

# THE BIG ANXIETY FORUM LEARNING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE

6 & 7 OCT 2022

**RMIT STOREY HALL & GREEN BRAIN BUILDING 16**  
336/348 SWANSTON STREET, MELBOURNE  
9.00AM - 5.00PM EACH DAY, \$30-\$75PP

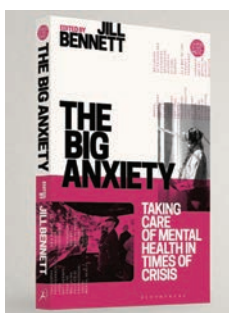
+ 2022 FORUM

An immersive 2-day forum for anyone interested in the complexities of mental and emotional health from lived experience perspectives.

Join us for two full days of creative engagements, in-depth conversations, workshops and performances, reimagining mental health through a creative, experiential lens.

This experience-based event is intended to be stimulating, uplifting, and ultimately enjoyable. It will also be challenging at times — and for some, transformative. The Forum prioritises being with lived experience rather than academic discussion. It is underpinned by collaborative research but is primarily a space for experiencing creative approaches to the day-to-day challenges of living with trauma, suicidality and mental distress.

Launching at the forum, our book, **The Big Anxiety: Taking Care of Mental Health in Time of Crisis** (Bloomsbury, 2022) features a range of artists/writers/presenters from The Big Anxiety festival including Siri Hustvedt, Claudia Rankine, Evelyn Araluen, Noreen Giffney, Lynn Froggett, Marianne Wobcke, Lois Weaver, Jill Bennett, fEEL Lab, Uti Kulintjaku – and discussion of Big Anxiety works such as Edge of the Present and Awkward Conversations.



## WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT THE 2-DAY INTENSIVE IN BRISBANE, MAY 2022

- + “It was like doing 10 years of therapy in one morning.”
- + “My cup is full. I feel seen, heard, and grateful.”
- + “Authentic. Genuine. Caring. This is how all Mental Health conferences should be structured!”
- + “The best mental health conference I’ve ever been to!”
- + “What I saw in Brisbane was culture change in motion.”

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# THE BIG ANXIETY

## DAY 1 THURSDAY 6 OCT 8.55AM - 5.00PM

**8.30 - 9.00AM Book sales by Readings Bookshop**

### 8.55 - 9.15AM STOREY HALL

#### + WELCOME

Welcome to Country, **Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Ringo Terrick** + MC **Micaela Cronin**, Director, Workforcé, Innovation & Development Institute, RMIT; **Renata Kokanovic**, Director, SGSC, RMIT (Co-director The Big Anxiety); **Tim Marshall** DVC, Design & Social Context, RMIT.

### 9.15 - 9.20AM

#### + OPENING ADDRESS: MARY O'HAGAN

Executive Director of Lived Experience, Mental Health and Wellbeing Division, Department of Health, Victoria.

### 9.20 - 9:45AM

#### + INTRODUCTION AND NAVIGATION Jill Bennett, Director of the Big Anxiety Research Centre (UNSW), festival founder/director with **Marianne Wobcke** & **Indigo Daya**.

### 9.45 - 10.25AM STOREY HALL

#### + HOLDING WHAT YOU'RE HOLDING

To start the event, lived experience researcher/educator and complex trauma expert, **Rebecca Moran** (ALIVE Centre, UNSW) will guide a reflection on what we bring with us into the Forum, and on how we might hold this throughout the two-day experience.



### 10.30 - 12.00PM STOREY HALL

#### + ROAD TRIP: PERINATAL DREAMING



An immersive audio-visual experience, focusing on cultural connection as a means to address

trauma and the birth/early life experiences that perpetuate it. Developed by **Marianne Wobcke** - nurse, midwife, artist of Stolen Generations lineage with maternal connections to Girimay mob from North QLD. Awarded 2021 Australia Council Ros Bower Award for Community Arts and Cultural Development.

### 10.30 - 11.45AM GREEN BRAIN

#### + MAD POETRY

Join Red Room's **David Stavanger**, Mad Poetry co-founder **Tim Heffernan**, and emerging voices **Lesh Karan** and **Kristen de Kline** to discuss working with poetry in the lived experience space. Co-presented by Red Room Poetry.

