



The Wheeler Centre  
Books Writing Ideas



# ANNUAL REPORT 2019





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# MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR



As the Wheeler Centre marks its tenth birthday, looking back at the year that was 2019 demonstrates the way in which this organisation has come of age across the decade. Our now-familiar programme of talks and public events, slate of initiatives to support writers and support for the book lovers of Melbourne rolled out with typical aplomb and our trademark combination of surprise, challenge and delight. But I wanted to single out three particular contributions from 2019 that epitomise where the Wheeler Centre is at this point of its life.

2019 saw the organisation transition from a modest ticketing system to a full-blown CRM, with the integration of Tessitura into our operations. This represents a major step up for the Centre, with vastly increased capacity to understand and support our audiences, donors and bookers. The transition was aided through the decision to join a licensing consortium for the software with Melbourne Festival, a further indication of the organisation's commitment to strong, embedded partnerships with our cultural peers.

It was also the year in which we refined our biennial Festival of Ideas model and saw unprecedented success in both cultural impact and box-office return. Rebadged Broadside, with a focus on feminist programming, the weekend-long event represented a significant milestone in the Centre's activities. Approximately 17,000 tickets were purchased over the two days – a record in concentrated programming for the organisation – with almost 25% of those being purchased by new or first time bookers to the Centre. In an event that *The Guardian* called 'paradigm shifting' the Wheeler Centre shaped and influenced public discourse in this city in a way that felt like a distillation of everything we do best.

And finally, our unique national writers' initiative – The Next Chapter – was also rolled out for its first year. Funded through a three year grant from the Aēsop Foundation, the national scheme combined elements of mentorship, professional development and direct artist grants to build an ambitious and widely acclaimed programme supporting emerging writers from marginalised and under-represented communities to develop their skills and launch their careers. Ten writers a year are chosen for support and the first year saw exciting and impressive take up, with strong buy-in from the publishing industry and particularly meaningful impacts for Indigenous writers.

On a personal note, 2019 was my last year as Director of this organisation. I've reflected amply elsewhere on what a privilege and delight having the chance to helm such a unique and extraordinary cultural institution has been. I'm sad to be leaving but so proud of what we've achieved in that time. Going into 2020, the organisation – led by a largely new and revitalised board – is recruiting for a new CEO to take it into the next period of its life. While this annual report is being produced at a time where the future is uncertain in all parts of our society and our public and private life, it reminds us again of how important the singular, ambitious, unexpected and expansive Wheeler Centre is. Public conversation – building and strengthening communities through books, writing and ideas – is and remains a lifeblood of this city and this country's cultural and intellectual life. The Wheeler Centre will be here through it all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Williams".

**Michael Williams**  
Director

# MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR



As our Centre moves into its tenth year, we pause to reflect on what has been achieved in our first decade. From those first months in 2010 when the Centre leapt onto Melbourne's cultural stage under the guidance of Chair Eric Beecher and Director Chrissy Sharp, the Wheeler Centre has cemented its position as one of Australia's most innovative arts organisations.

Under the stewardship of our outgoing Director Michael Williams and his dedicated management team, the Centre in 2019 offered a diverse events programme across three seasons. Our team worked in partnership with writers, academics, advocates, speakers, artists, curators, publishers and other arts bodies to bring our audiences more than 180 conversations, debates and talks.

We built audiences through our regional programmes, our events for schools and through our digital activities.

And in November the Wheeler Centre staged Broadside, a two-day feminist ideas and discussion weekend at the Melbourne Town Hall. The box office and critical success of this event made it a high point in our busy year and confirms Broadside as a must-attend biennial event.

At the heart of the Wheeler Centre's strategic objectives is its commitment to promoting books and writing, and to sharing ideas through public discussions, debate and conversations. Now, more than ever, our community needs opportunities to hear people speak, to read what they write, to discuss what they contend.

And we need opportunities to connect with one another.

I know the Wheeler Centre, with its clear-thinking board and its hard-working and talented staff, will meet these challenges with the same enthusiasm and dedication that have characterised the first 10 years. I look forward to the journey ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Susan Oliver'.

**Susan Oliver AM FAICD**  
Chair



# ABOUT THE WHEELER CENTRE

## OUR MISSION

The Wheeler Centre exists to drive the development and celebration of literature in Melbourne and beyond, and fosters broad public engagement in books, writing and ideas.

We aspire to be nationally and internationally renowned as a leading institution for the art of conversation, and a champion of the transformative power of informed public discussion and debate.

## OUR PRINCIPLES

The Wheeler Centre pursues a variety of activities, which are underpinned by six principles. Our principles express our aspirations as a leading Australian literary arts and cultural institution. They give shape to our creative initiatives and drive our relationship with audiences and the community.



## **Championing Writers and Writing**

We celebrate the contribution Australian authors make to our cultural and intellectual life. We offer new channels for writers to engage with readers, aim to make it easier to live and work as a professional writer in this country, and promote the achievements of writers across all genres. Writers are the backbone of Australia's literary reputation; their work permeates our society and without them, the Wheeler Centre wouldn't exist.

## **Elevating Public Conversation**

We are dedicated to supporting and strengthening conversations throughout our community. We aim to raise the act of public conversation to an art-form and be a major catalyst for engaged cultural discourse in Australia. We are a key facilitator for the conversations that matter for engaged citizens: these conversations enrich lives, change mindsets, and build social cohesion and identity.

## **Exemplifying Inclusion and Accessibility**

We are dedicated to the principle of universal accessibility. We strive to reach the broadest communities possible and are committed to embracing linguistic and cultural diversity on stage. We programme eclectic and inclusive subject matter and literary styles that appeal to as wide an audience as possible and deliver our programme in accessible locations across Melbourne and Victoria, with a growing focus on digital content for our national audiences. As a central tenet of accessibility, around seventy percent of the Centre's year-long programme is free and over seventy percent is filmed for digital broadcast.

## **Supporting the Literary Sector**

We aim to be Australia's leading literary organisation and a hub for Melbourne's vibrant writing sector. In this capacity, we support the health and vitality of the entire writing and publishing ecosystem. From individual writers and small literary organisations to publishers, booksellers and readers, we support our partners, colleagues and stakeholders to create their best work.

