

**photo
access**



**STRATEGIC PLAN
2024 - 2028**



photo access acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional Custodians of the unceded lands on which we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present. We acknowledge that thousands of generations of First Nations peoples have been making art and sharing stories here, and acknowledge all who continue to keep culture strong and care for Country.

OUR VISION

Driving the creation of present and future communities of Australian photographic culture.

OUR MISSION

photo access brings a holistic creative practice in photographic culture to the national arts sector in creating connected, equitable, joyful, and sustainable communities of making.





photo access exhibition opening, 2021. Photo: Gemma Fischer

WHO WE ARE

photo access is a unique centre for contemporary image-making and is the longest-lived photography-focused organisation in Australia. Founded 40 years ago as an artist collective, **photo access** has origins in grassroots arts activism and is embedded in our community.

In the national ecosystem of photographic culture, **photo access** is the only organisation combining community, making-spaces, and exhibitions. These three elements are interwoven at **photo access** – each has grown, evolved and sustained the others. Artists and audiences engage across these elements and develop layered relationships with **photo access**.

We are an organisation committed to speculation and experimentation, rather than canonisation. All participants develop and discover their own perspectives on photography through an encounter with different imaging technologies, through workshops, community events, discursive and artistic projects.

photo
access



making-spaces

community
joins
workshops



community

artists in
residence join
community
as tutors

artists using
making-spaces
exhibit

community
become
artists



exhibitions

OUR STORY



photo access founders Gerry Orkin and Huw Davies with Ricky Maynard in 1985
Photo: Gerry Orkin

Founded in 1984 by artists to offer opportunities for making and learning in an accessible community setting, **photo access** is a centre for contemporary photography, film, video and media arts. We are based on Ngunnawal land in Kamberri / Canberra and manage the Manuka Arts Centre. We are the region's photographic hub and we are actively engaged nationally and internationally.

As a much smaller community than Sydney and Melbourne, Canberra's arts community is grass-roots, down-to-earth, accessible, collaborative, and welcoming to all. Throughout the organisation's history **photo access** has been a part of collaborations with organisations focusing on other media. Here, high-profile artists have always mingled with emerging artists and the wider community.

Based in the national capital, we offer ready access to significant collections and expertise at national cultural institutions and the *Australian National University (ANU)*, with which we regularly collaborate. Students and graduates from the *ANU School of Art and Design* - and more recently the *University of Canberra* - have gravitated to **photo access** to develop professional practice. For many arts workers, **photo access** has been a springboard for their careers, leading to work at Canberra's national institutions.

photo access has always offered more than basic access to a darkroom facility and technical skills. The access has always captured the broader vision of empowering a creative community to make diverse identities visible. **photo access** manages residencies, workshops, an exhibition program, collaborations, and events.

During a period of radical transformation in image culture, **photo access** runs online and in-person workshops for all ages preserving analogue skills, and building understanding of the ubiquitous photographic image in the digital age. Through online public programs, we facilitate national and international discussion about visual literacy and contemporary practice.

photo access is proud to be one of six founding organisations moving to premises in the new world-class arts precinct in Kingston, Canberra in 2026-27. Our purpose-built home will quadruple our space, including darkroom, studios, a 300 m² gallery and access to artists' accommodation.



'Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography!', installation view, 2023. Photo: Maria Koulouris

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Photographic culture is how photography, in all its forms, shapes our world. This concept encompasses photo-image practices and objects circulating in the world today, as well as the processes, structures and meanings involved in photo-image creation, distribution and consumption.

The practice of photography has transformed to the extent that the artist known as a 'photographer' is only one of the image-makers our practice now embraces. Making space for diversity of practice and diverse ways of seeing is essential to sustaining this evolving artform as artists and technology constantly redefine the boundaries of the medium.

We believe that when people make, share and reflect on images, pursuing arts-based inquiries into the nature of the world, they understand themselves more fully, connect with each other more deeply and enrich health and wellbeing. We recognise that, in photographic culture, a way of seeing *IS* creative expertise.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

CREATIVE INCUBATOR

Sustain, extend and invest in communities, emerging artists and arts workers

EXPERIMENTAL HUB

Create space for testing concepts and ideas where artists can sustain and lead creative practice in a constantly-innovating medium.

