



# THE BIG ANXIETY

festival of  
arts + science  
+ people

2017  
REPORT

An Initiative of The University of New South Wales in association  
with The Black Dog Institute.



Deep VR - breath controlled virtual reality.  
Photo by Skyline Productions.



# ABOUT

The Big Anxiety brings together artists, scientists, and communities to reimagine the state of mental health in the 21st century. A radically new kind of international arts festival, in which every project is an open conversation, designed to promote curiosity, awareness, and action. Our goal is to create the rich engagements we need for our collective mental health.

Underpinned by the research enterprise of UNSW and Black Dog Institute, the inaugural Big Anxiety festival developed innovative methods for working with communities, supporting individual mental health and recovery, as well as building empathy and connection.

An independent evaluation survey was designed and implemented by Urbis.

# FESTIVAL STREAMS

## POWER + INSTITUTIONS

Talking about individual dysfunction is easy compared with tackling the bigger picture: What's wrong with the system? We examine the impact of institutions, work-places, and other structures of power on our struggle to maintain mental health and balance.

## LIVED EXPERIENCES

Creative initiatives that grapple with the nitty gritty of life – making sense of adversity, finding meaning in confusion, and contesting the labels that limit us.

## AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS

Conversations in different forms and places with the goal of connecting over hard-to-talk-about subjects like mental health.

## NEURODIVERSECITY

NeurodiverseCity acknowledges the spectrum of neurological difference. The NeurodiverseCity is an aspirational place where such variation thrives. Challenging 'neurotypical' assumptions, drawing on the insights of our radically diverse population to better understand anxieties and create safe havens and relaxing spaces.

## MOOD EXPERIMENTS

Where high-tech meets mindfulness, this program combines art + science + people to explore how environments affect our moods. Venues include the EPICentre (Expanded Perception and Interaction Centre), the world's highest resolution 3D Immersive cinema, the National Facility for Human Robot Interaction and the Mobile Mood Lab, a converted ambulance.





**140,000 VISITORS**

**264,630 WEBSITE VIEWS**

**75 PROJECTS**

**32 VENUES**

**200+ ARTISTS & PRESENTERS**

**100+ VOLUNTEERS**

**270 MEDIA REPORTS**

**45 PARTNERS**

**71 FREE EVENTS OVER 53 DAYS**

**16 WORLD PREMIERES**

**Mobile Mood Lab (George Khut) - a converted ambulance using biofeedback technology to reduce stress and anxiety.**  
Photo by Skyline Productions.





**Neural Knitworks**  
(Pat Pillai).  
Photo by Skyline Productions.

# FESTIVAL HUBS

The three Big Anxiety hubs were located at Customs House, Riverside Theatres Parramatta, and UNSW Art & Design Paddington.

UNSW Paddington was our Nerve Centre with a focus on digital technology and immersive environments. At Customs House, the NeurodiverseCity explored urban experience from the perspective of a cognitively and neurologically diverse population. At Parramatta, our eight-day hub, The Check-in Lounge at Riverside Theatres, offered art and technology encounters for mental health and self-care.



**Beta Shockers - live drumming and video installation exploring stage fright.**  
(Tina Havelock-Stevens).  
Photo by Silversalt Photography.

# 16 COMMISSIONS

Including:

