



The Wheeler Centre  
Books Writing Ideas



# Annual Report 2023

## **Acknowledgment of Country**

The Wheeler Centre acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which the Centre stands.

We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present, and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture.

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.

As an organisation committed to promoting diverse perspectives and cultural exchange, The Wheeler Centre recognises the ongoing impact of colonisation and the importance of reconciliation and respect for all First Nations peoples.

We are grateful for the opportunity to live, work and create on this land and we are committed to learning, listening and working towards a future of shared understanding and meaningful collaboration.

# Contents

<b>Who We Are</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>A Message from Our Chair</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>A Message from Our CEO</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2023 in Review</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Events and Experiences</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Production Highlights</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Supporting Storytellers</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Our Audience</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Our Team</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Our Resident Organisations</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Our Supporters</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Our Donors</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Our Partners</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Financial Overview</b>	<b>30</b>



# Who We Are

**The Wheeler Centre is Melbourne’s home for readers and writers. We connect audiences with storytellers and thinkers from around Australia and the world through live and digital events.**

We are a non-profit organisation dedicated to celebrating and supporting writing and ideas from voices from Australia and around the world.

Our community is made up of writers, audiences and the resident literary organisations that live within our building in Melbourne’s bustling CBD.

Through an extensive range of conversations, debates, readings, performances and discussions, alongside career growth opportunities for writers, the Centre explores ideas of the moment, highlights literary excellence and showcases emerging and established writers.

The Wheeler Centre is the centrepiece of Melbourne’s status as a UNESCO City of Literature.

Emma Donovan wows audiences during Spring Fling Opening Night. Photo: TJ Garvie.





# A Message from Our Chair, Kate Torney

**It has been a privilege to work with the enormously talented Wheeler Centre team alongside our exceptional board throughout 2023, which has been an ambitious, exciting and highly successful year for the organisation.**

This year, our programming connected with audiences across Melbourne and Victoria through several major event series, including M/Other, World of Words, and the second iteration of Spring Fling: A short series of big ideas. We also took The Wheeler Centre to the regions, holding 11 events for readers of all ages across regional Victorian centres, including Ballarat, Kyneton and Wodonga.

With the generous support of Creative Victoria, City of Melbourne, our corporate partners, our donors and our audiences, the year has been a highly successful one for the Centre, and we are in a strong position to continue inspiring and engaging people in 2024 and beyond.

We were thrilled to welcome Erin Vincent this year as our new CEO. It has been a delight working with Erin, who brings enthusiasm, care and a strategic mindset to all that she does. I thank our former CEO, Caro Llewellyn, for her enormous contribution, and for the vision, creativity and commitment she consistently brought to the Centre during her three-year tenure.

I also thank each of our dedicated Board members, particularly outgoing Board members Corrie Perkin and Adrian Sculthorpe, for their invaluable contribution over the years.

Thanks also to The Wheeler Centre's resident organisations, which together form this hub and home – this Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas.

And finally I extend my heartfelt thanks to The Wheeler Centre team, for their enthusiasm and extraordinary work.

**Kate Torney OAM**

Chair, The Wheeler Centre





# A Message from Our CEO, Erin Vincent

## **They came. They watched. They connected through conversation.**

2023 will be remembered as the year audiences at The Wheeler Centre returned to a pre-pandemic normal. More than 16,000+ people attended 122 events and thousands more engaged with our conversations online.

It was an honour to join The Wheeler Centre as CEO in August, and I would like to thank my predecessor Caro Llewellyn for her leadership in the role, particularly throughout the Centre's Covid recovery.

I am fortunate to be working with an inspiring, talented team and supported by a passionate and dedicated Board, led by Chair Kate Torney.

The work we do celebrates Victoria's love of storytelling and debate and elevates Melbourne's status as Australia's original UNESCO City of Literature. We support writers at every stage of their careers and support the work of the literary organisations that share our building.

This year we were fortunate to welcome Caraline Douglas, Daniel Scaffidi, Indi Wild and Autumn Royal to our team. I would also like to thank those who departed The Wheeler Centre – Daniel Coghlan, Maddy Macquine, Maddie Pawle, Nadiah Abdulrahim, Romy Ladowsky and Selina Moir-Wilson. I thank each of them for the mark they have left on The Wheeler Centre.

Thank you to our patrons Maureen and Tony Wheeler, whose vision allowed this Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas to become the one-of-a-kind cultural institution it is today.

I would also like to thank Creative Victoria and the City of Melbourne for helping arts organisations like ours rejuvenate through the Melbourne City Revitalisation Fund. This funding enabled a second successful Spring Fling series, where audiences were captivated by conversations, performances and storytelling from home-grown and international talent including Jelena Dokic, Trent Dalton, Melissa Lucashenko, Hannah Diviney, Leigh Sales, Robyn Davidson and Caroline O'Donoghue.

As a non-profit organisation, The Wheeler Centre relies on the support of its partners and supporters. We thank all our wonderful cultural partners; our accommodation partner The Sofitel; our wine sponsor Montalto; and major event and venue partners RMIT Culture and The Edge at Fed Square.

As we enter 2024, we are reimagining The Wheeler Centre's future with a new strategy to take us through to 2028, and we look forward to sharing those plans with you.

