All the Queens Men

Approach to Practice

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Sovereign Custodians of the lands on which we live, love, learn, and create. We pay our respect to their Elders, past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. Always was. Always will be.

Gratitude

Over the past decade, we have been the recipients of support from a wide range of people and Partners, without whom we couldn't have made it this far. We are forever grateful for this support in the work that we do.

www.allthequeensmen.net
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This document was co-authored by Jennifer Barry, Tristan Meecham and Bec Reid ©

Image: Danzal Baker (aka Baker Boy) performs at *Fun Run*, Gold Coast. Image by Bryony Jackson.

Approach to Practice

"ATQM's approach to community arts and development is the benchmark. At the heart of their practice is a genuine want to listen to a community followed by deployment of their creative arsenal to support citizens to share their truths in a safe and inclusive space. Participants are held throughout the creative process and always the focus of the work. ATQM are unyielding and uncompromising when establishing relationships within community. In Wyndham's experience, the resulting depth and impact of the work was surprising to many - including participants - evoking ongoing conversation and impetus for action." Wyndham City.

ATQM aims to challenge stereotypes, stimulate and expand awareness, build empathy, and promote dialogue. The Company's practice is informed by queer philosophies and principles, and ATQM is open to multiple approaches and methodologies when undertaking its work. Inspired by American academic Eve Sedgwick's definition of queer as *"the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses, and excesses of meaning",* ATQM is reflexive and open to engaging multiple and conflicting worldviews; often presenting a position against normative or dominant modes of thought.

ATQM's projects are conceived as 'gifts' that celebrate participants' varied lived experiences. The Company adopts the notion of 'gift' both literally and metaphorically to signify a reciprocal relationship between artist and community. The 'extravagance' of ATQM's projects is proportional to those engaged; people who often don't have the privilege of regular access to contemporary arts experiences. As such, ATQM's accessible events are often significant celebrations that can shift time and place, connecting diverse peoples. In this way, ATQM empowers individuals to feel part of a bigger community, in the same way sporting events can unite different tribes as a collective.

Concept Development

The initiating stimulus for ATQM projects can take varied forms. It can be as simple as artists in conversations with key members of a community, discussing issues of urgency and relevance to that community. Or an idea for a project may be informed by public and/or social policy, revealing broader societal issues that are impacting communities. Some projects are initiated by conversations with public stakeholders interested in the intersection between contemporary arts practice and a (health and social sector) Primary Prevention Framework. Academic research is often a starting point to link big conversations with community members, inviting their responses and integrating these into a creative concept. ATQM's vision, purpose, and values underpin these pathways to conceptual development.

Introduction to ATQM's Process

"These creatives are part genius, part theatricality, and part social warriors - using love, creativity and acceptance to transform what it is to be human - and along the way people change in front of your eyes - they are bolder and braver and standing in the light."

Alison Duncan, Manager Community Services, City of Melbourne.

The process for making ATQM's work is often intuitive. The Company's methodology pivots depending on the community it is working with, or the social issue being addressed. The Company embeds community collaboration at every stage - from development and presentation, through to ongoing engagement. ATQM's creative and social process is united by six core elements:

• **Community Collaboration**

• **Skills Sharing**

• **Partnerships**

• **Amplifying Community Voices**

• **Documentation**

• **Evaluation**

Image: Bec Reid and BAM Ensemble perform at *Fun Run*, Melbourne. Image by Bryony Jackson.

Image: Tristan Meecham conducts *TOY* Workshops, Queensland. Image by Ben Vos.

1. Community Collaboration

"After the Ansan Sewel Ferry Disaster in South Korea, we suffered inextricable grief. *Fun Run* changed the fabric of our city in ways we could not have imagined. Our community came together through art. We were deeply moved by the result."

Yoon, Jong-yeon, Artistic Director, Ansan Street Arts Festival.

Rather than impose its own values, ATQM's strength is its co-authorship with communities to build and create transformative experiences. ATQM creates unified spaces where people come together to release, celebrate, and collectively heal. This demands an organisational skillset capable of sensitively engaging individuals facing complex and varied social and economic issues.

This social and artistic balance is always in flux and, frequently, it is the community participants themselves who lead a project's development; shifting and changing its direction, with ATQM's artists serving the community's

Images from *Congress*, *Fun Run*, *TOY*, *The Coming Back Out Ball*, *LGBTIQ+ Elders Dance Club* and ATQM fourms. Photos by Bryony Jackson.

aspirations. ATQM hosts regular public forums and social events during the early stages of a new project's development, as a means for facilitating dialogue and social interaction with community participants, to gain insight into their needs, and to develop trust and connection. These types of events are also held consistently throughout the creative process. Additionally, through personal interviews, ATQM gains insight into the barriers specific individuals might face, and incorporates these insights into the creative developments. As needed, ATQM builds support mechanisms into projects, such as specific support workers, to ensure participants have optimal creative experiences.