**NeurodiverseCity**  
Customs House

**Snöosphere multi-sensory environment**  
UNSW Galleries

**We Are All Affected**  
Fairfield and Auburn; and Eid festival

**Parragirls Past, Present**  
UNSW Epicentre and Parramatta Girls  
Home

**Mobile Mood Lab**  
travelling Greater Sydney

**Grace Under Pressure**  
Seymour Centre

**Apocalypse Anonymous**  
Parramatta Park

**Beta Shockers**  
AGNSW and UNSW

**Little Big Woman**  
MAAS Powerhouse

**Dis/ordered**  
MCA

**Vicki Van Hout, Official Festival Poem**  
AGNSW; UNSW; and Parramatta Riverside

**The Petition to Never Die**  
Parramatta River



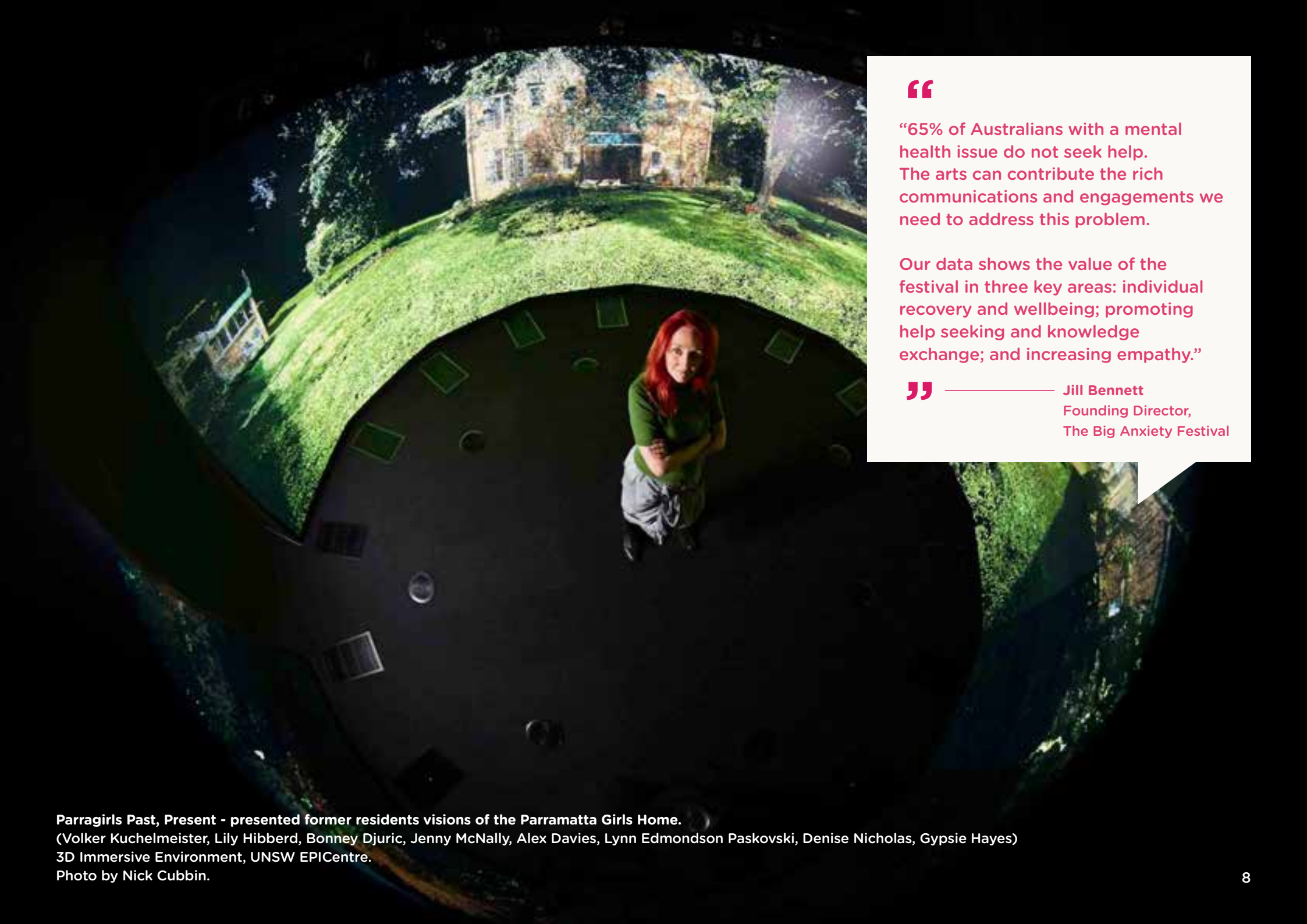


## 7 FESTIVAL AMBASSADORS



From top left to bottom right: Abdul Abdullah, Alessandro Donagh-De Marchi, Bè Aadam, Debra Keenahan, Mitch Jones, Vicki Van Hout, Yari Bangura.  
Photo by Richard Hedger.





“

“65% of Australians with a mental health issue do not seek help. The arts can contribute the rich communications and engagements we need to address this problem.

Our data shows the value of the festival in three key areas: individual recovery and wellbeing; promoting help seeking and knowledge exchange; and increasing empathy.”

