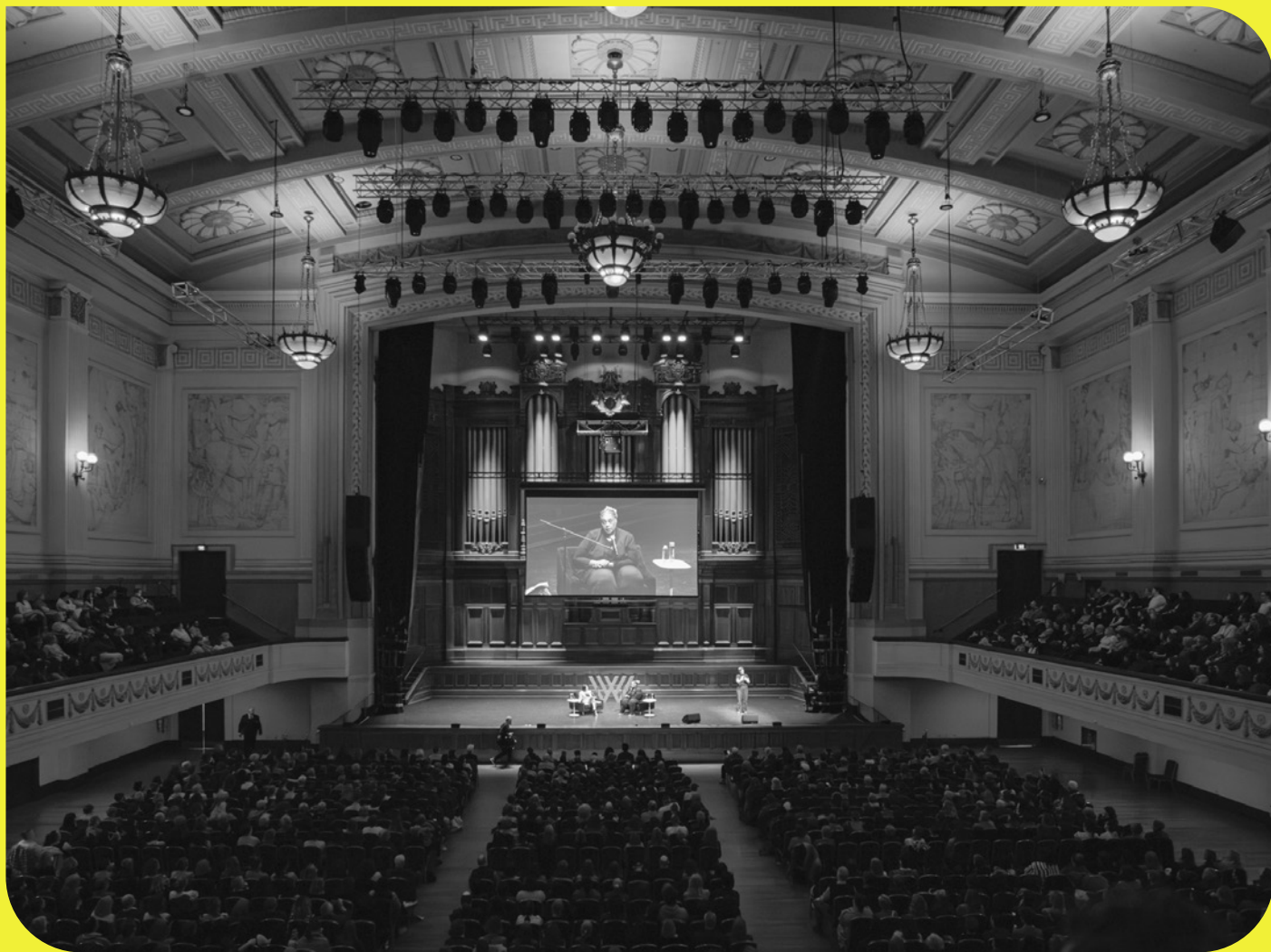


Annual Report



2024



The Wheeler Centre
Books Writing Ideas

The Wheeler Centre acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the Centre stands. We also acknowledge and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their Elders, past and present, as the custodians of the world's oldest continuous living culture.

COVER IMAGE: Roxane Gay at Melbourne Town Hall.
Photo by William Hamilton-Coates.
Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

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Who

The Wheeler Centre is Melbourne's home for smart, passionate and entertaining public talks. The Centre exists to support writers, readers and thinkers. Through live and digital conversations, debates, readings, performances and discussions, we deepen public engagement with the most pressing topics of the day. We are dedicated to creative collaboration, community engagement, diversity and innovation.

Melbourne was designated a UNESCO City of Literature in 2008 and this heralded the establishment of the Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas – a vibrant new hub for a diverse range of organisations focussed on literature and ideas. The aim: to provide a home and important focal point for the conversations that matter to Victoria, and Australia. As the Centre itself took its physical shape within a newly renovated and dedicated wing of the State Library of Victoria, our position was secured ahead of the official opening with the commitment of our patrons, Maureen and Tony Wheeler of Lonely Planet. From that day, the Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas became The Wheeler Centre.

Since 2009, The Wheeler Centre has been firmly established at the heart of Victoria's rich cultural life. Based in the Melbourne CBD on Little Lonsdale Street, we are also proudly a place where the state's most respected literary organisations are housed, work together and thrive.



We

Our Purpose

The Wheeler Centre exists to honour and amplify the culture of ideas, stories and debate that has existed in Victoria for millennia. We serve writers, storytellers, thinkers, readers, listeners – the diverse ecology of people, communities and cultures that keep ideas alive and evolving.

Our Vision

Our vision is to be a globally renowned home for storytelling and ideas that is sought after and celebrated by writers, readers, speakers, listeners and decision-makers.

Our Mission

To connect, support and promote Victoria's unique culture of writing, storytelling and ideas. We seek to open up writing, reading, storytelling and inclusive public discussion to everyone, everywhere and in doing this, we also elevate Melbourne's status as Australia's original UNESCO City of Literature.

Are

A Message from Our Chair, Kate Torney OAM



It is an honour to be the Chair of one of Victoria's leading cultural institutions at such an exciting time of transformation and growth. Throughout 2024, the incredibly talented Wheeler Centre team achieved outstanding progress strengthening the performance of the Centre, with the support and contribution of our skilled Board.

In 2024, our year-round programming delivered unmissable conversations, with a renewed focus on events inspired by ideas and domestic and global news events. A third iteration of Spring Fling captivated audiences throughout October, and 16 of our events reached audiences in the regions.

We supported and celebrated artists, publishers, booksellers and the creative process with five Next Chapter fellows, supported by industry mentors and 22 emerging writers undertaking Hot Desk fellowships.

The Wheeler Centre also launched its new strategy and a significant fundraising campaign, setting an ambitious target of raising a million dollars over the next three years. On behalf of the staff and Board, I would like to sincerely thank Maureen and Tony Wheeler for their ongoing support, as well as their generosity and belief in the Centre.

My thanks also go to our supporters including Creative Victoria, City of Melbourne, our corporate partners, our generous community of donors and of course our audiences – we owe much of our success of the past year, to you.

I would like to acknowledge outgoing Board members Julie Ligeti and John Gibbins for their enduring service and dedication and warmly welcome Kristin Badger to our Board. I also welcome the appointment of Chaman Sidhu as Deputy Chair, and Michelle Tyson Clark as Company Secretary.

I would also like to thank Erin Vincent for her leadership, vision and ambition for the Centre's future, and extend my gratitude to the leadership and staff.

I'm so proud of what we have achieved together and am excited by the possibilities of the year ahead – The Wheeler Centre's 15th birthday year.

Kate Torney OAM
Chair, The Wheeler Centre

A Message from Our CEO, Erin Vincent



What a remarkable year 2024 was for The Wheeler Centre, strengthening its reputation as the home of storytelling across Victoria.

I'm so proud to lead an organisation that celebrates Books, Writing and Ideas in a city that loves to read and prides itself on being a UNESCO City of Literature. It is a privilege to work with such a talented and dedicated team and to have the support of a passionate and highly engaged Board, led by our Chair Kate Torney. Together, we are committed to realising the potential of The Wheeler Centre, the only organisation of its kind in Australia.

In 2024, we delivered over a hundred events across Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Warrnambool, Kyneton, Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula. Programming highlights included Roxane Gay, Bonnie Garmus, Rebecca Yarros, Plestia Alaqad, Stan Grant, Helen Garner and Darcy Moore. We also delivered another season of Spring Fling delighting audiences throughout October with events featuring Gina Chick, Virginia Trioli, Ben Shewry, Tony Armstrong and Andy Griffiths. We launched an exciting four-year plan, setting ourselves the bold ambition of delivering Storytelling for Everyone, Everywhere, and we kicked off a major fundraising campaign to support our public programming and expand our development programs, which have a proud history of advancing the careers of many acclaimed Australian writers. We also delivered the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards on behalf of the Victorian Government, with Grace Yee becoming the first poet to take out the \$100,000 Victorian Prize for Literature, with her stunning debut collection *Chinese Fish*.

