) and Art and Youth for Peace Award (Colombia, 2010).

Claudia holds a Master in Theatre Practice and a Postgraduate Diploma in Performance Creation from The University of Melbourne, Faculty of the VCA and Music (Australia); a Master in Management (Hons) and Graduate Diploma in Marketing from Universidad de los Andes (Colombia) and a BA in Industrial Design (Hons) from Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Claudia also enjoys her family life with Jorge and Luna in the beautiful Rezza. ■

Jorge Leiva
jorgeleiva.com.au

Jorge Leiva is an interdisciplinary Colombian-Australian artist and educator with international recognition based in Melbourne. As an artist, he is active in the fields of music, visual arts, community arts and poetry. Jorge is also an experienced educator who has worked in the field of arts and language in diverse environments and countries. Jorge has published as an arts researcher, educator, poet and visual artist.

Jorge has been composing and writing music for over 15 years. He is a recognised percussionist and songwriter in Australia's Latin Music. Jorge has performed and collaborated with world-renowned artists and bands such as The Cat Empire (Australia), Juanes (Colombia), and Li Saumet (Bomba Estereo, Colombia). In the field of music for screen, his work has featured in international award winning short films (*Butterflies*, special Prize "City of Annecy Award" in the Festival international du film d'animation d'Annecy, 2018), worldwide social campaigns (*The Colombian Ambush*, 2018) and advertising campaigns in Australia and New Zealand (*BONDS*, Christmas Campaign, 2018).

Jorge's awards and scholarships include Languages Teaching Scholarship Department of Education and Training Victoria (Australia, 2013); ICETEX/ BOX HILL Scholarship (Colombia/ Australia, 2007); Colfuturo Scholarship (Colombia, 2010) and First Price Art Competition Plaza & Janes Ed. (Colombia, 1984).

Jorge holds a Master of Teaching (2010), Postgraduate Certificate in Modern Languages (2014) and a Postgraduate Diploma of Teaching (2009) at The University of Melbourne; an Associate Diploma of Music Performance (2008) and a Certificate IV in Teaching and Education (2011) at Box Hill TAFE; and a BA in Creative Arts (2004) at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Jorge also enjoys his family life with Claudia and Luna in the beautiful Rezza. ■

LINKS EL TARRO

[10 year celebration video](#)

[10 year celebration photos](#)

[Playlist: EL TARRO, 10 years of new tropical urban sounds](#)

[EL TARRO Facebook](#)

[EL TARRO Historical blog](#)

[EL TARRO Beat Magazine Article](#)

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Cover photo: Alejandro Espino Aldana - Mexican Man, portrait by Blacknote Photography, face paint by Katherine Gailer, *EL TARRO Fiesta Loca*, 28 September 2017, Fringe Club, North Melbourne Town Hall. Pic by Gianna Rizzo

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[EL TARRO 10 year compilation of new music released in 2018](#)

EL TARRO SESSIONS

| | | |
|----------|-----------------|---|
| 6/4/08 | CARLTON | EL TARRO LAUNCH |
| 4/5/08 | CARLTON | EL TARRO DOS |
| 1/6/08 | CARLTON | EL TARRO TRES |
| 6/7/08 | CARLTON | EL TARRO BRAIN |
| 3/8/08 | CARLTON | EL TARRO CUATRO |
| 7/9/08 | CARLTON | EL TARRO DEPARTURE |
| 5/10/08 | CARLTON | EL TARRO WASH A WAY |
| 29/10/08 | CARLTON | EL TARRO PLANCHA |
| 5/11/08 | MELBOURNE | PLAY:GROUND |
| 1/3/09 | CARLTON | EL TARRO CINCO |
| 21/3/09 | SAN FRANCISCO | EL TARRO SEIS |
| 2/4/09 | BOGOTA | EL TARRO COLOMBIA |
| 14/5/09 | MELBOURNE | EL TARRO PLEASE |
| 17/6/09 | SYDNEY | EL TARRO THE HUMAN FACE |
| 29/5/10 | CARLTON | EL TARRO OCHO |
| 24/7/10 | CARLTON | EL TARRO NUEVE |
| 21/8/10 | BUENOS AIRES | EL TARRO ARGENTINA |
| 27/8/10 | MELBOURNE | EL TARRO DIEZ |
| 2/10/10 | SYDNEY | EL TARRO SYDNEY |
| 6/11/10 | MELBOURNE | EL TARRO GOES SOUTH |
| 21/11/10 | ABBOTSFORD | EL TARRO EMERGING FROM STAGNANT WATER |
| 1/4/11 | CARLTON | EL TARRO LOVE FOOLS RULES |
| 10/6/11 | MELBOURNE | EL TARRO ASPIRINES AND VULTURES |
| 20/6/11 | BERLIN | EL TARRO EUROPE TOUR |
| 23/6/11 | CESENA | EL TARRO EUROPE TOUR |
| 25/6/11 | VENEZIA | EL TARRO EUROPE TOUR |
| 30/7/11 | KEW | EL TARRO EN LA CASA |
| 7/10/11 | COLLINGWOOD | CARNAVAL LATINO |
| 5/11/11 | MELBOURNE | EL TARRO PLAYGROUND SCREENING |
| 6/12/11 | MELBOURNE | EL TARRO LA SOCIEDAD DEL SEMAFORO |
| 13/12/11 | FITZROY | HAY QUE VIVIR CON ELLO |
| 25/2/12 | COLLINGWOOD | EL TARRO SUMMER REVOLUCION |
| 23/11/13 | MELBOURNE | EL TARRO LAUNCHES MISS COLOMBIA |
| 15/12/13 | MEXICO DF | EL TARRO MEXICO |
| 29/11/14 | PRESTON | EL TARRO THE GARDEN OF DELIGHTS |
| 24/9/15 | NORTH MELBOURNE | EL TARRO TROPICAL EXPLOSION |
| 17/9/16 | NORTH MELBOURNE | EL TARRO AMAZON WONDERLAND |
| 28/9/17 | NORTH MELBOURNE | EL TARRO FIESTA LOCA |
| 11/03/18 | BRUNSWICK | UNO, DOS, TRES, CUATRO |
| 24/11/18 | COLLINGWOOD | EL TARRO 10TH BIRTHDAY |
| 27/7/20 | MELBOURNE | WHO IS GOING TO LOOK THIS WAY? A GLIMPSE OF LATIN AUSTRALIAN CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS IN MELBOURNE TOWARDS THE 2020S (REPORT) |





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