”

Jill Bennett  
Founding Director,  
The Big Anxiety Festival

**Parragirls Past, Present - presented former residents visions of the Parramatta Girls Home.**

(Volker Kuchelmeister, Lily Hibberd, Bonney Djuric, Jenny McNally, Alex Davies, Lynn Edmondson Paskovski, Denise Nicholas, Gypsie Hayes)

3D Immersive Environment, UNSW EPICentre.

Photo by Nick Cubbin.

“

We visited Sydney this last weekend (27-29 October) from Brisbane, specifically to experience various events at the Big Anxiety festival. Wow, we had such a eye opening, stimulating experience!

The play Grace under Pressure (Seymour Centre) was brilliant and a very real insight into the health sector (although many of the themes resonate in other sectors as well).

The exhibits and interactive experiences at the UNSW Art and Design hub again were awesome. Congratulations to the artists who shared their works and visions to heighten public understanding and action.

”

Debbie (e-guestbook)

“

The inaugural Big Anxiety Festival has produced two very good pieces of theatre in recent days. The first was Grace Under Pressure, a very effective and affecting verbatim work exploring the dysfunctional culture of the healthcare system.

The second is UK-Australian duo Ridiculusmus's Give Me Your Love, a work inspired by an experimental therapy that saw soldiers suffering Post Stress Disorder (PTSD) treated with MDMA, the principal psychoactive component of ecstasy. A meticulous attention to physical detail; dry-to-deadpan humour, and a capacity to move you in unexpected ways.

”

Jason Blake,  
Sydney Morning Herald

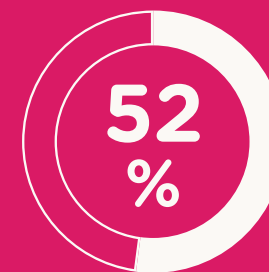




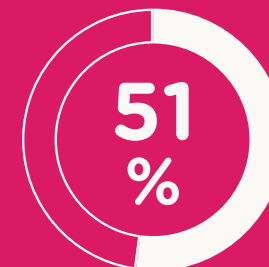
**Snoösphere** - a responsive sensory environment made in collaboration with autistic children and young people. (Lull Studios).  
Photo by Skyline Productions.

# OUR VISITORS

Of those surveyed,



Acknowledge having experienced a period of feeling mentally unwell.



Have a family member or a close friend who identifies as having a mental health issue.



**The Petition to Never Die** - a performance on the bank of the Parramatta River.  
(Vicki Van Haut and Marian Abboud).  
Photo by Skyline Productions.

# EMOTIONAL IMPACTS

Of those surveyed,



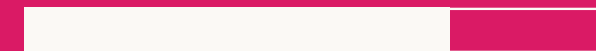
**80 %** Say the festival made them think about their own mental health.



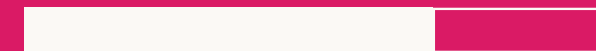
**82 %** Say the festival affected them emotionally.



**78 %** Say the festival inspired them creatively.



**75 %** Say they reflected on their own lives during the festival.



**71 %** Say they reflected on the lives of people they knew during the festival.



# PARRAGIRLS PAST, PRESENT

“

I think that's the most amazing thing... That I was believed. To go to the University and to have my first-born son, who was taken from me through Parramatta say, 'Mum, this is stunning and now I understand your story, I understand who you are'. It gave me back my reality...

”

————— **Jenny McNally**  
Former resident of  
Parramatta Girls' Home  
and collaborating artist.

“

It is possibly one of the most extraordinary experiences I've had. The most amazing intersection between art and science which opens up, and embodies the trauma of the past. I shall remember this for a very long time.

”

————— **Anuradha Kapur**  
Visitor, India.

## Parragirls Past, Present

(Volker Kuchelmeister, Lily Hibberd, Bonney Djuric, Jenny McNally, Alex Davies, Lynn Edmondson Paskovski, Denise Nicholas, Gypsie Hayes).

3D Immersive Environment, UNSW EPICentre.

Photo by Skyline Productions.



The Petition to Never Die  
(Vicki Van Hout and Marian Abboud).  
Photo by Skyline Productions.