**Erin Vincent**  
CEO, The Wheeler Centre

# 2023 in Review



**122**  
Total events

**73**

Venue hires

**59**

First Nations artists programmed



**473**

Writers and artists programmed



**16,000+**

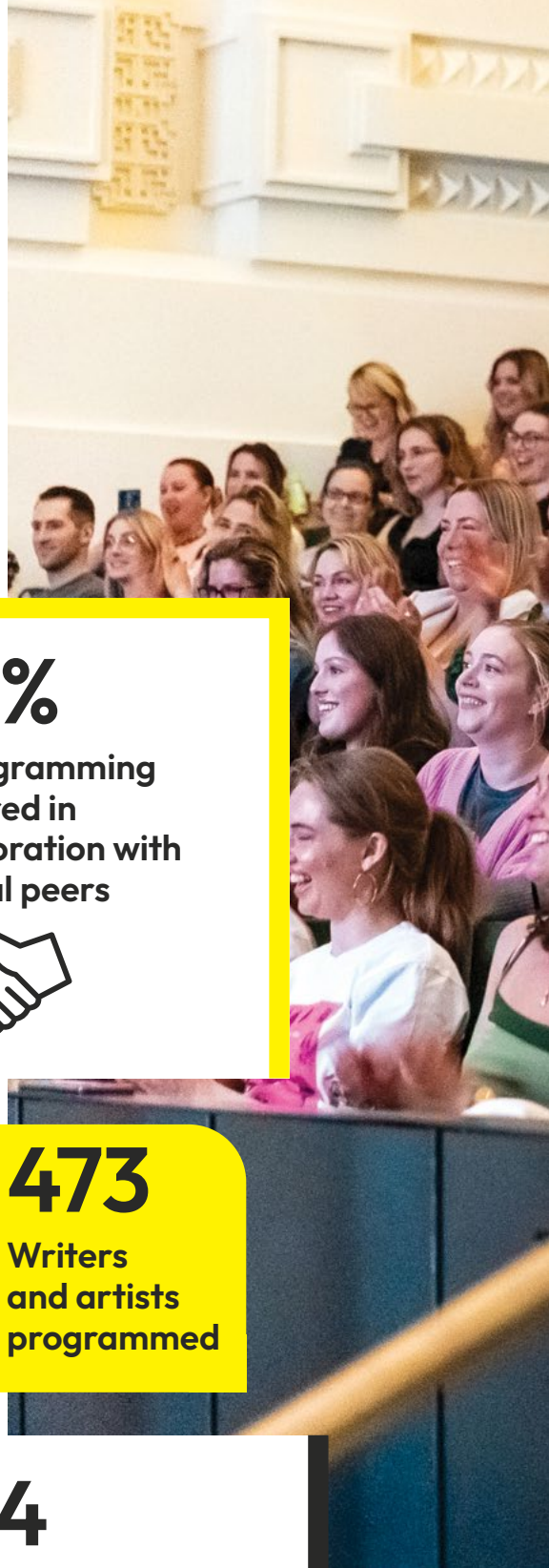
Tickets booked

**3834**

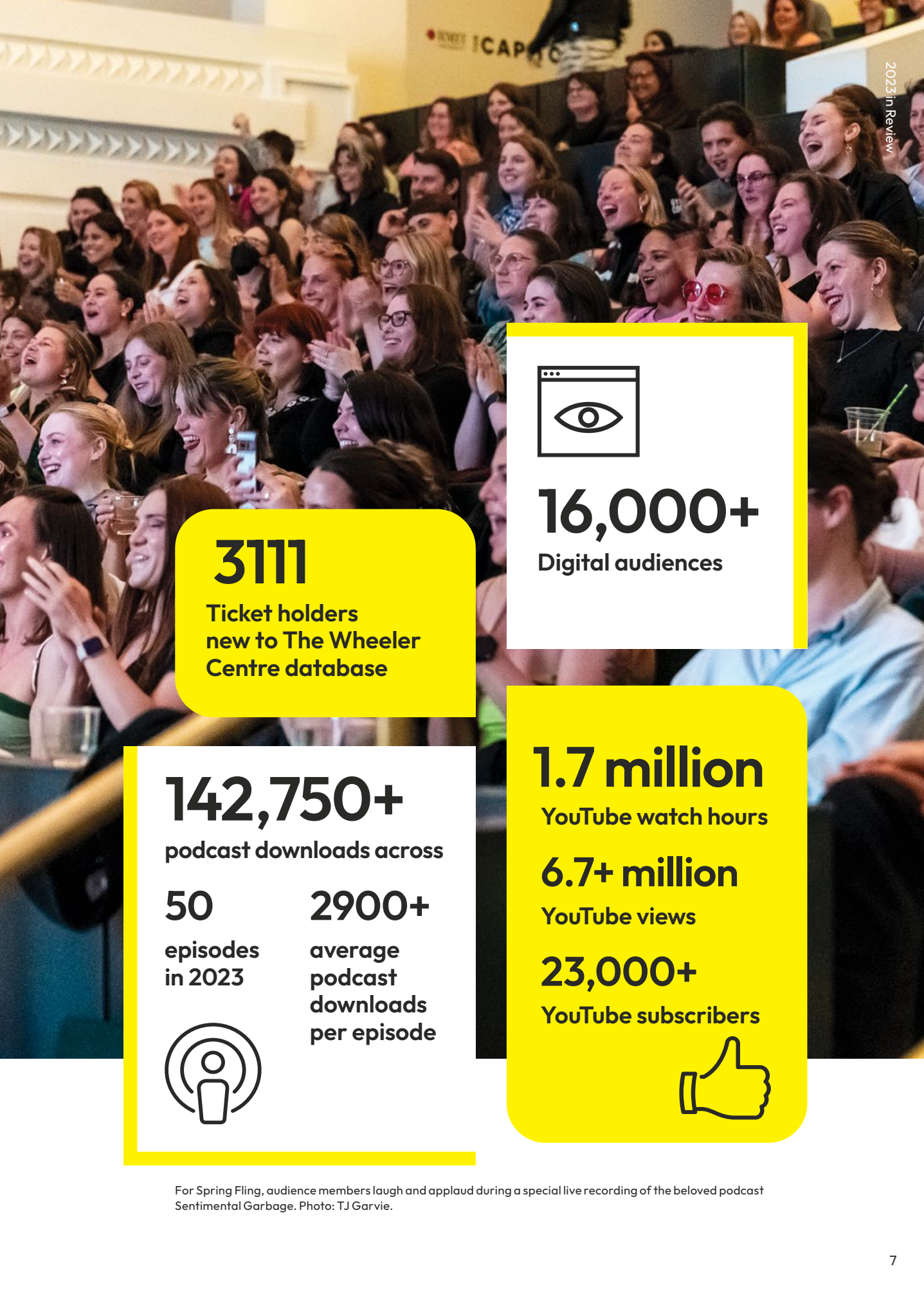
Pay What You Wish or Free tickets booked

**60%**

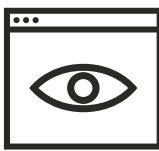
of programming delivered in collaboration with cultural peers









**3111**  
 Ticket holders  
 new to The Wheeler  
 Centre database

  
**16,000+**  
 Digital audiences

**142,750+**  
 podcast downloads across  
**50** episodes in 2023  
**2900+** average  
 podcast  
 downloads  
 per episode



**1.7 million**  
 YouTube watch hours  
**6.7+ million**  
 YouTube views  
**23,000+**  
 YouTube subscribers



For Spring Fling, audience members laugh and applaud during a special live recording of the beloved podcast Sentimental Garbage. Photo: TJ Garvie.

# Events and Experiences

**The Wheeler Centre’s 2023 program offered an ambitious, energetic and forward-looking array of conversations about books, writing and ideas. We attracted live audiences of 16,000+ people in Melbourne and around Victoria, with an additional 16,000+ tuning in online for live-streamed and recorded events. Across 122 events we featured 473 writers and artists. Approximately 60% of our program was delivered in partnership with other cultural organisations, festivals and community partners.**

## Spring Fling

Spring Fling: A short series of big ideas returned in 2023, and this year we went Above and Beyond as we celebrated the big ideas and the small moments that make us human.

The 2023 Spring Fling series ran for 12 days from 2 to 14 October and featured 24 events held across 7 venues and spanning



conversations, performances, galas, salons – and even a fancy-dress parade. Over 4000 audience members attended 2023 Spring Fling events that took us from deep sea to deep space; from the act of creative witnessing to torching colonial myths; from the craft of journalism to the limits of popular culture.

Over 60 writers, speakers, thinkers and performers joined us to celebrate and interrogate big ideas, including international guests Hernan Diaz, Caroline O’Donoghue, Rebecca Makkai, Ed Yong and Lonnie Holley; and local luminaries Trent Dalton, Thomas Mayo, Leigh Sales, Melissa Lucashenko, Jelena Dokic, Robyn Davidson, Santilla Chingaipe, and Andrew Quilty.

Three guest curators were invited to bring their expertise and passion to enrich the Spring Fling program. They were:

- Performance artist Frankie Van Kan – Stripped Queer,
- Singer-songwriter Jen Cloher – Everybody’s Trying to Find Their Way Home,
- Space archaeologist Dr Alice Gorman – Infinity and Beyond: Humanity and Space.

The Spring Fling events program was complimented by a major collaboration with the Metro Tunnel Creative Program, which commissioned original written pieces by six beloved Victorian writers – Claire G. Coleman, Jennifer Down, Carly Findlay, Alice Pung, Bruce Pascoe and Nevo Zisin – each of whom reflected on the series theme Above and Beyond. Visual artist ENOKi created a series of large-scale, visually arresting illustrations in response to the written pieces. This collaborative project was available to view in person at City Square on Swanston Street throughout Spring 2023.

Trent Dalton celebrates the release of his much-anticipated third novel, *Lola in the Mirror*. Photo: TJ Garvie.

## World of Words

From 17 May to 16 June, The Wheeler Centre presented World of Words: An International Writers Series. From South Korea to Mozambique, the UK to Vietnam, India to the USA – World of Words brought together some of the world's most exciting writers and thinkers as they shared insights, ideas and inspiration from their internationally acclaimed careers.

The series featured **13 events** with acclaimed writers including Bora Chung, Daniel M. Lavery, Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai, Jenny Odell, Asma Khan, William Sitwell, Anthony Joseph, and two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner Colson Whitehead. Additional events featured very special guests, humanitarian and political activist Dame Graça Machel, and Palestinian academic Bassam Aramin and Israeli graphic designer Rami Elhanan.