CENTRE FOR VISUAL LITERACY

Empower artists, audiences, and communities to engage socially, politically and culturally as a nationally and internationally networked resource for increasing visual literacy.



photo access sustains, extends and invests in communities, emerging artists and arts workers

GOALS

CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity-building for emerging artists, arts workers, potential arts board members facing systemic inequities

RESIDENCIES

Expand our cohesive suite of best-practice, accessible, group and individual residency opportunities, including a First Nations Residency for emerging artists nationally in 2025.

COLLABORATION

Maintain and extend collaborations with national cultural institutions.

Mervyn Bishop with workshop participants in the PhotoAccess Darkroom. Photo: Wouter Van de Voorde



EXPERIMENTAL IMAGE LAB

photo access is a space for testing concepts and ideas where artists can sustain and lead creative practice in a constantly-innovating medium

GOALS

MEDIA LAB

Establish Australia's first community-based Media Lab to drive creative innovation.

EXPERIMENTATION

Support artists to experiment with new technologies, techniques, and concepts at the forefront of photography and media practice.

ENGAGEMENT

Prioritise public engagement with the creative process through participatory Media Lab installations onsite, in the community, and touring.

'Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography!' installation view, 2023. Photo: Maria Koulouris



Empower artists, audiences, and communities to engage socially, politically and culturally as a nationally and internationally networked resource for increasing visual literacy

GOALS

EMPOWERMENT

Promote critical engagement, digital empowerment, activation beyond exhibitions, deeper understanding of images, and creative wellbeing through accessible practice-based learning and participation.

NETWORK

Support emerging artists and diverse audiences to sustainably grow networks with the global online arts community engaging with the future of image-making.

RELATIONSHIPS

Connect our community with nationally and internationally socially-engaged artists to inspire, mentor, and ignite new collaborations.

Ted Richards and workshop participants. Photo: Aditi Sargeant



CREATIVE ECOSYSTEM

ON COUNTRY

Kamberri

photo access stands on the unceded lands of the Ngunnawal people. **photo access** recognises that First Nations artists have proven photography to be a powerful medium for representation, disintegration of the colonial gaze and destruction of stereotypes. **photo access** has developed strong relationships through collaborations, workshops, and exhibitions. Principles of First Nations designed and led programs and culturally safe practice are core to the organisation.

CULTURAL POLICY

Canberra: Australia's Arts Capital Arts, Culture and Creative Policy (2022-2026) released by the ACT Government in 2022 commits to the ambition of Canberra becoming Australia's arts capital through the focus areas 'Create, Develop, Promote'. **photo access** is proud to receive Arts Centre Investment funding under this framework.

In February 2023, the Australian Government released the National Cultural Policy, **REVIVE** with five pillars: First Nations first; A place for every story; Centrality of the artist; Strong cultural infrastructure; and Engaging the audience. Our strategic objectives connect with these themes.

Bower. Photo: Alex Robinson



NATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

As a leading centre for community practice situated within Australia's capital, **photo access** regularly collaborates to develop public programming with the national cultural institutions. **photo access** draws on the expertise within these institutions for its teachers, mentors, speakers and Board Members. Artists-in-Residence at **photo access** also benefit from this remarkable access to collections and networks.

Our recent collaborations with Institutions include: *The National Gallery of Australia; The National Library of Australia; The National Museum of Australia; The National Film & Sound Archive; The Australia National University; Canberra Museum + Gallery; Canberra Short Film Festival; St. Vincent de Paul Society; Soldier On; Arts + Law.*



Photography is Dead! Long Live Photography! installation view, 2023. Photo: Maria Koulouris

***Photography is dead!
Long live photography!***

*Together with students from The Australian National University's School of Arts and Design, **photo access** held a tongue-in-cheek funeral of photography. International collaborators included Joanna Zylinska (artist and media theorist), Penelope Umbrico (artist), Adrian Sauer (artist), Brett Rogers (Curator and former Director of The Photographer's Gallery), Andrew Dewdney (author, 'Forget Photography') and Boris Eldagsen (promptographer).*

ON THE MOVE

photo access is currently located in and manages the Manuka Arts Centre for ArtsACT. **photo access** is proud to be one of the six organisations projected to move to the new world-class arts precinct being constructed in Kingston by 2026-27 offering **photo access** the facilities and space to fulfil its demonstrated potential.

A SUSTAINED CREATIVE SPACE

RESILIENCE

photo access is now, more than ever, a crucial piece of Australian arts infrastructure.

