The Ultimo Project Continues ...

Therese Kenyon



© Copyright all rights reserved 2026

The Ultimo Project Continues ...
ISBN 978-0-9925054-7-9

Author: Therese Kenyon
Editor and Designer: Gail Kenning
Images courtesy: Tina Fiveash, Barbara Licha, Dale Kentwell, Doug Aitken, Therese Kenyon



UPSPACE GALLERY + STUDIOS

ULTIMO PROJECT INC.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This history of The Ultimo Project (UP) was created to accompany the exhibition 'Continuity' to mark the group's 40th anniversary and to celebrate the ongoing life of these Sydney-based artists. Writing a history of such a flexible and fluid group of artists is not easy or uncomplicated. Wayne Hutchins and I started collecting documents and images in 2025 to celebrate the 1985 naming of the group in that 40th year. Unfortunately we both had life changing episodes which meant we needed the history to go on hold for a year. I was keen to start again and use the 1988 date of UP's incorporation as my more fluid deadline.

Time and budget did not allow for full notification of all past members of the UP collective so any errors, oversights or omissions are open for noting and I apologise in advance for them.

I would like to thank the following people for contributing, advising and editing:

Wayne Hutchins, Barbara Licha, Dale Kentwell, Gail Kenning, Tina Fiveash, Anie Nheu, Jude Rae, Hilik Mirankar, Allan Giddy, Nick Vickers, Adam Laerkesen, Jane Eagger, Warren Coleman and Dr Jim Macnamara AM.

Therese Kenyon



UPSPACE GALLERY + STUDIOS

ULTIMO PROJECT INC.

FOREWORD

The Ultimo Project, an arts collective currently operating in the Sydney suburb of Marrickville was established in the mid-1980s making it one of the longest operating arts collectives in Australia.

The collective is 100% self-funded by the artists working in and supporting The Ultimo Project.

The Ultimo Project provides 26 affordable studio spaces for artists to work – an important role when studio space for artists is extremely limited and expensive in major cities. The collective licences one of 20 historic buildings operated and maintained by the Addison Road Community Organisation, known affectionately as 'Addi Road', a registered charity and leading multicultural community centre.

The Ultimo Project houses and supports painters, sculptors, installation artists, and digital artists.

It also hosts open studios, workshops, and exhibitions of the work of members and other artists. Its members also actively participate in local, national, and international arts and cultural networks, art fairs, and community events.

The Ultimo Project has supported many emerging artists who have gone on to exhibit their work in the Sydney Arts Festival, Sculpture By The Sea, other major arts fairs and exhibitions, and in commercial galleries.

As well as contributing to Australian culture, The Ultimo Project contributes tangibly to Australia's creative industries that in total contribute more than $70 billion to the Australian economy and represent 2.5% of gross domestic product (GDP).

Therese Kenyon, who has been a longstanding member and contributor to The Ultimo Project and a key member of the Sydney arts community, and her colleagues are to be congratulated on producing this historical record and celebration of The Ultimo Project.

Dr Jim Macnamara AM
Emeritus Professor and author

The Ultimo Project Continues ...

Forty Years of an Artist-Led Initiative

The Ultimo Project (UP), established in the mid-1980s and incorporated in 1988, has supported Sydney artists for more than four decades. Over that time, the collective has relocated from its original home in Ultimo to Glebe, Erskineville, and, most recently, to Marrickville, adapting to the changing landscape of Sydney's inner-city suburbs while maintaining its commitment to affordable studio space and artist-led collaboration.

This publication celebrates the artists who have sustained the collective across 40 years and highlights the continuing need for accessible and secure workspaces for artists in Sydney. As industrial buildings and former manufacturing precincts have progressively given way to residential development, artist communities have repeatedly been displaced. Yet The Ultimo Project has endured, continuing to provide opportunities for artists to work, exhibit, and engage with one another and the broader community.

Today, The Ultimo Project comprises 28 members occupying 26 studio spaces. Beyond providing affordable studios, the organisation actively participates in local, national, and international arts networks through exhibitions, exchanges, open studios, workshops, and public programs. Members regularly exhibit in commercial galleries, regional institutions, artist-run initiatives, art fairs, and community venues, while also contributing to the wider cultural sector as educators, researchers, curators, arts administrators, and community practitioners.



Artists and visitors celebrate an exhibition opening on a warm summer evening

Origins and Influences (1979-85)

The origins of The Ultimo Project can be traced to developments within the British artist studio movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Organisations such as the Acme Artists Housing Association in London demonstrated how artists could transform under-utilised buildings into affordable living and working spaces. These initiatives provided a model through which artists could move from informal occupation of vacant properties towards more secure, organised forms of tenancy.

One of the leading advocates of this approach was the British artist Bridget Riley, who championed the concept of open access to studio opportunities. During a visit to Australia in 1979, Riley met with artist Chris Downie and a group of interested Sydney artists at Downie's studio. These discussions encouraged local artists to explore how similar models might be adopted Australia.

The circumstances in Sydney, however, differed significantly from those in Britain. Rapid urban redevelopment and escalating property values made it difficult to secure buildings that could be used as long-term artist studios. Property developers were often reluctant to permit temporary artistic occupation of vacant sites, particularly in areas close to the city centre where redevelopment pressures were intense. As a result, while British models provided inspiration, Sydney artists were required to develop their own strategies for securing space.



Chris Downie (B.1946-deceased) Image: Dale Kentwell

The search for affordable studios would eventually lead to an unlikely opportunity in Ultimo and lay the foundations for what would become the Ultimo Project.

The Kelly St Kolektiv and the Birth of an Artist Community (1986-1988)

In 1985, sculptor Hilik Mirankar identified an under-utilised space within a former wool store occupied by the Broadway Freight Company in Ultimo. After making enquiries, he began renting a studio on the building's second floor. Within a short time, he encouraged other artists to join him and began developing a gallery and studio community within the building.