Our Head of Programming Veronica Sullivan left the Centre after six years, leaving behind a proud programming legacy. Jamila Khodja, Bec Kavanagh, Natalie Williams, Kate Thorburn and Autumn Royal also departed, and I thank each of them for their passion and dedication. We were thrilled to welcome Gene Smith as our new Head of Programming, bringing his global experience to our team, as well as Tamarah Scott as our new Senior Producer, Digital Content. We also appointed Joe Toohey as our Chief Operating Officer, and I thank Joe for his outstanding work throughout the year.

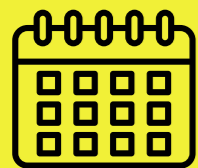
I'd like to sincerely thank the Minister for Creative Industries Colin Brooks for his commitment to Victoria's cultural sector and to the teams at Creative Victoria and the City of Melbourne for the work they do championing the value of the arts to our state. A heartfelt thank you to our founding patrons Maureen and Tony Wheeler for the many ways they continue to support the Centre they helped bring to life.

The Wheeler Centre is so fortunate to have such a generous network of donors, partners and supporters – thanks to each of you for believing in the transformative power of storytelling. I'd also like to thank the wonderful resident organisations we share our building with, our valued cultural partners, our accommodation partner The Sofitel Melbourne on Collins; our wine sponsor Montalto; Shiff and Co for their pro bono legal support and our major event and venue partners RMIT Culture and The Edge at Fed Square. We can't wait for 2025 and to mark The Wheeler Centre's 15th birthday – reflecting on all the Centre has achieved and looking ahead to an exciting future.

Erin Vincent
CEO, The Wheeler Centre

2024

Total Events



95

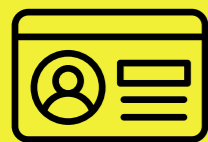
Wheeler Centre events in Metropolitan Melbourne

55%

Of events in 2024 presented with cultural partners

52

Venue hires in 2024



253

Wheeler Centre Members

5783

New ticket buyers in 2024

21562

Total tickets booked in 2024

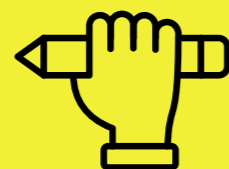


1469

Pay What You Wish or Free tickets booked

49

No One Turned Away for Lack of Funds tickets sold



337

Writers and artists

47

First Nations Artists

Digital Snapshot

24.6k

YouTube subscribers



24.1k

Instagram followers

+759k

New social media views in 2024

39k

Facebook followers

61%

Wheeler eNews average open rate

48k

X followers

14%

Wheeler eNews average click through rate

7k

LinkedIn followers

in

Review

'It was a wonderful experience to see a favourite author of mine, as well as feeling the close sense of community among fellow *Fourth Wing*/Rebecca Yarros fans. It was great to meet new people who have the same interests and be able to chat about our favourite parts and fan theories.'

Anonymous audience feedback following our event *Rebecca Yarros in Conversation*.



Rebecca Yarros during her sold out event at Melbourne Town hall.
Photo by Phoebe Powell.

Our 2024 Program in Review



Rebecca F. Kuang in conversation with Beverley Wang. Photo by TJ Garvie.

In 2024, The Wheeler Centre delivered a thrilling and diverse program of world-class events, spanning conversations, panel discussions, lectures, family activities and regional activations. We engaged live audiences selling over 23,000 tickets, with more than an additional 16,000 tuning in online for live-streamed and recorded events. Across 125 events, we featured 337 writers and artists. Approximately 55% of our program was made possible through partnerships with other cultural organisations, festivals and community partners.

The Wheeler Centre celebrated the achievements of Australian writers, with authors and thinkers addressing a wide range of topics – from Australia’s housing crisis to celebrations of Asian-Australian writing at the inaugural Liminal Festival; from the complexities of masculinity to the state of Australian media; from in-depth analysis of the US federal election to the role of community in sports. We were also honoured to host numerous events featuring some of Australia’s most revered authors, including Santilla Chingaipe, Michelle de Kretser, Helen

Garner, Stan Grant, Andy Griffiths, Kathy Lette, Thomas Mayo, Shaun Micallef, Sally Rippin, Don Watson, Tim Winton, Alexis Wright and many others.

Over 30 international guests visited Melbourne, taking the stage at The Wheeler Centre to share insights from their illustrious careers, electrifying new books and a diverse range of big ideas and current affairs. Highlights include fantasy romance sensation Rebecca Yarros, multi-million-copy *New York Times*-bestselling author Bonnie Garmus, and prolific writer and social commentator Roxane Gay, all of whom captivated packed audiences at Melbourne Town Hall. Other notable events featured Rebecca F. Kuang, author of *Babel* and *Yellowface*, speaking at a sold-out Melbourne City Conference Centre; award-winning dissident writer and human rights activist Ma Thida reflecting on her imprisonment in Myanmar; Palestinian journalist and poet Plestia Alaqaq discussing her coverage of the Israel-Gaza war; *Rolling Stone* staff writer Brittany Spanos exploring the cultural impact of Taylor Swift; and literary icons Patrick de Witt, Richard Ford and Jane Smiley discussing their latest critically acclaimed works of fiction.

Families were treated to a variety of interactive events and activities, including a series of live performances blending storytelling and music, presented in partnership with Orchestra Victoria, and a special Christmas holiday S-PECK-tacular show featuring Andrew McDonald and Ben Wood, creators of the popular *Real Pigeons* books.

The Wheeler Centre is committed to supporting the local literary sector, and the writers, booksellers, publishers, critics and readers who contribute to its ongoing success. In 2024, we worked with over 16 bookstores across Melbourne and Victoria as official event booksellers, and more than 25 publishers were represented across the Centre’s programmed authors. We also hosted the 2024 Victorian Poetry Month Gala, launched the 2024–2025 Australian Children Laureate’s campaign, marked 20 years of the annual Melbourne Prize, and celebrated First Nations literary classics in partnership with Blak & Bright.

Spring Fling

We embraced Wild Abandon for Spring Fling 2024, and for its third and final edition, it invigorated Melbourne and the regions throughout October. Featuring some of Australia’s most esteemed writers, thinkers and performers, the month-long festival attracted a diverse audience selling over 2,000 tickets across 20 experiences.

Program highlights include Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts delivering the annual E. W. Cole Lecture, where she highlighted the urgent work of advocates fighting to protect First Nations children from institutional harm. A unique gathering of storytellers came together for an evening of erotic writing and performance, in collaboration with Melbourne Fringe. Bruce Pascoe and Lyn Harwood delighted guests at the Black Duck Lunch, hosted at The Moat restaurant where the menu featured Aboriginal ingredients. Australia’s comedians rallied to pen and deliver a touching tribute to the irrepressible and very-much-still-alive Shaun Micallef. And three First Nations performers – Laniyuk, Jazz Money and Nardi Simpson – reflected on connection, Country and resistance in an evening of poetry and music.

Prominent authors Tim Winton and Michelle de Kretser engaged audiences with discussions on their latest works of fiction, while Noni Hazlehurst and John Safran took a journey through their pasts to uncover the moments that shaped who they are today.

Beyond the city, musician Kasey Chambers lit up Geelong with a conversation about her life and career. Reporter Rick Morton visited Queenscliff to discuss Australia’s failed Robodebt scheme. Broadcaster Virginia Trioli shared her passion for

good food and wine in a special edition of Books and Ideas at Montalto on the Mornington Peninsula.

In partnership with Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, we offered a unique opportunity for audiences to walk through the Gardens and listen to an exclusive podcast discussion, in which British writer Olivia Laing and our own Sophie Cunningham explored the beauty of wandering through nature.

The Fifth Estate

The Fifth Estate is The Wheeler Centre’s long-running go-to series for those seeking in-depth analysis of politics, current affairs and big ideas. Throughout 2024, the series, hosted by Sally Warhaft, brought together four prominent thinkers who offered their expertise and unique perspectives on some of the most pressing issues facing the world today.

Eric Beecher provided chilling insights into the abuse of power within the media, shedding light on the dynamics that shape public discourse and influence political agendas. Peter Frankopan, author of *The Earth Transformed*, took audiences on a journey through his monumental study of how climate change has shaped human history and culture from the dawn of civilisation to the present day. His thought-provoking discussion explored the long-term impacts of climate change on our societies and the urgent need for action in our current moment.

George Megalogenis offered his research into the shifting forces influencing Australia’s population and political landscape. With an eye on demographic changes and their influence on voting patterns, the political historian explored how these evolving trends are shaping the future of Australian politics. And Don Watson took a deep dive into the complex dynamics of the U.S. election, providing timely analysis during the height of the intense campaigns led by Democrats and Republicans. His examination of the political climate in America offered a gripping account of the polarising forces at play.

The Fifth Estate continues to be a vital platform for exploring complex global issues, putting forward our sharpest minds to challenge assumptions, spark critical thinking and encourage informed dialogue about the world’s most significant challenges.

