

BLAK BOX: Major New Architecture and Sound Pavilion Explores Barangaroo's Past, Present and Future

“Urban Theatre Projects is one of the too few performance companies that continually think outside the square,” The Sun Herald



Artist impression; Image courtesy and copyright Kevin O'Brien and UTP

‘Deep listening at Sydney Harbour: Past, present and future coexist. If the speed of sound warps our sense of time then we can still hear the crackle of fires lit thousands of years ago on the foreshore of the world’s most magnificent harbour. The presence of the First People is inscribed in the acoustic memory of the place they now call Barangaroo. Contemporary voices share stories of country. Are you listening?’ - Daniel Browning, Urban Theatre Project, Blak Box Curator

Sydney, Australia: Urban Theatre Projects (UTP) is delighted to unveil BLAK BOX: a world-premiere, architecturally-designed sound pavilion sharing First Peoples stories at Barangaroo Reserve from 2 to 24 June. The state-of-the-art and surround-sound space has been purposely designed by globally-renowned architect Kevin O’Brien. The harbour-side pavilion will be filled with a powerful suite of newly commissioned sound works curated by Daniel Browning, presenter on ABC Radio National. The works bring together a moving range of contemporary Aboriginal voices to respond to the past, present and future of the Barangaroo site.

BLAK BOX offers audiences a vantage point for a wider exploration of the First People’s relationship with their waters through that most compelling and fleeting artefact of human consciousness – sound. The inaugural BLAK BOX program is titled *humechochorus* (hum echo chorus) and comprises commissioned oral histories of the harbour headland before 1788, informal interviews and spoken word performances. These will sit alongside over 15 separate commissioned sound pieces comprising original music and hydrophone field recordings taken from underwater at the site. Together the works offer a sound stream of consciousness blending stories of the past (echo), the present (hum) and an imagined future (chorus).

UTP’s Artistic Director, Rosie Dennis says: “BLAK BOX is one of our most ambitious projects to date - bringing together design, installation and sound for a completely unique contemporary storytelling experience for audiences. Daniel has curated an intelligent, layered and thought-provoking program which grapples with the complexity of urban development, place and history.”

UTP is delighted to work for the first time with Barangaroo Delivery Authority to present this powerful and important new pavilion at Barangaroo: Australia’s next cultural precinct and Sydney’s newest creative stage for leading-edge public art and programming. The pavilion will be situated at Barangaroo Reserve in Sydney for three weeks before it tours nationally. The 2018 world-premiere project marks the beginning of a three-year partnership with UTP and Barangaroo Delivery Authority which will commission a suite of new art and sound installations at the site at the same time each year until 2020.

BLAK BOX is a cutting-edge surround-sound listening space, built with recyclable and reusable materials, designed for audiences to experience contemporary First Peoples stories. Ambitious in vision, BLAK BOX is stripped-back storytelling with minimal lighting and the sound of the human voice blending stories for groups of 30 visitors at a time. BLAK BOX straddles sound, architecture, temporary public art and creative writing.

BLAK BOX embraces the First Peoples concept of 'deep listening' which is based on stories, silences and the spaces that lie between. The BLAK BOX experience invites audiences to join this shared process of deep listening. It is an innovative and unique model for the exploration of sound and language from a First Peoples perspective.

Daniel Browning is one of Australia's most respected commentators on Indigenous visual arts. A journalist and broadcaster on ABC Radio National (RN), Browning is from the Bundjalung and Kullilli peoples of far northern New South Wales and south-western Queensland. Browning is also a visual arts graduate of the Queensland University of Technology. Since 2005, Browning has produced and presented the *Away!* Indigenous art and culture program on ABC RN.