Artists who became involved included Scott Blundell, Elaine Gay, Ray James, Don Hopkins, PCD 89, Jacqueline Eyers, Carlos Catalano, Sam Spade, and many others. Together they established the Kelly St Kolektiv Gallery at 2-8 Kelly Street, Ultimo. According to Mirankar, the collective eventually comprised more than 120 members and associates.

The gallery became a significant exhibition and performance venue, supporting both member artists and external organisations such as the Poets' Union. Through exhibitions, performances, meetings, and public events, the Kelly St Kolektiv quickly emerged as an important cultural hub within Sydney's alternative arts scene.

Recognising the opportunities offered by the building, Mirankar encouraged Chris Downie and Jude Rae to establish studios on the floor below. With assistance from a small grant, a section of the first floor was divided into studio spaces known as 'The Bridge'. This initiative would later evolve into The Ultimo Project. The artists paid only a nominal rent to the Broadway Freight Company, which was later revealed to be operating under Sydney City Council ownership.

The affordable rents and supportive atmosphere attracted an increasing number of artists. By 1987 figures such as Robert Linden and Dale Kentwell had joined the growing studio community that would soon become The Ultimo Project.

Two Visions: The Kelly St Kolektiv and The Ultimo Project



The original sign for the Kelly St Kolectiv Gallery - archive of Hilik Mirankar.2025.

While the Kelly St Kolektiv (KSK) and the emerging Ultimo Project shared common origins within the Kelly Street building, they gradually developed distinct philosophies regarding how artists should organise, sustain, and govern their communities.

The Kelly St Kolektiv was strongly influenced by a kibbutz-style model of collective management. Having grown up in Israel and worked on a kibbutz, Hilik Mirankar championed a democratic and non-discriminatory approach to collective creativity. The organisation emphasised shared responsibility, collective decision-making, and active participation by all members.

Weekly meetings and numerous committees formed the backbone of KSK's governance structure. Members spent almost a year developing a constitution tailored to their unique circumstances before formally registering the organisation as an incorporated association with the Corporate Affairs Commission. This commitment to grassroots self-determination reflected KSK's belief that artists could collectively create alternative cultural structures independent of external influence.

As both organisations grew, philosophical differences became increasingly apparent. One of the most significant points of divergence concerned government funding.

The Kelly St Kolektiv opposed seeking government grants, believing that financial support from government agencies could eventually compromise artistic independence. Members feared that reliance on external funding might create long-term dependencies and ultimately undermine the organisation's autonomy and creative freedom. In contrast, prominent Ultimo Project members, including Ross Wolf and Chris Downie, believed that government support could play a vital role in securing sustainable working and living environments for artists. Their vision extended beyond the occupation of temporary spaces; they sought to establish permanent artist housing and studio facilities, whether through the adaptation of existing buildings or the development of purpose-built complexes.

These differing approaches gradually led some artists associated with the Kelly St Kolektiv to relocate to The Ultimo Project studios on the floor below, strengthening the emerging identity of the newer organisation.

By 1987, The Ultimo Project had begun actively advocating for secure artist housing and studio provision. With a grant of $8,000 from the Visual Arts/Crafts Board, the collective prepared a submission to the NSW Department of Housing under the Local Government and Community Housing Program. The proposal sought support for an integrated housing and cultural complex designed specifically for artists.



Robert Linden, Dale Kentwell, Chris Downie

Although the lack of affordable workspaces for artists was increasingly recognised at a federal level, the success of such initiatives ultimately depended upon support from local and state governments, which were often reluctant to prioritise artist housing. While several projects received funding, including Alpha House Association in Newtown, The Ultimo Project's proposal was unsuccessful.

Incorporation and Displacement (1988)

At the same time, the Kelly Street building faced growing uncertainty. Repeated rent increases imposed by the Broadway Freight Company placed increasing pressure on the artists who occupied the premises. In an effort to stabilise the situation, Hilik Mirankar requested that Sydney City Council transfer the lease directly to the Kelly St Kolektiv, a decision he would later regard as a mistake.

As part of the lease review process in 1988, engineers and health officers from Sydney City Council inspected the building. Their assessment concluded that the premises were unfit for occupation, leading to the closure of the entire site.

The consequences were far-reaching. The Broadway Freight Company was evicted, and both the Kelly St Kolektiv and The Ultimo Project were forced to leave the building. The sudden displacement of artists from Kelly Street marked the end of an important chapter in Sydney's alternative arts scene, but it also accelerated the formal development of The Ultimo Project as an independent organisation.

Faced with the need to establish its own identity and governance structure, The Ultimo Project incorporated as an independent association on 1 June 1988 while still occupying the Ultimo premises.

During this period, Jude Rae departed for Paris after being awarded a residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts. Chris Downie remained a central figure in shaping the organisation's future. Continuing his advocacy for artist housing and studio provision, he contributed a paper titled Cutting the Fringe to the 1989 conference Endangered Spaces, organised by Artspace Sydney. The conference examined artist-run organisations and collectives from Australia and overseas and highlighted the growing challenges facing independent cultural initiatives.

The newly incorporated Ultimo Project now faced the urgent task of finding a new home.

The Wigram Lane Years, Glebe (1988 - 1995)



Jayne Dyer, Barbara Liche, Peggy Randall, Jane Eagger, Ignacio Streichhahn, Jaqui Eyers, Johan Melander

Following the closure of the Kelly Street premises, The Ultimo Project relocated to an almost abandoned warehouse at 1 Wigram Lane, Glebe. According to Jude Rae, the building also housed storage facilities for the Australian Opera and stood adjacent to studios associated with the production of the first Mad Max film.

The move marked the beginning of what many members remember as one of the most vibrant and formative periods.

For the next eight years, the warehouse developed a distinctive underground character. The atmosphere was energetic, informal, and intensely creative. Members shared extensive communal facilities, including a large kitchen, living area, and dedicated gallery space. These shared environments became the social and cultural heart of the collective, providing opportunities for conversation, collaboration, exhibitions, and experimentation.