World of Words was supported by the Melbourne City Revitalisation Fund, a Creative Victoria and City of Melbourne joint initiative.

## M/Other

Over **14** events running from 3 to 5 March, M/Other was a weekend of fearless conversation about the ways 'motherhood' is experienced, portrayed and labelled by those who mother, have been mothered, wish they were mothers, do not identify as mothers, cannot or do not want to mother, and by society at-large.

Featuring a line-up of international and Australian writers, thinkers and creators, M/Other acted as a conversation starter for complex topics such as the birthing body, maternal figures, the perinatal health system, and gendered roles in parenting. By bringing these often overlooked or taboo topics into the public sphere, the series sought to challenge, offer comfort, and value the myriad experiences of people, without presuming any easy answers. M/Other centred audacious and frank discussion on the immense joy, exhaustion, creativity, fury, and strength that mothers derive from their roles, and interrogated the word 'mother' itself.

The series was programmed by The Wheeler Centre's Programming Manager Jamila Djafar Khodja and Youth Programming

Manager Bec Kavanagh, and featured speakers including Rosie Batty, Jacinta Parsons, Clementine Ford, Jan Fran, Antoinette Lattouf and Gina Rushton, as well as international guests Rachel Yoder, Esther Freud and Pragya Agarwal.



In March of last year, The Wheeler Centre took on a new theme – motherhood. For three days, we welcomed hundreds of new audience members into our performance space for frank, unflinching and beautiful conversations about those who mother, those who choose not to or cannot mother, and everyone in between. It was incredible to see our space transformed to welcome children and babies, and audience members feeling so comfortable. A standout event was the Life Drawing class, during which participants explored the notion of the post-birth body, guided by Frankie van Kan. M/OTHER was an incredible culmination of energy, warmth and critical thinking about a role that society often underestimates.

**Jamila Djafar Khodja,**  
Programming Manager




I love seeing The Wheeler Centre transform to welcome communities outside of the regular literary crowd. At M/Other, we saw babies and toddlers roaming the free little library while their mothers and carers found a community who shared their experiences. At Deep Sea Divas during Spring Fling, it was a bubble-filled underwater disco fancy dress parade extravaganza for kids. For *Lost in Space: A Live Choose Your Own Adventure* it was teens to the front for a low-tech sci-fi spectacular. *Up Late: Where Has All The Money Gone?* transported us to an intellectual speakeasy cabaret. These kinds of community-driven transformations showcase the best of what The Wheeler Centre offers and speak to the breadth of ages and audiences who find community with us.

**Bec Kavanagh,**  
Youth Programming Manager



Performance artist DANDROGYNY shares a reading of beloved picture book *The Underwater Fancy-Dress Parade* at Deep Sea Divas during Spring Fling. Photo: Ernesto Arriagada.





As part of our Spring Fling series, historian and documentary-maker Santilla Chingaïpe delivered the second annual E.W. Cole Lecture on the topic 'Who Gets to Write History?'. In a wide-ranging and thoughtful lecture, Chingaïpe drew on her work exploring settler colonialism, slavery, and post-colonial migration in Australia to scrutinise the process of writing history, questioning what is considered historical truth and whose histories may be erased as a result. It was a thought-provoking, deeply informed yet always engaging and accessible address – all qualities that are embedded in Chingaïpe's work and research, and that typify the values of the E.W. Cole Lecture series.

**Veronica Sullivan,  
Head of Programming**



Poet, novelist, academic, musician and winner of this year's TS Eliot Prize for Poetry, Anthony Joseph. Photo: TJ Garvie.

## International Guests

Throughout the year, The Wheeler Centre was privileged to host many incredible international guests.

These included acclaimed writers and storytellers such as Women's Prize-winning British novelist and memoirist Bernardine Evaristo; beloved author of over one hundred books Alexander McCall Smith; British science journalist and author of *The Patriarchs: How Men Came to Rule* Angela Saini; translator and author of *Porn: An Oral History* Polly Barton; *Rolling Stone* climate journalist Jeff Goodell; American author Geoff Dyer; humorist and memoirist Sloane Crosley; Kurdish-Iranian writer and journalist Behrouz Boochani; and a special International Women's Day event with Pakistani author Fatima Bhutto.

Beyond the literary sphere, we also hosted events with a wide range of performers, thinkers and public figures, including Iranian-American actor, women's and girls' rights activist and recipient of the 2023 Sydney Peace Prize Nazanin Boniadi; British comedian Mark Watson; and pop auteur Caroline Polachek.

## Australian Writing Thrives

The Wheeler Centre is dedicated to supporting the local literary sector, and the writers, booksellers, publishers, critics and readers who ensure its continued success. In 2023, we worked with **14** different bookstores across Melbourne and Victoria as official event booksellers. In total, **30** publishers were represented across the Centre's programmed authors. We hosted the 2023 Victorian Poetry Month Gala, as well as the announcement of the 2023 Stella Prize shortlist.

We continued our partnership with the Melbourne City Reads initiative to bring readers together and support Melbourne's incredible literary culture. In 2023, The Wheeler Centre hosted six Melbourne City Reads events, featuring André Dao, Mark Brandi, Dennis Glover, Jane Harrison and Eleanor Elliott Thomas in conversation about their new books, as well as a celebration of legendary music producer Tony Cohen's life and posthumous memoir.

We were honoured to host Booker Prize-winning Australian author Richard Flanagan's major Melbourne event for the release of his new novel, *Question 7*.



I have the privilege of programming and hosting the Next Big Thing series at The Moat. It has been such a pleasure meeting and hearing from so many first-time authors. I also manage the Hot Desk Fellowships program and I love having the opportunity to feature the fellows in this reading series. It is a highlight for me to hear what the fellows have worked on after observing them tinkering away at their manuscripts during their ten-week stints in the building. I am always blown away by the calibre of talent of the writers who come through this program. It makes me proud to be a small part of their writing journeys and I love being able to close out the end of their fellowship with such a celebratory event.

**Diem Nguyen,**  
Program Coordinator

## Big Ideas

The Wheeler Centre's ideas-focused programming drew strong engagement from audiences in 2023. The popular and long-running Fifth Estate series, hosted by Sally Warhaft, featured topical events including Louisa Lim on China's cultural influence, Craig Foster on the republic question, Alan Finkel on Australia's pathway to clean energy, and Nick McKenzie and Chris Masters on the case of Ben Roberts-Smith.

Mind Over Machine: AI, Creativity, Humanities, and the Arts brought together AI experts, academics, and creatives – including Chief Scientist of UNSW, AI Professor Toby Walsh and founder and chair of Digital Rights Watch Lizzie O'Shea – to explore the impact of artificial intelligence on the arts and humanities, in partnership with Humanities 21.

## Regional Highlights

The Wheeler Centre's regional touring program saw us partner with organisations across Victoria to present a dynamic and diverse program of 11 events with prominent writers, thinkers and leaders. Partners included Warrnambool City Council, Ballarat Mechanics' Institute, Macedon Ranges Shire Council, Castlemaine State Festival, and The Cube Wodonga.

Developed in consultation with cultural and venue partners, our regional program strengthens reciprocal collaborations across Victoria to meet the unique needs and resources of each organisation's audiences and communities. Key events included:

- Author and campaigner Thomas Mayo in conversation at Castlemaine Goods Shed about the Voice to Parliament ahead of the referendum
- Australian Children's Laureate Gabrielle Wang's series of storytelling and illustration workshops at Warrnambool Library
- Andrew McDonald and Ben Wood, creators of the hugely popular *Real Pigeons* series, delighted young fans in Kyneton and Wodonga.

Our regular Books and Ideas at Montalto series entered its tenth year, as Mornington Peninsula audiences enjoyed lunch, great wine and fascinating conversations with guests Leigh Sales, Pip Williams, Kate Legge, and international speakers Geoff Dyer and Asma Khan.



Craig Foster, chair of the Australian Republic Movement, discusses Australia's future with the monarchy. Photo: The Wheeler Centre.