2. Skills Sharing

The practice of 'reciprocity' is embedded into ATQM's creative process, ensuring that both artist and community are learning from each other, and building something new *together*. Additionally, ATQM aims to leave people and communities legacy capacity skills to continue their own creative processes. By way of example, *Congress* brings several

Image: *Congress*, Melbourne.
Image by Gregory Lorenzutti.

community participants together with professional wordsmiths, in a one-on-one capacity, over an extended period. During this time, the professional artists mentor the community participants, giving them the creative tools and confidence to tell their own stories. A community collaborator on *Congress* (Fatima Measham), has now been engaged as a professional writer by Wyndham City through their direct collaboration with ATQM.

3. Partnerships

Key to ATQM's creative approach is the Company's partnerships at the intersection of social services, creativity, and government; in tandem with community, artists,

and audiences. Collaborating with partners across arts and culture, health, equality, social inclusion, and creative ageing ensures ATQM's work reaches *far beyond* an informed 'Arts' audience, and amplifies the Company's capacity to measure the value and social impact of its work.

An example of this type of collaborative partnership is *The Coming Back Out Ball*, which was originally presented as an event of the Victorian Seniors Festival in association with the National LGBTI+ Ageing and Aged Care Conference. The work was supported by a consortium of 15 partners representing the government, corporate, philanthropic, health, LGBTI+, and arts sectors.

Image: *LGBTIQ+ Elders Dance Club*, Melbourne. Image by Bryony Jackson

4. Amplifying Community Voices

"They just don't let you pretend to be anyone else. Just be yourself, be proud of yourself - it's something of big value. Your voice now. People are going to hear it."

Nadeem, *Congress* - Citizen Speaker.

ATQM embeds conversations, activism, education, and ongoing community consultation into its projects, to ensure the social mission and values of the Company's work are placed at the forefront of a broader community enquiry. A community contribution to ATQM's work - enabled through social media,

community advocacy, and the engagement of project ambassadors - is an essential part of the Company's creative and consultative process; augmenting any value this might offer a work's subsequent marketing and promotion. For many stakeholders, social media offers a digestible and dynamic way to stay connected to a project, its politic, and its thinking, and this dynamic process helps ATQM gather evidence to better understand which aspects of a project resonate most with participants, audiences, and partners (allowing the artists to pivot their creative approach, as needed).
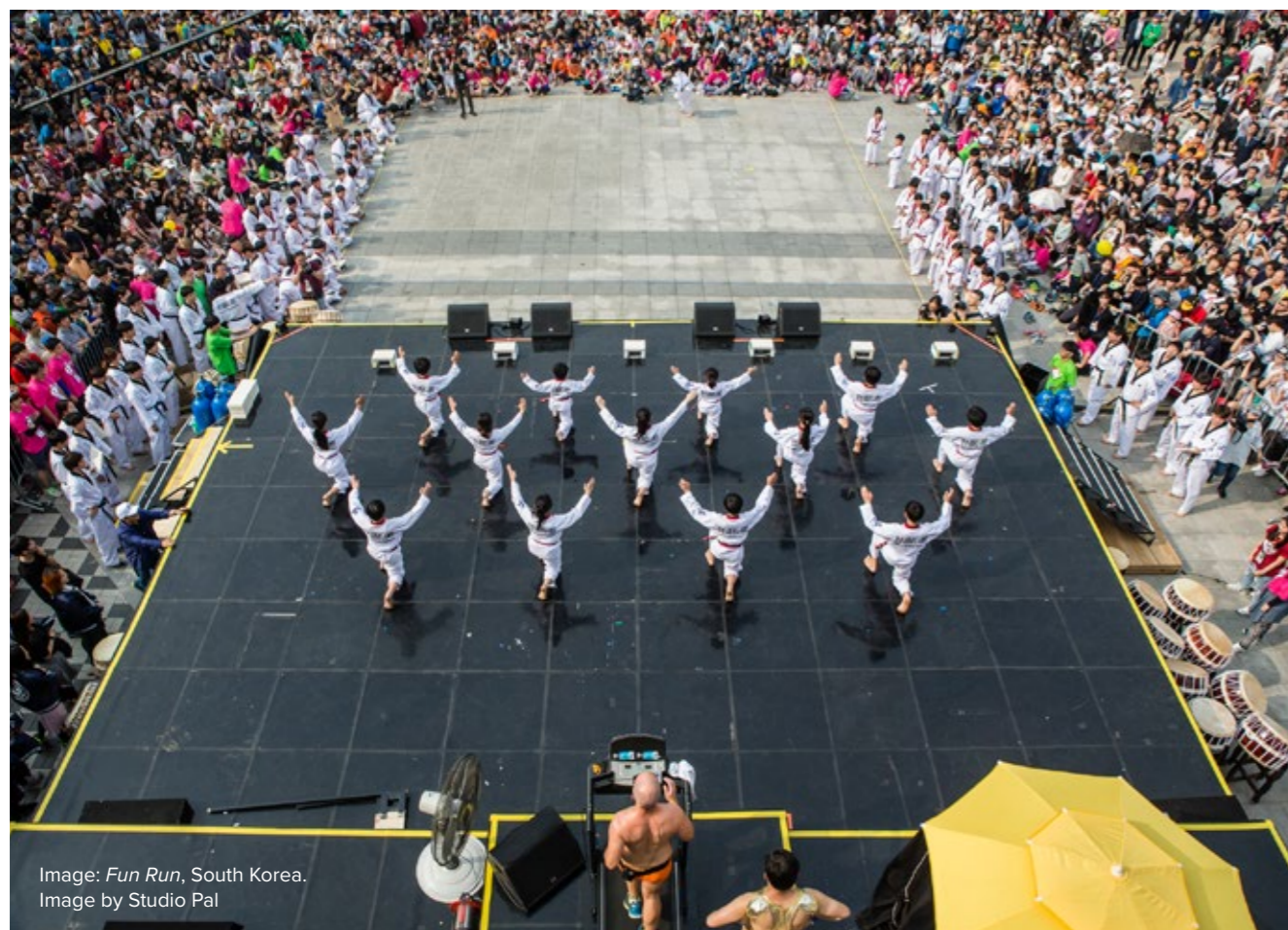
Image: *Fun Run*, South Korea. Image by Studio Pal