A challenging period for the photographic ecosystem that saw organisational closures, including *Stills Gallery* in Sydney, *The Australian Institute of Professional Photography*, and the *Australian Centre for Photography*. Closure of other photographic organisations has seen **photo access** become the nearest photographic centre for artists in greater Sydney and the NSW South Coast.

photo access is resilient, with an expansive approach to a medium that is radically in flux, supporting the development of critical thinkers and makers to make sense of photography's past and future in a culture inflected by Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Rather than approach the photograph as the singular outcome of an artistic vision, we are uniquely positioned to allow artists and audiences to explore the expanded field of image production through the practices of audiences, scientists, and machines which are shaping the present and future of the image.

Hyperspectral

Hyperspectral is **photo access**'s annual showcase for contemporary photography, film, and multimedia. Featuring local, national, and international artists working at the forefront of emergent technologies. In 2023 'Hyperspectral' received funding through the ACT Government's Winter Innovation Festival Fund.

'Hyperspectral', installation view, 2023.
Photo: ACT Government



MAKING AND SHARING

We provide a crucial base for developing concepts and making work and innovating practice. In the last year, *Monash Gallery of Art* has rebranded as the *Museum of Australian Photography (MAPh)*. However, the focus of these institutions is the display and contextualisation of work in their gallery spaces, as does *Perth Centre for Photography*, and *Centre for Contemporary Photography*, Melbourne.

photo access continues to function as a space for thinking, making, and collaborating in an ecosystem dominated by exhibiting and episodic programming. Photography festivals such as *Head On*, *PHOTO Melbourne*, and the *Ballarat International Foto Biennale* have grown vigorously in the last years, demonstrating the continuing thirst for this medium. **photo access** is distinctive in its provision of space for artists to develop practice, speculate, and collaborate. As a 'lab' for new ideas and experimentation, we support the whole of practice, not just exhibition outcomes.

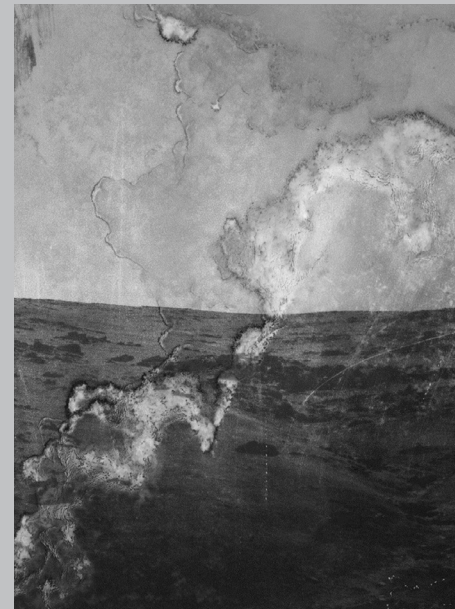
Concept to Publication



With the medium of photobooks enjoying a renewed global popularity as a distinctive photographic medium, **photo access** ran a first iteration of *Concept to Publication* workshop in 2022. This workshop is a mentored nine-month studio program is for any image maker wanting to develop and curate a portfolio of work and realise it as a unique photo-book.