# ARTS REACHING DIVERSE AUDIENCES

Of those surveyed,



**83 %** Do not regularly attend arts events at the venue.



**69 %** Do not work in the arts sector.



**23 %** Speak a language other than English at home. (National Average 21%, 2016 Census)





**3.5 TONNES OF MOVING ART**

**10 LOCATIONS ACROSS GREATER SYDNEY**

**2,258 UNIQUE INTERACTIONS**

# MOBILE MOOD LAB

The Big Anxiety's Mobile Mood lab was a converted ambulance, travelling Greater Sydney throughout the festival. The Mood Lab was developed by artist George Khut in collaboration with Westmead Children's Hospital, and used biofeedback technology to reduce stress and anxiety.

Fully accessible and inclusive artwork:  
Wheelchair accessible; Audio Described  
Tactile Tours; Auslan Interpreted.



Prof Peter Kinderman Our Turbulent Minds Auslan Interpreted.  
Photo by Skyline Productions.

# ACCESS AND INCLUSION

**13** Auslan Interpreted events and performances

**9** Events with audio description

**3** Deaf-led Walking Tours of 12 events with Auslan Support

**4** Major programs between UNSW Hub and Customs House Hub, led by neurodiverse artists for neurodivergent audiences/participants.

By request:  
Tactile tours  
Autism-led tours  
Accessible Print

Wheelchair  
accessible  
events and  
venues



# Participation

Emotional impacts were exceptionally high (rating greater than 8 out of 10) for Parragirls, Awkward Conversations, and other participatory events.



Awkward Conversations with Debra Keenahan  
Photo by Skyline Productions.

“

I had a liberating and utterly fascinating conversation about suicide and the ways that we might be more aware about the signs that our thinking is going in a certain direction – and just what we might do to get support – there and then. Brilliant. Thank you...

”

Clive, e-Guestbook

“

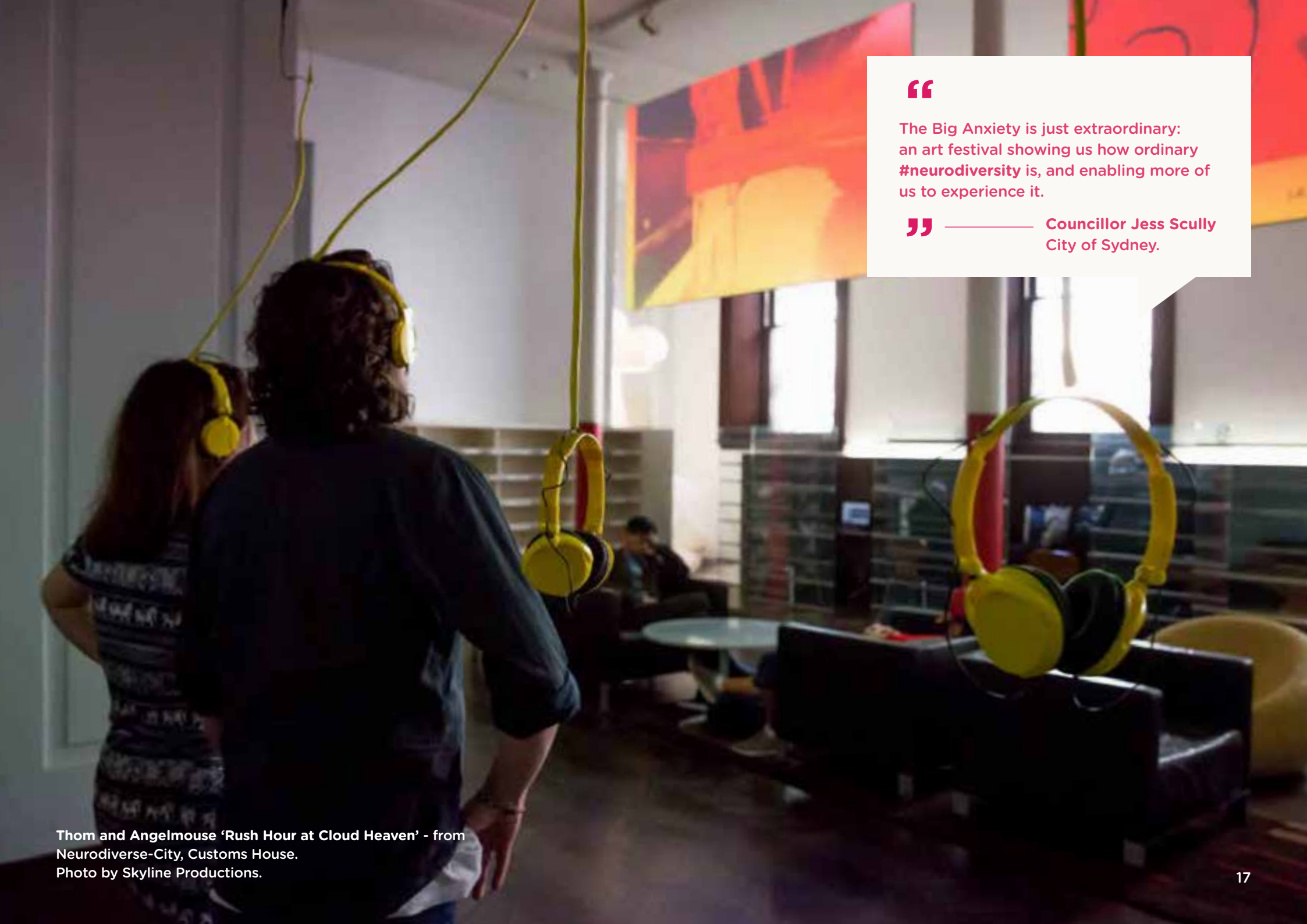
‘The S Word’ asks people to talk openly about suicide and that has the potential to save lives.