## **Engaging Audiences**

Conversations require multiple voices and perspectives. Writers develop new vocabularies, hone their argument and test character; audiences probe ideas, and ask questions that expose dark areas to light. Together this constantly evolving community advances knowledge and recommits to a culture of analysis, curiosity and connection. We endeavour to engage audiences through a variety of channels that embody our commitment to dialogue.

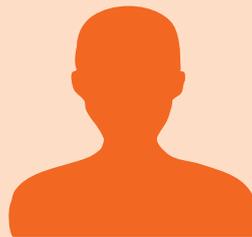
## **Future Proofing our Approach**

We are building a national and international reputation as a high-performing and unique cultural institution. Our achievements to date have required significant resources and an accelerated mode of operating. In the next stage of its life, the Centre will continue to be ambitious and innovative while consolidating the means required to do so. We must maintain our current level of output, build capacity for new ventures, and ensure that we have created the best possible conditions for the company's future.

# THE STORY SO FAR



Since our inception we have held **2389** public conversations and events, giving **4478** speakers a platform for their writing and ideas and payment for their participation in our programme.



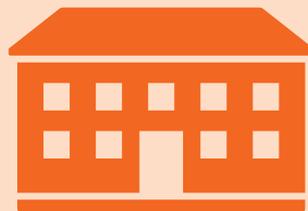
To date we have supported **166** Hot Desk Fellows from Victoria and around Australia. Over **685** writers have been employed as judges and readers for awards and writers schemes to date.



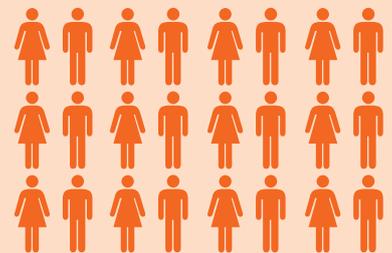
In addition to **1300** videos of talks, performances and interviews, we also offer over **1450** podcast episodes, alongside over **380** longform and **2300** shortform articles.



Over **70%** of our events are free each year. Furthermore, **70%** of our events are available digitally for anyone to access online.



**7** literary organisations are housed in the Wheeler Centre hub. More than **346** other arts and community organisations have utilised the building facilities for their own endeavours.



**419,927** audience members joined our conversations, with **87%** residing in metropolitan Melbourne. **10%** of the total audience were located in regional Victoria, **2%** interstate and **1%** internationally.



# 2019 SNAPSHOT



188 public conversations and events, giving 565 speakers a platform for their writing and ideas.



35,033



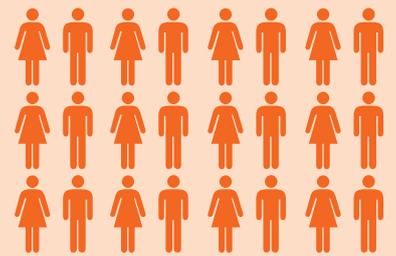
52,180



15,144



10,968



35,973 audience members joined in our public conversations.

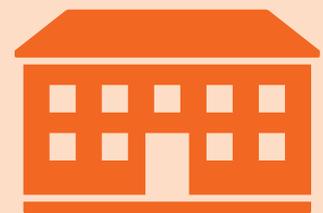


On YouTube, videos on our channel accumulated 787,334 views totalling 177,039 hours of watch time – with 18.1% of those views from Australia, 26.6% from the US and 10.1% from the UK.



49.8K

851,181 sessions took place on our website from 565,535 unique users. Our wonderful community of *Wheeler Weekly* newsletter subscribers reached 49,827.



62% of events have taken place in partnership with other major cultural institutions, community groups, festivals and arts organisations.

# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

## 2019: A diverse range of Australian and international voices, meaningful partnerships and exciting new festival programming for Melbourne audiences and beyond.

2019 was the year in which we refined our biennial Festival of Ideas model and saw unprecedented success in both cultural impact and box-office return. Rebadged as Broadside, with a focus on feminist programming, the weekend-long event represented a significant milestone in the Centre's activities. Approximately 17,000 tickets were purchased over the two days – a record in concentrated programming for the organisation – with almost 25% of those being purchased by new or first time bookers to the Centre. In an event that *The Guardian* called 'paradigm shifting' the Wheeler Centre shaped and influenced public discourse in this city in a way that felt like a distillation of everything we do best.

In November we proudly launched a new festival for Melbourne audiences. **Broadside** saw us programme two days of an unapologetically feminist agenda at Melbourne Town Hall on 9 and 10 November.

With spectacular guests including Ariel Levy, Curtis Sittenfeld, Courtney Barnett, Zadie Smith, Monica Lewinsky, Helen Garner, Tressi McMillan Cottom, Jan Fran, Maria Tumarkin and more, audiences were treated to smart, funny people sharing their expertise and their stories. A special Teen Day was held at the Wheeler Centre on 8 November for a day of free talks and workshops designed to inspire community and action specifically for young people, particularly those from marginalised communities.

Imprisonment and resilience were the themes of the **Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (VPLAs)** ceremony, taking place once again at MPavilion, with Kurdish asylum seeker Behrouz Boochani winning the overall prize for *No Friend But the Mountains*.

Our programme of events, released across three seasons throughout the year, continued to champion public conversation. The year began with our annual **Gala Night of Storytelling**, on the theme of **Crush**. A testament to the rush of fandom, infatuation and unabashed adoration, our ten writers and thinkers dished on their fictional crush at the Athenaeum theatre. In partnership with *Archer Magazine* we presented **Private Parts**, an ongoing series of events that explored sexuality, gender and identity, in three frank and generous conversations throughout the year. A new genre series, **Group Texts**, saw the Wheeler Centre spotlight excellent Australian genre writers across three events covering spoken word poetry, crime fiction and romance writing.