Wigram Lane studio kitchen, Barbara Licha

As the community expanded, a new generation of artists joined the organisation. Among them Barbara Licha and Jane Eagger, both of whom remain active members of The Ultimo Project today. Other members included Jacqueline Eyers, Peggy Randall, Jayne Dyer, and, later, Joris Everaerts, together with many other artists who contributed to the dynamic culture of the period.

The Wigram Lane years established many of the values that continue to define The Ultimo Project: mutual support, collective responsibility, artistic diversity, and a commitment to maintaining affordable and accessible studio space for professional artists. The building became more than a workplace; it was a thriving community whose influence would continue to shape the organisation through subsequent relocations and generations of members.

The Coulson Street Era, Erskineville (1995 - 2004)



Open studios at Coulson Street invitation

Fortunately, the search for new premises was already underway before the end of the Wigram Lane period. The next phase in The Ultimo Project's history began with a move to the former Kelly Country suit-making factory in Building A at 2 Coulson Street, Erskineville. The site offered a promising opportunity: the owner was supportive of artists and had an under-utilised industrial building suitable for conversion into studios.

The initial lease with Peter Hero Properties was signed on 10 August 1995. The agreement provided a three-year tenancy at a monthly rental of $5,106 and was signed by Jacqueline Anne Eyers, Margaret Mary Randall, Ignacio German Streichhahn, and Johan Ludvig Melander, all longstanding members of the collective from the Wigram Lane years.

Relocating and reconstructing the studios required an enormous collective effort. Members were responsible not only for moving but also for adapting the building to suit their needs as working artists. Barbara Licha recalls the scale of the undertaking:

> *It was a physically difficult move. We wanted to build everything we needed. It required a lot of time and energy from all the members. We were rewarded with a period of stability, good relations with our landlord, and a coherent and diverse group of artists.*

The move marked the beginning of one of the most stable and productive periods in the organisation's history. During this time, members continued to refine the cooperative financial structure that underpinned the collective. Studio fees were calculated according to the square metreage of individual workspaces, together with contributions towards shared facilities such as kitchens, toilets, and communal areas. This principle of shared responsibility remains central to the organisation today.

The Coulson Street years also saw important developments in the collective's governance and financial management. Jane Eagger was appointed Treasurer, a role she held until 2009, working closely with President Wayne Hutchins and the executive committee. Reflecting on this period, she recalls:

> *We introduced a studio bond at a flat rate of $200, which was placed into a contingency fund held in a high-interest-bearing term deposit account.*



Barbara Licha in studio at Coulson Street

The establishment of a contingency fund proved to be a significant step in strengthening the organisation's long-term sustainability and preparedness for future relocations.

As the collective matured, questions surrounding the use of studio spaces became increasingly important. Internal debate emerged over whether studios should continue to function as both living and working spaces. Following extensive discussion, the committee determined that future Ultimo Project studios would be designated exclusively as workspaces.

This decision clarified a policy that had previously been inconsistent and reflected changing expectations from landlords regarding occupational health and safety requirements, insurance obligations, and rental compliance. The shift also signalled the organisation's evolution from a loosely structured artist community towards a more formal and sustainable studio provider.

Further administrative reforms followed. Jane Eagger proposed the appointment of a part-time bookkeeper and cleaner, preferably drawn from within the membership. To avoid conflicts of interest, it was agreed that any member employed in these roles would be ineligible to serve on the executive committee while undertaking paid duties for the organisation. These measures helped professionalise the management of the collective while maintaining its cooperative ethos.

In 1998, the Kelly Country lease was renewed and extended until 2002, with the monthly rent increasing to $8,200. The agreement was signed by President Wayne Hutchins and witnessed by Robert Hawkins, both of whom remain active members of The Ultimo Project today. But, the renewed lease included a two-year notice provision requiring the collective to vacate the premises by 10 March 2004.

Despite the eventual need to relocate, the supportive relationship with the building owner provided artists with eight years of relative stability. This extended period enabled members to focus on their artistic practices, strengthen the organisation's administrative structures, and build financial reserves. When notice to vacate was finally received, the collective was considerably better prepared than it had been during previous moves. Members who wished to remain with the Ultimo Project placed their equipment, materials, and studio contents into storage while a search for new premises commenced. Although most artists chose to continue with the organisation, some members, including Jayne Dyer, Ann Ferran, Julie Pryor, Don Campbell, Ross Mullane, and Joris Everaerts, elected to pursue other paths.

The Move to Addison Road Community Centre (2004 - present)

The conclusion of the Coulson Street era prompted another search for suitable premises. In 2004, negotiations commenced with the Addison Road Community Centre commonly known as Addi Road. The support of ARCCO President Don Mamouney, of Sidetrack Theatre, and gallery curator Terry Cutcliffe proved instrumental in introducing The Ultimo Project to the wider Addison Road community and helping secure the organisation's long-term future.

The discussions led to the refurbishment and occupation of Building 24, a large former assembly hall constructed in 1914. Historically, the building had served as a military recruitment centre and training facility prior to the Second World War. More recently, it had been occupied by the performance company Legs on the Wall and traces of trapezes and rigging remained visible during the conversion process.

The transition required substantial planning and renovation. The former hall, with its stage at one end and large open-plan interior, needed extensive modification before it could function as a studio complex. In addition, occupancy was granted on the basis that critical building repairs would be undertaken addressing water ingress and roofing issues. The Ultimo Project made significant financial and practical investments to make these improvements. Major works, including reroofing, were funded through the collective's contingency fund, supplemented by a personal loan provided by President Wayne Hutchins. Members financed and undertook the conversion of the large hall into sixteen purpose-built studios, creating well-lit

workspaces to support a range of artistic practices.

Additional facilities were gradually added over time. Building 15, a demountable structure, provided space for four additional artists. Sculptor Geoff Hague constructd a communal kitchen, while further upgrades addressing emergency lighting, fire safety, and building compliance were implemented as resources allowed. Collectively, the efforts to transformed this site was the most ambitious in the organisation's history.