Our 2024 Program in Review

Books and Ideas at Montalto

Set amidst the picturesque vineyards of Montalto, a stunning winery in Red Hill on the Mornington Peninsula, some of the world's most beloved writers engaged in intimate conversations with a select audience over dinner and drinks.

In 2024, five Books and Ideas at Montalto events took place, including:

Kathy Lette, author of Australian classic *Puberty Blues*, who discussed her new book *The Revenge Club* over two sold-out events.

Peter Singer, the renowned philosopher and author of *The Buddhist and the Ethicist*, who shared his insights as one of Australia's leading thinkers.

Eric Beecher, founder of *Crikey News*, in conversation about his examination of power and the media in *The Men Who Killed the News*.

Virginia Trioli, ABC radio broadcaster and arts journalist, who reflected on life, food and small joys in her book *A Bit on the Side*.

Ben Shewry, the acclaimed chef, who discussed his memoir *Uses for Obsession*.

Regional Events

Our regional touring program brought together a range of organisations across Victoria to deliver a vibrant and diverse lineup of 16 events featuring prominent writers, thinkers and leaders. Developed in collaboration with cultural and venue partners, the program fosters strong, reciprocal relationships across the state, tailored to meet the unique needs and resources of each organisation's audience and community.

In 2024, our partners included the Queenscliff Literary Festival, Mountain Writers Festival,

Bendigo Writers Festival, Ballarat Mechanics' Institute, Geelong Regional Libraries and more. These collaborations allowed us to engage with a wide variety of communities, bringing our events and thought-provoking discussions to regions across Victoria.

A special highlight of our regional program was the inclusion of Heather Ewart, the host of ABC's *Back Roads*. Heather took part in two sold-out events in regional areas, where she captivated audiences with her insights and stories from her book *The Great Aussie Road Trip*.

The Wheeler Centre's regional program continues to be a vital part of our mission to bring literature, storytelling and meaningful dialogue to communities across Victoria. It fosters cultural exchange and strengthens the bond between writers and thinkers – and their audiences – wherever they may be.

The Next Big Thing

The Next Big Thing is The Wheeler Centre's cherished series that celebrates and showcases the work of emerging writers. Held at The Moat restaurant, these vibrant events bring together a dynamic group of debut authors, along with at least one contributor to a Melbourne literary magazine. These writers take the stage to present short readings of their latest work, offering audiences a unique opportunity to discover fresh voices and new perspectives in the literary world.

In 2024, we proudly hosted nine events, bringing together over 47 writers from diverse backgrounds and experiences. These included five themed events – 'Echoes,' 'Into the Ether,' 'Growing Pains,' 'Wild Abandon' and 'Search and Rescue' – which explored a wide range of ideas and literary forms. The series also featured three Hot Desk Fellowship readings, offering fellows a platform to showcase the work they developed through our prestigious creative development program. Additionally, one event was held in partnership with Emerging Writers' Festival as part of their 2024 program.

Each Next Big Thing event is a celebration of the creativity and potential of emerging writers. We are deeply grateful to George and Rosa Morstyn for their generous support, which has made this ongoing series possible.

Lunch Orders

The centrepiece of The Wheeler Centre's 2024 education program was Lunch Orders – a series of bite-sized digital conversations designed for livestreaming into any classroom or library, with the added flexibility of on-demand viewing through our website.

In term one, the program kicked off with a series of inspiring talks. Illustrator and designer Stephen Mushin encouraged students to imagine a different kind of future – one where we 'ultrawild' our cities and urban landscapes. Takatāpui Māori permaculture teacher Guy Ritani shared valuable insights into sustainable land management and agricultural practices. Dr Alice Gorman took the audience on a journey into space, recounting her experience as a space archaeologist and raising thought-provoking questions about our ethical responsibilities as we explore the cosmos. Vidya Rajan explored the intersection of art, performance and technology, highlighting how social media itself can be a form of performance.

In term two, the program turned its focus to self-image, body positivity and mental well-being.

Dr Melissa Kang offered insights into the challenges people face with body changes during puberty, drawing from her long tenure as Dolly Doctor. April Héléne-Horton, also known as The Bodzilla, delved into fat positivity and body acceptance movements. Psychologist and educator Chris Cheers discussed the importance of self-acceptance and how to keep the mind and body connected. To close out the term, performance artist Betty Grumble invited us to embrace the joy of movement, encouraging a fun and freeing boogie.

In term three, the spotlight shifted to artificial intelligence. Dr Matt Agnew explored what artificial intelligence is, its historical applications and its future potential. Ashley Ronning discussed how artificial intelligence can both assist and challenge the creative process. Ruby Quail took us through the history of the internet, from its origins to the Age of AI. Finally, Dr Tim Dean examined the philosophical and ethical considerations surrounding the development and use of artificial intelligence technology.

We thank George and Rosa Morstyn for their support of Lunch Orders.



Keshe Chow, Sophie Matthiesson, Kylie Mirmohamadi and Lucy O'Shea Carré during The Next Big Thing Wild Abandon. Photo by Laura May Grogan.

A Message from Content Committee Chair



The Wheeler Centre takes seriously its role as a leading facilitator of respectful, vigorous debate and discussion about current issues, including in areas of politics, media, human rights, gender and race.

For this reason, the Content Committee was initiated as part of a shared vision between the Wheeler Centre board, the CEO and senior creative staff members. Operating in a strategic advisory capacity to the Board, the Committee provides analysis, oversight and reflective insights on The Wheeler Centre's programming initiatives. Committee members understand and agree that it is not the role of Board members to intervene in the artistic direction or decide curatorial content; creative leadership is firmly the responsibility of The Wheeler Centre's programming team. Since terms of reference and membership were agreed upon in April 2024, the Committee's primary function has been to ensure that programming aligns with our broader strategic objectives.

In June, the Committee adopted a set of programming principles, developed by the programming team, to guide future decision-making. I'm pleased to report that, in my view, in 2024 the Committee acquitted their role appropriately and effectively, supporting the Head of Programming of The Wheeler Centre first under Veronica Sullivan, then Jamila Khodja in an acting capacity and now Gene Smith.

Of note in 2024, has been the adoption of risk mitigation strategies while continuing to pursue a bold creative agenda. The team should be proud

of the care and respect they have extended to all artists, our audience and staff while maintaining a commitment to platforming open dialogue.

The programming team has done an exemplary job, including during a period of transition, and it's been a pleasure to support their work. Plans for the next six months, led by Gene Smith, are shaping up to be ambitious, surprising and engaging. I'd like to thank fellow Committee members Jock Serong and Julie Pinkham for their fine contributions in 2024-25, as well as Erin Vincent for her preparedness and consistently sound judgement.

Jamila Rizvi
Chair of the Content Committee,
The Wheeler Centre



John Lyons discusses the Future of Democracy.
Photo by Phoebe Powell.



Ben Shewry and Marieke Hardy discuss the inevitable.
Photo by William Hamilton-Coates.

2024 Program Partners

Our program partners play a critical role in helping us reach the widest possible audience in metropolitan Melbourne, and in suburban and regional communities.

2024 Partners



2024 Official Booksellers



Thank You, Artists

In 2024, more than 330 speakers took the stage at The Wheeler Centre in Melbourne, across Victoria, throughout Australia and online. Through panels, talks, readings, performances and workshops, we were inspired by Australian and international writers, thinkers, poets, comedians, musicians and podcasters who shared their stories, ideas and insights. The Wheeler Centre is deeply grateful for the creativity, vision and generosity of all the brilliant artists who contributed to our 2024 program.

- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Abbey Lay | Chanel Contos | Megalogenis | Kate Grenville | Michelle Brasier | Powell |
| Adayla Nash | Cher Tan | Gina Chick | Kate Lilley | Michelle de Kretser | Sharlene Allsopp |
| Hussein | Chris Ames | Glenn Perry | Kate Robinson | Michelle See-Tho | Shashini Gamage |
| Aisling Smith | Chris Cheers | Grace Yee | Kathryn Gledhill-Tucker | Mindy Meng Wang | Shaun Micallef |
| Al Speers | Christie Whelan | Gurmeet Kaur | Kathy Lette | Minoli De Silva | Shelley Ware |
| Alan Dingley | Browne | Guy Ritani | Katy Hessel | Mitch McTaggart | Shivram Gopinath |
| Alan Kohler | Christos Tsiolkas | Hannah Diviney | Keshe Chow | Mykaela Saunders | Sian Prior |
| Alex Creece | Clare Bowditch | Hannah Wu | Khin Myint | Nam Le | Simone LeAmon |
| Alexis Wright | CS Pacat | Hasib Hourani | Kieran Perkins | Nardi Simpson | Sisonke Msimang |
| Alice Gorman | Daniel James | Heather Ewart | Kim Scott | Nasser Mashni | Sophie Black |
| Alison Willmore | Danny Soberano | Helen Garner | Kitty Obsidian | Nat Amore | Sophie Cunningham |
| Amanda Chong | Darcy Moore | Hilary Harper | Kylie Mirmohamadi | Natasha Mitchell | Sophie Matthiesson |
| Amelie Jean Staff | Darcy Vescio | Huda Hayek | Laniyuk | Neil Morris | Sreedhevi Iyer |
| Amie Kaufman | Daryl Lim Wei Jie | Hugh Leitwell | Larissa Behrendt | Noni Hazlehurst | Stan Grant |
| Amy McQuire | Daryl Qilin Yam | Hugh van | Leah Davis | Olivia Laing | Stella Theocharides |
| Andre Dao | Dassi Erlich | Cuylenburg | Leah Jjing McIntosh | Osman Faruqi | Stephen Hall |
| Andrew Brooks | David Francis | Izzy Roberts-Orr | Leah Muddle | Ouyang Yu | Steve Mushin |
| Andrew McDonald | David Slucki | Jac Semmler | Lee Lai | Panda Wong | Stuart Flanagan |
| Andrew Schultz | Denise Hylands | Jacinta Dietrich | Leigh Sales | Patricia Karvelas | Sui Zhen |
| Andrew Sutherland | Denise Hylands | James Jiang | Lexie Jeuniewicz | Patrick deWitt | Suren Jayemanne |
| Andy Griffiths | Don Watson | Jamil Badi | Lia Dewey Morgan | Patrick Johnson | Suri Matondkar |
| Andy Jackson | Dr Melissa Kang | Jan Fran | Louisa Lim | Patrick Ness | Susan Carland |
| Anna Walker | Dylan Coleman | Jane Gilmore | Louise Milligan | Peter Frankopan | Tamala Shelton |
| Ashley Ronning | Dylin Hardcastle | Jane Smiley | Lucinda Price | Peter Singer | Tarang Chawla |
| Astrid Edwards | Eda Gunaydin | Janet McLeod | Lucy O'Shea Carré | Plestia Alaqaad | Tex Wise |
| Aurelia St Clair | Elena Gomez | Jared Richards | Lucy Van | Priya Kunjan | Thabani Tshuma |
| Autumn Royal | Elena Hogan | Jazz Money | Lyn Harwood | Rachel Withers | Thomas Mayo |
| Aysha Buffet | Elijah Money | Jeanine Leane | Lynda Ng | Raeden Richardson | Tigest Girma |
| Barrie Cassidy | Elizabeth McCarthy | Jenny Zhang | Ma Thida | Rebecca F. Kuang | Rebecca Yarros |
| Beau Windon | Ella Baxter | Jess Knight | Mackenzie Lee | Richard Ford | Richard Ford |
| Bebe Oliver | Ellen Whinnett | Jess Racklyeft | Madison Griffiths | Rick Morton | Richard Morton |
| Bec Kavanagh | Emilie Collyer | Jess Zanon | Mahmood Fazal | Robbie Arnott | Robbie Arnott |
| Belinda Rule | Emilie Zoey Baker | Jessie Perrin | Manisha Anjali | Robert Watkins | Robert Watkins |
| Bella Li | Emma Fulu | Jillian Tamaki | Maria Birch-Morunga | Ronia Ibrahim | Ronia Ibrahim |
| Ben Shewry | Emma Hall | Jim Malo | Mariam Veiszadeh | Roslyn Orlando | Roslyn Orlando |
| Ben Wood | Emma Sjaan | John Lyons | Marieke Hardy | Roxane Gay | Roxane Gay |
| Betty Grumble | Beukers | John Safran | Marina Sano | Ruby Pivet-Marsh | Ruby Pivet-Marsh |
| Beverley Wang | Eric Beecher | Jonathan Green | Marita Dyson | Ruby Quail | Ruby Quail |
| Bhakthi | Erik Jensen | Jordan Prosser | Mark Humphries | Ruby Todd | Ruby Todd |
| Puvanenthiran | Ernest Price | Jordan van den Berg | Masha Gessen | S Shakhthidharan | S Shakhthidharan |
| Bodzilla | Esmé Louise James | Berg | Matt Agnew | Sally Rippin | Sally Rippin |
| Bonnie Garmus | Esther Tuddenham | Josh Kemp | McKenzie Wark | Sally Warhaft | Sally Warhaft |
| Brian Castro | Ethan Cutajar | Joshua Ip | Megan Cheong | Sam Elkin | Sam Elkin |
| Brittany Spanos | Eugenia Lim | JP Pomare | Melanie Saward | Samah Sabawi | Samah Sabawi |
| Brodie Lancaster | Evelyn Araluen | Jumaana Abdu | Meredith Whittaker | Sammy J | Sammy J |
| Bruce Pascoe | Fern Brady | Kamarra Bell-Wykes | Michael Sun | Santilla Chingaipe | Santilla Chingaipe |
| Caitlin Farrugia | Fiona Foley | Kanika Chopra | Michael Williams | Sarah Krasnostein | Sarah Krasnostein |
| Carly Sheppard | Frankie van Kan | Kasey Chambers | Michelle Aung Thin | Scott Stephens | Scott Stephens |
| Cat Yen | George | | | Shannon May | Shannon May |

Opportunities and Special Programs



VPLA Winners: L-R (Back) Antony Loewenstein, Ellen van Neerven, Daniel Browning, Rachel Morton, S. Shakthidharan, Grace Yee, Melissa Lucashenko, Lili Wilkinson. Photo by TJ Garvie.

Victorian Premier's Literary Awards

Proudly administered by The Wheeler Centre on behalf of the Premier of Victoria, the annual Victorian Premier's Literary Awards celebrates the best contemporary Australian writing.

The shortlists for the 2024 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards were announced in December 2023, showcasing some of the most exceptional and diverse literature published in Australia over the previous year. Notably, this announcement marked the return of the Prize for Children's Literature category – featured for the first time since 1995 – thanks to a joint effort between The Wheeler Centre, industry leaders and the State Government of Victoria to reinstate this vital award.

The winners of the main suite of awards – the prizes for Fiction, Non-Fiction, Drama, Poetry, Indigenous Writing, Children's Literature and Writing for Young Adults – each received \$25,000.

The \$100,000 Victorian Prize for Literature is awarded to the best overall entry across the main suite of categories and was awarded to Grace Yee in 2024 for her poetry collection *Chinese Fish*.

Warrnambool writer Rachel Morton won the Unpublished Manuscript Award for her manuscript *Panajachel*, which was subsequently acquired by

the University of Queensland Press and scheduled for publication in 2025.

The 2024 category winners were:

Victorian Prize for Literature: *Chinese Fish*, Grace Yee

The Prize for Fiction: *Edenglassie*, Melissa Lucashenko

The Prize for Non-Fiction: *Personal Score*, Ellen Van Neerven

The Prize for Drama: *The Jungle and the Sea*, S. Shakthidharan and Eamon Flack

The Prize for Poetry: *Chinese Fish*, Grace Yee

The Prize for Indigenous Writing: *Close to the Subject*, Daniel Browning

The Prize for Writing for Young Adults: *A Hunger of Thorns*, Lili Wilkinson

The Prize for Children's Literature: *Ghost Book*, Remy Lai

The Unpublished Manuscript Award: *Panajachel*, Rachel Morton

The People's Choice Award: *The Palestine Laboratory*, Antony Loewenstein

The winners were announced at a ceremony in February held at The Edge in Melbourne's iconic Fed Square, hosted by celebrated comedian and writer Sami Shah. The ceremony was presented in partnership with Fed Square.

Hot Desk Fellowships

The Wheeler Centre celebrated the 12th year of the Hot Desk Fellowships in 2024, with 22 fellowships offered to emerging writers thanks to the generous support of Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne, the Readings Foundation and the Just Pretending theatre group.

The 2024 Hot Desk fellows worked on a range of projects spanning different genres and forms, including fiction, creative non-fiction, comic, memoir, middle-grade fiction, young adult fiction, playwriting and poetry. During their ten-week fellowships, these outstanding emerging writers used their dedicated workspaces at The Wheeler Centre to develop their writing projects, hone their craft and expand their creative networks.

The Wheeler Centre showcased the unique creative talents of this year's Hot Desk fellows to the wider community, publishing excerpts of their projects on our website and featuring them as speakers in The Next Big Thing, one of The Wheeler Centre's longest running and much beloved event series.

We are thrilled to welcome the 2024 fellows to a distinguished alumni of storytellers whose work deeply enriches Australian literature.



2024 Hot Desk Fellows

Al Speers
Andrew Sutherland
Ayesha Mona
Belinda Rule
Cat Yen
Chris Ames
Frankie van Kan
Hannah Wu
Hugh Leitwell
Isobel Morphy-Walsh
Jacinta Dietrich
Jessie Perrin
Kate Harris
Lia Dewey Morgan
Megan Cheong
Roniah Ibrahim
Shannon May Powell
Shashini Gamage
Stella Theocharides
Suri Matondkar
Xiaole Zhan
Yogashree Thirunavukarasu



The Next Chapter

The Next Chapter writers' program was established in 2018 to support emerging voices that are underrepresented through conventional publishing channels, by investing time, money and expertise in writers who reflect the diversity of Australian identities and experiences. Forty-five writers have now taken part in The Next Chapter program.

