



THE BIG ANXIETY

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THEBIGANXIETY.ORG

MEDIA RELEASE

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THE BIG ANXIETY FESTIVAL

Cultivating empathy in place of stigma, fear and discrimination – and supporting mental health and suicide prevention.

The Big Anxiety Festival, the world's largest mental health and arts festival, has announced their full 2019 program designed to embrace diverse experiences across the vast spectrum of mental health by focusing on one central challenge; how do we cultivate empathy in place of stigma, fear and discrimination?

With 65% of Australians having a mental health problem failing to seek help, **The Big Anxiety Festival's** national and cultural importance is significant in both creating discussions around Empathy and Stigma; Care and Healing; and Suicide Prevention while providing innovative, engaging and practical tools to encourage Australians to seek help.

Working with partners such as **Lifeline** and **The Black Dog Institute**, the 2019 program has been curated to find new and groundbreaking ways of reaching and engaging people of all ages, abilities, cultural backgrounds and beliefs to promote important discussions around suicide and mental health to improve our capacity to take care of ourselves and others.

Professor Jill Bennett, Artistic Director of the Festival said, "The arts are the best means we have for sharing complex experiences. They show us what we don't know about ourselves and others. They shine light on the relationships and social settings that help or hinder mental health, and they are a means to transform those relationships.

"The six-week Festival, spanning mental health month (October) uses **62 projects, 25 venues, 9 exhibitions** and **8 Ambassadors**, across multiple creative platforms including immersive media, visual art, conversation, film, multi-media, performance, poetry, song, and virtual reality to explore various ways for us to connect, hear and be heard; and to make change by breaking down barriers people experience and through building better futures," she said.

Combining art and science to promote empathy and reduce stigma, **The Empathy Clinic** and its innovative app **Course of Empathy** explores perspective shifting as a pre-condition of empathy through a combination of virtual reality and encouraging self-reflection through a range of follow-up tools and resources.

Awkward Conversations offers a series of one-to-one conversations in experimental formats, tackling anxieties, habits and hard-to-talk-about subjects like mental health. **The S Word**, a free special event held on **World Mental Health Day 10 October** at Tallawoladah Lawn (outside MCA), will present **Lifeline's crisis support team** hosting one-to-one informal conversations in addressing anything people want to ask about suicide and mental distress.

Dr Anna Brooks, National Manager, Lifeline Research Foundation said, "Using art to promote engagement with mental health, **The Big Anxiety Festival** offers an unprecedented opportunity to shine a light on the work of Lifeline's crisis supporters to help reduce stigma by bringing essential conversations about suicide out of the shadows and into the light."

The Edge of The Present, an imaginative use of technology in suicide prevention melds art with science to create an immersive VR environment that literally cultivates the capacity for future thinking and is inspired by suicide survivors and neuropsychological research.

The Visit, part of the **fEEL Lab** also uses technology creatively through an intimate interactive engagement to promote understanding of the lived experience of dementia.

Festival Ambassador and poet, Omar Sakr, Artist Cameron Cripps-Kennedy and students of **Bradfield College** stage poetic conversations across the external walls of buildings in St Leonards in **These Walls Could Talk** to bring conversations about mental health into the public realm, reflecting on the possibilities for creating living and working environments conducive to better mental health.

Acclaimed British novelist and former mental health nurse, **Nathan Filer** will argue in **The Language of Madness - The Big Anxiety Prize** that it is time to re-imagine care, rethink mental health labels and anti-stigma campaigns. The Big Anxiety Prize is awarded to a creative thinker advancing the discussion of mental health.

Uti Kulintjaku (UK) Initiative is part of **The Empathy Clinic** and is an innovative, Aboriginal-led mental health literacy project providing cultural resources to support mental health in remote communities. The UK initiative works at the interface of knowledge systems and languages to better understand mental health.

Drawing on real-life stories, **The 12 songs of Daughters** are emblematic of a global crisis that affects one in three women in their lifetime by following a powerful journey tracing the effects of gender violence to evoke the strength and tragedy of women and girls lost to violence.

The Anxiety, Culture And The Future Conference, a three-day conference, will bring together international and national thinkers to explore new ways to imagine the future through workshops and presentations that focus on the practical question of how we generate individual and collective responses to address anxieties, loss of hope and the general failure of future thinking. The conference is open to everyone.