### 12.00 - 1.00PM STOREY HALL

#### + UNKNOWING MADNESS

Premiere of concert (+ discussion) produced from Creative Sound Workshops exploring complex trauma as felt experience beyond medical language presented by **Thembi Soddell** (project lead), a sound artist with lived experience of complex trauma, and **Alice Hui-Sheng Chang**, a vocalist and art therapist, together with workshop participants.

### 12.00 - 1.00PM GREEN BRAIN

#### + PERINATAL DREAMING: ON JUSTICE, RECLAMATION AND TRANSFORMATION

To process and reflect on Marianne's workshop, join RMIT nurse academic and host of the Birthing and Justice podcast **Dr Ruth De Souza**, artist and Program Coordinator of Badjurr-Bulok Wilam at the Royal Women's **Gina Maree Bundle**, midwife **Storm Henry** and nurse, midwife and artist **Marianne Wobcke**, talking reclamation, healing and transformation.

**1.00 - 1.30PM Lunch, Storey Hall Foyer**

### 1.30 - 2.30PM STOREY HALL

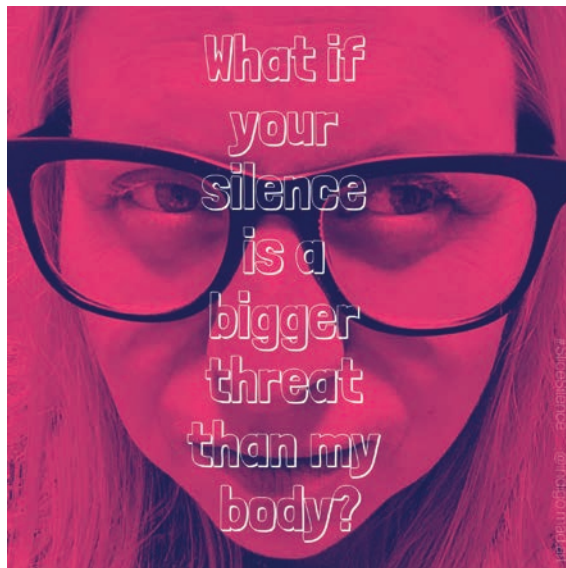
#### + LIPS: DANIEL REGAN (UK)



**LIPS** offers a chance to generate a collaborative film with participants contributing short pieces in which their lips are filmed whilst recalling times of loss. This develops a concept used in the video, **to bloom**, which Daniel will share for the first time in our exhibition. In it, Daniel combines video of his mother's lips as she recalls living through his suicide attempt, juxtaposed with footage of Daniel himself subsequently talking about his mother's death. Book place at registration.

## DAY 1 CONTINUED

### 1.30 - 2.30PM STOREY HALL + SLICE/SILENCE BY INDIGO DAYA CONVERSATION CIRCLE 1



This special commission explores self-injury and silencing, and the implications of this in the larger context of societal silencing and blame around trauma and abuse. An installation in place throughout the Forum will provide a space to cut through silence and explore self-injury openly. Cushions and pillows stand in for bodies, each one bringing a unique history of violence. Visitors will be invited to engage with the cushions and pillows as they choose: injure them, heal or tend to them, hold them, speak to them, read them, write on them, destroy them or love them. People can also contribute and interact with the space from an online portal or share them on social media using the hashtag #slicesilence.

In the conversation circles, guests will be invited to openly explore experiences of self-injury, silence and injustice while interacting with the installation. Informal sessions will also be held.

### 1.30 - 2.30PM GREEN BRAIN

#### + LISTENING TO VOICES: ACTUALLY IT'S ME

A dynamic performance about navigating trauma and the mental health system by people who've redefined experiences of voice hearing and self. Listening to Voices is a Wodonga Gateway Health NGO project, mobilising the voices of those with lived experience. Performers: **Kelly Bayley, Ben Pearson, Sarah Sewell, Jain Thompson**. Project Manager/performer, **Kate Fiske**. Musician: **Yomal Rajasinghe**, Artistic Director, **Catherine Simmonds**.

#### EXHIBITION SPACES LEVELS 5+7

During Day 1, artist **Debra Keenahan** will be on site, presenting her VR work, Being Debra.