The allocation of studios reflected the collective's commitment to fairness and transparency. Larger studios were initially offered to artists who could afford the additional space. The remaining studios were allocated through a lottery system, with member names and studio numbers drawn separately. Artists were free to negotiate exchanges if mutually agreeable. This process helped establish a sense of equity and collective ownership from the outset. The Existing Rules of Association continued to govern membership, studio allocation, fees, bonds, and operations.

Under the leadership of Wayne Hutchins, the organisation nurtured a productive relationship with Addison Road Community Centre management and neighbouring organisations. Having guided the collective through multiple relocations and periods of uncertainty, Hutchins provided continuity and stability during a critical phase in the organisation's development. The move to Addison Road marked a period of increasing organisational maturity. Administrative responsibilities expanded as the studio complex grew, leading to the creation of more formal management and governance structures. The bookkeeping position evolved into a broader administrative role and was undertaken by Gail Kenning, while Sue Pedley continued in the contracted cleaning role established during the Coulson Street years. Together these positions contributed significantly to the maintenance and daily operation of both the studios and gallery.

To distribute responsibilities more effectively among members, a Gallery Committee and a Studio Allocation Committee were fomed. This enabled greater member participation in decision-making and supporte the collaborative ethos that has always distinguished The Ultimo Project.

The success of the organisation depends not only on artists' creative contributions but also on the willingness of members to contribute time, expertise, and labour to its operations. Many members have worked as educators, curators, researchers, museum preparators, arts administrators, and community arts practitioners. Others have helped maintain the physical infrastructure of the studios or contributed to governance, financial management, and strategic planning.











The challenge begins for The Ultimo Project at Addi Rd

Leadership, Governance and Community Service

Artists such as Wayne Hutchins and Robert Hawkins have dedicated significant effort to maintaining and improving studio facilities while sustaining their own artistic practices. Jane Eagger served as Treasurer for much of the Coulson Street period and was key in liaising with landlords and managing the organisation's finances. Other members have volunteered on committees, undertaken administrative responsibilities, or contributed specialist expertise in areas such as law, governance, building maintenance, and fundraising.

As a member organisation within Addison Road Community Centre, The Ultimo Project also maintains representation at ARCCO board meetings, ensuring that artists have a voice in decisions affecting the broader community centre.

A new generation of members has gradually assumed leadership positions as others have stepped back. As of July 2026, Adam Laerkesen serves as President, Therese Briggs as Secretary, Felix Rives and Carolyn Brady as Treasurer, and Tina Fiveash as Vice-President.

The recent allocation of Building 24A, formerly, a video teaching facility, has further expanded the organisation's capacity. This development has increased both the number of available studios and the number of practicing artists who can be accommodated.

Today, The Ultimo Project comprises 28 artists working across multiple buildings at Addison Road Community Centre.

COVID-19: Isolation, Resilience and Renewal

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2022 represented one of the most significant disruptions in the history of The Ultimo Project. For an organisation built upon shared spaces, collective activity, exhibitions, and daily interaction, the sudden introduction of public health restrictions fundamentally altered the rhythms of studio life.

Artists were advised to minimise contact and, for periods of time, access to studios became difficult or uncertain. The informal conversations, collaborative exchanges, and sense of community that had long characterised life at The Ultimo Project were temporarily suspended. Open studios, exhibitions, and public events were postponed, while many artists found themselves working in relative isolation.

The effects of the pandemic were felt differently across the membership. Some artists were able to continue working independently, valuing the quiet and uninterrupted time for reflection and making. Others experienced a profound sense of separation from their creative communities and professional networks. For many members, particularly older artists, concerns about health and personal safety added another layer of uncertainty to an already challenging period.

The pandemic also exposed the precarious position of artists within the broader economy. As opportunities for exhibiting, teaching, and freelance work diminished, many artists faced financial pressures while continuing to maintain their practices. The experience served as a reminder that cultural workers often remain vulnerable during times of crisis, despite the important role that arts and culture play in community wellbeing.



The invitation for the first Post-Covid Exhibition

Yet The Ultimo Project endured. As it had through previous relocations and uncertainties, the collective adapted to changing circumstances and continued to provide an important point of connection for its members. The studios remained a valued resource whenever access was possible,

offering artists a place of continuity during a period of widespread disruption.

The years following the pandemic have been marked by a renewed sense of energy and purpose. Members returned to studio practice with a deeper appreciation of the value of shared creative spaces and artistic community. Exhibition activity resumed, public programs expanded, and renewed efforts were made to engage audiences through open studios, group exhibitions, and collaborative projects.

The post-pandemic period has also coincided with growing recognition of the importance of artist-run initiatives. As commercial rents continue to rise and opportunities for independent exhibition spaces diminish, organisations such as The Ultimo Project and UPSpace Gallery play an increasingly vital role in supporting artistic practice. The ability to provide both affordable studios and opportunities for exhibition has become even more significant.

Ongoing Challenges and Future Sustainability

Despite changing economic conditions and increasing pressures on creative space throughout Sydney, the organisation continues to provide a stable, affordable, and supportive environment for professional artistic practice. The issue of studio affordability remains as pressing today as it was when the organisation was first established.

In 2025, Addison Road Community Centre undertook a review of tenancy arrangements across the precinct, seeking to bring rents closer to commercial market rates. The resulting increases affected all resident organisations. Some longstanding tenants, including Reverse Garbage, vacated their premises, while others were required to reassess their long-term viability within the centre.

These developments serve as a reminder that artist-run organisations remain vulnerable to economic pressures, rising property forma, and changing urban priorities. Yet they also reinforce the continuing importance of organisations such as The Ultimo Project, which have demonstrated remarkable resilience over four decades.

A dedicated studio space allows artists to sustain careers over many years, supporting the development of substantial bodies of work and enabling long-term engagement with the cultural life of the city. Open studio events and exhibitions reveal the depth of talent that has passed through the organisation, including many artists who continue to maintain active studio practices at Addison Road and many others who have gone on to establish successful careers throughout Australia and internationally.