5. Documentation

Documentation is an essential element of ATQM's work. It is key to telling ATQM's story and building the Company's body of work. High-quality photographic imagery, strong filmic pieces, and personal impact statements/testimonials are always factored into the realisation of a project. As ATQM's work travels around the world, these outputs become critical, not only in advocating for the Company, but as a resource for a global family of like-minded thought leaders in community-focused artistic practice. Some projects will generate a publication, (such as *The Coming Back Out Ball*), and others may take the form of a mini, filmic

documentary (such as *Fun Run*). These become invaluable tools for the Company, its collaborators, and sector peers.

6. Evaluation

To continuously inform its practice, ATQM invites feedback on the Company's work from community participants, as well as project artists, industry partners, and sector stakeholders, documenting their expectations and experience of being a part of an ATQM project. Different modalities are utilised for collecting this feedback - from surveys and forums, through to focus groups and interviews. ATQM uses the following evaluative framework for assessing the

social impact of its work on the communities it engages with:

A. **Social cohesion**: connections between people and groups, intercultural and intergenerational understanding.

B. **Community empowerment and self-determination**: participant and partner capacity building, consultation, involvement in democratic processes, and support for community-led initiatives.

C. **Local image and identity**: generating a sense of place and belonging, local distinctiveness, and the image of groups or public bodies.

D. **Health and wellbeing**: health benefits and education through the arts, and people's enjoyment of life.

Where possible, ATQM partners with academic institutions so that an objective evaluation of the work can be undertaken. To date, RMIT has partnered with ATQM to evaluate the social impact of *The Coming Back Out Ball*, and *Fun Run* has been extensively evaluated by Arts Centre Melbourne, providing invaluable quantitative and qualitative insights into these projects. Academic partnerships will continue to be sought over the coming years to further inform ATQM's practice.

ATQM has developed a seven-question framework for assessing the quality and vibrancy of the Company's artistic work. The questions are used as a guide for discussion and reflection between ATQM's Artistic Directors, project artists, community participants, project partners, and audiences.

1. Was the work radical (aesthetically, politically, imaginatively)?

2. Was the work 'queer' (in thinking, intent, form, process, presentation)?

3. Was the work joyfully ambitious (in scope, form, and content)?

4. Did the work pack a punch (emotionally, intellectually, culturally)?

5. Did the work honour everyone involved in its making?

6. What was the work's buzz factor (with sector, media, audiences)?

7. Will the work have a future (relevance, discourse, touring, education, local (re)interpretations and (re)imaginings)?

Each element of these questions is comprehensively unpacked to consider: how? in what way? to what extent? with what impact? As ATQM works are created with a long life in mind, the Company also considers replicability, flexibility, and quality of artistic process and documentation.

Project Management

Informed by Co-Design methodology, ATQM's practice facilitates a 'continuous' conversation with all project stakeholders to support an 'iterative' creative process. Underpinning this agile approach is a structured framework that provides a secure buttress for each project and its participants. All projects have constraints of time, budget, and location, consequently, depending on a project's anticipated scope, scale, and objectives, ATQM employs different methodologies for project management. ATQM currently uses two project management models:

7D Model

ATQM's 7D Model is beneficial for generating new works or commissions. It has a deep-engagement focus, where projects are created from the ground up, over longer time frames. The 7D model comprises seven 'stages': Discover, Define, Develop, Decide, Deliver, Document, and Decompress. Each of these steps is briefly summarised below. The format of each stage is designed on a case-by-case basis, reflecting the

capacities of a community, and the specific objectives of a project.