Winner of the **Best New Event at the Australian Event Awards 2018**, **The Big Anxiety Festival** is a world leading initiative of UNSW Sydney in association with the **Black Dog Institute** with more than 25 partnerships across mental health and community organisations including remote communities as well as leading arts and community venues.

Most events at **The Big Anxiety Festival** are FREE or Low Cost. Venue numbers are limited, so advanced booking will guarantee participation.

For more information visit:

www.thebiganxiety.org

[facebook.com/thebiganxiety](https://www.facebook.com/thebiganxiety) | twitter.com/thebiganxiety | [Instagram.com/thebiganxiety](https://www.instagram.com/thebiganxiety)

Media Centre: Background information, images, biographies of key personnel and the full program can be accessed at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/83sb267ma5n67wx/AADHeeRI9bdPcfaYl6x31p9na?dl=0>

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

NATHAN FILER (UK)

23 Oct, 6.30pm, Lower Ground Floor, City of Sydney Town Hall

The acclaimed British novelist and former mental health nurse argues that it is time to re-imagine care, rethink mental health labels and anti-stigma campaigns.

THE EMPATHY CLINIC

27 Sept- 16 Nov, Tues-Sat 10am-5pm, UNSW Galleries

Unless we can imaginatively 'step into someone else's shoes' we cannot empathise. The Empathy Clinic sets out to provide the practical tools, techniques and insights we need to become more empathetic. A unique set of rooms, installations and virtual reality tools by international and Australian artists will enable visitors to shift perspectives, gain insight into other minds and diverse forms of empathy, and undertake 'empathy training' with measurable results.

THE S-WORD - AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS WITH LIFELINE

10 October, Tallawoladah Lawn, near MCA, The Rocks

In an event for **World Mental Health Day**, Lifeline's crisis support team host one-to-one informal conversations addressing anything you want to ask about suicide and mental distress.

DAUGHTERS

17 Oct, 6.30pm Panel Talk with 8pm Concert, City Recital Hall, Angel Place

Daughters is a world premiere song-cycle by librettist Tammy Brennan and composer David Chisholm that uses the haunting form of Portuguese fado, to follow a powerful journey tracing the effects of gender violence.

THESE WALLS COULD TALK

27 Sept - 3 Nov, Bradfield TAFE; also Chandos St & Atchison Lane, St Leonards

Artist Cameron Cripps-Kennedy, poet Omar Sakr and students of Bradfield College stage poetic conversations across the external walls of buildings in St Leonards.

UTI KULINTJAKU INITIATIVE - NEW VIRTUAL REALITY WORKS

UNSW Galleries, see *The Empathy Clinic*, 27 Sept - 16 Nov and *Art After Hours*, AGNSW, 16 Oct

The Uti Kulintjaku [UK] initiative is an innovative, Aboriginal-led mental health literacy project that takes its name from a Pitjantjatjara phrase that means 'to think and understand clearly'. The UK initiative works at the interface of knowledge systems and languages to better understand mental health.

EDGE OF THE PRESENT

27 Sept-16 Nov, Mon-Sat 10am-5pm, UNSW Galleries

Edge of the Present is an immersive virtual reality environment that cultivates the capacity for future thinking. Inspired by suicide survivors and neuropsychological research, this exhibit is led by artist Alex Davies. Informed by cognitive neuropsychology as well as lived experience, Edge of the Present is a partnership with The Black Dog Institute and the NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence in Suicide Prevention, supported by NSW Minister for Mental Health.

AMBASSADORS

John A Douglas, Sonakshi Babbar, Sandra Pankhurst, Will Centurian, Nat's What I Reckon, Evelyn Araluen, Honor Eastly & Omar Sakr.

JOURNALIST NOTES

FESTIVAL PROGRAM

For full event and exhibition details visit thebiganxiety.org

Empathy & Experience

NATHAN FILER (UK)

23 Oct, 6.30pm | Lower Ground Floor, City of Sydney Town Hall

“There is no uncontroversial language when talking about mental illness – and that includes the phrase ‘mental illness’” says Nathan Filer in his new book, *The Heartland*, described as an “entertaining and absorbing” exploration of the politics and experience of schizophrenia (The Guardian). The acclaimed British novelist and former mental health nurse argues that it is time to rethink mental health labels and anti-stigma campaigns.