However, the collective is confronting a set of challenges that were less visible during its earlier decades. Many long-term members are now navigating the realities of ageing while remaining committed to active studio practice. Health issues, changing physical capacities, caring responsibilities, and the increasing costs of living can all impact an artist's ability to sustain regular creative work. For some, opportunities to generate income through teaching, commissions, arts administration, or casual employment have diminished, resulting in greater reliance on fixed incomes or retirement savings.

While many artists now have more time available for creative practice than they did during their working lives, maintaining an affordable studio remains a significant financial challenge. Access to secure and reasonably priced workspaces has therefore become increasingly important, not only for emerging artists but also for older practitioners seeking to sustain long-established careers.

The Ultimo Project continues to welcome new members and younger artists into the organisation. These artists bring fresh perspectives, new skills, and renewed energy to the collective. Their arrival contributes to an ongoing exchange of knowledge between generations, ensuring that institutional memory, practical experience, and artistic traditions are shared while new ideas and approaches continue to emerge. This enables The Ultimo Project to evolve while remaining grounded in the values that have sustained it for more than four decades.

The continued vitality rests upon this balance between continuity and renewal. Long-term members contribute experience, history, and a deep commitment to the organisation, while newer members bring innovation, enthusiasm, and fresh perspectives. Together they demonstrate that artist-run initiatives remain an essential part of Sydney's cultural ecology, providing affordable workspaces and a community in which artists can support one another through the changing circumstances of their personal and professional lives.

Exhibiting, Connecting, Contributing

From its inception, The Ultimo Project has been more than a provider of affordable studio space. Exhibition-making has been central to the organisation's identity, providing artists with opportunities to test ideas, present new work, engage with audiences, and contribute to Sydney's broader cultural life. Throughout its history, members have exhibited extensively across commercial galleries, public institutions, artist-run initiatives, art fairs, and community venues, while maintaining a commitment to collective exhibition activity. The organisation's longevity has enabled generations of artists to sustain professional practices that extend well beyond the walls of their studios.

The significance of the collective's contribution can be measured not only through its forty-year history but also through the achievements of its members. Artists associated with the Ultimo Project have exhibited nationally and internationally, received prizes and commissions, participated in major events such as Sculpture by the Sea, and are represented in public, university, corporate, and private collections.



UPSpace Gallery at Addi Rd

Throughout the years, members of The Ultimo Project have been consistently encouraged to exhibit their work within their own gallery space. As co-curator, Geoff Levitus was instrumental in inviting members to participate in group shows to use the gallery space at least once a year, but especially during open studio days as part of Art Month, Marrickville Council events, Inner West Council cultural events, and festival weekends.

In 2024, the area at the entrance to the studios, previously used as an occasional gallery was still somewhat underutilised. It was rebranded as UPSpace Gallery and Studios. This initiative was undertaken to provide a dedicated showcase for the diverse talents of the collective's members, provide a showing venue for local artists and to provide a modest revenue stream to the organisation and support running costs. The space fosters engagement with the broader community and offers support to fellow artists. It was initiated by Therese Kenyon, Anie Nhue and Tina Fiveash and taken up by other volunteers as the gallery committee to keep running in consultation with UP administrator, Gail Kenning.



Wayne Hutchins at Sydney Contemporary Art Fair

The ongoing spirit of self-determination continues through the activities of UPSpace Gallery. It provides a professional yet accessible environment for exhibitions, artist-led projects, workshops, talks, and public programs. The gallery serves several important functions. It provides members with regular opportunities to exhibit new work, allows emerging and invited artists to engage with the organisation, and creates a public interface through which the broader community can encounter contemporary art practices.

One of the most visible expressions of the organisation's exhibition activity has been its long-standing participation in Sydney Contemporary. The Ultimo Project has participated in the fair's Works on Paper sector for at least a decade, providing members with access to one of Australia's most significant contemporary art events. In 2026, the collective celebrated its tenth year of participation and used the occasion to promote both its artists and the activities of UPSpace Gallery. The fair has provided an important platform through which members can engage with collectors, curators, fellow artists, and wider audiences. Participation has also increased public awareness of The Ultimo Project as one of Sydney's longest-running artist collectives.

At the same time, the collective has always recognised that a healthy arts ecology requires opportunities for artists to exhibit outside conventional commercial systems. This commitment reflects the organisation's origins within the artist-run movement of the 1980s, when artists increasingly created their own spaces, networks, and exhibition opportunities in response to the limited availability of affordable studios and galleries. Exhibitions by The Ultimo Project have never been limited to formal gallery presentations. Open studios remain a vital aspect of public engagement. Events such as the Creative Trails / Midjuburi Open Studios program have invited visitors directly into artists' working environments, offering insights into artistic processes, materials, research methodologies, and works in progress.

These events reinforce one of the collective's founding principles: that artists should remain connected to the communities in which they live and work. Visitors encounter not only finished artworks but also the realities of artistic labour, experimentation, collaboration, and research. Such opportunities have become increasingly valuable at a time when studio spaces are disappearing from Sydney's inner suburbs and opportunities for direct engagement with artists are becoming less common.

The exhibition program associated with the Ultimo Project and UPSpace Gallery demonstrates the importance of artist-run initiatives within Australia's cultural landscape. While commercial galleries and public institutions play an important role, artist-led organisations provide spaces where experimentation, risk-taking, mentorship, and collaboration can flourish.



Barbara Licha solo exhibition at UPSpace

Recollections of artists

The stories of how people came to join UP, reveal the interconnectedness of the Sydney art community and the support artists give to each other sharing studios, making introductions and creating lifelong working relationships and friendships.

Sue Pedley recalls "I moved to Coulson Street soon after UP relocated there from Glebe. The Kelly Country suit factory was next door, where I collected the woollen off cuts from the factory for my work and exposed cyanotypes in the dusty car park."

Wayne Hutchins joined UP at Coulson St, becoming president when Joris Everaerts nominated him. Some internal disputes had been making things volatile in the group and a firm yet fair hand was needed, with no prior knowledge of issues. He was president for 28 years keeping things on an even keel.