The **AFLW Season Wrap** returned by popular demand, in a week of sporting controversy centring around an image of Carlton player Taylor Harris posted on Seven Network's social media accounts where it was swamped by misogynistic online comments. In March, at **The Future is Fungal**, mushroom science was a focus with 'bio-neers' Gavin McIntyre and Brian Pickles at the Wheeler Centre for a one-off event presented in partnership with WOMADelaide's Planet Talks Programme. Later in the year **Misha Glenny**, the BBC's central Europe correspondent and author of *McMafia: Seriously Organised Crime*, took us on a fascinating journey through cyber crime, geopolitics and international syndicates and their effect on the world around us.

Our **MAYHEM** series saw us bring together an alchemy of writers and an explosion of ideas with 19 events over three weeks in April and May. Major international authors were paired with Australian writers and thinkers; including Rebecca Traister (*Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger*) and Jamila Rizvi, Alexander Chee (*How to Write An Autobiographical Novel*) and Leah Jing McIntosh, Andrew Sean Greer (*Less*) and Benjamin Law, Jill Abramson (*Merchants of Truth*) and Sally Warhaft, and more.



Internationally renowned historians and academics visited Melbourne with William Dalrymple and Simon Schama both attracting full audiences at the Athenaeum theatre.

We entered the second year of the **Next Chapter** writers' scheme, supported by the Aesop Foundation, and continued our work on elevating new and diverse Australian voices by giving them the time, support and space in which to thrive. Over 600 applications were received for the second year intake and in November, at a function at Sofitel Melbourne, the 2019 Next Chapter recipients and their mentors were announced.

The Wheeler Centre continued its commitment to regional programming with events taking place across the year in Ballarat, Warrnambool, Kyneton, Clunes and Bendigo. Australia's response to asylum seeker arrivals in regional cities was discussed at a panel event that included human rights lawyer Julian Burnside and Ballarat refugee community mentor Deruka Dekuek at Ballarat Mechanics' Institute. Author Claire G. Coleman released their new speculative fiction novel, *The Old Lie*, and spoke in conversation with Tyson Yunkaporta at Kyneton Town Hall. Together they discussed their writing craft, creativity and Indigenous imaginations.

The annual **F Word Address** saw poet, essayist, legal scholar and Gomeri woman Alison Whittaker focus on the complexities of using storytelling as a tool for justice for Blak women – in law and in literature. **Not Racist, But ...** returned for a panel event curated by Santilla Chingaipe that looked at **Racism in the Workplace**, how it manifests itself, and what impact this has on both the employee and employer.

Series favourites, *The Next Big Thing* and *The Fifth Estate*, returned in 2019 alongside exciting new literary and genre-focused ones. **Double Booked Club** brought together two great local fiction authors to discuss their work, their backlists and their shared themes in a series of live-streamed lunchtime events.

Our ongoing festival partnership with **Melbourne International Comedy Festival** continued with two free events in March and April at the Wheeler Centre. *Comic In Tuition: Can Comedy be Taught?* saw host Wes Snelling discuss mentoring and directing, comedy as a learning tool, and its place in the school curriculum with a panel of comedians and educators. *Jeez Jouse: Memoir* looked at how comedians mine their personal lives (and those of others) for the sake of comedy.

We partnered with **Melbourne Writers Festival** for two special Fifth Estate events at The Capitol. Antisemitism, featuring acclaimed historian Deborah Lipstadt, and *The Future of Indonesia* with Andreas Harsono and Norman Erikson Pasaribu. Also, in a special three-event *Take It From Me* series held at the Moat, host and dispenser of sexy advice Jess McGuire brought together two wise and attractive panellists to solve love conundrums.



## HIGHLIGHTS

### Victorian Premier's Literary Awards

Behrouz Boochani won the overall prize at the 2019 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards for *No Friend But the Mountains*. Boochani accepted the award via video link in detention on Manus Island where he was imprisoned for seeking asylum. Boochani won the \$100,000 Victorian Prize for Literature, Australia's most lucrative literature award, as well as the \$25,000 prize for Non-Fiction.

The Prize for Fiction, Drama, Poetry, Writing for Young Adults, Prize for Indigenous Writing, Unpublished Manuscript and People's Choice Award were won by Elise Valmorbida, Kendall Feaver, Kate Lilley, Ambelin and Ezekiel Kwaymullina, Kim Scott, Victoria Hannan and Bri Lee respectively.

The VPLAs celebrate the best contemporary Australian writing and are administered by the Wheeler Centre on behalf of the Premier of Victoria.

The winning entries were announced at an awards ceremony on 31 January 2019 at MPavillion.



### 2019 Gala: Crush

For our Gala Night of Storytelling, we invited some of our favourite writers and thinkers to dish about their fictional crush. Be it a character of page, stage, screen or stereo – or some life-changing, out-of-reach hero of the real world.

Awkward. Sweaty. Flushed. Euphoric. Crushes are like mini-Great Loves. They compel us to daggy earnestness while inspiring unusual boldness, even grandiosity. How much of our best writing, art and music do we owe to crushes, and the intensity they lend to our days and nights? And, actually, how much of our *worst*?

Ten speakers including, Megan Washington, Jon Faine, Lawrence Leung, Claire G. Coleman and Alison Evans, swooned through their personal testament to the rush of fandom, infatuation and unabashed adoration.



### William Dalrymple: Corporate Violence and the East India Company

To a packed Athenaeum theatre, historian William Dalrymple joined author Claire Wright in conversation as they discussed the long reach and devastating legacy of the East India Company.

Dalrymple's latest work, *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company 1739-1803*, describes an aggressive colonial power operating under the guise of a multinational company. At a time when global media corporations and tech giants wield increasingly pervasive power and influence, the story is a cautionary tale.





## Sohaila Abdulali: Consent and Power

More than three decades after Sohaila Abdulali wrote about her gang rape experience, her article went viral online – after the fatal attack of another young woman in Dehli in 2012. In 2019, Abdulali's voice is again reaching around the globe. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape* builds on the momentum of #MeToo, as well as years of her own meticulous academic research and work as a coordinator at a rape crisis centre.

Abdulali joined Jane Gilmore at the Wheeler Centre for a poignant conversation on power, consent and the global dimensions of #MeToo.