+ **ARTISTS TALKS** include **Anita Glesta** at 1.30

### 2.30 - 4.00PM STOREY HALL

#### + THE LONG TABLE:

#### A CONVERSATION ABOUT SUICIDE & DISTRESS



Hosted and led by people with lived experience, the Long Table conversation builds on the model recently evolved in a community setting in Warwick QLD and at the Big Anxiety forum in Brisbane. The Long Table is unmoderated and uncensored with the emphasis on creating a safe space in which to speak and listen to lived experience. The Long Table originated as a performance installation, developed by artist Lois Weaver, using the private form of a dinner table as a non-hierarchical structure for larger conversations. The format enables anyone wishing to speak to join the table. The conversation is seeded by some invited guests, including **Josh Moorhouse** (Lived Experience Co-design Researcher in the ALIVE National Centre for Mental Health Research Translation), **Alise Blayney** (poet and peer educator, also supported by ALIVE), **Marnie Weule** and members of Thirrili, Indigenous Suicide Postvention Service, and **Cynthia Hoffman** (who first attended the Long Table in Warwick, QLD) Information about the protocol, safety guidelines and what to expect are on the [website](#).

### 4.00 - 5.00PM STOREY HALL

#### + TWO ALTERNATIVE DECOMPRESSION ACTIVITIES

#### 4.00 - 5.00PM

#### + MOVEMENT DECOMPRESS

Focusing on being with emotion in movement by **Tamara Borovica**. A trauma informed, open floor movement practice for mindful and playful engagement with emotions arising from the Forum. An opportunity to decompress instead of tensing our bodies when faced with intensity and overwhelm.

#### 4.00 - 5.00PM GREEN BRAIN

#### + VOCAL EMBODIMENT

By **Alice Hui-Sheng Chang**

[vocal improviser/arts therapist] Participants will be guided through an embodiment, to locate their own unique listening experiences inside their body, and through playful vocal expression to vibrate and connect with these inner experiences.

#### EVENING EVENT

#### 6.30PM THE CAPITOL

+ **BRAIN STORMS: CREATIVITY AND MENTAL HEALTH.** See [HERE](#)

## DAY 2 FRIDAY 7 OCT 9 - 5PM (ARRIVE 8.50AM)

### 9.00 - 10.00AM STOREY HALL

#### + FORUM THEATRE

**Minola Theatre**, in collaboration with **Arts for Inclusion** and community actors with lived experience, utilise Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed technique of Forum theatre to uncover and disrupt the power relations inherent in interactions within mental health systems.



### 10.00 - 11.00AM STOREY HALL + FINDING YOUR VOICE AS A LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT

A session by **Rebecca Moran** for anyone thinking about beginning to work as an educator, activist, advocate, or other expert. Come to refine your voice, position, and story, and potentially take it to the open mic event on day two.

### 10.00-11.00AM STOREY HALL CONVERSATION CIRCLE 2:

#### + SLICE/SILENCE SPACE WITH INDIGO DAYA AND GUESTS

### 10.00 - 11.00AM GREEN BRAIN

#### + HIROMI TANGO AND GRACE McQUILTEN

- talking about art, trauma and The Children's Sensorium. They invite the audience to make together and contribute to the exhibition by knitting and weaving new additions to Hiromi's work. No art or textiles skills required.



### 10.00 - 11.00AM STOREY HALL

#### + EXHIBITION & VR SPACE

Talk to artists/curators about the work on show.

### 11.00 - 12.00PM STOREY HALL

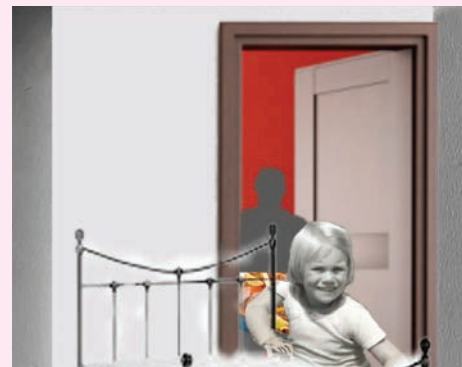
#### + UTI KULINTJAKU

Formed by Ngangkari (traditional healers) and multi-artform artists of the **NPY Women's Council** Uti Kulintjaku is an innovative, Aboriginal-led mental health literacy project that takes its name from a Pitjantjatjara phrase that means 'to listen, think and understand clearly'. Their performance-presentation explores mental health, trauma and healing from Anangu perspectives.