”

Catherine Lourey  
NSW Mental Health Commissioner.



Paul McDonald ‘Charlie’.  
Portrait co-developed in workshop.  
Contact Sheet Gallery.



“

The Big Anxiety is just extraordinary: an art festival showing us how ordinary **#neurodiversity** is, and enabling more of us to experience it.

”

————— Councillor Jess Scully  
City of Sydney.

Thom and Angelmouse 'Rush Hour at Cloud Heaven' - from  
Neurodiverse-City, Customs House.  
Photo by Skyline Productions.





MOBILE MOOD LAB volunteer and participant.  
Photo by Skyline Productions.

# CHANGING BEHAVIOURS

Of those surveyed,



**87 %** Were likely to have conversations about the festival events with people they knew.



**64 %** Were likely to seek out more information.



**57 %** Were likely to try to change someone's mind about mental health.



# 100 VOLUNTEERS

“

I work in psychiatric emergency care and everyday I see people in acute crises... the reality is, I can help the person in front of me, but it is art that can create social change. This festival has been important in not only creating awareness about mental health, but also encouraging people to think critically about mental healthcare in Australia and re-imagining new possibilities to the future.

”

Stefanie Orlik  
Volunteer,  
Psychiatric Registrar.





# 270 MEDIA REPORTS

Spanning 12 countries including Australia, United States, United Kingdom, Singapore, China, Italy, Spain, Africa, Japan, Belgium, Egypt, and India.

## Extended Features include:

**ABC TV Lateline**  
Snoosphere, 20/9/17  
Mobile Mood Lab, 29/9/17

**ABC TV**  
One Plus One, 18/10/17

**Buzzfeed Oz News**  
Snoosphere, 96k views,  
10/10/17

**Lancet Psychiatry Podcast  
(UK)**  
8/11/17

**The Guardian**  
24/9/17

**BBC 5 Live**  
27/9/17

# PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS



## Mental Health Pod Commissions

Professor Jill Bennett, Festival Director, with The Hon. Tanya Davies, MP, NSW Minister for Mental Health and one of the mental health pods commissioned for the festival by the NSW Government (supported by PTW Architects and Growthbuilt) and now gifted to public schools in Penrith and Ingleburn.



## The Big Anxiety Launch 2017

Professor Jill Bennett (Festival Director) with Natalia Bradshaw (BHCF), Professor Katherine Boydell (Festival Mental Health Lead, Black Dog Institute), Tina Tian (BHCF), and Stephen Fitzpatrick (BHCF). BHCF - Bridging Hope Charity Foundation