## Krack!n the Industry: Inclusion on Screen

*Get Krack!n* co-creators Kate McLennan and Kate McCartney, together with disability activist Jess Walton and host Alistair Baldwin, joined us at the Wheeler Centre to speak about the importance of Australian comedy representing a broader range of voices in writers' rooms, on screen and behind the scenes.

This event was one of three presented in partnership with The Other Film Festival and Arts Access Victoria with the support of City of Melbourne and Screen Australia. All events were Auslan interpreted, live-streamed and live-captioned.



## Shelling Out: Bastian Obermayer and the Panama Papers

The Panama Papers, which made headlines across the world in 2016, represented the biggest data leak in the history of journalism. Journalist Bastian Obermayer was the man who received the first batch of documents that sparked the unprecedented investigation that followed.

Obermayer joined Sydney journalist Neil Chenoweth at the Wheeler Centre, where they talked secret sources and stashpiles of the rich and famous with ABC business journalist and host Nassim Khadem.





## Thurston Moore in Conversation

With Sonic Youth, Thurston Moore turned on an entire generation to the value of rock 'n' roll. Within the band, and outside of it, Moore has kept a relentless schedule of performance, collaboration, recording and writing.

In Melbourne for MIFF, he joined ABC Radio's Jacinta Parsons in conversation at the Plenary as part of MIFF Talks, presented by the Melbourne International Film Festival and the Wheeler Centre. Together they discussed his career in music and writing, and his latest foray into the world of cinema.



## Blak & Bright Festival

In partnership with Blak & Bright First Nations Literary Festival and Melbourne Writers Festival, the Wheeler Centre hosted three events that celebrated the diverse expressions of First Nations writers, covering all genres, from songs to essays, oral stories to epic novels, and from plays to poetry.

Read a Blak Book Lately? served as the official opening to the festival where hosts Daniel Browning and Evelyn Araluen discussed and reviewed some of the latest – and some of the greatest – Blak books. Treaty, Yeah saw writers including Ali Cobby Eckermann, Ellen van Neerven and Uncle Jim Everett, respond in a creative way to the idea of a Treaty. Change the Date? A Hypothetical panel event, hosted by Gregory Phillips, asked should Australia Day happen on 26 January or not?



## Books and Ideas at Montalto

On eight Fridays throughout the year, from March to November, the Wheeler Centre brought the best of Australian writing to the Mornington Peninsula. With series host, Elizabeth McCarthy, guests were treated to an immersive look at the stories behind the stories – featuring outstanding food and wine, fascinating company and the opportunity to hear from some of Australia's most treasured authors in an intimate and relaxed setting.

2019 guests included: Jock Serong, Carly Findlay, Meg and Tom Keneally, Andrea Goldsmith, Tony Birch, Rick Morton, Charlotte Wood and Sophie Cunningham. In May – at a special lunch event – professor, scholar and BBC stalwart Simon Schama joined Dr David Hansen for a discussion about art, creativity and his new TV series, *Civilisations*.





## Mayhem

Throughout late April and May the Wheeler Centre hosted 19 events with major international writers and speakers direct from the Sydney Writers' Festival. We talked to authors who are re-writing the literary rules, brought together those who fuse fiction with geopolitics; and showcased rising stars, Pulitzer-winners, polemicists, veteran journalists and master conversationalists.

Speakers included Max Porter (author of *Lanny*), Rachel Kushner, (*The Flamethrowers* with her latest work, *The Mars Room*), New York Times bestselling author of *Friday Black*, Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, hip-hop artist and author Akala, British scholar and BBC broadcaster Simon Schama, the *New Yorker's* non-fiction doyenne Susan Orlean, and former editor at *The New York Times*, Jill Abramson.



## Broadside

Broadside – the new feminist ideas festival that took place over the weekend of 9 and 10 November at Melbourne Town Hall – showcased the Wheeler Centre's remarkable and ambitious programming strategy.

Across two days, and eleven events, we shone a spotlight on an impressive line-up of international and local speakers who delivered a powerful feminist agenda. Smart, funny people came together to share their expertise and their stories. Speakers included: Helen Garner, Curtis Sittenfeld, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Zadie Smith, Jia Tolentino, Aminatou Sow, Mona Eltahawy, Fatima Bhutto, Tressie McMillan Cottom and Monica Lewinsky.

In addition to this, a Teen Day programme was held on 8 November at the Wheeler Centre. 132 students aged between 12 and 18 years attended a tailored day of free talks and workshops designed to inspire community and action.



## EVENT SERIES

### Writing in Exile

'Exiles see double, feel double, are double,' André Aciman has written. 'When exiles see one place, they're also seeing – or looking for – another behind it.'

In this four-part series, presented in partnership with PEN Melbourne and hosted by ABC Radio's Sami Shah, we drew on the double vision of some incredible writers living and working in exile here in Melbourne. They included; poet playwright and academic Mammad Aidani, radio producer and journalist Roza Germain and playwright, essayist and author Samah Sabawi.





## Double Booked Club

In this new monthly lunchtime series for 2019 we brought together two great local fiction authors to discuss their work, their backlists and their shared themes at the Wheeler Centre and live-streamed online. Ahead of each event, ticket bookers received reading material relating to the books in question.

Authors included: Yassmin Abdel-Magied and Alison Evans with their YA novels, Carrie Tiffany and Peggy Frew on the theme of family dynamics, Sarah Bailey and Mark Brandi on crime fiction, Anna Krien and Favel Parrett on global narratives and Peter Polites and Christos Tsiolkas tackled class, sexuality and community.



## As She Appears: The Muse in Art

Our partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria continued in 2019 in a three-part series, As She Appears: The Muse in Art. These events uncovered the many meanings of the artistic muse with curators, writers and performers as they responded to works in the NGV Collection – talking representation, inspiration, family and the female body.

### Sirens

Nayuka Gorrie, Roj Amedi, Vidya Makan and Angela Hesson explored the representations of destructive and seductive women in mythology, focusing on Bertram Mackennal's *Circe* (1893) and John Longstaff's *The Sirens* (1892).