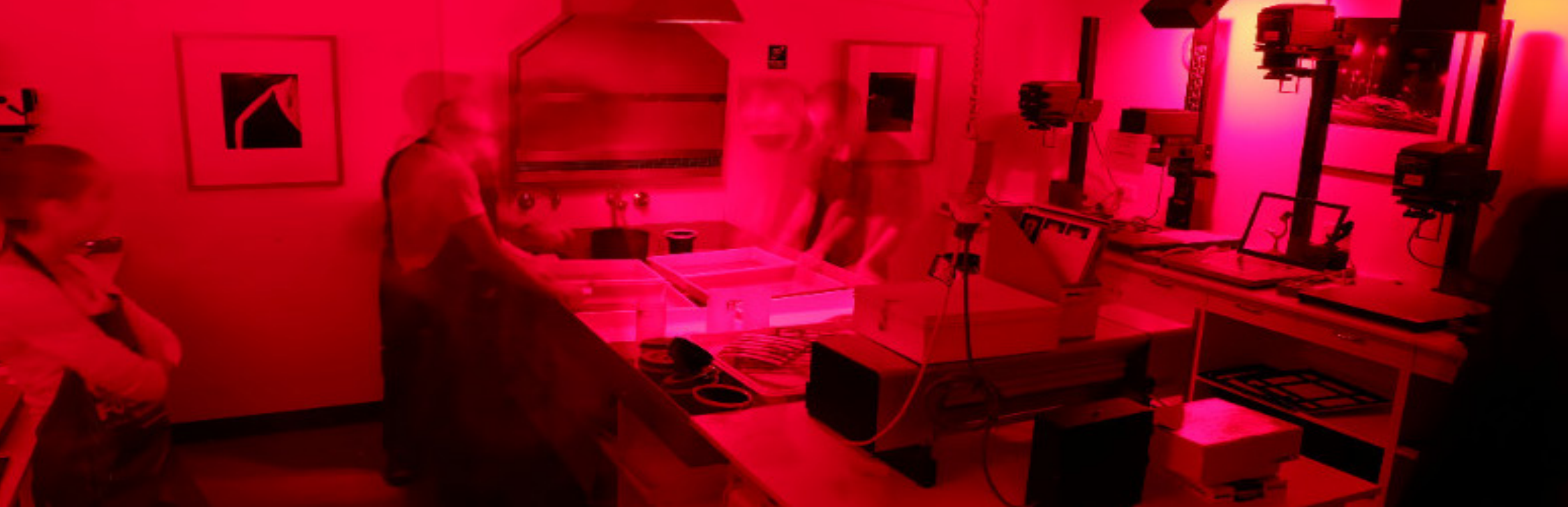
Concept to Publication, installation view, 2022.
Photo: Maria Koulouris

Dark Matter Residency: Odette England



In 2022 Odette England was awarded one of the **photo access**'s *Dark Matter Residencies*. England is a 2023 *Paul Guggenheim Fellow* and 2022 *Foam Paul Huff Award Nominee*. During the time of her residency England taught a short mentored workshop and engaged deeply with the **photo access** community.

Photo: Odette England, from the series 'Buried', 2023



PhotoAccess darkroom. Photo: Robert Agostino

INSIDE AN EVER-EVOLVING MEDIUM

HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

We are now the only organisation in our region developing black & white film for the public with steadily increasing demand. **photo access** supports preservation of analogue skills and experimentation in offering the only public darkroom between Sydney and Melbourne. Most of our collaborations with the national cultural institutions focus on engaging audiences in hands-on historical photographic processes. **photo access** makes sure the skills that made photographic history are not lost.

ARTISTS DEFINING PHOTOGRAPHIC CULTURE

There is no longer a division between analogue and digital within artists' practices which consistently span both. 80% of our darkroom users are now under 35 years of age and many are working in a hybrid of analogue and digital processes. In the age of the networked image, artists are creating new modes of practice at the boundaries of visual knowledge with virtual and augmented realities, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Working with partners such as ANU's *Computational Culture Lab* in the *School of Art & Design*, **photo access** is pushing forward on how to transform itself during a period of rapid technological change, and how we might serve our present and future audiences: We are committed to remaining at the centre of this conversation.



FROM GALLERY TO EXPERIMENTATION LAB

A hybrid space of media convergence is emerging and the space between photography, the internet and moving image has never been more fluid. Artists are re-discovering historical imaging technologies, whilst others are drawn to 21st century technologies such as photogrammetry and machine learning.

Presently, most small to mid-size non-collecting visual arts organisations in Australia model themselves on a *kunsthalle* (galleries focusing on temporary exhibitions). Outside of the Universities, there are few places for artists and communities to engage in creative research and development. This sits in contrast to Europe, where media labs (ranging in scale from *ZKM* to *Birmingham Open Media*) have become engines for supporting creative research and education activities.

photo access has a track record of providing space, facilities and technical know-how to support experimental practice at the intersection of art and imaging technologies, we are drawing on the media lab model in the development of our capability as a creative incubator and reimaging exhibiting in an experimental image lab.

ENTANGLED WITH A POWERFULLY ACCESSIBLE ARTFORM



Photo: Rory Hamovit, *Shadowpuppet*, 2022

OUR AUDIENCE

Today, as cameras integrate with phones, machines create more images than humans and online algorithms mine billions of social media images each day. The idea of 'photography' is constantly reforming, and as a result over the past five years **photo access** audiences have changed. Strategic organisational focus on engaging with critical photographic culture has seen a dramatic rise in participation of 18 to 35-year-old people working in the creative economy. **photo access** engages directly and openly with contemporary and future practice.