In April 2023, it was wonderful to have Australian Children's Laureate, Gabrielle Wang, present two interactive workshops for Grade 5 and 6 aged children in partnership with Warrnambool Library. This was our very first time working with the venue and they were absolutely fabulous.

Gabi led participants through an engaging dragon drawing experience, where they learned how to create their own magical creatures and bring them to life on the page. During the workshops, Gabi also shared her creative inspiration, and spoke about her journey to becoming an author and her experiences growing up with Chinese heritage in Australia.

**Lauren Taylor, Senior Program and Podcast Producer**



Relationships between The Next Chapter alumni and The Wheeler Centre often continue beyond their year-long mentorship and it is always a thrill to have them featured in our program in successive years. This year, it was wonderful to watch 2019 Next Chapter participant Dan Hogan share the stage with writers, including Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Hernan Diaz at the Spring Fling event *Up Late: Where Has All the Money Gone?* Hasib Hourani was selected for The Next Chapter program in 2020, and will soon have his debut poetry collection published through Giramondo. He spoke powerfully in an opening address at André Dao's State of the (Writing) Nation oration in November. Quite a few more alumni graced our stages this year, including Giselle Au-Nhien Nguyen interviewing Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai and Evelyn Araluen interviewing Melissa Lucashenko – both writers participated in the inaugural Next Chapter program and have become impressive, influential voices within the literary and cultural landscape.

**Xanthea O'Connor, Program and Special Projects Producer**

Award-winning author Melissa Lucashenko discusses her monumental new novel, *Edenglassie* with poet and author Evelyn Araluen at Spring Fling.



## Youth Programming

Our Youth Programming encompassed **25** events and attracted audiences of **1770** children, teenagers and families, with an additional online audience of **1446** viewing digital events. Highlights included:

- In 2023 we launched *Telling Tales*, the perfect series for young adult bookworms and genre enthusiasts alike. Each of these storytelling evenings was inspired by a different genre, bringing favourite YA superstars together with extraordinary emerging teen writers to send audiences to worlds far and near. Themes included *Worlds Away*, *Reality Bites*, and *Sports Shorts*.
- A lively, interactive *Compost Kids* school holiday workshop taught kids the how-and-why of composting and empowered them to positively impact the environment through creative and playful activities.
- *Real Pigeons Live Mystery: When Doves Crime* invited junior crime fighters to spread their wings and join the *Real Pigeons* creators as they tackled a brand-new live mystery. Events were held regionally (see *Regional Highlights*) and in Melbourne.
- Our annual end-of-year *Teen Gala* invited the best and brightest young storytellers, poets, performers, musicians and comedians to share their work on The Wheeler Centre stage.

## First Nations Focus

The Wheeler Centre prioritises First Nations storytelling and is committed to exploring subjects relevant to First Nations people's experiences. In 2023, **59** First Nations artists appeared in our program and a wide range of events had a particular focus on First Nations subjects, including:

- *Writing Blak Legacies: A First Nations Literature Gala* – Held during NAIDOC Week, this special event celebrated the richness and cultural significance of First Nations writing and marked the release of the University of Queensland Press's *First Nations Classics* series. It featured speakers Tony Birch, Evelyn Araluen, Larissa Behrendt, Ellen van Neerven, Alison Whittaker, Jeanine Leane, Archie Weller, Kev Carmody and Tara June Winch alongside series editor Yasmin Smith and series designer Jenna Lee, with a special musical performance by Nardi Simpson and *Yarn Bomb* by Zerene Jaadwa. Presented in partnership with *Blak & Bright First Nations Literary Festival* and supported by RMIT Culture.
- *Justice, Elders and Culture in the Koori Court* – This panel discussion featured experts exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to justice and the law and the Koori Court, honouring the NAIDOC Week theme 'For Our Elders'. Presented in partnership with *Liberty Victoria*, supported by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.
- *Chelsea Watego: Can We Decolonise Health and Community Care?* – In this insightful and provocative lecture, Professor Chelsea Watego explored one of the nation's most pressing topics: Can we decolonise health and community care? Presented in partnership with Faculty of Arts, Monash University.
- *Everything You Need to Know About The Voice* – Professor Megan Davis and Professor George Williams AO are two of Australia's leading legal experts on the constitutional recognition process. They joined host Esther Anatolitis to discuss their book *Everything You Need to Know About the Voice*, charting the journey of this nation-building reform from the earliest stages of Indigenous advocacy, and examining the tangible benefits the Voice offers to all Australians.

Illustrator of the bestselling *Real Pigeons* series, Ben Wood, brought the pigeon crime-buster to life. Photo: Ernesto Arrigada.

## Major Program Partners



## Regional Partners



## Official Booksellers



## Artist Thank Yous

In 2023, over **400** speakers appeared onstage at Wheeler Centre events held in Melbourne, in regional Victoria, around Australia and online. Across panels, talks, readings, performances and workshops, we heard from Australian and international writers, thinkers, poets, comedians, musicians, and podcasters as they shared stories, ideas and insights. The Wheeler Centre is deeply grateful for the creativity, vision and generosity of all our brilliant 2023 artists.