### Country

Judith Ryan, Bridget Caldwell-Bright, Laniyuk and Taylah Cole examined how community and country serve as inspiration in the work of women artists on display in *Making Time: Indigenous Art from the NGV*.

### Subversion

The subversion of traditional notions of the muse, inspired by *Olympia: Photographs by Polixeni Papapetrou* and *Petrina Hicks: Bleached Gothic* were highlighted by Maria Quirk, Susan van Wyk, Eloise Grills and Maria Tumarkin.



## Private Parts

In partnership with *Archer Magazine* we presented a three-part series of events which explored sexuality, gender and identity – with an emphasis on the lesser-heard perspectives for which the magazine is known. We held frank and generous conversations about intimacy and examined how sex and gender relate to our bodies, our partners, our communities and our rights.

### More than Queer

Adolfo Aranjuez, Peter Waples-Crowe, Nayuka Gorrie and Jax Jacki Brown examined what are the most pressing issues currently facing Australia's diverse queer population, and how well are they being represented.

### Polyamory and Non-monogamy

Amy Middleton, Liz Duck-Chong, Anne Hunter and Dani Boi / Dani Weber looked at the ethics, complexities, misconceptions and truths of poly relationships, and shared a conversation about how to fully exist in relationships defined by openness and communication.

### How to Teach and Learn Consent

Amy Middleton Anne-lise Ah-fat and Bexx Djentuh-Davis addressed how we can get better at teaching, and practicing, reciprocal respect in all sexual encounters. They examined sex education in schools and talked through the principle of enthusiastic consent.





## So What If ...

In May, in partnership with Melbourne Knowledge Week, the Wheeler Centre hosted a series of lunchtime talks about the future. These events speculated on social structures and systems – from citizenship and gender to law and order – and discussed how changing things up might change our world. We asked: what's broken, what's working, and what should we leave behind?

Sessions included: So What If ... AFL Can Cure Democracy?, So What If ... We Didn't Gender Babies?, So What If ... Melbourne Was Underwater?, and So What If ... We Didn't Have Prisons?.



## DIGITAL ACTIVITY

### Invasion of the Pod People

This ongoing series, celebrating all things audible, continued to bring our audiences some of podcasting's best and brightest to share their thoughts and insights on the art (and business) of listening.

#### Stop Everything

Beverley Wang and Benjamin Law, co-hosts of the ABC's *Stop Everything!* podcast, joined us for a live recording of the show devoted especially to the theme of pop culture confessions.

With Lawrence Leug and Joel Creasey, they divulged their surprising and disgusting guilty pop-culture pleasures.

#### Queering the Archives

*Archive Fever* is an Australian history podcast of conversation with writers, artists, curators and historians about the possibilities and limitations of archival records. At this event held at the Wheeler Centre, hosts Clare Wright and Yves Rees were joined by historian Noah Riseman and trans scholar and activist Julie Peters to discuss the absence of queer people, especially trans and gender diverse people, from conventional records and historical data.



### Signal Boost

Signal Boost is an initiative offering tailored mentorship, practical support, and professional development for aspiring Australian podcasters. It is generously supported by The Ian Potter Foundation. In 2019 seven recipients were paired with an experienced mentor, provided with equipment and access to software to help them realise their audio goals, and have the opportunity to attend a series of intensive workshops led by some of Australia's leading podcast and radio industry professionals.

In 2019 the Signal Boost participants and projects were; Eugenia Zoubtchenko – *Terra*, Silvi Vann-Wall and Izzie Austin – *Pill Pop*, Angel St James and Gina Song – *Violet Town*, Ivy Shih – *Reanimate* and Annaliese Redlich – *All Ears*.





## The Hot Desk Fellowships

The 2019 Wheeler Centre's Hot Desk Fellowships were made possible by the continued and generous support of the Readings Foundation. 24 writers were offered fellowships throughout the year, and an additional Playwright Hot Desk was offered to an emerging female playwright, with thanks to the Just Pretending Theatre group.

In partnership with the University of Melbourne's Victorian College of the Arts, and Copyright Agency we were excited to announce three fellowships for regional or interstate writers. These fellowships were made available to three writers who, by their location, could not ordinarily participate in the professional development initiative, and included accommodation for five weeks at the Norma Redpath Studio in Carlton, as well as travel to and from Melbourne.

All fellowships included a \$1000 stipend and workspace in the Wheeler Centre over a ten-week period. Hot Desk Fellows were given the opportunity to meet and network with the Wheeler Centre's resident organisations, and their projects were featured on our website and included as live-readings in a special Hot Desk edition of The Next Big Things series.

The 2019 fellows were:

Nic Alea	Whitney Munroe
Millie Baylis	Adalya Nash
Christine Davey	Hussein
Vanessa Giron	Jennifer Nguyen
Bella Green	Kaitlyn Plyley
Josefina Huq	Oliver Reeson
Nimity James	Sumudu
Hayley Lawson-Smith	Samarawickrama
(playwright fellow)	Jasmine Shirrefs
Shannan Lim	Cher Tan
Gareth Morgan	Thabani Tshuma
Gabriella Munoz	Yen-Rong Wong.

The three Hot Desk Fellows undertaking Norma Redpath Studio residencies were fiction writer Geetha Balakrishnan from New South Wales, creative non-fiction writer Rebecca Giggs from Western Australia and poet Yvette Holt from the Northern Territory.



## The Next Chapter

With support from the Aēsop Foundation, The Next Chapter writers' scheme – launched with the intent of discovering new Australian stories and voices and to nurture a new generation of writers from all backgrounds – continued to support its first-year recipients. They regularly met with their industry mentors and were offered various opportunities to participate in the Wheeler Centre's public program.

Two events at Sydney Writers' Festival celebrated their achievements. Iconic Duos saw Wheeler Centre Director Michael Williams talk with writers and mentors from the inaugural intake about collaboration and constructive criticism. In Writing Blak, three recipients and host Melissa Lucashenko discussed the politics, pressures and prerogatives of Blak storytelling in Australia today.