1. **Discover:** communities, people, influencers, leaders, values, interests, ideas, stories. This stage involves many cups of tea in loungerooms, food court meetings, social excursions, getting to know each other, and building trust. It is also where the gatekeepers - people with agency within their own communities - are discovered.

2. **Define:** protocols and rules of engagement. At this stage, basic assumptions are tested, and ways of working are overtly articulated. ATQM asks: how would you all like to work together? Is everyone hearing the same thing and are all expectations clear? It is an important step in the process because it ensures cultural, community, and individual safety and respect.

3. **Develop:** artistic skills, creativity, cooperation, collaboration, ideas, stories. At this stage in the process, a range of professional artists engage with community members to share artistic skills and explore various creative representations of the ideas and stories discovered in stage one.

The Coming Back Out Ball, 2018

4. **Decide:** what elements to include in a new work, deconstructing how these decisions are made, by whom, and why? Are the right people at the table to make decisions about this idea/story/opportunity?

5. **Deliver:** public and community outcomes/stories/expressions/a shared moment of connectivity with all.

6. **Document:** capture data, processes, outcomes, impact - artistic, personal, collective - and establish post-project communication arrangements. At this stage, ATQM invests in high quality documentation, case-studies/publications, to tell the

story of the project, and create resources for sharing with sector peers.

7. **Decompress:** celebrate, reflect, evaluate, consult, question, rest. At this final stage of a project, participants and stakeholders have an opportunity to come together and consider, in a guided way, how (if) the project worked, where it didn't work as well and why, and how it might be improved in the future. It is also a time to celebrate collective and individual achievements, and look at what new ideas and opportunities might have arisen as a result of the project.

Pre-Mix Model

ATQM's Pre-Mix Model is employed for projects where the Company brings something 'pre-mixed' (an existing artistic framework), to the table. In these scenarios, local communities add the bespoke flavours that make each version of the project unique to that place and time. The Pre-Mix Model is robust, because a clearly defined concept is activated and animated by the communities ATQM works with. Specifically, communities bring: individuals and their stories, unique facets of the local environment, demographic characteristics, histories, and imagined futures.

These elements constitute the 'spice' which ensures the ideas and outcomes are always the truest reflection of that context.

Due to its clear conceptual parameters, and the defined processes used between ATQM artists and local community collaborators, *Congress* can be (and has been) re-constituted, in a hyper-local way, in vastly diverse contexts. Similarly, every version of *The Coming Back Out Ball* is unique to the community in which it is presented. To do this successfully takes a skillful balance of guidance and direction, in tandem with flexibility and adaptability.

For more information visit:
www.allthequeensmen.net
Love + Art + Community
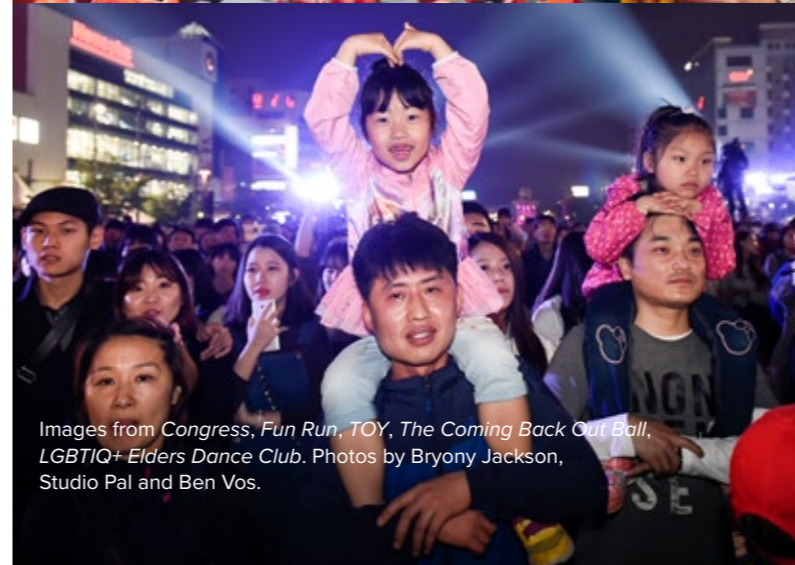
Images from *Congress*, *Fun Run*, *TOY*, *The Coming Back Out Ball*, *LGBTIQ+ Elders Dance Club*. Photos by Bryony Jackson, Studio Pal and Ben Vos.

Love

+

Art

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Community