VISUAL LITERACY

Visual literacy is the ability to read and create visual images to generate understanding, communication, and interaction. Visual literacy for the digital age is key to public conversation, social equity, and a vibrant creative economy. Photography dominates public discourse. The medium is powerfully present in storytelling around climate change and extinctions, conflict, social justice, and decolonisation. All of **photo access**'s workshop programs for all ages and diverse communities are designed to enhance visual literacy.

INCLUSION & EMPOWERMENT

photo access has delivered an exceptional number of socially-engaged and inclusive programs over the past 7 years and maintains strong networks with diverse artists and audiences. To maintain accessibility, **photo access** continues to deliver online programming originally developed during the pandemic closures.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The Board meets bimonthly with committees meeting in between. Reporting and oversight ensures that all **photo access** activities are aligned to our mission, vision and strategy. **photo access** employs qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools to measure success:

- Artist and community participation and feedback across the program
- Diversity of participation and growth in first-time participation
- Financial sustainability
- Creating and sustaining relationships, including partnerships and networks
- Communications reach

GOVERNANCE

We are a non-profit registered under the Incorporated Associations Act (1991) ACT. Our volunteer board brings strong professional expertise and experience in board governance, financial management, artistic practice, and exceptional cross-sector networks. **photo access** is proud to receive ACT Government Arts Centre Investment funding. The Board convenes committees for Finance, Strategic Planning, Governance and Risk, Membership and Development.

Focus areas for sustaining best-practice governance to support the **photo access** vision, mission and strategic priorities:

FIRST NATIONS REPRESENTATION

Maintaining an organisational structure and culture that supports First Nations representation among artists, arts workers, and Board Members including prioritising relationships, consciousness of cultural load, and developing a Reconciliation Action Plan by 2025.

ROBUST GOVERNANCE & CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

Constitutional and policy review including, the corporate structure, limiting Board terms and succession planning.

BOARD DIVERSITY & SKILLS

Further diversify the cultural and personal knowledges held within the Board and increase the expertise and local, national and international business networks. Affirmative measures to increase equity of opportunity and introducing a program of mentored paths to Board participation in 2024.



PhotoAccess Open Day, 2021. Photo: Gemma Fisher

RISK AND RESILIENCE

photo access creatively and carefully identifies and controls risks and opportunities in an approach that supports a small organisation to build resilience and deliver its strategic objectives. During the 2019 bushfires and throughout Covid, **photo access** operated in an external environment defined by extreme uncertainty.

With a risk-based approach **photo access** adapted, built organisational resilience, and provided online content and programs to audiences and members in lockdown. **photo access** also opened up the Manuka Arts Centre garden for events, including openings, festivals and performances. The sustained success of these programs demonstrates **photo access** is an organisation that remains relevant as our world and practice evolves, and is trusted and valued by the audiences and community it serves.

Maintaining creative and organisational momentum

Risks

- Retention of arts workers compromised resulting in a loss of expertise, corporate knowledge, and consistent organisational culture
- Reduction in organisational capacity from arts worker burn-out, and compromised wellbeing
- Sustaining the energy and drive to support the development and move to the new arts precinct in Kingston, particularly if construction is further delayed

Sources of resilience

- Able to offer fair remuneration and stable employment
- **photo access's** reputation and longstanding position in the Arts community attracts high calibre staff
- Strong team culture where knowledge is shared and professional development opportunities are created with Board support
- Strong community partnerships and collaborations

Sustaining online and onsite communities

Risks

- Reaching digital infrastructure limits
- Our facilities, programs, and expertise falling behind contemporary practice, especially in digital capabilities
- Ongoing health impacts on accessibility for members of our community
- Financial impact of rising costs

Sources of resilience

- A new website supported by grant funding is currently being built – for completion in 2024
- Internal design and photography skills amplify external web design expertise
- Planning for arts precinct move will allow upgrade of digital equipment and emerging techniques
- Continued hybridising of programming between onsite and online delivery for openings, workshops and residencies

Relationships

Risks

- Failure to maintain diversified revenue streams including partnerships with businesses and organisations, sponsorships, and grants

Sources of resilience

- Implementation of a fundraising strategy with a focus from Board and Director on diversification of revenue
- Membership and Development Committee meet quarterly to review the strategy for actionable goals and upcoming opportunities

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VIEW2021 Opening, Photo: Gemma Fischer

cover image: Nicci Haynes performance at 'Hyperspectral', 2023. Photo: Gemma Fischer