Applications for the second year of the scheme were open from 2 May until 12 July and a total of 639 entries were received. Eight experienced writers and editors were tasked with devising an initial longlist for the judges. On 20 November, at a function at Sofitel Melbourne, the 2019 Next Chapter recipients and their mentors were announced.

Our 2019 intake included; Arthur Bolkas, Racheal Oak Butler, Sam Elkin, Meleika Gesa-Fatafehi, Dan Hogan, Faina Iligoga, Grace Lee, Jasmin McGaughey, Lorna Munro and Jasper Wyld.





## Wheeler Kids

Our ongoing Wheeler Kids series – designed for the younger reader in your life – brings together an immersion in literacy with a nurtured love of books and reading.

Taking place in or around school holidays illustrators, authors and spoken word poets graced the Wheeler Centre stage and beyond with two events held in Warrnambool.

Sessions included: poetry and spoken word workshops with Abdul Hammoud, web and mobile design workshops with Sher Rill Ng, storytelling sessions with author Davina Bell and illustrator Allison Colpoys and a comics workshop with Jess Parker.



## The Fifth Estate

With our in-house news anchor Sally Warhaft at the helm, The Fifth Estate fortnightly series continued in 2019 with in-depth conversations with guests from the world of politics, culture, journalism and international relations.

Guests in 2019 included; executive editor of the *New York Times* Jill Abramson, Palestinian-Syrian rebel and human rights activist Kassem Eid, french academic and investigative journalist Frédéric Martel, human rights advocate Tim Soutphommasane, journalist and filmmaker Santilla Chingaipe, non-fiction author Judith Brett, former US representative to the United Nations Samantha Power, and former US Republican Congress member Mia Love.



## The Show of the Year 2019

Our annual tradition of closing out the programming season with the Show of the Year saw a glittering line-up of writers, comedians and musicians remember 2019 in style.

We said goodbye to towering figures in literature and politics, including Toni Morrison, Bob Hawke and Les Murray. Protests shook Hong Kong and the Amazon, and Australia, caught fire. We had the mandatory Big Cultural Moments too: someone finally won the *Game of Thrones*, Beyoncé came home and Lil Nas X shot to stardom via TikTok.

Hosted by the talented Casey Bennetto, our special guests including Paul Kelly, Louise Milligan, Bill Shorten and Alice Bishop, made 2019 one to remember.





# FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

The Wheeler Centre is a key medium-sized organisation in the cultural sector, with an annual turnover of \$3.9m. The Wheeler Centre values fiscal accountability, with a focus on generating new revenue streams and managing our cost base responsibly. The Board and its audit risk sub-committee, monitor performance against budget for all activities and oversee the long-term security of the company. The following breakdown provides a snapshot of our 2019 financial operations. It is not intended to replace or modify the content of the Centre’s independently audited Annual Financial Statements.

## Expenditure

The Wheeler Centre’s annual expenditure patterns in 2019 demonstrate the high levels of resourcing required to support our mission:

### Public Programming:

Artists’ fees and production and travel costs account for 25% of expenditure.

### Fundraising:

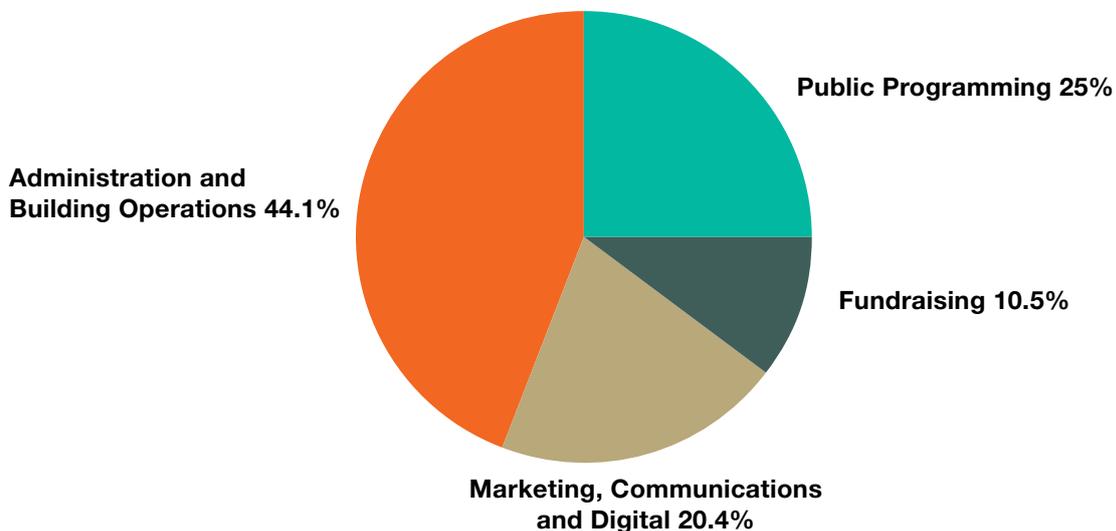
Various fundraising activities account for 10.5% of expenditure.

### Marketing, Communications and Digital:

20.4% of expenditure was spent of marketing, communications and digital activity including video, audio, and website development.

### Administration and Building Operations:

The remaining 44.1% was spent on building operations, staffing and administration.





## Income

Demand for our talks and special events continues to grow. Likewise the support we provide to the sector has become invaluable to partners, publishers, booksellers, writers and literary organisations. The Wheeler Centre is focused on securing income levels that enhance our ability to deliver on this demand.

We have five main revenue streams:

### Box Office:

The Wheeler Centre has consistently achieved ambitious box-office targets and increased this income stream in 2019 largely due to the success of the inaugural feminist ideas festival, Broadside. Box office and transaction fees account for 19% in 2019.

### Resource Utilisation:

A steady income stream comes from rental rates and venue hire, accounting for 6% of overall income.