Writers selected for the program each receive \$15,000 to develop their work and are matched with an experienced mentor to provide them advice and critical feedback on their writing across a 12-month period.

Claire Cao was mentored by bestselling author Tamsin Muir

Laniyuk was mentored by writer, publisher and translator Alejandro del Castillo Garza

Jake Corvus was mentored by bestselling author C.S. Pacat

Maria van Neerven was mentored by poet and author Maxine Beneba Clarke

Raqiya Ahmed was mentored by writer, visual artist and advocate Amani Haydar

In May, the fellows took part in a week-long residency at Varuna, The National Writers' House in Katoomba, NSW. The fellows came together again in November at The Wheeler Centre for a two-day publishing intensive, where they met with publishers, agents, festival programmers and past participants of The Next Chapter.

Thanks to the support of the Malcolm Robertson Foundation, The Wheeler Centre was able to offer a \$5,000 cash stipend for a Next Chapter alum to develop a poetry manuscript in 2024. News of this new fellowship opportunity was warmly received by the 40 previous Next Chapter recipients. Following



a rigorous application and judging process, Anne-Marie Te Whiu was selected as the recipient of the inaugural alumni fellowship, allowing her to further refine the poetry collection that she developed during the 2022 Next Chapter program and ready it for publication.

In 2024, a record number of Next Chapter alumni saw the manuscripts they developed during their fellowship year published. We were delighted to celebrate these achievements with book launches featured throughout the year as part of The Wheeler Centre's public events program.

In February, Ultimo Press published Sharlene Allsopp's debut novel *The Great Undoing*, which was celebrated at The Moat.

In May, Upswell published Sam Elkin's memoir *Detachable Penis*, which was celebrated at The Wheeler Centre.

In June, Black Inc. published Khin Myint's memoir *Fragile Creatures*, which was celebrated at Readings Carlton.

In August, Vintage published Jumaana Abdu's debut novel *Translations*, which was celebrated at The Wheeler Centre.

In September, Giramondo published Hasib Hourani's poetry collection *rock flight*, which was celebrated at Kines, Brunswick.

The Next Chapter was made possible this year thanks to the generous support of Creative Australia, the Malcolm Robertson Foundation and the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Arts. Additionally, this program would not be possible without the endorsement and enthusiasm of our many publishing industry peers.

Photo left: Laniyuk, Jake Corvus, Maria van Neerven, Claire Cao, Raqiya Ahmed.



'A cascade of opportunities set-off by The Next Chapter has delivered me into a writing community that has surprised me with welcome arms, the life-giving challenge of being taken seriously, and a whole year of protected time to write under the generous and revelatory mentorship of Hannah Kent.

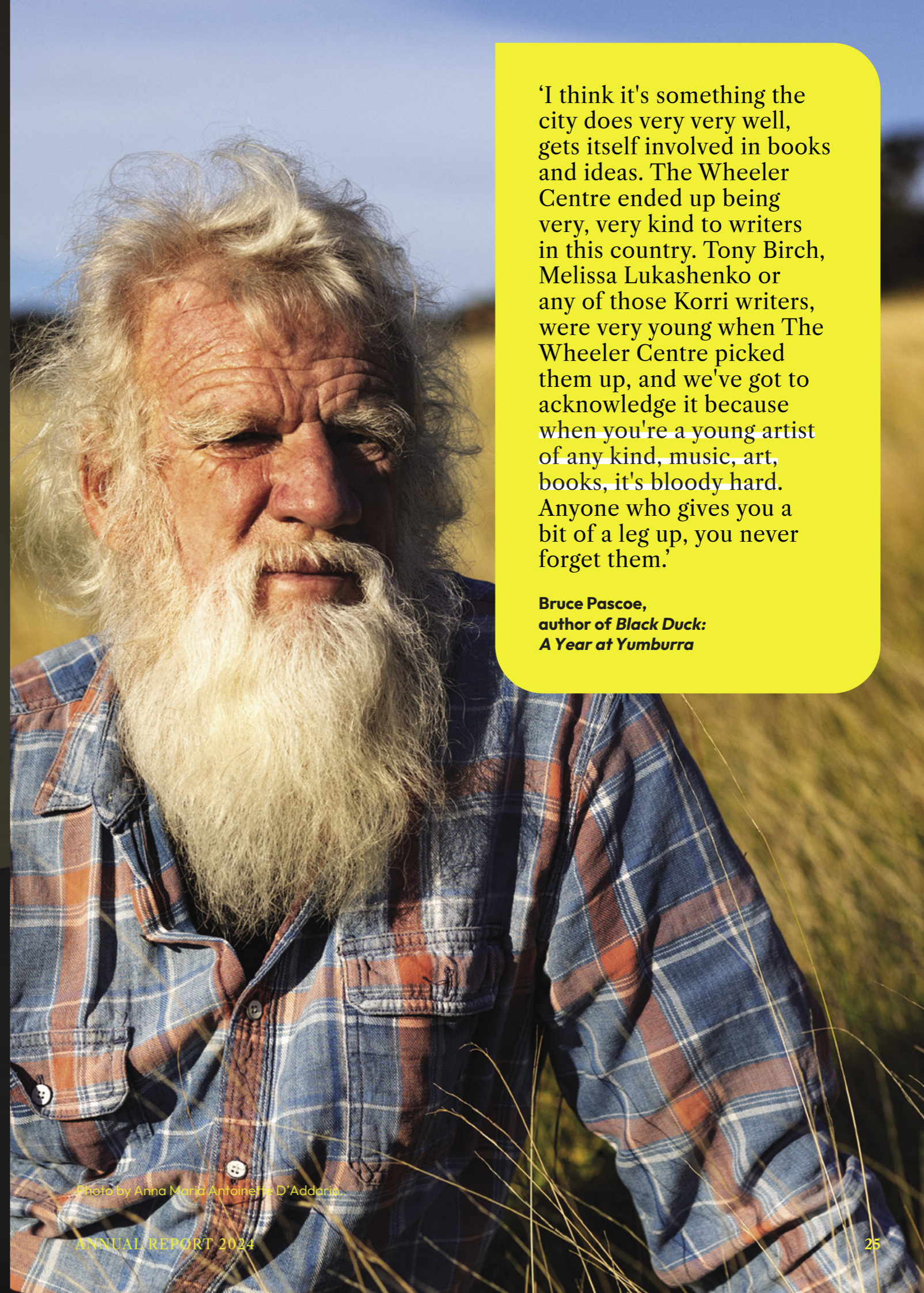
It was the first time I was treated as a writer with artistic - not solely biographical - merit, which has been vital. Now, I have a few publications under my belt and agent and publisher interest in my debut manuscript, no doubt aided by the dooropener of a Next Chapter credit beside my name. My Next Chapter year equipped me with imagination, excitement, and peer-challenge that I never would have accessed had I continued on in isolation. I may run the risk of hyperbole in my fiction, but I can say without exaggerating that The Next Chapter fellowship has rerouted the course of my entire life.'

Jumaana Abdu, Next Chapter recipient and author of *Translations*.



'I was approached by The Wheeler Centre in 2022 to mentor one of their Next Chapter recipients, Jumaana Abdu. I was immediately impressed by Jumaana's voice and vision for her manuscript and commend the rigorous judging process undertaken to identify writers like Jumaana as someone who will benefit exponentially from time, money and mentorship. I strongly endorse The Next Chapter program, The Wheeler Centre must continue this important work of nourishing emerging talent and ensuring debut work like Jumaana's is not only realised as a finished manuscript, but honed to a world-class standard in a supportive environment.'

Hannah Kent
Next Chapter mentor



'I think it's something the city does very very well, gets itself involved in books and ideas. The Wheeler Centre ended up being very, very kind to writers in this country. Tony Birch, Melissa Lukashenko or any of those Korri writers, were very young when The Wheeler Centre picked them up, and we've got to acknowledge it because when you're a young artist of any kind, music, art, books, it's bloody hard. Anyone who gives you a bit of a leg up, you never forget them.'

Bruce Pascoe,
author of *Black Duck:*
A Year at Yumburra

Photo by Anna Maria Antoinette D'Addario

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Production Highlights



John Safran during Spring Fling opening night. Photo by Laura May Grogan.

In 2024, The Wheeler Centre Production team consolidated event and post production operations, venue hire bookings and delivery logistics as well as the technical systems for The Wheeler Centre's spaces. This consolidation has **allowed the Centre's Production team to expand their focus into other areas of the building operations.**

Digital Archive

A major infrastructure upgrade with the Centre's digital archive was developed and rolled out in 2024. This upgrade has allowed for a great improvement with digital post-production workflows as well as archive accessibility. This upgrade has brought down digital archive running costs substantially.