Jane Eagger echoes the experience of many long-term members looking for a studio. She recalls "I joined Ultimo Project in 1992 after meeting Joris Everaerts at a life-drawing class held at Blackwattle Studios at Glebe Point waterfront. The evening class was run out-of-hours by architecture students from the University of Technology Sydney.

"I had travelled from Melbourne with my young family, rented in Glebe and was looking for a studio close by. Before I left Melbourne I was collaboratively managing Roar Studios, an artist-run collective of gallery and studio spaces in Brunswick St, Fitzroy, Melbourne. So I was pleased to find a place at The Ultimo Project, at that time in premises in Wigram Lane, Glebe."

Gail Kenning joined UP in 1998 following a residency in Hue, Vietnam where she met Sue Pedley. She had just left a studio she had rented from artist Janet Lawrence and with Sue's help applied to UP at Coulson St. Gail has maintained UP bookeeping and administration for nearly 15+ years.

Nicole Ellis recalls she joined Coulson St, studios in the late 1990s and moved to the Addison road Centre in 2004. "I originally worked in the large shed number 24 and then later moved into one of the four demountable buildings."

Therese Kenyon was at Tin Sheds Art Workshops at University of Sydney, when fire partially damaged a studio. She needed to move. Existing UP member Jane Dyer, helped her apply to David Hope, the poet and UP live-in manager at Coulson St in 1999.

Adam Laerkesen remembers joining UP at Coulson st studios at around the turn of the century and have moved with UP to Addi road centre. He says "last year whilst becoming president of UP I set up a, predominately, sculpture studio in Hut 24a attached Hut 24 a dream come true".

Mark Dubner recalls "It was around the turn of the century my lease on a studio at the Teachers building in Surry Hills was coming to a close. I answered an ad pinned to a notice board at an art supply shop. I was welcomed and inducted into the establishment by the wonderful David Hope."

Jan Fieldsend reflects on her introduction to UP "About 2008/9, friend and colleague Therese Kenyon told me that collective member, Rita Bila, was looking for an artist to temporarily use her studio within the Drill Hall building at Addison Road Community Centre In Marrickville. I took up her offer of Studio 11 and at some point became a full member. I was excited to have a dedicated space to house all my materials and practice, and to participate in The Ultimo Project arts community.

Jennifer Levitus recalls "in the early 2000's not long after UP moved to Addison Road I sublet the studio of Geoff Levitus on occasions when he travelled overseas. Some time around 2012, I was lucky to be able to sublet Studio 10 from Jan Fieldsend when she went away for a period. Jan then moved into another studio that became vacant. I was very grateful to be offered her studio, and have been there ever since."

Anthony Cahill - I was teaching at Meadowbank TAFE Art School in the early 2000's and had just finished my MFA , so I was without a studio. A colleague at the art school Geoff Levitus, mentioned that a studio was coming up and that I might be interested.

Anie Nheu recalls "I came to know of UP Studios through Annie Aitken after doing my MFA show at Tin Sheds Gallery in 2006. Nicole Ellis was away on a residency at the time and I used her space. When Nicole moved to the demountable, I remained in that space It felt like a gift

After being at UP for 20 years, I have witnessed how rare studio spaces have become as time passes.

Tina Fiveash had been on the waiting list for a studio at Addi Road since around 2005. "In 2014, I met Sylvia Guenther from UPSpace, who had a studio in Hut 24, and asked her how I could apply for a space there. She suggested I put my name on the 'visiting artist', and in 2016 I became a temporary member occuping a studio for two years. When Sylvia left UPSpace in 2018, I was offered her former studio, which I have occupied ever since.

India Zegan recognises the value of the organisation for artists suggesting "Artists joining the organisation are aware of how it's unique organisational position as a member of the Addison Road Community Centre and a incorporated co-operative structure in its own right is integral to the ongoing longevity, success and the future of Ultimo Projects. UP provides unparalleled studio security for artist-carers who undertake studio-led practice and who can only work part-time." She continues after having a temporary studio from 2016-2017 in Nicole Ellis' space, I was lucky to have the opportunity to permanently move into the main building in 2018. In November 2024 I was able to swap studios and moved into the sculpture studio annex space. Thankyou: Nicole Ellis, Liz Day, Kate Deacock.

Therese Briggs was delighted to have the opportunity to become a temporary member for a few years. Then in 2025 she applied and was fortunate to obtain one of the studios becoming vacant, on a permanent basis. "It's such an honour and a pleasure to work alongside such talented and committed artists in this green creative hub in Sydney's inner west. As spaces for artists to work and practice become increasingly difficult to find, places like this are more important than ever."

Carolyn Craig answered a facebook ad whilst running artist run studios/space with Em ingram Shute called Railway street studios, "as we were about to be thrown out for a property development. I applied to share space with Damian Dillon. That studio share enabled us to renew and enrich a lifelong friendship with Adam Laerkenson and realise that we really wanted to be part of this space. When 24 A was started we asked if there might be room for us there and amazingly there was.

I then hopped next door when a vacancy came up as my area was a bit popular with the possums. Now I am next door to an artist whom I have had in my lectures for ten years (Jan Fieldsend). What an honour. It feels like such an important legacy.

Em Ingram-Shute
was delighted to join UP "It has been through sheer fortune that I have joined UPSpace this year in 2026. My friend Carolyn Craig and I had to leave our Artist Collective due to a redevelopment. It so happened that a temporary space became available at UPSpace just as this was occurring. After a year of occupying the studio of an UP member on sabbatical, a permanent studio became available and I was lucky enough to get it. Community is important to me and it's a real pleasure to be part of this one with good friends and new friends forming."

Eleonora Pasti recalls "After first visiting UPSpace for an open day in 2024 and meeting Barbara Licha, I was a temporary meber of UP occupying a studio of member working overseas, for a year before finally getting my own studio and officially joining The Ultimo Project in March 2026."