### Auspiced Projects:

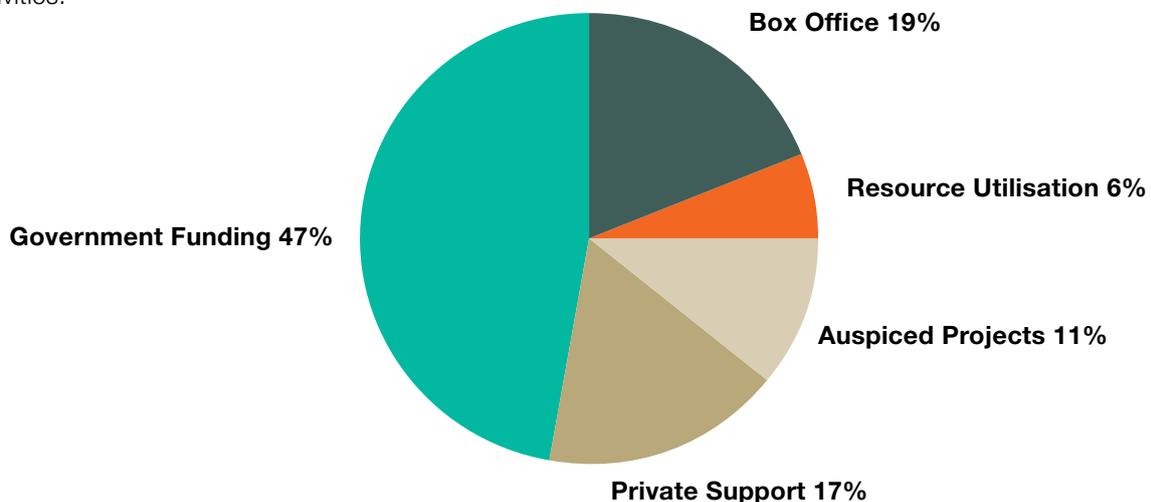
11% of the Wheeler Centre's income is provided to administer the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards (VPLA's) on behalf of the Premier of Victoria, house the City of Literature office and in 2019 received as Project Funding for regional activities.

### Private Support:

17% of the Wheeler Centre's income derives from major Donors, Trusts and Foundations as well as corporate sponsors and partners, fundraising campaigns and in-cart donations since this initiative was introduced earlier this year.

### Government Funding:

The Wheeler Centre receives support for our activities from federal, state and local government through the arts and culture portfolios, accounting for 47% of income.





# FUTURE PROOFING OUR APPROACH

## Our Donors

As we recognise the achievements of the past year, we offer our deepest thanks to the generous support of our donors. By supporting the Wheeler Centre, you are helping to build a community around a passion for books, writing, ideas and smart conversations. With your help we will continue to support local and international writers and thinkers to share their stories and ensure that public debate remains free and accessible to all.

Establishing and nurturing relationships with local businesses, individuals and organisations across Victoria continues to be a priority for the Wheeler Centre. Complementing funding from the Victorian Government, an increase in private funding in 2019 enabled us to bring our ambitious Broadside Festival to life. The two-day festival – which included a discrete programme especially for school students – saw more than 11,500 people from across Victoria engage in an ‘unapologetically feminist agenda’. The festival showcased 11 events featuring international headliners such as Monica Lewinsky, Zadie Smith, Jia Tolentino and Helen Garner. Broadside would not have been possible without our consortium of generous female donors who believed in our vision: Krystyna Campbell-Pretty, the Hon. Justice Michelle Gordon, Ellen Koshland and Carol Schwartz AO.

In 2018, the Centre introduced in-cart donations enabling audiences to add a donation to their ticket booking across free and paid events. This initiative successfully generated new income and raised awareness of the need for financial support at all levels. In 2019, \$17,822 was raised through in-cart donations, a 33% increase from the year before. Our Adopt a Word campaign also continued successfully in 2019, with 68 people ‘adopting’ unique words and raising a total of \$6,800.

Our annual appeals are growing in number each year, and we extend a warm welcome to our new donors who joined the Wheeler Centre in 2019. We acknowledge the longstanding, generous support of George and Rosa Morstyn and their contribution to *The Next Chapter* writers’ scheme.

Every single donation supports us to keep the conversation going and we thank you again for your giving.

### Patrons

Maureen Wheeler AO  
and Tony Wheeler AO

### Game Changers: \$25,000+

Krystyna Campbell-Pretty  
The Hon. Justice Michelle Gordon and  
the Hon. Kenneth Hayne  
Ellen Koshland  
Carol Schwartz AO and Alan Schwartz AM

### Big Thinkers: \$15,000+

George and Rosa Morstyn, *Inaugural*

### Conversation Starters: \$5000+

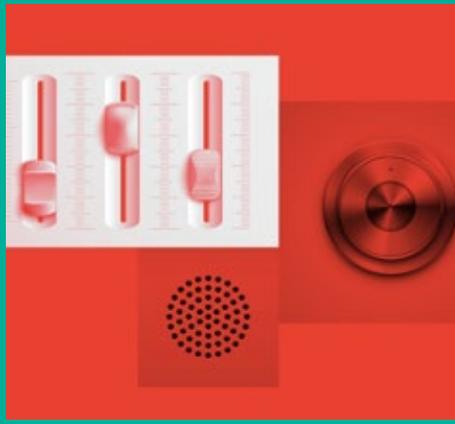
Eric and the late Sue Beecher, *Inaugural*  
Heather Carmody  
Jo Fisher and Peter Grayson  
Jennifer Gilchrist  
Elke Gjergja  
Andy and Jill Griffiths, *Inaugural*  
The Hudson Family, *Inaugural*  
Craig and Annabelle Semple  
Chaman Sidhu  
Brigitte Smith, *Inaugural*  
Ricci Swart  
Wendy Whelan, *Inaugural*  
Janet Whiting AM and Phil Lukies,  
*Inaugural*

### Bright Sparks: \$2,500+

Susan Oliver AM FAICD  
Julie Pinkham

### Enquiring Minds: \$1,000+

Robin and the late Marylou Friday  
John Gibbins  
Catherine Heggen  
Josh Kinal



## Our Trusts and Foundations

Trusts and Foundations continue to provide transformative support to our programming.

Thanks to the Aēsop Foundation, The Next Chapter writers' scheme continued to provide life-changing mentorship, training and funding to support ten budding Australian writers from diverse or marginalised backgrounds. 2019 marked the second year in this generous three-year funding agreement.