Building Improvements

Our expanded focus on general building operations has allowed us to achieve great improvements in our building's various spaces. These include reformatting the layout and installing additional AV in our reception space. A reimagining of our workshop space which is now located on level 1. This space which has been retitled 'Downstairs at The Wheeler Centre' is larger and can house small events. Soundproofing and improving the acoustics

of office spaces allowing for private meetings and audio recordings. The Production team also helped our Resident Organisations Melbourne Writers Festival and Writers Victoria reformat their spaces to allow for better working environments.

Technical Events

A notable production highlight in March was the Rebecca F Kuang: Yellowface in-conversation event at Melbourne City Conference Centre, which was simultaneously live-streamed to a separate audience in the Wheeler Centre's Performance Space. This event utilised the greatest number of the Centre's production and Front of House staff at any one time in the last three years. This event was technically complex but proved to be a big success for The Wheeler Centre as these dual presentations enabled a large audience to engage with the event.

Technical Post-Production

The Lunch Order series saw The Wheeler Centre's Production team film and live stream educational conversations on the stage of our Performance Space, which were then broadcast to school classrooms around Australia. These conversations were both hybrid and in-person in nature. Our hybrid event technology (vMix and Zoom) along with our fully upgraded and bespoke camera system (Ronin Gimbals with Middle Things APC-R units), allowed for seamless facilitation of these constructive conversations.



Audience members during McKenzie Wark - Photography by Jackson Loria.

Watch

YouTube



7.6m

Total views since channel launch (lifetime)

+380k

New channel views in 2024

1.8m

Hours watched (lifetime)

+62K

Hours watched in 2024

Podcasts



Seven

Live channel playlists

1471

Episodes available (lifetime)

360k

Downloads (lifetime)

+69k

New downloads in 2024

Listen



+29k

Visits to the Watch, Listen, Read web pages

Read

Audience Engagement and Experience in 2024



Audience members at Rebecca Yarros. Photo by Phoebe Powell.

Enhancing Audience Experience

The 2024 calendar year was a significant one for The Wheeler Centre's marketing, engagement and customer service teams. Under the new leadership of our CEO Erin Vincent, we undertook a number of major projects with a goal to align with our new Strategic Plan: storytelling for everyone, everywhere.

With a focus on improving audience experience at The Wheeler Centre, we launched a new website in July which provided a cleaner, more user-friendly interface for event discovery and bookings. The transition to this upgraded website through our providers at Bravo includes an events-first user experience, streamlined content management and mobile-friendly design.

Early in the year, we implemented a refresh of our foyer to present a more welcoming reception space to visitors. This resulted in increased signage opportunities for promoting our events to visitors, making our pre-event experiences at The Wheeler Centre more welcoming and engaging.

We also successfully recruited regular Visitor Services Officers and formalised a Box Office presence before our events, a further improvement for our customers and audience. This, alongside the full implementation of Tessitura V16, has improved internal efficiencies and enhanced customer interactions, setting The Wheeler Centre up for long-term success.

Strengthening Engagement

March 2024 saw the official launch of our Memberships Program, offering exclusive benefits and fostering deeper engagement with our audience. With an initial goal of 100 members, we exceeded expectations, reaching 235 members by November. Our Members received exclusive ticket presales, special discounts and access to premium digital content, providing our audience with continued opportunities to engage with our content and The Wheeler Centre.

Regular audience surveys have played a crucial role in shaping our offerings. We launched a more formalised structure for audience surveys, circulating these to our ticketholders quarterly throughout 2024. These have assisted us with refining our event strategy, assessing our audience demographics and providing qualitative and quantitative data about our audience's experience.



Audience members at Stirring the Pot for Spring Fling. Photo by Tamarah Scott.

Expanding Our Reach

2024 was a landmark year for major events. The sold-out Rebecca Yarros event at Melbourne Town Hall attracted a record number of under-30 ticket buyers, broadening our audience base. Roxane Gay's in-conversation event with Jan Fran was another standout, drawing over 1,700 attendees. Spring Fling continued for its third year in 2024, delivering an opportunity for a 360-degree marketing campaign to increase The Wheeler Centre's brand reach, drive substantial social media engagement and generate ticket sales. This campaign included media partnerships with RRR and the *Guardian* as well as a significant outdoor campaign with Plakkit. We also established a spirits partnership with Melbourne Gin Company which saw pop-up bars and activations at key Spring Fling events.

In line with one of our key strategic goals to formalise our Digital Strategy, from September to November 2024, members of the marketing team undertook Creative Australia's Digital Specialist in Residence program. This program was completed successfully, and this initiative will guide the formalisation of a comprehensive digital strategy in 2025, allowing us to further expand our reach and engagement.

Driving Brand Awareness

This year presented many opportunities for increased Wheeler Centre brand awareness. Our efforts to boost brand visibility saw new initiatives such as branded digital screens in the foyer, increased building signage and distribution of event brochures at key locations. This contributed to heightened awareness and audience engagement across multiple platforms.

As we closed out 2024, we launched a selection of key 2025 events in December to mark our 15th anniversary. This also included the launch of a special sub-brand for our 15th year, setting the stage for a milestone year in 2025. The lessons learned from our major events, ticketing improvements, and digital initiatives will inform our strategic growth as we continue to foster deeper engagement with our audience for years to come.

In 2024, the City of Literature Office played its key role in connecting our City of Literature to the 53 Cities across the UNESCO Creative Cities network. We worked with 62 writers and artists, 39 from our City of Literature and 23 from 20 different sister Cities of Literature. Collaborating with Cities of Literature across Africa, Asia, Europe and America on 14 projects, we connected writers and literary workers from all over the world.

The Office delivered a range of digital programs, delegations and international collaborations with other Creative Cities. One of the key initiatives was Parallel Panels, a residency exchange program in partnership with RMIT Culture and Bucheon City of Literature, where a graphic storyteller spent two weeks in each sister city to work on personal projects and engage with local peers. Another significant project, 20-Minute Cities, collaborated with the Emerging Writers' Festival to create a video series featuring emerging writers from 7 Cities of Literature, (including Jakarta, Kozhikode and Wrocław) providing a glimpse into their creative processes and their Cities of Literature.

Additionally, we launched the Melbourne Calling program, which supported Melbourne writers by paying a fee for them to appear virtually at international events. This initiative was piloted through a virtual workshop in collaboration with Edinburgh poetry festival Push the Boat Out. To mark the 20th anniversary of the UNESCO Creative Cities of Literature network, The Roads that Lead to Edinburgh project invited poets from various Cities of Literature to contribute works inspired by the theme, which were shared during the City's anniversary celebrations.

Another successful initiative was the Virtual Writers in Residence program, which returned for its fourth year, hosting writers from cities such

as Nottingham, Durban, Dunedin, Manchester and Barcelona. These writers worked with local organisations to create workshops, original writing, panels and social media content, fostering connections within the Melbourne literary community.

The Green House project brought together nature writers from Melbourne, Heidelberg, Slemani, Exeter, Quebec City and Iowa City in an online writers' room, where they exchanged inspiration drawn from nature.

The Office also responded to various callouts from sister Cities of Literature, commissioning local writers for overseas projects. These projects included Small Delights (Leeuwarden), where local writers contributed literary texts about 'small joys' for a cultural festival and The Bremen Town Language Musicians (Bremen), where we recorded an Australian version of the Bremen Town Musicians in English.

We participated in World Youth Day Roundtable (Nottingham), where emerging writers from across the Cities of Literature network gathered virtually to celebrate International Youth Day and engage in cross-cultural dialogue. Another project, Byron 200: Reimagining the Black Friar (Nottingham), invited reinterpretations of a ghostly friar that haunted Lord Byron, with contributions from local artists.

In response to Illustrating the Wor(l)d (Exeter), a local writer created an ekphrastic poem inspired by an illustration from the World Illustration Awards. We also collaborated on Threads (Manchester), where an Australian Tapestry Workshop featured a piece exploring the theme of translation, as part of an exhibition celebrating International Mother Language Day. As part of Poetry on the Move (Heidelberg), two poets contributed poems that were shared as postcards throughout the city, centred around the theme of 'being on the road.'

Lastly, for the World Poetry Day, six poets were featured in a live virtual event, where their works were showcased to a global audience, celebrating the diversity and vibrancy of contemporary poetry.

Meet the resident organisations that call The Wheeler Centre home.

Australian Poetry exists as a national poetry body to interconnect and support a flourishing community of Australian poets, to enhance and promote their poetry, here and internationally, and to reach and engage directly with readers, lovers and potential admirers of Australian poetry, and promoters of it.

Blak & Bright is Australia's leading organisation championing First Nations literary voices. Founded in 2016 as their flagship literary festival, Blak & Bright also runs year-round events, workshops, panels and performances. These gatherings create vital spaces for Blak storytellers and conversations, showcasing writers at all stages of their careers to an expanding and increasingly diverse audience.

The **Emerging Writers' Festival (EWF)** is one of Australia's most established and well-respected literary festivals. We exist to develop, nurture and promote Australia's new writing talent, creating platforms for connecting writing communities and their audiences.