THE EMPATHY CLINIC

27 Sept - 16 Nov, Tues-Sat 10am-5pm | UNSW Galleries

Unless we can imaginatively ‘step into someone else’s shoes’ we cannot empathise. But the empathy problem goes deeper. Neuroscientific evidence suggests that we direct empathy to people we perceive to be ‘like us’. Some of us make a conscious effort to overcome bias and stigma – but are we really comfortable with difference and diversity? Can we deal with another’s distress, or even listen effectively? The Empathy Clinic sets out to provide the practical tools, techniques and insights we need to become more empathetic.

Includes new works by Uti Kulintjaku, r e a & Judy Atkinson, Debra Keenahan, Wart, fEEL, Sherre DeLys, alongside Bobby Baker (UK), Leigh Ledare (US), Lee Lai (Can) and more.

APP: A COURSE OF EMPATHY APP

A practical tool for cultivating empathy, designed by psychologists and artists at the Felt Experience & Empathy Lab (fEEL) in conjunction with The Empathy Clinic courseofempathy.org

THESE WALLS COULD TALK

27 Sept - 3 Nov | Bradfield TAFE; & Chandos St & Atchison Lane, St Leonards

Artist Cameron Cripps-Kennedy, poet Omar Sakr and students of Bradfield College stage intimate and poetic conversations about mental health across the external walls of buildings in St Leonards.

ANXIETY OF AGEING

Meet Viv, a character created from interviews with women with dementia, in the pioneering interactive animation, *Confabulations* – and hear about ageing at the margins in our panel discussion, *The Razz* (9 Nov). Special events on ageing, emotion and community in a range of Local Government Authorities (see website for details).

UTI KULINTJAKU INITIATIVE - NEW VIRTUAL REALITY WORKS

UNSW Galleries, Paddington see *The Empathy Clinic*, 27 Sept - 16 Nov & Art Gallery of New South Wales, see *Art After Hours*, 16 Oct.

The **Uti Kulintjaku [UK] initiative** is an innovative, Aboriginal-led mental health literacy project that takes its name from a Pitjantjatjara phrase that means 'to think and understand clearly'. Led by the Ngangkari traditional healers and artists of the NPY Women's Council, UK explores mental health from both Aboriginal and Western perspectives.

Working with the Big Anxiety and fEEL, the UK team have created two new virtual reality works for *The Empathy Clinic* showing at UNSW Galleries, Cunningham Dax, Melbourne and in a special presentation at AGNSW's *Art After Hours*.

Suicide Prevention & Future Thinking

EDGE OF THE PRESENT

27 Sept-16 Nov, Mon-Sat 10am-5pm | UNSW Galleries

How do you imagine the future when you can't see it? **Edge of the Present** melds art with science to create an immersive environment that literally cultivates the capacity for future thinking. Inspired by suicide survivors and neuropsychological research into the workings of memory and imagination, this compelling virtual reality exhibit was created by a team led by artist Alex Davies, using technology in new ways that help you better engage with the present moment with openness, curiosity and positivity.

THE S-WORD - AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS WITH LIFELINE

10 October | Tallawoladah Lawn, near MCA, The Rocks

In a special event for Mental Health Day, Lifeline's crisis support team host one-to-one informal conversations addressing fears, inhibitions and anything you want to ask about suicide and mental distress.

Gender & Power

LONG TABLE: WOMEN IN POWER

9 Oct, 11.30am-2.30pm, with book launch at 4pm | Parramatta Female Factory Precinct

PARRAGIRLS host a Long Table discussing Women in Power - celebrating female survivors, political and community leaders and activists who speak truth to power. The Long Table creates a democratic forum for public discussion. Anyone is welcome to take a seat at the table and share their perspective.

DAUGHTERS

17 Oct, 6.30pm Panel + 8pm Concert | City Recital Hall, Angel Place

Daughters is a world premiere song-cycle that uses the haunting form of Portuguese fado, female voice and intimate musical accompaniment to evoke the strength and tragedy of women and girls lost to violence. Drawing on real-life stories, the 12 songs are emblematic of a global crisis that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime. Librettist Tammy Brennan and composer David Chisholm, through soprano Aivale Cole take the audience on a powerful journey tracing the effects of gender violence. Discussion panel precedes recital.