Thanks to the Ian Potter Foundation, the Wheeler Centre launched Signal Boost, a new initiative offering tailored mentorship, practical support and professional development for aspiring Australian podcasters. This is an exciting new step as we increase our digital content and support unheard voices to share their stories.

We were also able to engage storytellers from all across the state. The Robert Salzer Foundation provided generous funding to deliver a series of Wheeler Kids events as part of our regional programme to engage young people in storytelling workshops and activities across regions including Warranambool City Council and Macedon Ranges Shire Council.

The Readings Foundation continued its annual support of our Hot Desk Fellowships, providing 21 writers with a stipend and the opportunity to work on their writing from their own desk at the Wheeler Centre for a period of ten weeks.

In 2019, in partnership with the University of Melbourne's Victorian College of the Arts, and Copyright Agency Cultural Fund, three additional fellowships were added to the Hot Desk Fellowship for regional or interstate writers who could not ordinarily participate in the professional development initiative. This partnership enabled us to offer accommodation for five weeks at the Norma Redpath Studio in Carlton, as well as travel costs to and from Melbourne.

## Our Partners

We are indebted to the generous, longstanding partnerships we hold with Creative Victoria, Australia Council for the Arts and City of Melbourne. In 2019 we were selected as part of Creative Victoria's inaugural Fair Play project, an equity and inclusion capacity building program that will help us to better collaborate with First Nations people, people with disability and people from diverse backgrounds, in our mandate to include all Australians in public debate.

This year marked the beginning of an exciting partnership with Monash University, our principal partner for Broadside. A highlight of this partnership saw Monash students enjoy a private writing tutorial with the bestselling British author Zadie Smith. We are grateful for the partnerships we continue to nurture with Montalto, Sofitel on Collins, RTR Productions, Schiff and Company and JB Were, as well as more recent partnerships with Two Birds Brewing and St. Ali Coffee Roasters.



# INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

## Venues, Publishers and Bookshops

The Wheeler Centre is proud to partner with a number of local and regional venues across our yearly programme of events. Our ongoing collaboration with Australia's diverse publishing industry and our support of local bookshops demonstrates our commitment to bringing writers and ideas to our audience.

## Cultural Collaborations

Energetic and imaginative collaborations with community and cultural partners enable us to enhance our offerings to the community. Working with partner organisations also allows us to engage more broadly with diverse audiences.

## Resident Organisations

Melbourne's designation as a UNESCO City of Literature recognises the invaluable contribution made by the following organisations, all of which reside in the Wheeler Centre.

Alongside these organisations, a range of volunteer-led entities operate within the Wheeler Centre, from our Hot Desk residencies. These organisations are a vital component of the ecology of our literary and publishing sector. The Wheeler Centre is proud to support their activities.





# THANK YOU

As a cultural institution, we rely on the vision and generosity of our partners and supporters. Their contributions and commitment enables us to champion writers and writing, support the literary sector, elevate public conversation and produce an extraordinary year-long programme with 70% of events free to attend. We take this opportunity to say thank you.

## PRINCIPAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERS



## MAJOR PARTNERS



## PROGRAM PARTNERS



## SUPPORTING PARTNERS



## TRUSTS AND FOUNDATIONS





# OUR PEOPLE

## Our Patrons

Maureen and Tony Wheeler

## Our Board

Susan Oliver AM FAICD – Chair  
 Rebecca Batties (Commenced 3 June)  
 Marcus Fazio  
 John Gibbins  
 Will Hayward  
 Corrie Perkin  
 Julie Pinkham  
 Chaman Sidhu (Commenced 3 June)  
 Claire Wright OAM  
 Anita Ziemer

## Our Staff

**Director** Michael Williams  
**General Manager** Lauren Bialkower (until April)  
**Head of Programming** Helen Withycombe  
**Head of Marketing and Communications** Emily Harms  
**Head of Development** Jacqueline Williams (until June)  
**Head of Publishing** Sophie Black (until March)  
**Head of Operations** Gabrielle Ryan (from April)  
**Head of Finance** Lucy McNamara (from June)  
**Office Manager** Sally Rosevear  
**Programming Manager** Veronica Sullivan  
**Programming Coordinator** Stella Charls  
**Special Projects Coordinator** Hiroki Kobayashi  
**Festival Director** Tamara Zimet  
**Schools Programmer** Bec Kavanagh  
**Senior Digital Editor** Jon Tjhia  
**Marketing Manager** Shannon Hick  
**Development Coordinator** Ngairé Freeman (until February)  
 Brigid Reid (from February)  
**Ticketing and CRM Coordinator** Claire Flynn  
**Publicist** Sallie Butler  
**Senior Writer/Editor** Sophie Quick  
**Digital Producer** Scott Limbrick  
**Events Manager** Gabrielle Ryan (until April) Mia McAuslan (from June)  
**Production Manager** Johnboy Davidson  
**Technical Coordinator** Jose Eveline  
**Receptionist** Harry Reid  
**Accounts** Sam Ryan (until July) Dom Billings (from July)

## Our extraordinary front and back of house team who ensure our events run seamlessly night after night:

Abby Alexander  
 Millie Baylis  
 Anastasha Boado  
 Anne Bravos  
 Roxy Brown  
 Bridget Caldwell  
 Monica Enriquez  
 Faith Everard  
 Else Fitzgerald  
 Selwyn Hoffmann  
 Bromley Isombard  
 Shamini Joseph  
 Zoe Kaser  
 Charlie Kerekes  
 Doni Marmer  
 Kate McHugh  
 Leah Jing McIntosh  
 Angela McMurray  
 Theodore Murray  
 Adalya Nash Hussein  
 Linh Nguyen  
 Xanthea O'Connor  
 Niklas Pajanti  
 Ruby Pivet  
 Cher Tan  
 Inez Trambas  
 Billie Tumarkin  
 Saaro Umar  
 Dylan van Oirschot  
 Nevo Zisin





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Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas  
trading as The Wheeler Centre.

[wheelercentre.com](http://wheelercentre.com)