For over 30 years, **Express Media** has been developing, supporting and promoting young writers through workshops that develop skills, through opportunities for constructive feedback and publication, and through awards and programs that recognise excellence. Our flagship publication, *Voiceworks*, is made entirely by writers, editors and artists under the age of 25.

Freeplay Independent Games Festival explores the vital margins of independent, alternative, and experimental games culture. The festival champions artistic exploration and experimentation in games and play, and positions game making as arts practice.

Melbourne Writers Festival brings writers and readers together to be inspired, challenged and thrilled by an intelligent, rousing and diverse program of books and ideas. Since 1986, the organisation has entertained hundreds of thousands of readers as Australia's boldest literary festival. Based in Melbourne, a UNESCO City of Literature, we provide the inspiration and framework for vital, timely conversations.

The **PEN Melbourne Centre** is one of 147 PEN International centres worldwide whose members are united in a common concern for the art of writing and freedom of expression. As an affiliate of PEN International, PEN Melbourne brings writers together from across cultures to share experiences, explore ideas and conduct public conversations about how literature transforms, influences and fosters cross-cultural exchange.

The **Small Press Network** is a representative body for small and independent publishers in Australia. It was formed to promote independent publishing and support the principle of diversity within the publishing industry as a vital component of Australian literary culture.

Writers Victoria is a not-for-profit membership organisation that advocates for, supports and connects with writers at all stages of their development. We strive to foster a diverse and flourishing writing community across Victoria where writers are supported and valued. Through the delivery of our core programs and services, we provide the writing community with opportunities for experimentation, sharing, mentoring, discovery, and commissions.

The Centre values the opportunity to work with these organisations towards our shared goals of promoting literature and ideas and supporting writers across Australia.



'The Wheeler Centre is a beautiful place, and I was honored to be there [tonight]. But I think my favourite part was meeting the Melbourne readers. And for me, it's a huge honour and a huge privilege to talk to people about my book and meet people who want to talk to me about their own stories.'

Bonnie Garmus,
author of *Lessons in Chemistry*



Photo by Phoebe Powell.

Our Supporters

The Wheeler Centre is strengthened by its community of generous donors and partners, and we sincerely thank them for their continued support. **Their contributions allow us to connect with audiences through bold, ambitious, thought-provoking programming** and invest in the next generation of great Australian writers.

Principal Government Partner

Thank you to Creative Victoria for supporting The Wheeler Centre and for its commitment to creating a vibrant cultural sector in Victoria.

Government Partners

We also extend our thanks to the City of Melbourne for its ongoing support through the multi-year arts fund. We thank Creative Australia for creating opportunities for writers through The Next Chapter program, advancing the careers of authors who reflect the diversity of Australian perspectives and experiences, and for funding our participation in the Digital Specialist in Residence Program.

Trusts and Foundations

Thank you to the Malcolm Robertson Foundation for creating opportunities for underrepresented writers through The Next Chapter Program and for understanding the power of investing in writers at such a critical stage of their development.

In 2024, The Readings Foundation supported a place in the Hot Desk Fellowship program for an emerging Young Adult writer, in memory of Australian Young Adult author Gabrielle Williams. Thank you to everyone at Readings, particularly Mark Rubbo, for your visionary support of the Hot Desk Fellowships over so many years, and for continuing your support through the Gabrielle Williams Fellowship.

The third E. W. Cole Lecture built on the successful series to date, thanks to the generous support of the E. W. Cole Foundation. Vanessa Turnbull Roberts delivered an arresting address inspired by her book Long Yarn Short. This annual lecture series invites Australia's biggest thinkers to deliver talks that spark bold and innovative ideas.

Education Partners

Our Hot Desk Fellowships wouldn't be possible without the funding from the Arts Faculty at the University of Melbourne, along with the Readings Foundation, thank you for championing the work of emerging writers. Your contribution gave 20 writers a stipend, and the time and physical space needed to create their next major work. Since 2017, the Just Pretending theatre group has also supported one fellowship place specifically for female or non-binary participants emerging in the field of playwriting.

The University of Melbourne's Faculty of Arts also offers five Highly Commended applicants from The Next Chapter program a 12-month mentorship with acclaimed, diverse writers from the University of Melbourne's Creative Writing Department, including the opportunity to access classes and resources connected to the University's Writing and Publishing programs.

Thank you also to RMIT Culture for your contribution to the creative process, providing a two-week residency for the winner of the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards Prize for an Unpublished Manuscript. We also thank Varuna: The National Writers House for hosting The Next Chapter participants for a one-week residency.

Our Corporate Partners

To our corporate partners, we sincerely thank you for the many ways you contribute to the work that we do – our wine sponsor Montalto, Sofitel on Collins, Melbourne for the luxury accommodation for our guests and Shiff and Co for their pro bono legal support.

Our community

We also want to thank and recognise those who donated what they were able to, in what was another difficult year for so many. We want you to know that every donation plays an important part in our story and in sustaining our vibrant community.

To our highly engaged group of members – thank you for embracing this new and exciting opportunity to support our work and enjoy some of the benefits we love sharing with you.

Finally, to our loyal audience – we extend our deepest gratitude to each of you for being such an important part of our journey.

Our Donors

Patrons

Maureen Wheeler AO
Tony Wheeler AO

Game Changers

\$25,000+

George and Rosa Morstyn
Maureen Wheeler AO and Tony Wheeler AO

Conversation Starters

\$5000 - \$9999

The Hon. Justice Michelle Gordon AC and
The Hon. Kenneth Hayne AC KC
The Hudson Family
Jane Kunstler
Chaman Sidhu and Richard Taylor

Bright Sparks

\$2500 - \$4999

Jennifer Gilchrist

Enquiring Minds

\$1000 - \$2,499

Michael Cowen and Sharon Nathani
Shelley Dolan
Sue Dahn
Glenda De Marinis
Alice Hill
Michael and Radhika Santhanam-Martin
Kate Torney OAM
Rosalind Willett
Sarah Yeomans

Supporters

\$500 - \$999

Megan Davis
John Gibbins
Julie Ligeti
Elizabeth Loftus
Julie Pinkham
Victoria Ponsford
Prof Steven Williams

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to our founding patrons Tony and Maureen Wheeler for their renewed investment in literary and intellectual engagement. Last year Tony and Maureen supported our major fundraising campaign with a transformational pledge to match all donations to the Centre for the next three years, up to one million dollars. We are so grateful for their belief in books and the exchange of ideas. A very special thanks too to George and Rosa Morsytn for their support of The Next Big Thing and Colin Batrouney for his generous bequest.

The enduring support of our Conversation Starters, Bright Sparks and Enquiring Minds allows us to share the benefits of public programming inspired by books, writing and ideas has also allowed us to take our conversations to more communities and to reach new audiences.



A Message from **People and Nominations Committee Chair**



In 2024 we saw the Centre launch its **four-year strategy: Storytelling and Ideas for Everyone, Everywhere**. People are at the heart of the Centre delivering on that strategy: our terrific team, the talented writers we work with, the literary community, our valued partners and of course readers and audiences.

The People and Nominations Committee evolved during the year to include a focus on the Board's composition and performance, so that the Board is best placed to support the strategic ambitions of the Centre. The Committee had a key focus during the year of supporting the Board's succession planning, recruiting Kristin Badger as an incoming Director. We deeply appreciate the contributions of outgoing directors Julie Ligeti and John Gibbons and thank them for their years of service.

People-related focus areas of the Committee included supporting management on organisational structure, remuneration strategy and evolving key policy areas to support our people. Staff were also supported through general skills development and in areas specific to our mission, such as programming, audience data and ticketing.

Erin Vincent has noted some key team member changes in her message earlier in this report. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank in particular the contributions of Joe Toohey as Chief Operating Officer in continuously evolving operations and policy to support staff and of Michelle Tyson Clark as Company Secretary supporting governance.

I'd also like to thank fellow Committee members Kate Torney and Julie Pinkham for their contributions throughout the year.

The Centre is a hub that shares its building with other key Victorian literary organisations, and the management team has worked collaboratively with those organisations in areas such as making a joint submission inputting to Victoria's next Creative State strategy.

The impact of the Centre is supported by and amplified through many diverse partners and new alliances in suburban communities and throughout regional Victoria. In 2024 we strengthened the accessibility of our programming regionally, digitally and to diverse audiences by partnering with other organisations on more than half the Centre's events.

We thank our staff, artists, partners, literary organisations, our generous donors, and supporters, as well as Creative Victoria and City of Melbourne. Together, we can deliver on our vision to be Victoria's globally renowned home for storytelling and ideas.