Kevin O'Brien is an architect of Kaurereg and Meriam descent. He is globally renowned for his designs which draw on Aboriginal concepts of space. O'Brien's *Finding Country* exhibition was an official Collateral Event of the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale 2012. The designer has also received multiple National and State Awards from the Australian Institute of Architects. O'Brien is widely accepted as one of the country's leading architects and a pioneer in his field and this ambitious undertaking will be a milestone in his already impressive career. The BLAK BOX design features similar materials and design principles to previous examples of O'Brien's award-winning architecture by harnessing natural light and presenting a sleek aesthetic whilst maintaining environmental friendliness and a connection to Country.

Karen Norris has worked extensively as a lighting designer in Australia, the United Kingdom and Europe. In Australia she has worked for numerous theatre and dance companies including Bangarra Dance Theatre, Belvoir Street Theatre, Red Shed Theatre Company, State Theatre of South Australia, Griffin Theatre Company and One Extra. In 2008 Karen returned to Australia from living in France and her work has since included designs for the opera *Ingkarta Project* (Adelaide Festival 2008), Noel Jordon's *In the Shape of a Girl* (Sydney Opera House), *Love Me Tender* (Director Matt Lutton for Company B, PICA and Griffin Theatre Company), *Hansel and Gretel* (Pacific Opera), and *Christine Douglas*.

UTP is based in Bankstown and boasts a 35-year history of making ground-breaking work and its reputation has never been stronger than it is today. The company was created to re-imagine what theatre can be, and who it can be for. BLAK BOX is one of its most ambitious works yet, as the company continues to scale to new heights of artistic invention. UTP has also caught the attention of art lovers from across the city who now readily travel to new neighborhoods for its unforgettable art experiences. Now it is bringing its own brand of art and conversation to the heart of Sydney's busy CBD. UTP has long been a major player in Australia's cultural landscape. In the past five years it has reached even greater heights with Rosie Dennis at the helm. Dennis recently marked five years since taking the reins of the company. This project will build that profile even further and cement UTP's reputation for creating artworks that tell contemporary Australian stories in surprising ways. BLAK BOX will continue to uphold the UTP mantra of making artworks that explore personal stories within a universal context, to reflect important issues unfolding in Australia both past and present.

BLAK BOX INSTALLATION DETAILS:

CREATIVE TEAM:

Curator: Daniel Browning

Architect: Kevin O'Brien

Lighting Designer: Karen Norris

Lead Builder: David Hawkes

BLAK BOX ARTISTS INCLUDE:

JOEL DAVISON (Gadigal language worker); SHANNON FOSTER (D'harawal saltwater knowledge keeper); CURTIS KENNEDY (Musician/composer); Professor JOHN MAYNARD (Historian); Professor JAKELIN TROY (Linguist); and TEILA WATSON (Writer/Spoken Word Artist)

BLAK BOX INSTALLATION DETAILS:

Date: 2 June to 24 June 2018

Times: 6-9pm Tuesday – Saturday / 3-6pm Sunday. Closed Monday.

Duration: Six individual sessions running 30 min each

Location: Barangaroo Reserve, Sydney

Cost: FREE. Bookings recommended

Information: <http://urbantheatre.com.au/>

Bookings: <http://urbantheatre.com.au> from 1 May

BLAK BOX has been supported by the Barangaroo Delivery Authority.

BLAK BOX has been made possible thanks to the generous support of the following UTP partners:



Barangaroo Delivery Authority

PROJECT SPONSORS:



BLAK BOX PARTNER BIOGRAPHIES:

ABOUT URBAN THEATRE PROJECTS

For more than 35 years, Urban Theatre Projects (UTP) has consistently delivered a program that has put cultural diversity and under-represented voices front and centre. During this time, UTP has created more than 100 new Australian works, based on a process of dialogue between contemporary theatre practice and diverse communities predominantly living in Western Sydney. UTP has an outstanding track-record in terms of process and delivering high-quality end results. The philosophy of UTP has driven investigations of new forms, new collaborations and new contexts, consistently challenging and reinvigorating art form practice. It is dedicated to fostering opportunities for new voices to reach audiences. UTP has created seminal works that have earned the company multiple awards including a Sidney Myer Award in recognition of the company's outstanding contribution to theatre. Highlight projects undertaken by UTP in recent years include: **BANKSTOWN: LIVE** in 2016 which transformed a suburban street in Bankstown into an arts festival foyer and backyards into theatres as audiences gathered to experience world-class performance, film, music and installation alongside deck chairs and clotheslines. **Home Country** in 2017 presented an epic theatre-based work in a Blacktown multi-level car park. The work shared perspectives on identity and told three interweaving stories from the perspective of an Aboriginal man, post-war Greek migrant and a recently arrived Lebanese immigrant. Another UTP highlight was **One Day For Peace**: an ambitious screen-based work which explored religion and faith. The film took viewers on a journey across the suburbs of Western Sydney to ask: what do you believe? It wrestled with some big (and not so big) questions inside homes, prayer houses and from the back seat of a taxi. *One Day for Peace* was screened on train stations and billboards outside iconic buildings across the city's west, and later aired nationally on ABC TV.

ABOUT BARANGAROO DELIVERY AUTHORITY

Barangaroo Delivery Authority is responsible for the development of Barangaroo on behalf of the NSW Government, and for the delivery of high quality urban design and public spaces. As part of this remit, the Authority oversees the delivery of public art, cultural activities and public programs within the precinct. Responses to the form, geography, the rich history and future of the Barangaroo site are integral to the design and delivery of the program. The **Barangaroo Public Art and Cultural Plan** covers 11 hectares of public domain and represents one of Australia's largest suites of public art and cultural activity. The Plan outlines nine priority public art and cultural programs for delivery by 2020, including a series of cultural activities and civic events. In recent years, this has included: **Barangaroo Ngangamay**, an immersive multimedia artwork by Amanda Jane Reynolds and Genevieve Grieves; **Aurora Eora**, a beautiful collaboration with the Gondwana Choirs and acclaimed contemporary artists, which brought Barangaroo to life through song and art; **Four Thousand Fish**, a free Sydney Festival installation curated by Emily McDaniel that invited visitors to return frozen fish-shaped sculptures to the water surrounding Barangaroo Reserve; and **Papillon**, a large-scale temporary artwork by leading Australian artist, Nike Savvas, that suspended dramatic coloured ribbons above Exchange Place.

CURATOR DANIEL BROWNING

Daniel Browning is a highly respected journalist and radio broadcaster from the Bundjalung and Kullilli peoples of far northern New South Wales and south-western Queensland. A trained painter, he is a visual arts graduate of the Queensland University of Technology. Since 2005 he has produced and presented *Away!*, the Indigenous art and culture program on ABC Radio National. He has produced sound artworks from three UNESCO World Heritage sites, exhibited during the 2015 Mildura Palimpsest Biennale and in extremis at Arts House, Melbourne in 2017. As a documentary maker he has received a bronze medal at the New York Festival for *Cast Among Strangers*, a study of the human zoo phenomenon. His documentary *Fernando's ghost* about the Aboriginal rights activist Anthony Martin Fernando was highly commended in the John Newfong Media Prize in 2008 and received an honourable mention at *imagineNATIVE*, the international festival of Indigenous film and media arts in Canada. Currently, he produces *Word Up*, a podcast which shares Australia's diverse Indigenous languages one word at a time. As curator of Urban Theatre Projects' *BLAK BOX*, he has developed a program of storytelling, oral history and music which imagines the past, present and future of the Barangaroo precinct.

ARCHITECT KEVIN O'BRIEN

Kevin O'Brien is an artist of Kaurereg and Meriam descent. He is globally renowned for his designs which draw on Aboriginal concepts of space. His *Finding Country* exhibition was an official Collateral Event of the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale 2012. He founded Kevin O'Brien architects in 2006. In 2018 he joined BVN as a principal. He has been an ambassador for GOMA's 10-year anniversary celebrations and sits on the Boards of IMA and La Boite Theatre.

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