### 12.00 - 12.30PM Lunch, Storey Hall Foyer

### 12.30 - 1.30PM STOREY HALL + HOW DID ALICE GET OUT OF THE RABBIT HOLE?



**By Jenny Hickinbotham** - a new multimedia performance in 4 chapters, telling the story of Jenny's early childhood, where the seed of mental distress was sown and watered; a first psychosis resulting from an assault; and the onset of Jenny's second psychosis while at high school. Not even Alice can answer the question: How could this world, her family, be so demeaning, punitive, and unkind? In the final chapter, Jenny shares her leap from the blackness of that rabbit hole, the chaotic psychotic thinking, the demeaning disabling family, through her hand-written songs and performance. **Jenny Hickinbotham**, vocals/song-writing, **Dale Gorfinkel** 'detuned punk guitar', **Mish Szekelyhidi** percussion. **James Rushford**, organ; **Joel Stern** home-made synthesizer.

## 12.30 - 1.30PM GREEN BRAIN

### + WORKING WITH MONSTERS: WRITING WORKSHOP

Musician and writer **Dr Khin Myint** will focus on forming questions to drive honest creative writing about lived experience. After a childhood rife with racism and toxic masculinity norms, Khin struggled with clinical depression and suicide attempts. He healed by creative work that led him to examine identity, shame and medically unexplained illnesses. Khin will talk about big ideas (and concepts of monsters) and how these can focus our intimate stories in new ways, linking the personal and the political. His work encourages unusual styles of creative reflection, hopefully moving audiences to share parts of their own lives in unexpected ways at the open mic event.

## 1.30 - 2.30PM STOREY HALL

### + MACHINES FOR CHANGE

**Minola Theatre** and **Arts for Inclusion** present **Machines** - a participatory Theatre of the Oppressed technique for social change, used to reimagine the machine of the mental health sector and its malfunctions.



## 1.30 - 3.00PM GREEN BRAIN

### + FALLING FOREVER: THOUGHTS ABOUT THE UNTHINKABILITY OF TRAUMA

Complete with fortune cookies, this is a session of associative thinking about experience and feeling with Irish psychoanalytic therapist, **Noreen Giffney** and UK psychosocial research **Lynn Froggett**, who will also offer a longer workshop on 5th Oct *Playful States of Mind* expanding their experiential approach to the challenge of being open to experience.

## 2.30 - 3.30PM STOREY HALL

### + SCHIZY INC.: GNARLY WRITERS

Gnarly writers are wisdom-holders with long lived experience of the public mental health system. Australians over 30 don't qualify for lucrative preventative funding, but they carry rich insights to the system and healing no one else can speak. The precious words from Gnarly Writers

will come in handy to anyone starting out on a mental health lived experience apprenticeship or seeking validation for a lifetime of service. Artists include: **Gemma Mahadeo, Maggie Toko, Tom Polochek, Adam Pollock, Michel Tuomy, Sandy Jeffs, Isabella Fels, Jenny Hickinbotham, Michelle Morris, Naomi Fryers.**

## 3.00 - 4.30PM GREEN BRAIN

### + STOMACH ACHE: OBJECTS OF DIGESTION

**Vanessa Bartlett, Rachel Marsden** and artist **Lindsay Kelley** explore the felt sense of gastrointestinal relations. Participants are invited to think of (or bring along) an object that describes their relationship to digestion and mind gut connection. The workshop aims to creatively reimagine the gastrointestinal tract and its impact on anxiety, wellbeing and social relationships. Lindsay Kelley will lead a tasting from her performance *Dysphagiatic*, which responds to the feeding tube as an object that challenges social and sensory relationships with food. This event is designed to be supportive for people with different eating abilities and tasting elements will be optional.

## 3.30 - 4.00PM STOREY HALL

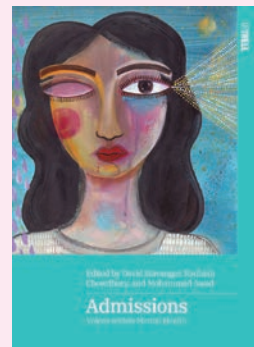
### + OPEN MIC

Welcoming anyone wishing to share their work from earlier sessions

## 4.00 - 5.00PM STOREY HALL

### + ADMISSIONS

Book launch with performances by poets in the anthology, *Admissions* (*Upswell Publishing, 2022*), documenting the lived/living experience of mental health issues in Australia. Join two of the editors **David Stavanger** and **Mohammad Awad** plus contributors **Paula Keogh, Gemma Mahadeo, Quinn Eades, Darby Hudson, Heidi Everett, Josie/Jocelyn Deane, Es Foong, Sandy Jeffs, Tim Heffernan** and **Justin Heazlewood/The Bedroom Philosopher** as part of this live readings launch.