Chaman Sidhu
Chair of the People and Nominations Committee,
The Wheeler Centre

Meet the Team

Staff

Erin Vincent
CEO

Simon Cotter
Head of Production

Jamila Djafar Khodja
Senior Programming Manager

Caraline Douglas
Head of Marketing and Engagement

Rick Maxwell Douglas
Technical Supervisor

Bec Kavanagh
Youth Programming Manager (to July)

Diem Nguyen
Program Coordinator

Xanthea O'Connor
Program and Special Projects Producer

Courtney Percy
Senior Manager, Customer Experience and Ticketing

Autumn Royal
Venue and Office Coordinator (to June)

Gab Ryan
Producer (August to October)

Sam Ryan
Accounts

David Ryding
Director, City of Literature Office

Daniel Scaffidi
Marketing and Communications Coordinator

Tamarah Scott
Senior Producer, Digital Content (from August)

Abhishek Singh
Front of House Manager

Gene Smith
Head of Programming (from November)

Veronica Sullivan
Head of Programming (to August)

Lauren Taylor
Senior Program and Podcast Producer

Sarah Thompson
Development Consultant (from July)

Kate Thorburn
Marketing and Communications Manager (to January)

Joe Toohey
Chief Operating Officer

Michelle Tyson Clark
Company Secretary

Panda Wong
Communications Officer, City of Literature Office

Natalie Williams
Digital and Marketing Coordinator (to July)

Indi Wild
Executive & Reception Coordinator

Common State
Media and Publicity

Board

Kate Torney OAM - Chair
Julie Ligeti (to December)

Marcus Fazio
John Gibbins (to December)

Julie Pinkham
Jamila Rizvi

Jock Serong
Chaman Sidhu

Front and Back of house

Aiesha Amaya

Ashley Stirling

Callum McKinnon

Charlotte Kerekes

Edvard Christie

Elizabeth

Robinson-Griffith

Emily Wildfyre
Evangeline Mullins
Felix Tobin

Gabrielle Downes
Greta Ryan
Hannah Wu

Indigo Tait-Atkin
Inez Trambas
Jaris McCall

Jay Crossman
Jenny Cheng
Franklyn Hudson

Joel Keith
Yoni Shemesh
Jose Eveline

Joshua Trajkovski
Luke Meehan
Nevo Zisin

Oscar Clark
Ruby Foster-Drummond
Thanh-Vu Nguyen

Sumaiya Hoque
William Da Luz

Interns

Melanie Bakewell
Podcast Intern (August to October)

Hemali Sawant
Marketing Intern (July to November)

A Message from the Audit and Risk Committee Chair



The new CEO, Erin Vincent was appointed in August 2023. The Board asked Erin to review our financial performance, with a focus on reducing operating costs, **revitalising events and renewing the fundraising program**. A cost review was conducted with reductions aimed at improvements in program delivery and operational efficiency.

Operating activities

Whilst our revenue remained static, our overall costs reduced by \$177,000.

This represents significant steps towards sustainability and together with additional donations in 2025 will enable retained earnings to be brought back to surplus.

With a renewed focus on quality rather than the quantity of our events program, event and resources income also increased by \$153,000.

A development consultant was also engaged to support the renewal of the fundraising program.

This included focussed fundraising events which were held during the year to enhance the philanthropy program.

Sponsorship and donations increased by \$188,000.

The Planet Wheeler Foundation has also pledged an additional donation of \$1 million in matched funding over 2025 to 2027. Recurrent annual

funding from the Victorian Government was \$1.54 million in 2024, the same amount as 2023 and representing the bulk of government support for the period. Total non-recurrent government funding in 2024 (excluding funding for auspice activities) fell to \$354,049 from \$756,699 in 2023, consistent with the conclusion of major grant projects in 2023.

Non-operating activities venue: The Wheeler Endowment Fund

The Wheeler Endowment Fund, funded by a gift from the Planet Wheeler Foundation, has been placed into a separate reserve. The endowment is managed by an independent investment fund manager.

The Deed governing this gift provides that the income from the Fund can only be used for the development and provision of high-quality, additional programming.

At 31 December 2024, the balance of funds held in the Wheeler Endowment Fund was \$11.76 million. Withdrawals in 2024 totaled \$300,000 for additional events, including the 2024 Spring Fling series delivery.

City of Literature Office

The Wheeler Centre has had a long-standing memorandum of understanding with Creative Victoria and Melbourne City Council to support the City of Literature Office (the Office) and the position of the Office Director, which was extended again in 2022, 2023 and 2024. The memorandum

of understanding stipulates Creative Victoria and Melbourne City Council have agreed to provide financial support for the operation of the Office and the employment of the Director with The Wheeler Centre providing in-kind assistance to support the Office. All the income and expenditure of the Office is administered through The Wheeler Centre.

Grants received from Creative Victoria and Melbourne City Council are first recognised in the statement of financial position as a liability until the funds are used for the operation of the Office, at which point The Wheeler Centre's performance obligation is fulfilled.

Blak & Bright First Nations Literary Festival

Blak & Bright is a First Nations literary festival based in Melbourne. It is a multi-day festival celebrating the diverse expressions of First Nations writers.

In September 2021, The Wheeler Centre entered an auspice agreement with Blak & Bright Festival. Grant and donations received for Blak & Bright festival are first recognised in the statement of financial position as a liability until the funds are used for the operation of Blak & Bright Festival. The Wheeler Centre provided both in-kind support and financial support to Blak & Bright Festival throughout 2024. This arrangement will conclude in 2025, as Blak & Bright moves to become an independent organisation.

Financial results

Operations

The Centre's net operating result was a deficit of \$301,051 in 2024 (2023: deficit of \$489,640). Net operating revenue does not include transfers made from the Wheeler Endowment Fund for operating activities, which totaled \$300,000 in 2024.

The net income from investments was \$1,086,184. The net result from all transactions after depreciation and amortisation of \$131,586 was a surplus of \$653,547 (2023: \$509,203).

Balance sheet

Net assets of The Wheeler Centre amount to \$11.70m (2023: \$11.05m) at the end of 2024.

The Wheeler Endowment amounted to \$11.76m, up from \$11.08m in 2023.

Current assets increased 14% to \$1.05m and total liabilities increased by 10% to \$1.21 million. Total grants and income in advance/unearned income on 31 December 2024 comprised the bulk of the liabilities, at \$772,937.

Cash as of 31 December 2024 was \$906,983. Of this, \$241,667 comprises restricted funds for City of Literature office and Blak & Bright Festival programs.

John Gibbins

Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee
The Wheeler Centre



Tony Armstrong entertains children during George The Wizard event. Photo by Tamarah Scott.

Financial Overview 2024

Financial Performance	2024 (\$)	2023 (\$)
NET INCOME FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
OPERATING REVENUE		
Creative Victoria - Multi-Year Organisation Grant	1,541,600	1,541,600
Creative Victoria - Premier's Literary Award Grant	299,000	265,000
Creative Victoria - Regional Tour Grant	-	34,450
Creative Victoria - Melbourne City Revitalisation Fund	-	392,116
City of Melbourne- Multi-Year Organisation Grant	55,049	52,679
Creative Australia	74,722	12,454
Event & Resources Income	872,530	719,741
Sponsorship & Donations	396,820	208,928
Reimbursements & recoveries	38	1,141
Total operating revenue	3,239,759	3,228,109
OPERATING EXPENSES		
Employee Benefits Expense	(1,953,371)	(1,912,118)
Prize Money	(384,500)	(303,750)
Public program	(542,767)	(781,537)
Marketing and Promotions	(215,218)	(270,129)
Building Operations	(305,572)	(316,262)
Administration	(139,382)	(133,955)
Total operating expenses	(3,540,810)	(3,717,751)
Net Income from Operating Activities	(301,051)	(489,640)
NET INCOME FROM NON-OPERATING ACTIVITIES		
Interest Received in the Bank	17,126	21,529
Philanthropic Funds Flow	769,058	811,757
The Wheeler Endowment Investment Portfolio Movement (Restricted)		
Distribution to Operating Activities	300,000	270,000
Philanthropic Funds Flow	1,069,058	1,081,757
Net Income from Non-Operating Activities	1,086,184	1,103,286

NET RESULT FROM AUSPICE PROJECT		
City of Literature Office		
Government Grants - City of Literature Office	285,221	321,610
Project expenditure - City of Literature Office	(285,221)	(321,610)
Blak & Bright Festival		
Government Grants- Blak & Bright Festival	308,911	119,818
Other income - Blak & Bright Festival	34,384	48,537
Project expenditure - Blak & Bright Festival	(343,295)	(168,355)
Net result from Auspice Project	0	0
Net result from transactions before depreciation	785,132	613,646
Depreciation and amortisation	(131,586)	(104,443)
Net result from transactions after depreciation	653,547	509,203
COMPREHENSIVE RESULT	653,547	509,203

Financial Performance	2024 (\$)	2023 (\$)
ASSETS		
Total current assets	1,054,059	920,676
Total non-current assets	11,854,984	11,225,063
Total assets	12,909,043	12,145,739
LIABILITIES		
Total current liabilities	1,182,682	1,074,185
Total non-current liabilities	22,840	21,580
Total liabilities	1,205,522	1,095,765
Net assets	11,703,521	11,049,974
TOTAL EQUITY	11,703,521	11,049,974



Aurelia St Clair during the live podcast recording of Being Biracial. Photo by The Round.



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