## The Big Anxiety LGBTQI Community Breakfast

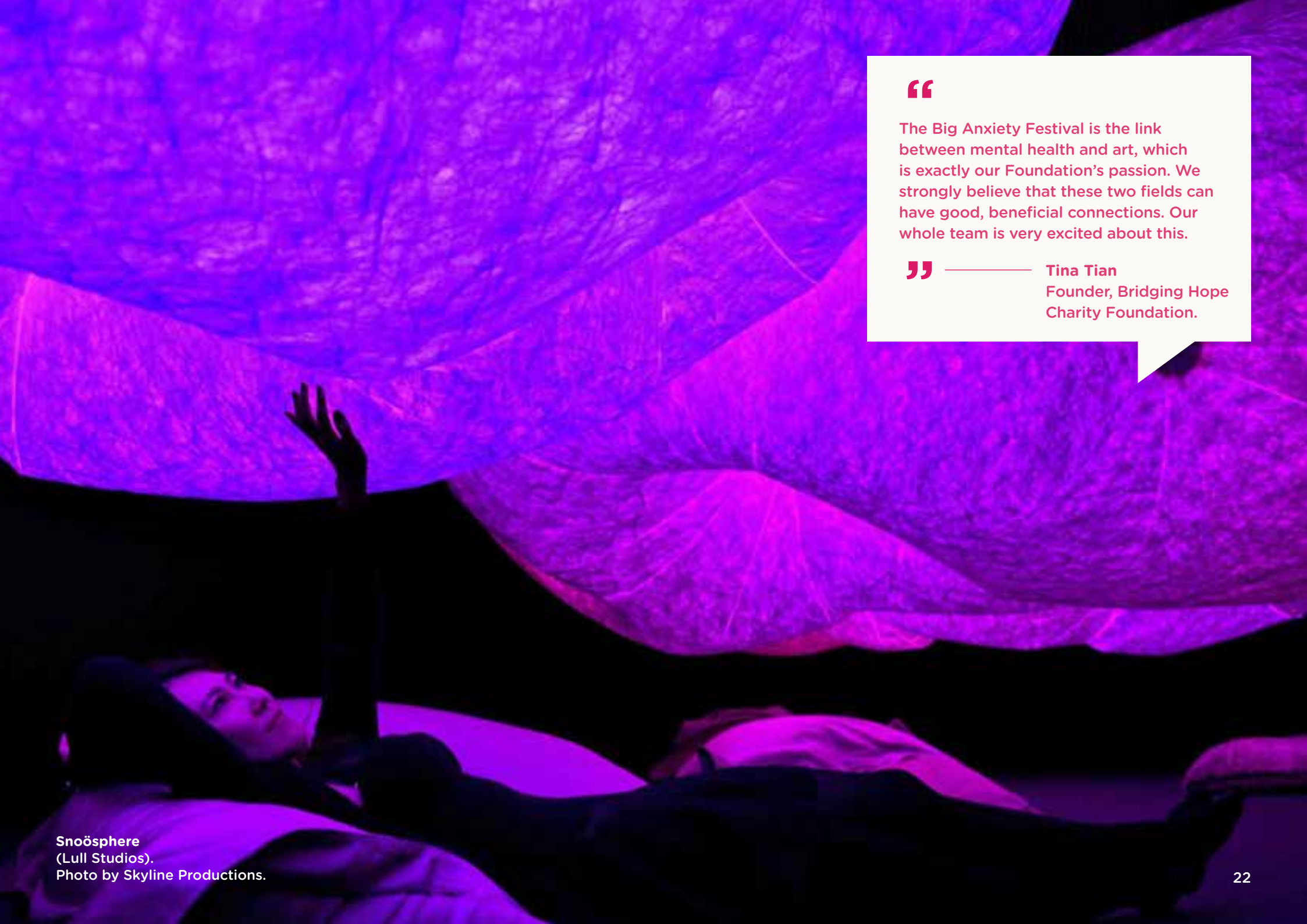
Professor Jill Bennett (Festival Director) with The Hon. Tanya Plibersek, MP, Deputy Leader of the Labor Party and festival volunteers, Marnie Cooper and Stefanie Orlik.



## The Big Anxiety at Parliament House

Professor Jill Bennett (Festival Director) with Professor Peter Kinderman (UK), Catherine Lourey, NSW Mental Health Commissioner, The Hon. Tanya Davies MP, and Dr George Khut (festival artist) in front of the Mobile Mood Lab at Parliament House on World Mental Health Day.





“

The Big Anxiety Festival is the link between mental health and art, which is exactly our Foundation's passion. We strongly believe that these two fields can have good, beneficial connections. Our whole team is very excited about this.

”

————— **Tina Tian**  
Founder, Bridging Hope  
Charity Foundation.