Erin Schoeffel "I joined Ultimo Projects in 2024, after Adam invited me to become part of the newly established 24A studio. I was fortunate to join the side-project at its beginning, working alongside a group of wonderful sculptors to renovate the space and help shape this new extension of the studios."



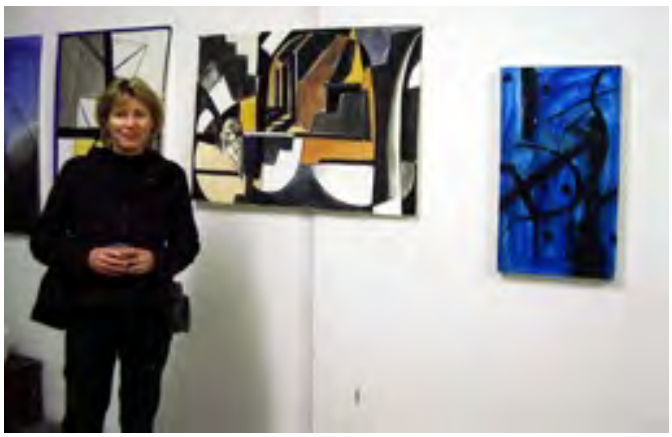
Adam Laerkesen



Gail Kenning



Annie Aitken



Jane Eagger



Geoff Hague



Mark Dubner



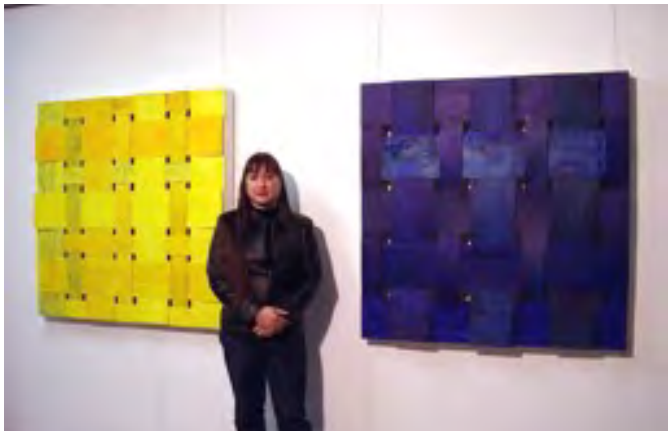
Barabara Licha



Geoff Levitus



Nicole Ellis



Carolyn Brady



Grahame Byrne



Paul Miller



David Hope



Jayne Dyer



Julee Pryor



Rita Bila



Robert Hawkins



Ross Mullane



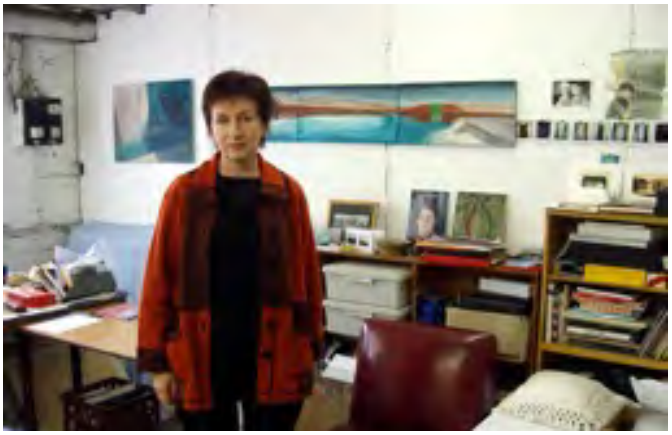
Sue Pedley



Sylvia Guenther



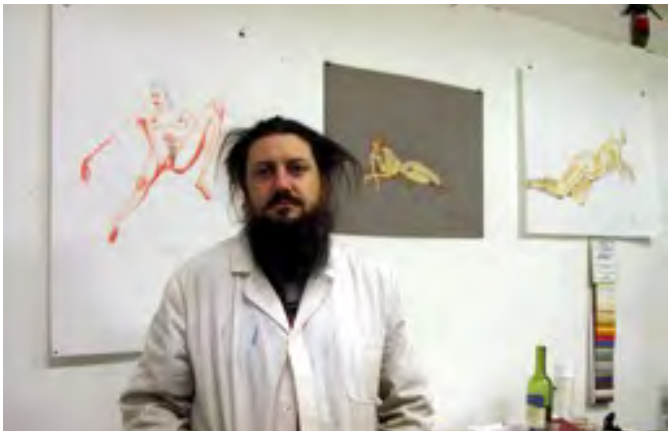
Wayne Hutchins



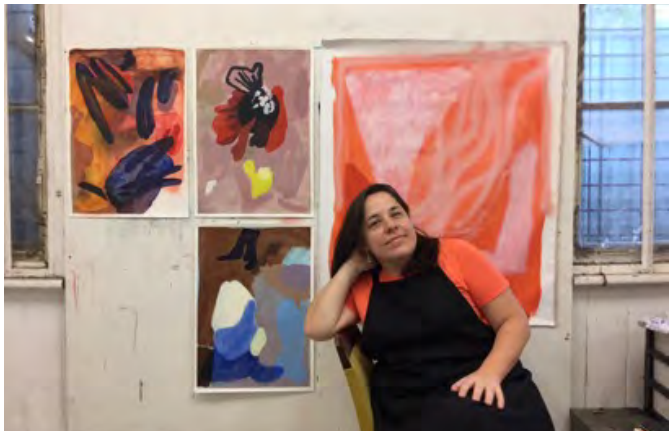
Therese Kenyon



Wart



Todd McCoy



Tonee Messiah



Anie Nheu



India Zegan



Jan Fieldsend



Tina Fiveash



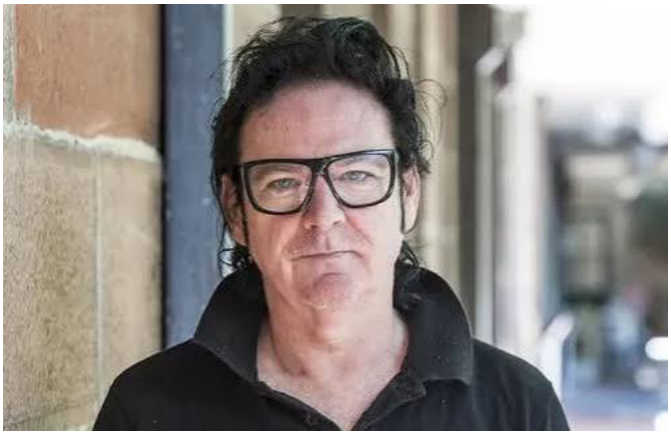
Anthony Cahill



Jenny Levitus



Caroline Craig



Damian Dillon



Em Ingram-Schute



Eleanora Pasti



Erin Schoeffel



Allan Giddy



Elaine Suhui



Abigail Montgomery



Felix Rives

A note from the author:: This publication and accompanying catalogue mark a celebration of The Ultimo Project's outstanding forty-year plus history of supporting artists. The event honours both current and past members who have contributed to and sustained the collective's shared vision over the decades. It is gratifying to learn that quite a few members have created other collectives in various places across Australia and New Zealand. For example Jude Rae in NZ, and Sue Nettlefold in Tasmania.

I apologise if there are inadvertent mistakes or unacknowledgement of some artists, but the scope of this exhibition was limited by funding, so only the current members were asked to show at this time.

Annie Aitken, Lisa Anderson, Paul Atroshenko, Peter Barnes, Rita Bila, Janice Bowley, Susan Bray, Carolyn Brady, Therese Briggs, Daniel Brown, Graham Byrne, Anthony Cahill, Don Campbell, Daryl Chapman, Zara Collins, Robert Connelly, Mike Contos, Christine Cornish, John Crawford, Peter Crocker, Carolyn Craig, Damian Dillon, Kate Deacock, Chris Downey, Mark Dubner, Jane Eagger, Nicole Ellis, Erth (Steve Howarth), Jaqui Eyers, Joris Everaerts, Peter Fay, Anne Ferran, Jan Fieldsend, Tina Fiveash, Sarah Gibson, Allan Giddy, Alex Gilly, Tom Gray, Sylvia Guenther, Geoff Hague, Lana Halchenko, Hoops, Julie Harris, Robert Hawkins, David Hope, Wayne Hutchins, Johan Ludvig Melander, Gail Kenning, Therese Kenyon, Dale Kentwell, Robert Kinder, Kovacs, Adam Laerkesen, Janet Laurence, Chelsea Lehmann, Geoff