EVELYN ARALUEN - FESTIVAL POET

16 October, 7.30pm | Art After Hours Art Gallery of NSW

The 2019 Big Anxiety Festival Poet **Evelyn Araluen** is a descendant of the Bundjalung nation, born, raised, and writing in Dharug country. Evelyn will perform her commissioned poem "Interior Anxious" and will host *Black Rhymes* at Art Gallery of NSW 7.30pm on 16 October.

SLEEPLESSNESS

1 Nov, 6.30pm | *Studio One, E8 Theatre, UNSW Kensington*

Sleeplessness maps a remarkable Australian story, revealing the impact of migration, institutionalisation and transgenerational trauma on families. Part mystery, part documentary, part forensic investigation, Karen Therese explores the experiences of three generations of women from 1920s Budapest to Western Sydney today. Therese is an interdisciplinary artist and also Director of the Powerhouse Youth Theatre, Fairfield, whose work has been called “profoundly moving and fiercely ambitious”.

AWKWARD CONVERSATIONS

12-13 Oct, 11am-1pm & 2- 4pm | *Customs House*

Awkward Conversations offers one-on-one conversations in experimental formats, tackling anxieties, habits and hard-to-talk-about subjects like mental health. Conversationalists include:

- + **Jonathan Dunk** - a writer/researcher with experience of Type II Bipolar and O.C.D.
- + **Bhenji Ra** - an artist and dancer who uses body and voice to negotiate her public visibility as a trans woman of colour, living in the intersections of body dysmorphia and gender dysphoria.
- + **Debra Keenahan** - an artist confronting taboos of sexuality and disability in relation to her own lived experience with achondroplasia (dwarfism).
- + **Daniel Regan** – London-based artist who uses photography to survive, and to ask questions about self-harm.
- + **Wart** - a multidisciplinary artist and self-described “kook” whose life experience in the realm of the so-called schizo-affective has given her entertaining insights into psychiatry and community mental health.
- + **Eugenie Lee** - an artist living with pain and using technology to communicate this.
- + **Wil Centurian** - a performer whose own mental health experiences inform the counselling and life-coaching he now provides to actors, singers and dancers.
- + **Faisal Sayani** – a filmmaker and former journalist in Pakistan whose work is informed by his experience of depression.
- + **Amala Groom** - a Wiradjuri artist who uses First Nations knowledge(s) and perspectives to address the experience of anxiety.

MORE HIGHLIGHTS

NOSFERATU (THE UNDEAD) – JAVIER TELLEZ (VENEZUELA)

27 Sept-16 Nov, Mon-Sat 10am-5pm | *UNSW Galleries, Paddington*

A film installation by Venezuelan-born artist Javier Téllez, inspired by FW Murnau’s silent horror masterpiece and developed in collaboration with people living with mental illness in order to challenge stereotypes of representation.

MUSIC, FEELING & EMOTION

Thu 8 Oct, 12.30pm | *City Recital Hall*

Have you ever noticed how profoundly music affects your mood? Mental health researchers Dr Sandra Garrido and Professor Katherine Boydell host a free interactive lunchtime session exploring the emotional and psychological benefits of music.

IN TROUBLE

9-20 Oct, 10am-6pm | *BoomGate Gallery, Long Bay Jail*

Artworks from inmates at Long Bay Correctional Complex and Justice Health Forensic Hospital, examining the critical role of art in the maintenance of mental health.

EXPLORERS - Project Art Works (UK)

28 Sept-7 Oct, Mon-Sun 10am-5pm | Museum of Contemporary Art

Explorers by Project Art Works is a three-year transnational initiative informed and led by neuro-diverse communities, placing them at the heart of social, civic and cultural activity. It features ***Into the Wilderness***, a collaboration between filmmakers Ben Rivers and Margaret Salmon with neuro-diverse artists, makers, families and carers, as well as workshops. A public Long Table 'Art*People*Care' on radical arts-led models of care on 2 October, 6-8pm.

MCA ART IS FOR EVERYONE WEEKEND

Sat 28 – Sun 29 Sept, 11am to 4pm

The MCA celebrates its commitment to access by hosting a weekend of inclusivity focused talks, films and workshops. This free 2-day program brings together artists and access partners to celebrate people with disability and access requirements. Visit the MCA website for details.

HOME BY STUDIO A

19 Oct – 2 Nov 10am-6pm | Sub-Base Platypus, North Sydney

An exhibition exploring how home is understood & imagined by artists with intellectual disabilities from Studio A. Enter their immersive dream home experience, housed within the centuries-old Retort House Harbour Trust building overlooking Sydney harbour.