## FOUNDING PARTNER



## PRINCIPAL SUPPORTER



## PRINCIPAL PARTNER



## MAJOR SUPPORTERS



## GOVERNMENT PARTNERS



## RESEARCH PARTNERS



## MARKETING & MEDIA PARTNERS

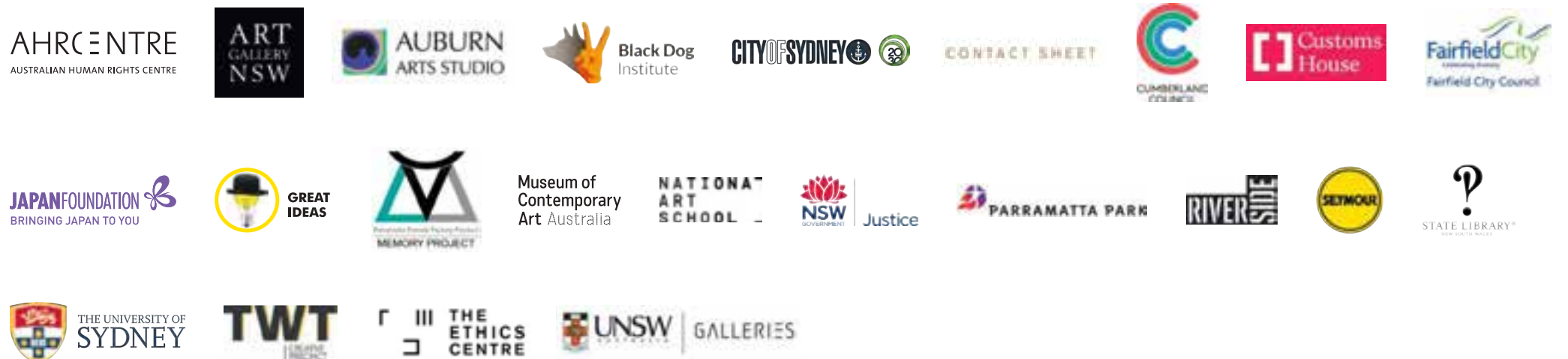




## EXHIBITION SUPPORTERS



## VENUE PARTNERS



## ASSOCIATED PROGRAM PARTNERS



# COMMENTS FROM e-GUESTBOOK

“

I want to say how amazing and wonderful this program is, I along with a group of friends attended the body mapping at the Art Gallery last night and we all loved it. How refreshing it is to have real conversations about life and connect with other people. Thank you.

”

————— Carmel, e-guestbook.

“

The concept and entire thinking behind this festival is inspiring and so very timely. It brings together the best of contemporary and experimental thinking and creativity and positions it in the context of what is usually medicalised, culturally demonised or, possibly worse, romanticised. It's where art needs to be – at the intersections, making change, holding up mirrors, smashing them, giving voice to people, especially those denied public and cultural voice.

”

————— Jane Crawley  
Creative Victoria.

“

Congratulations to the amazing Professor Jill Bennett and all her team, ambassadors and sponsors for organising and funding such an inspirational, affirming and much needed festival. The scale and inventiveness of this venture must have taken a huge effort on your part. On behalf of all those living with mental health challenges like myself and the huge number of people in the community who are feeling troubled by too many people taking their own lives due to their pain and the many more living in hope of new treatment interventions and strategies such as performance art, I thank you. Sydney you are blessed to have this festival.

”

————— Diana, e-guestbook.

“

Finally we can come out of the closet and defy uninformed prejudice. Thank you. A diverse sea of talented, worthy, good people who live with a crippling illness. May this festival be the beginning of the future.

”

————— Kate, e-guestbook.

“

What a relief! Big Anxiety is a festival that truly speaks to the complexity of being alive – bringing together science based perspectives, lived experiences and the capacity of artists to provoke, disrupt and reveal us to ourselves.

”

————— Angharad Wynne-Jones  
Arts Centre Melbourne.

“

Wonderful, challenging, inspiring, soothing, confronting, all at the same time.

”

————— Nicole, e-guestbook.



“

We want to find functional ways to respond to dysfunctional situations.

”

Abdul Abdullah  
Artist, interviewed in  
The Daily Telegraph,  
17 October 2017



We Are All Affected - Fairfield, Gallery.  
Artwork By Abdul-Rahman Abdullah.



@thebiganxiety