Levitus, Jennifer Levitus, Barbara Licha, Joanne Linsdell, Rowan Little, Luanne, Kirsty Mate, Kristine McCarroll, Todd McCoy, Tonee Messiah, Paul Miller, Abigail Montgomery, Ross Mullane, Francis Mawer, Sue Nettlefold, Anie Nheu, Eleonora Pasti, Sue Pedley, Katie Plummer, Julia Raath, Jude Rae, Sharon Raggett, Peggy Randall, Felixe Rives, Amanda Robins, Angela Rowson, Phaptawan Suwannahudt, Margarita Sampson, Peter Schell, Deborah Scire, Erin Schloeffel, Kathryn Shearer, Emily Ingram Shute, Ric Simhauser, Ruth Stone, Elaine Suhui, Julia Taylor, Anita Tesoriero, Sam Valenz, Deborah Vaughn, John Webb, India Zegan.

List of exhibition and open studio events at UpExhibitions and open studio events at UPSpace.

2006 MGM Marrickville Galleries and Museums Guide
2008 Marrickville Open Studio Trail
2010 'Clouding the Issue' Group exhibition UPSpace
2011 'Hang a Friend' A Sydney Fringe Exhibition at UPSpace
2012 'Once was Re(a)d' Art Month, UPSpace
'Diminutive' A Sydney Fringe exhibition at UPSpace.
2014 'One Metre Max' Group exhibition at UPSpace
2015 'Upmost' MOST open studio weekend at UPSpace
2016 'Making it UP' Art Month Sydney MOST Marrickville Open Studio Trail 2016
2017 'Upscape' IWOS event at UPSpace
2018 IWOST Inner West Open Studio Trail
2019 'Wintering on the Edge' Group exhibition at UPSpace
2022 'An UP Trail Mix' Group exhibition at UPSpace
2023 'Up and Go' Group exhibition at UPSpace
2024 'Rinse and Repeat 1' Works on Paper at UPSpace from Sydney Contemporary
2025 'Rinse and Repeat 2' Works on Paper at UPSpace from Sydney Contemporary
2026 'Continuity' Group exhibition at UPSpace for 40th anniversary.
2023 'Up for a Show'
2024 'Rinse and Repeat 1' exhibition of SCAF print exhibition rehung at UPSpace
2025 'Rinse and Repeat 2' exhibition of SCAF print exhibition rehung at UPSpace
2026 'UP 40th year anniversary history project'.

References:

1. Chris Downie. Essay, Cutting the Fringe in Endangered Spaces conference booklet, 1989.
2. Ref. Pg 24 'Endangered Spaces - Artist Run Initiatives in New South Wales' a forum and exhibition at Artspace
3. Eds. Adrienne Doig and Tess Horwitz 1989
4. Ultimo Project archives of minutes, grant applications, financial
5. and occupation lists, catalogues, letters and lease arrangements.
6. Author Interview with Hilik Mirankar on 18 Feb 2026
7. Author Interview with Jude Rae on 12 May 2026
8. Author Interview with Wayne Hutchins 18 May 2026
9. Author Interview with Jane Eagger and Gail Kenning 17 August 2026

Artist, curator, writer and long-time member of The Ultimo Project, Therese Kenyon reflects on the remarkable 40-year journey of a pioneering artist-led collective in Sydney, Australia.



ISBN 978-0-9925054-7-9
9 780992 505479 >