### + 1:1 AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS

Also available in The Garden Building, RMIT City Campus 11.00 - 4.00PM  
Information & bookings [HERE](#).

## RETREAT ROOMS

NEXT TO GREEN BRAIN LEVEL 7

A quiet one for time out or listening to a soothing meditation and a not-so-quiet one space for chat.

## ART TABLE + ART THERAPISTS

LEVEL 5 FOYER

Dabble, decompress, relax and process. Art therapists are onboard to support the creative process and help you express whatever it is that's on your mind, in your heart or at the tip of your fingers. Come and see what a little art therapy can do. Hosted by **Skye Rogers** and **ART (co) LAB**

## EXHIBITION LEVEL 7 ROOMS + CONVERSATIONS

Curated exhibition features: **Daniel Regan's** *to bloom*; *Heartsick* with **Achol Juk**, *In our own words*; *The Visit*; (fEEL) + **Lucia Barrera's** *Nos-otros* + **Anita Glesta's** *Unnerved*.

Virtual Reality experiences previously commissioned by The Big Anxiety may be explored at any time with curator, Gail Kenning and artists/volunteers on hand to guide you with VR.

## + VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCES WAUMANANYI:

### THE SONG ON THE WIND

By **Uti Kulintjaku** (with fEEL)

An Anangu-led response to the experiences of constraint, entrapment, and depression through the traditional story (or 'tjukurpa') of 'The Man in the Log'. *Wauamananyi* is an innovative VR artwork used in remote communities in the APY Lands.



## BEING DEBRA

Presented by artist **Debra Keenahan**. Shot from a first-person perspective, *Being Debra* conveys Debra's embodied experience of achondroplasia dwarfism in contemporary Australian society (with all its challenges, ugliness and triumphs). The VR experience includes her routine daily encounters as well as flashbacks to Debra's memories of school, dating, and engaging with authority figures and the medical establishment.



## EMBODIMAP

A creative Virtual Reality experience that enables users to connect with and explore how their feelings, anxieties and emotions are experienced in the body. Try a ten minute guided session, then explore as you wish.



## PARRAGIRLS PAST, PRESENT

A deeply moving 3D immersive experience, unlocking memories of institutional 'care' by former residents' visions of the Parramatta Girls Home.

CONTRIBUTE TO OUR SURVEY ON SAFE SPACE [HERE >](#)

## + OTHER RESOURCES/ACTIVITIES

AirSticks by **Alon Ilisar** drummer, composer, improviser and instrument designer.

## + MASSAGE

**Dr Leela Klein**, trauma informed practitioner, specialising in Chinese medicine will offer **Shiatsu massage** 9.30-4.30pm, 6 Oct.

We recommend attendance for the full two days. The program builds in sessions and spaces designed to support engagement with trauma and complex emotions.

In accordance with The Big Anxiety's Don't Rush Home policy, we undertake to provide a safe and supportive environment and strongly encourage participants to make contact if any distress or concerns arise.

Please note that this is not a clinically directed event. An experienced trauma counsellor will be available - and many of the presenters are experienced trauma-workers. However, we are guided by principles outlined by the consumer movement, lived experience scholarship and peer work, and by community partners. In particular, we align with critical mental health and disability perspectives that advocate experience-led practice. References will be provided via the website so that you may determine in advance if the approach is right for you.

*We acknowledge the traditional owners of Naarm (where the city known as Melbourne now stands), and of land on which this event is held, the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation, whose sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from across the continent who will come together in The Big Anxiety Forum.*

- + THIS IS A NON-PROFIT EVENT
- + FORUM TICKETS [HERE](#) >
- + WEBSITE [HERE](#) >

## CREDITS

*Photographs of the Big Reach by Markus Ravik. Hiromi Tango photo by Raghav Kumar*

### Acknowledgements

The Big Anxiety Forum is supported by the Department of Health, Victoria; RMIT's Enabling Capability Platforms of Social Change, Design and Creative Practice, and Biomedical Health Innovation; Workforce Innovation & Development Institute RMIT; Social & Global Studies Centre, RMIT and the Big Anxiety Research Centre, UNSW.



**UNSW**  
Big Anxiety  
Research Centre



Department  
of Health



Transformative Research for Social Justice



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Australian Government  
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