Allara / Corbin Afanashev / Pragma Agarwal / Shireen Ahmed / Manisha Amin / Esther Anatolitis / Susie Anderson / Rachel Ang / Maria Angelico / Manisha Anjali / Evelyn Araluen / Bassam Amin / Caroline Arnoul / David Astle / Petah Atkinson / Alice Atkinson / Shokoofeh Azar / Bebe Backhouse / Sarah Bailey / Emilie Zoey Baker / Renay Barker-Mulholland / Polly Barton / Sienna Barton / Juliet Beattie / Sophie Beer / Larissa Behrendt / Maxine Beneba Clarke / Namila Benson / Prue Bentley / Judith Beveridge / Fatima Bhutto / Tony Birch / Sophie Black / Guy Blackman / Janty Blair / Mia Boe / Olga Boichak / Nazanin Boniadi / Behrouz Boochani / Clare Bowditch / Kate Box / Dan Box / Scout Boxall / Peter Boyle / Mark Brandi / Phoebe Briggs / Rachael Brown / Linda Bull / J.R. Burgmann / Julia Busuttil Nishimura / Tim Byrne / Leticia Cáceres / Sophia Cai / Kev Carmody / Bonny Cassidy / Simona Castricum / Emma Checker / Wesley Chen / Melanie Cheng / Santilla Chingaipe / Keshe Chow / Bora Chung / Paige Clark / Jen Cloher / Elias Clure / Jenna Cohen / Alexandra Collier / Zoe Coombs Marr / Annabel Crabb / Melissa Cranenburg / Fiona Crawford / Sloane Crosley / Jaclyn Crupi / Amy Crutchfield / Grace Cummings / Sophie Cunningham / DANDROGYNY / Paul Dalgarno / Trent Dalton / Bias Dance Crew / André Dao / Maude Davey / Robyn Davidson / Megan Davis / Saskia deLeeuw Kyle / Ruth De Souza / Krystal De Napoli / Sue deGennaro / Gloria Demillo / Hernan Diaz / Hannah Diviney / Jelena Dokic / Julie Dolan / Emma Donovan / Jennifer Down / Amanda Dunstall / Andrew Dux / Monica Dux / Geoff Dyer / Astrid Edwards / Kutcha Edwards / Rami Elhanan / Eleanor Elliott Thomas / Anna Emina El Samad / Bernadine Evaristo / Alan Finkel / Pip Finkemeyer / Sarah Firth / Richard Flanagan / Clementine Ford / Craig Foster / Jan Fran / Martin Frawley / Esther Freud / Karen From Finance / Lisa Fuller / Kelly Gardiner / Helen Garner / Virginia Gay / Joëlle Gergis / Alice Glenn / Denis Glover / Madison Godfrey / Andrea Goldsmith / Jeff Goodell / Alice Gorman / Veronica Gorrie / Zuva Goverwa / Tara Grace / Dave Graney / John M. Green / Ezra Griffin / Madison Griffiths / Eloise Grills / George Haddad / Mahsa Hajjari / Hilary Harper / Nat Harris / Jane Harrison / Mick Harvey / Mali Hawke / April Hélène-Horton / Mark Hewitt / Nicole Hight / Tanya Hill / Adam Hills / Deanna Hitti / Jess Ho / Maya Hodge / Dan Hogan / Poppy Holden / Lonnie Holley / Ada Horsfall / Hasib Hourani / Alexandra Hudson / Steph Hughes / Eliza Hull / Oliver Hunter / Monique Hurley / Azmeena Hussain / Evelyn Ida Morris / Tait Ischia / Sammy J / Andy Jackson / Eleanor Jackson / Shuja Jamal / Kevin Jared Hosein / Casey Jenkins / Erik Jensen / Leah Jing McIntosh / Kate Jinx / Anthony Joseph / Kudzai Kanhutu / Patricia Karvelas / Anna Kate Blair / Mike Katz / Amie Kaufman / Abigail Kay / Victoria Kenworthy / Asma Khan / Erin Kim / Richard King / Natalie Kon-Yu / Will Kostakis / Ramona Koval / Anna Krien / Zoe Laidlaw / Brodie Lancaster / Lanilyuk / Antoinette Lattouf / Michael Lavarch / Daniel M. Lavery / Jes Layton / Jeanine Leane / Jenna Lee / Reggie Lee / Kate Legge / Sarah L'Estrange / Catherine Liddle / Jess Lilley / Louisa Lim / Anabel Liu-Mu / Melissa Lucashenko / Graça Machel / Rebecca Makkai / Anneliz Marie Erese / Chris Masters / Thomas Mayo / Alexander McCall Smith / Elizabeth McCarthy / Andrew McDonald / Jess McGuire / Magdalena McGuire / Audrey McKenzie / Nick McKenzie / Janet McLeod / Laura McPhee Browne / Kate Mildenhall / Lisa Millar / Billy Miller / Suzie Miller / Pia Miranda / Scott-Patrick Mitchell / Dana Mitchell / Natasha Mitchell / Selina Moir-Wilson / moirra / Yana Mokhonchuk / Cath Moore / Kylie Moore-Gilbert / Maki Morita / John Morrissey / Lauren Mullings / Astrid Munday / Gabriella Munoz / Vanessa Muradian / Kirsty Murray / Ilona Mutuku / Monique Nair / Giselle Au-Nhien Nguyen / Vivian Nguyen / Jack Nicholls / Ava Nunan / Lizzie O'Shea / Kerry O'Brien / Jenny Odell / Isabelle Oderberg / Caroline O'Donoghue / Libby O'Donovan / Alice Oehr / Charlie Owen / Celia Pacquola / Simone Page Jones / Jo Panckridge / Jacinta Parsons / Zoya Patel / Jasper Peach / Karen Percy / Breanne Peters / Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai / Karen Pickering / Stanislava Pinchuk / Galyna Piskorska / Ruby Pivet-Marsh / Alison Pouliot / Jemmason Power / Clare Press / Edwina Preston / Alice Pung / Bhakthi Puvanenthiran / Andrew Quilty / Ben Quilty / Astrid Raab / Vidya Rajan / Rehekorero / Harry Reid / Isabelle Reinecke / Francesca Rendle-Short / Lara Ricote / Margret RoadKnight / Izzy Roberts-Orr / Shoshanna Rockman / Rose Falla / Gina Rushton / Myles Russell-Cook / Penni Russon / Fig Russon-Jorgensen / Samah Sabawi / Angela Saini / Leigh Sales / Kim Salmon / Mykaela Saunders / Niki Savva / Diana Sayed / Melanie Schuijers / Julianne Schultz / Ronnie Scott / Elfy Scott / Kiowa Scott-Hurley / Danielle Scrimshaw / Leah Senior / Sami Shah / Noa Shenker / Claudia Sherman / Shauntai Sherree / Beejay Silcox / Nardi Simpson / Dane Simpson / Lefa Singleton Norton / William Sitwell / Robert Skinner / Alex Skovron / Aisling Smith / Yasmin Smith / Anita Solak / Alicia Sometimes / Jeff Sparrow / Jana Stewart / Terrie Stewart / Helen Sullivan / Michael Sun / Andrew Sutherland / Zeno Sworder / Ari Tampubolon / Karinda Taylor / Amy Taylor / Chris Thompson / Thndo / Adrian Todd Zuniga / Ruby Todd / Claire Tonti / Jamie Tram / Thabani Tshuma / Maria Tumarkin / Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts / Kristen Tytler / Abigail Ulman / Jenny Valentish / Ellen van Neerven / Frankie van Kan / Velma Vouloir / Chris Wallace / Uncle Wally Harrison / Toby Walsh / Nina Wan / Gabrielle Wang / Alex Ward / Sally Warhaft / Myf Warhurst / Chelsea Watego / Mark Watson / Archie Weller / Kelli Weston / Colson Whitehead / Alison Whittaker / Lili Wilkinson / Jessica Wilkinson / Pip Williams / George Williams / Tara June Winch / Beau Windon / Panda Wong / Yen-Rong Wong / Ben Wood / Jeremy Wortsman / Fiona Wright / Hannah Wu / Anthea Yang / Grace Yee / Rachel Yoder / Ed Yong / Sista Zai Zanda / Jess Zanoni / Sharon Zhang / Rufaro Zimbudzi / Nevo Zisin /



# Production Highlights

**In 2023, The Wheeler Centre Production team achieved welcome stability in operations and technical systems, enabling improvement in other areas of activity such as our venue hire offering. The diminishing disruptive effects of Covid-19 lockdowns allowed for increased steadiness among technical and front-of-house staffing. The 2023 year was very successful for Production in terms of the quality of technical production both with live events and digital (podcasts and videos), audience satisfaction with front of house services, as well as venue hire and resident organisation event delivery.**

## Upgrading our systems

We invested in critical camera control upgrades in the Performance Space, replacing ageing camera motors with newer and future-proofed components (DJI Ronin gimbals). Integrated with our pre-existing technology, these gimbals offer remote control and camera shot presets. Enhanced control features allow for easy manipulation of pan/tilt, zoom, and focus. These upgrades have significantly improved reliability, responsiveness, and reduce switching errors and post-production work.

This new setup has made camera technical operation and switching extremely intuitive and reliable, which has significantly improved our live video production, and vastly reduces post-production work.

## New technology

Alongside these camera control upgrades, Production acquired ten battery-powered lights, primarily used for uplighting and improving the ambiance of the the Performance Space. These lights enhance the venue's energy and vibrancy and can be easily transported for use at external venues such as The Capitol, The Edge and Melbourne Town Hall to enhance the visitor experience at our offsite events.



Audience members experiencing Kate Jinx and Brodie Lancaster recording their hit podcast See Also. Photo: TJ Garvie.

# Supporting Storytellers

## Hot Desk Fellowships

The Wheeler Centre celebrated the 11th year of the Hot Desk Fellowships in 2023, with **21** fellowships offered to emerging writers thanks to the generous support of the Readings Foundation and the Just Pretending theatre group.

The 2023 Hot Desk fellows worked on a range of projects spanning different genres and forms, including fiction, memoir, middle-grade fiction, young adult fiction, screenplays, playwriting and poetry. During their ten-week fellowship period, these outstanding emerging writers used their dedicated workspaces in The Wheeler Centre building 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 our Next Big Thing event series.

We are thrilled to welcome the 2023 fellows to a distinguished alumni of storytellers whose work deeply enriches Australian literature.

Since its inception in 2012, the Hot Desk Fellowships program has nurtured over **220** new and exciting writers by providing money, time and space to write, thanks to our key funder The Readings Foundation. 2023 marked the final year of The Readings Foundation's involvement in this program, and we wholeheartedly thank the Foundation and Mark Rubbo for their visionary support and passion, which have enabled so many emerging Australian writers to thrive.