AIRSPACE TRIBUNAL

14 Oct, 5.30-8.30pm | The Ethics Centre, Sydney

Conceived by Barrister Nick Grief and artist Shona Illingworth (Denmark/Scotland), the Airspace Tribunal considers the case for and against the recognition of a new human right to protect the freedom to exist without physical or psychological threat from above.

LEIGH LEDARE (US) IN CONVERSATION

18 Oct, 6.30pm-8pm | UNSW Art & Design, Paddington

Leigh Ledare-US artist, filmmaker is joined by psychosocial researcher Lynn Froggett (UK) to discuss Ledare's film, *The Task* (2017), which uses psychoanalytic group therapy techniques to expose race, gender and other power dynamics in social interactions – part of *The Empathy Clinic* at UNSW Galleries.

ANXIETY, CULTURE AND THE FUTURE CONFERENCE

18–19 Oct | Art Gallery of NSW & Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences

anxietyculturefuture.org

When only 35% of Australians with so-called mental health problems seek help from health providers, perhaps the cultural sector is key to providing greater insight, agency, resources and collective action? This conference looks at the psychological and social work of the arts and asks what role the cultural sector might play in ensuring our health and wellbeing, and what this could mean for the future of museums, galleries and cultural practice. Keynotes include: Renata Salecl (Slovenia), acclaimed author of *On Anxiety* and *Choice*; and Claire Doherty (UK), curator.

ART AFTER HOURS

16 Oct, 5.30pm-9.00pm | Art Gallery of NSW

The Big Anxiety Art After Hours includes:

5.30pm: Uti Kulintjaku Initiative (Entrance Court)

Ngangkari (traditional healers) and artists from NPY Women's Council still the gallery spaces of AGNSW with guided meditations in language – followed by a performance presentation.

6.30pm: The Listening Panel (Centenary Auditorium)

Experts with highly developed listening and empathy skills discuss the tools of their trade and what makes a good listener. Panel speakers: artist and meditation expert, Sherre DeLys; funeral celebrant Victoria Spence; Wayside Chapel pastor Jon Owen; psychiatrist Russell Meares; and Lynne Malcolm, presenter of Radio National's *All in the Mind*, will moderate. Free but bookings are essential.

7.15pm - Body Mapping (Gallery Space) Booking Essential via Eventbrite

Depict your own experience of anxiety on a life-sized body map in a dynamic workshop amidst artworks in the Gallery's collections. Facilitated by Dr Sally Nathan.

7.30pm-Black Rhymes (Entrance Court)

Sydney's leading performance event for Aboriginal writers gives voice to Indigenous perspectives on mental health and healing. Hosted by Big Anxiety Ambassador and Poet, Evelyn Araluen, with the powerful and transformative poetry of Lorna Munro, Alison Whittaker, Luke Patterson and Elizabeth Jarrett.

All evening - Virtual Reality Station (AGNSW Café)

Experience virtual reality works from The Empathy Clinic, including:

- + *Parragirls Past, Present*-an immersive and moving VR work, rewriting institutional history;
- + *Being Debra* - empathise and feel the lived experience of a person with dwarfism;
- + *Ngura Wirukutu Katinja* and *Purlu Katalarranguru*-creative visualisation and calming meditation from the UK Initiative.

Venues

- + AD Space UNSW Art & Design
- + Art Gallery of NSW
- + Artspace
- + Black Dog Institute
- + Bradfield TAFE, and Atchison Lane, St Leonards
- + Callan Park, Rozelle
- + City of Sydney Town Hall, Lower Ground Floor
- + City Recital Hall
- + Cunningham Dax Centre, Melbourne
- + Customs House Library and Forecourt
- + Double Bay Library
- + MAAS - Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences
- + Macquarie Hospital
- + MCA - Museum of Contemporary Art
- + Northern Beaches community venues
- + Northside Hospital
- + Parramatta Female Factory Precinct
- + Sub-Base Platypus, North Sydney
- + Tallawoladah Lawn, The Rocks
- + The Boom Gate Gallery, Long Bay Correctional Complex
- + The Ethics Centre
- + UNSW Galleries Paddington Campus
- + UNSW Kensington, School of Arts and Media
- + Horizon festival, Maroochydore