### 2023 Hot Desk Fellows

Jamie Tram, Anneliz Marie Erese, moirra, Ruby Todd, Sienna Barton, Michelle Sewell, Anita Solak, Lauren Mullings, Mark Hewitt, Victoria Kenworthy, Vivian Nguyen, Jack Nicholls, Kristen Tytler, and Anthea Yang. Photo by Diem Nguyen.

Hot Desk Fellows not pictured:  
Caroline Arnoul, Sue deGennaro, Elese Dowden, Ellen O'Brien, Lucy Robin, Shoshanna Rockman, Melanie Schuijers



Image of the 2023 Hot Desk Fellows. Photo: The Wheeler Centre

## 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.

Writers selected for the program each receive \$15,000 to develop their work. Over the 12-month period of the scheme, each writer is matched with an experienced mentor and connected with peers, publishers and readers.

The Next Chapter was made possible this year thanks to the generous support of Creative Australia and the Malcolm Robertson Foundation.

The participants were selected by esteemed judges Bruce Pascoe, Maria Tumarkin and Maxine Beneba Clarke.

Thanks to the ongoing support of Varuna, The National Writers' House, each Next Chapter recipient undertakes a week-long residency in Katoomba, NSW, and receives a Varuna alumni membership.

The Highly Commended writers were each offered 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. This is made possible through the generous support of the University of Melbourne's Faculty of Arts.



### The 2024 intake of The Next Chapter writers were announced in November 2023. They are:

Raqiya Ahmed / Claire Cao / Jake Corvus / Laniyuk / Maria van Neerven

### In addition to the five successful recipients, the judges identified five Highly Commended writers:

Munira Tabassum Ahmed / Fernanda Dahlstrom / Liz Habermann / Alana Hicks / Gurmeet Kaur

## Signal Boost

The Wheeler Centre's podcast development program Signal Boost ran its final year in 2023, providing essential support for emerging audio storytellers developing their craft. The program started in 2019 and empowered participants to trial different types of audio-making such as sound art, interviews and audio documentaries.

The Wheeler Centre thanks the many incredible contributors, participants and mentors who made Signal Boost possible.

Signal Boost was generously supported by the Ian Potter Foundation.

### 2023 Signal Boost participants

Melanie Bakewell / Kelly Bartholomeusz / Anna Emina / Alice Garner / Loretta Hart / Caitlin Ramsay / Daniel Tan / Kaspar Visser







2023 VPLA Winners: John Harvey, Lystra Rose, Eda Gunaydin, Jessica Au, Mick Cummins, Kate Murray, Karlie Noon and Krystal De Napoli. Photo: TJ Garvie.

## Victorian Premier’s Literary Awards

Administered by The Wheeler Centre on behalf of the Premier of Victoria, the Victorian Premier’s Literary Awards celebrated the best contemporary Australian writing and recognised the most exceptional literary achievements of the year.

The winners of the main suite of awards – the prizes for Fiction, Non-Fiction, Drama, Poetry, Indigenous Writing, and Writing for Young Adults – each received \$25,000. The winner of the Award for an Unpublished Manuscript receives \$15,000 and a residency at McCraith House on the Mornington Peninsula, thanks to RMIT Culture.

Jessica Au won the prestigious \$100,000 Victorian Prize for Literature for her novel *Cold Enough for Snow*, which also received the \$25,000 Prize for Fiction. The Victorian Prize for Literature is awarded to the best overall entry across all categories and was selected by the convenors of each category judging panel: Adolfo Aranjuez, Bridget Caldwell-Bright, Erin Wamala, Leah Jing McIntosh, Tasnim Hossain and Yves Rees.

The Minister for Creative Industries, the Hon. Steve Dimopoulos MP, and Catherine Andrews announced the winners of the awards in February at a ceremony held at The Edge, Fed Square, hosted by storyteller and community builder Sista Zai Zanda. The ceremony was presented in partnership with Fed Square.

### The 2023 main suite category winners were:

**The Prize for Fiction:** Jessica Au for *Cold Enough for Snow*

**The Prize for Non-Fiction:** Eda Gunaydin for *Root and Branch: Essays on Inheritance*

**The Prize for Drama:** John Harvey for *The Return*

**The Prize for Poetry:** Gavin Yuan Gao for *At the Altar of Touch*

**The Prize for Indigenous Writing:** Lystra Rose for *The Upwelling*

**The Prize for Writing for Young Adults:** Kate Murray for *We Who Hunt the Hollow*

**Award for an Unpublished Manuscript:** Mick Cummins for *One Divine Night*

**People’s Choice Award:** Karlie Noon and Krystal De Napoli for *Astronomy: Sky Country*



# Our Audience

## Engaging The Wheeler Centre Audience

This year saw The Wheeler Centre recalibrate to a year of increased audience engagement following two years of pandemic. Industry research indicates that audiences are returning to events, performances and experiences with higher visitation levels, closer to pre-pandemic levels. This is supported by Wheeler Centre audience research that was undertaken following Spring Fling. For Spring Fling, 43% of audiences were entirely new to The Wheeler Centre. We saw strong audience attendance from podcast listeners who attended our two sold-out events with Caroline O'Donoghue, the host of the hugely popular Sentimental Garbage podcast. Audiences also flocked to our popular events with homegrown talent: Trent Dalton: Lola in the Mirror, Robyn Davidson: Unfinished Woman and Leigh Sales: Beyond the Headlines.

## Building Brand Awareness

This year saw continued exposure for The Wheeler Centre brand, most notably at our major event series M/Other, World of Words and Spring Fling. Supported by a 360 degree full-marketing campaign, our Spring Fling series built significant exposure for The Wheeler Centre brand through both traditional and digital media buys. The campaign featured digital, print and outdoor channels, a TVC pre-roll campaign in partnership with MIFF and Cinema Nova, podcast ads, radio ads with Melbourne-based broadcasters and a media partnership with 7am.

Audience feedback on Spring Fling was positive, with 92% of respondents saying they were very likely to extremely likely to attend in the future, with the top three words used by respondents to describe their Spring Fling experience were Insightful, Enriching and Inspiring.

\*As of the Tessitura Learning Community Conference in November 2023.

## Digital Audience

Following the work undertaken to improve the website and The Wheeler Centre's digital presence in 2022, this year saw continued emphasis placed on growing our digital engagement. Through the development of short video content pieces promoted across our social platforms, our content drove traffic to our resource-rich website.

In 2023, our website sessions increased by 135% and pageviews were up 137%. This data also supports the overall trend that audiences are continuing to buy and make ticket purchases online, even as attendance has returned to in-person experiences.\*

### Anonymous audience feedback from Spring Fling:

*I appreciate your efforts to make Wheeler Centre events more accessible to First Nations people. I have immensely enjoyed every event I've attended there, and I always find them incredibly emotional. I feel safe there too - like, I know I'm amongst like-minded people who are committed in one way or another to the betterment of society and humanity. I hope you all realise the wide social impact the Wheeler Centre has - Melbourne/Naarm would not be the same without you.*

*Loved the diversity of the Spring Fling events I attended - wish I could have attended more!! Thank you for your work :)*

*I love the breadth of these events and, as a postgrad student, that there are pricing options for me now. Love how challenging and interesting the topics are - keep it up.*

# Our Team



## A Message from People and Culture Committee Chair, Chaman Sidhu

**This year was significant for the Centre as we farewelled Caro Llewellyn and welcomed Erin Vincent as CEO. Caro, Erin and the leadership team have taken great care to achieve a successful leadership transition.**

Acting Chief Operations Officer Joe Toohey has been instrumental in ensuring The Wheeler Centre's future sustainability and I'd like to thank Joe for his efforts consolidating our processes. I'd also like to thank our Head of Programming Veronica Sullivan for her thoughtful and creative curation throughout the year and Head of Production Simon Cotter, who continues to enhance the in-person and digital experience of our events. We were also fortunate to welcome our new Head of Marketing and Engagement Caraline Douglas, who has immediately made an impact and I thank her predecessor Daniel Coghlan for his contribution to the marketing team. My thanks also go to Michelle Tyson Clark for her exceptional work in her new role as Governance Lead.

Reflecting the diversity of the Victorian community The Wheeler Centre serves, the team delivered an impressive breadth of events that included speakers from First Nations, CALD, youth, LGBTQIA+, and disability communities, as well as regional events.

The team enjoyed collaborating with and provided support to resident organisations and other organisations resulting in **72** partnered events in 2023. Partnering with the wider arts sector, alongside the auspice support of the City of Literature Office and the Blak & Bright festival, is an important aspect of the Centre's four-year strategy to deliver Conversations to Create Change.

The Wheeler Centre and resident organisation staff development was fostered through training that included Indigenous cultural literacy and trans and gender diversity. Staff and Board induction processes were also improved.

There are many stakeholders who contribute to our vital mission: audiences, staff, donors, resident organisations, partners, The Moat restaurant, groups who utilise our venue spaces, Creative Victoria, and City of Melbourne to name a few. Thank you to you all.

**Chaman Sidhu**  
Chair, People and Culture Committee



# Meet the Team

## Staff

### Erin Vincent

CEO (from August)

### Caro Llewellyn

CEO (to July)

### Nadiah Abdulrahim

Digital Manager (to January)

### Simon Cotter

Head of Production

### Daniel Coghlan

Head of Digital and Marketing (to June)

### Jamila Djafar Khodja

Programming Manager

### Caraline Douglas

Head of Marketing and Engagement (from July)

### Rick Maxwell Douglas

Technical Supervisor

### Bec Kavanagh

Youth Programming Manager

### Romy Ladowsky

Head of Development (to May)

### Maddy Macquine

Senior Audio Producer (to August)

### Selina Moir-Wilson

Venue and Office Coordinator (to March)

### Diem Nguyen

Program Administrator (to June)

Program Coordinator (from July)

### Xanthea O'Connor

Program and Special Projects Producer

### Madison Pawle

Venue and Office Coordinator (to March)

### Courtney Percy

Database and Ticketing Manager

## Autumn Royal

Venue and Office Coordinator (from February)

## Sam Ryan

Accounts

## Daniel Scaffidi

Web and Ticketing Coordinator (from May)

## Abhishek Singh

Events Manager

## Veronica Sullivan

Head of Programming

## Lauren Taylor

Senior Program and Podcast Producer

## Kate Thorburn

Marketing and Communications Manager

## Joe Toohey

Head of Finance

## Michelle Tyson Clark

General Manager (to July)  
Governance Lead (from August)

## Natalie Williams

Digital and Marketing Administrator (to July)  
Digital and Marketing Coordinator (from July)

## Indi Wild

Executive Coordinator (from July)

## Board

Kate Torney OAM - Chair

Julie Ligeti

Marcus Fazio

John Gibbins

Corrie Perkin (to December)

Julie Pinkham

Jamila Rizvi

Adrian Sculthorpe (to December)

Jock Serong

Chaman Sidhu

## Front and Back of house

Aiesha Amaya

Alejandro Perez Arango

Ambrin Hasnain

Callum McKinnon

Charlie Kerekes

Christa Johnathan

Damian Galbraith

Edvard Christie

Elizabeth Robinson-Griffith

Eloise Moya

Emily Wildfyre

Evangeline Mullins

Greta Ryan

Hannah Wu

Indigo Tait-Atkin

Inez Trambas

Jari McCall

Jay Crossman

Jenny Cheng

Franklyn Hudson

Jivan Simons Mistry

Joel Keith

Jose Eveline

Luke Meehan

Raj Bharath Jaganathan

Ruby Foster

Tarn Vu Nguyen

Tom Schier

Ummay Hoque

Yoni Shemesh

## Our Resident Organisations

**The Wheeler Centre is home to ten resident organisations, each with their own unique focus and contribution to Australia's literary landscape.**

**Australian Poetry** is a national poetry body that interconnects and supports 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. Across publications, live events and digital offerings, Australian Poetry presents an extraordinary nation-wide calendar of events and accessible, affordable professional development activities.

**Blak & Bright** First Nations Literary Festival is based in Naarm (Melbourne). Established in 2016, the four-day showcase celebrates the diverse expressions of First Nations writers and covers all genres from oral stories to epic novels and plays to poetry. We believe that Blak stories are for everyone.

**The Melbourne UNESCO City of Literature Office** works to coordinate and promote literary activity in metropolitan and regional Victoria, and to promote Melbourne's designation by UNESCO as a City of Literature. In 2008, Melbourne joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network when it was designated the first City of Literature in Australia, and the second in the world.

**The Emerging Writers' Festival** develops, nurtures and promotes Australia's new writing talent, creating platforms for connecting writing communities and their audiences. The Festival provides opportunities for emerging writers to develop professionally and supports them to engage new and larger audiences.

**Express Media** develops, supports and promotes young writers through workshops that develop skills, through opportunities for constructive feedback and publication, and through awards and programs that recognise

excellence. Express Media's 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** is one of Australia's most loved literary institutions, MWF is where intellect, imagination and inquiry take the stage.

**PEN Melbourne** 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 leading provider of information, resources and skills development for members and the broader writing community. Writers Victoria's annual program is developed in response to the needs of members and participants. It includes a diverse range of professional development activities.

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



# Our Supporters



Comedian Janty Blair predicts the future during our Comedy Crystal Ball: What's in Store for 2024. Photo: TJ Garvie.

**The Wheeler Centre sincerely thanks our valued partners and donors for their continued support. The generosity of our partners enables us to celebrate and promote Victoria's unique culture of writing, story, and ideas.**

## Government Partners

With the support of Creative Victoria and the City of Melbourne's Revitalisation Fund, we proudly presented the second iteration of Spring Fling: A short series of big ideas. This support has been critical to helping us rejuvenate post-Covid, allowing us to engage audiences with thought-provoking discussions and performances from local and international luminaries.

## Donors

To our donors and supporters, your continued generosity fuels our mission, allowing us to deliver accessible year-round programming. Special thanks go to George and Rosa Morstyn, The Hon. Justice Michelle

Gordon and The Hon. Kenneth Hayne and the Readings Foundation for their important contributions which enable us to nurture emerging storytellers.

The consistent support and enduring commitment of our Conversation Starters, Bright Sparks, and Enquiring Minds has enabled us to launch new initiatives and present impactful public discussions.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to our patrons Tony and Maureen Wheeler for their contribution and vision from which The Wheeler Centre has grown, allowing us to also elevate Melbourne's status as Australia's first City of Literature.

Finally we extend our thanks to those who give what they can when they can. We recognise it's a challenging time for many and want you to know that every donation plays a significant role in sustaining our vibrant community and ensuring The Wheeler Centre remains Victoria's home of storytelling and ideas. Your support



allows us to host, nurture, and facilitate conversations that resonate for everyone, everywhere.

As we reflect on the past year, we extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who has been part of our journey. Together, we celebrate Australian and international writers, thinkers and storytellers, providing a space where their voices are heard.

### Trusts and Foundations

The support of Trusts and Foundations is pivotal in expanding The Wheeler Centre's reach and empowering writers and artists through innovative development programs.

In 2023, with thanks to the Readings Foundation's support of the Hot Desk Fellowships program, this groundbreaking initiative provided **20** voices the opportunity and financial support to develop work and nurture their writing practice at The Wheeler Centre. Since 2017, the Just Pretending theatre group has provided additional support for one additional fellowship place specifically for a woman or non-binary participant emerging in the field of playwriting.

This year also marks the fourth year of The Next Chapter program. We extend our special thanks to the Malcolm Robertson Foundation, who along with Creative Australia, support a new wave of writers who reflect the diversity of Australian identities and experiences.

The Ian Potter Foundation's generous multi-year commitment facilitated the successful final year of our Signal Boost podcast program. This invaluable initiative empowered emerging audio storytellers to hone their skills, forge industry connections, and expand their portfolios through immersive workshops. The impact of this program has extended far beyond its participants, enriching the craft of audio storytelling.

The successful E.W. Cole Lecture series continued this year through the generous support of the E.W. Cole Foundation. Santilla Chingaie delivered a powerful presentation on the topic 'Who gets to write history?' The annual E. W. Cole Lecture, now in its second year, invites Australia's brightest thinkers to deliver talks that spark optimistic, progressive and innovative ideas and celebrate the combination of intellect and play.



Historian and author Santilla Chingaie asks, 'who gets to write history?' for our annual E.W. Cole Lecture at this year's Spring Fling. Photo: TJ Garvie

## Our Donors

### Patrons

Maureen Wheeler AO  
Tony Wheeler AO

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

George and Rosa Morstyn

### Big Thinkers: \$10,000+

The Hon. Justice Michelle Gordon AC  
and The Hon. Kenneth Hayne AC QC

### Conversation Starters: \$5000+

The Hudson Family  
Wendy Whelan

### Bright Sparks: \$2500+

Michael Cowen  
Chaman Sidhu

### Enquiring Minds: \$1000+

Dr Marianne Broadbent  
Carrillo Gantner AC and Ziyin Gantner  
Jamila Rizvi  
Michael and Radhika Santhanam-Martin  
Brigitte Smith  
Sarah Yeomans

### Supporters: \$500+

Nikki Gaskell  
Ellen Koshland  
Julie Ligeti  
Elizabeth Loftus  
Kate Torney OAM  
Prof Steven Williams

## Our Partners

The Wheeler Centre is deeply grateful for the support of our valued partners.

### Government



### Trusts and Foundations



### Corporate Partners



# Financial Overview



## A Message from the Audit and Risk Committee Chair, John Gibbins

### Operating activities

Events and facilities income in 2023 totaled \$719,741, a reduction on the 2022 figures of \$801,778. Recurrent annual funding from the Victorian Government was \$1.54 million in 2023, the same amount as 2022 and representing the bulk of government support for the period. Total non-recurrent government funding in 2023 (excluding funding for auspice activities) remained steady at \$756,699 (2022: \$631,834). Sponsorship and donor activity fell in 2023 to \$208,928 from \$496,477 in 2022. Multi-year funded projects The Next Chapter and Signal Boost concluded or their delivery was pushed into 2024.

Expenditure reduced by 3% overall from last year. Employee expenses continue to be the largest outlay, followed by programming spend.

### Non-operating activities: 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 2023, the balance of funds held in the Wheeler Endowment Fund was \$11.08 million. Withdrawals in 2023 included \$70,000 towards the delivery of the M/Other weekend and \$200,000 towards the delivery of the Spring Fling series.

### City of Literature Office

The Wheeler Centre has had a longstanding 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 in 2022 and 2023. 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 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 Festival

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

In September 2021, The Wheeler Centre entered an auspice agreement with Blak & Bright Festival. Grants 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 the Blak & Bright Festival. The Wheeler Centre provided both in-kind support and financial support to Blak & Bright Festival throughout 2023.



## Financial Performance

### Operations

The Centre's net operating result was a deficit of \$489,640 in 2023 (2022: deficit of \$353,802). Net operating revenue does not include transfers made from the Wheeler Endowment Fund for operating activities, which totaled \$270,000 in 2023.

The net income from investments was \$1,103,286. The net result from all transactions after depreciation and amortisation of \$104,443 was a surplus of \$509,203.

### Balance sheet

Net assets of The Wheeler Centre amount to \$11.05m (2022: \$10.54m) at the end of 2023.

The Wheeler Endowment amounted to \$11.08m, up from \$10.35m in 2022.

Current assets decreased by 38% to \$920,676 and total liabilities decreased by 28% to \$10.07 million. Total grants and income in advance/unearned income at 31 December 2023 comprised the bulk of the liabilities, at \$739,217.

Cash as of 31 December 2023 was \$696,778. Of this, \$190,182 comprises restricted funds for City of Literature office and Blak & Bright Festival programs.

#### John Gibbins

Chair, Audit and Risk Committee



Podcast sensation Caroline O'Donoghue records a special episode of Sentimental Garbage live in Melbourne. Photo: TJ Garvie.

## Summary of results 2023

Financial Performance	2023	2022
	\$	\$
<b>NET INCOME FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>		
<b>OPERATING REVENUE</b>		
Creative Victoria - Multi-Year Organisation Grant	1,541,600	1,541,600
Creative Victoria - Premier's Literary Award Grant	265,000	265,000
Creative Victoria - Regional Tour Grant	34,450	30,551
Creative Victoria - Melbourne City Revitalisation Fund	392,116	284,384
City of Melbourne - Multi-Year Organisation Grant	52,679	51,900
Creative Australia	12,454	0
Event & Resources Income	719,741	801,778
Sponsorship & Donations	208,928	496,477
Reimbursements & recoveries	1,141	9,430
<b>Total operating revenue</b>	<b>3,228,109</b>	<b>3,481,120</b>
<b>OPERATING EXPENSES</b>		
Employee Expenses	(1,912,118)	(2,033,049)
Event Generated Expenses	(781,537)	(748,901)
Prize Money	(303,750)	(428,000)
Marketing and Promotion Expenses	(160,420)	(112,252)
Digital Publishing Expenses	(109,709)	(84,109)
Operating Expenses	(133,953)	(97,172)
Facilities Expenses	(316,262)	(331,439)
<b>Total operating expenses</b>	<b>(3,717,749)</b>	<b>(3,834,922)</b>
<b>Net Income from Operating Activities</b>	<b>(489,640)</b>	<b>(353,802)</b>
<b>NET INCOME FROM NON-OPERATING ACTIVITIES</b>		
<b>Interest Received in the Bank</b>	<b>21,529</b>	<b>3,978</b>
<b>Philanthropic Funds Flow</b>		
The Wheeler Endowment Investment Portfolio Movement (Restricted)	811,757	(103,678)
Distribution to Operating Activities	270,000	(200,000)
<b>Philanthropic Funds Flow</b>	<b>1,081,757</b>	<b>(299,700)</b>
<b>Net Income from Non-Operating Activities</b>	<b>1,103,286</b>	<b>(299,700)</b>
<b>NET RESULT FROM AUSPICE PROJECT</b>		
<b>City of Literature Office</b>		
Government Grants - City of Literature Office	321,610	381,291
Project expenditure - City of Literature Office	(321,610)	(381,291)
<b>Blak &amp; Bright Festival</b>		
Government Grants - Blak & Bright Festival	119,818	176,330
Other income - Blak & Bright Festival	48,537	41,622
Project expenditure - Blak & Bright Festival	(168,355)	(217,952)
<b>Net result from Auspice Project</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Net result from transactions before depreciation</b>	<b>613,646</b>	<b>(653,502)</b>
Depreciation and amortisation	(104,443)	(86,979)
<b>Net result from transactions after depreciation</b>	<b>509,203</b>	<b>(740,481)</b>
<b>COMPREHENSIVE RESULT</b>	<b>509,203</b>	<b>(740,481)</b>

<b>Financial Position</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2022</b>
	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Total current assets	920,676	1,478,579
Total non-current assets	11,225,063	10,573,990
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>12,145,739</b>	<b>12,052,569</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Total current liabilities	1,074,185	1,495,135
Total non-current liabilities	21,580	16,663
Total liabilities	1,095,765	1,511,798
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>11,049,974</b>	<b>10,540,771</b>
<b>TOTAL EQUITY</b>	<b>11,049,974</b>	<b>10,540,771</b>





The Wheeler Centre  
Books Writing Ideas



Melbourne  
City of  
Literature