

Sydney Writers' Festival 2025

Guest curator Nardi Simpson on storytelling, the body and First Nations voices

FESTIVALS

LUCY GLEESON

AT this year's Sydney Writers' Festival, guest curator Nardi Simpson didn't just help design the program, she created a space where relationships, connection, the body and the written word intersect.

As a Yuwaalaraay storyteller, member of the musical-duo Stiff Gins and most recently, author to her second novel *The Belburd*, Simpson is no stranger to crafting stories across mediums. Yet, the Writers' Festival gave her a chance to challenge traditional literary boundaries.

"I love seeing the capability of relational ways of working in a written space, and that's what I hope I'm bringing, a different way to connect and engage with story," Simpson said.

After serving as a First Nations Curator at the Melbourne Writers Festival earlier this month, Simpson turned her focus to Sydney, where she's based, and the chance to spotlight voices close to her heart.

This year's theme, *In This Together*, strikes a personal chord for Simpson. "In a beautiful way, the people I'm engaging with and the stories I'm interested in are from my Blak writing community. It's another opportunity to celebrate their work... we're always family, festival or not."

The theme of connection took physical form in the event *Beyond the Self*, a discussion panel that Simpson co-hosted alongside Daniel Browning and Thomas Mayo. "I'm interested in the body of work, the written artifact. How can we embody that in our physical selves, but also in the structures that our bodies interact with? The structures that are external to us like the Constitution or the media," she said.

"And in that way, it allows the written word, the book, to have a life in a body and have a life in a structure, in a different way."

Also curated by Simpson, *Songstress Poetica* brought together a panel of First Nations female poets whose work blurs the line between verse and voice.

"(The poets) have a language that transcends all ways of being.



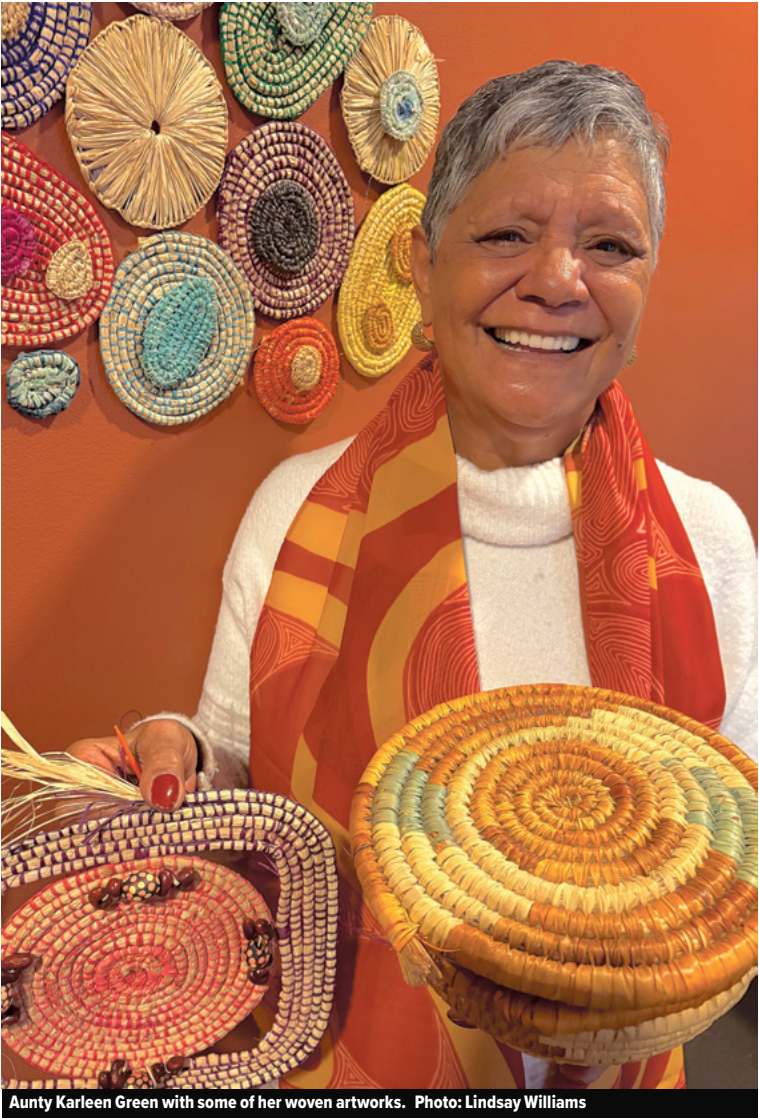
Nardi Simpson. Photo: Jacquie Manning

So, I want to put a big mob of deadly female poets on stage, and let them weave their magic, it's music to me. It's not just the fluidity of words. It's the way that a body measures the delivery of those which is just as musical."

Above all, Simpson hoped to inspire a genuine connection between attendees and the events they experience, encouraging them to engage with the voices, stories and cultures presented in new, fresh ways.

"I would love people to be gushing about the creativity and the skill of First Nations creatives and their special ability to share generously all that they are and to offer that as a gift of who we can be together."

SSH



Aunty Karleen Green with some of her woven artworks. Photo: Lindsay Williams

Weaving a way to knowledge and healing

FIRST PEOPLES

KARLEEN GREEN

I was born Karleen Green in Brisbane, even though my family lived at Fingal on the Tweed River in Bundjalung country, northern NSW. I sit in the middle of 10 children to my mother Ruth Green (nee Curry) who is now 91 years of age from Beaudesert in Queensland and my father Michael Green from Coolangatta.

I grew up at Fingal Head where, as children, our lives were free and easy. Our front yard was our river, and our backyard was our beach where we went fishing, camping and swimming. I remember we protested against the mining company who wanted to dredge out beautiful beaches at Kerosene Bay and take the sand to build up Gold Coast beaches. Our story about the protest made it to the ABC program *Four Corners*. We were so proud of our efforts.

When I was 18 years old, I travelled to Sydney to seek employment. My first job was at the NSW State Library where I was able to do inter-library loans. I was able to develop my skills in research which I loved because this allowed me to research my family history as well as my Aboriginal culture.

In 1994 I moved to Darwin and enrolled in a four-year textile course at Nungalinga Combined Churches Training College. This is where my passion for weaving and textiles developed. I focused on basket weaving which included dyes, screen and silk printing.

Students' work was supplied to major airports in Australia allowing us to buy more art products and to provide the education of Aboriginal culture through artistry and textiles to the international visitors.

Currently my role is a community educator and traditional weaver. I run workshops and teaching at places such as the Sydney Opera House, the Australian Museum, NSW Art Gallery, Barangaroo and the Black Markets at Circular Quay,

and Bare Island. I was also an artist in residence at Carriageworks in Eveleigh.

I volunteer at a women's shelter in Sydney. Weaving was Aboriginal women's business so what a wonderful way for people to journey with me to connect with their culture and a healing process. Particularly since it allows them to talk and share their knowledge and experiences.

I love what I do. I love working with and teaching other women about the art of weaving and for them to share my journey of cultural knowledge, experience and healing.

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CITY OF SYDNEY
South Sydney Herald

This article is part of a series by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living and working on Gadigal land. The series, a joint project of the SSH and the City of Sydney, is curated by Aunty Norma Ingram.

Follow @karleengreen

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590 beanies for 590 lives

Hats for Homeless marks Sorry Day with powerful tribute

HUMAN AFFAIRS

ANDREW COLLIS

HATS for Humanity, a special project of the Sydney-based grassroots initiative Hats for Homeless, marked this year's Sorry Day with a striking gesture of remembrance and solidarity: the distribution of 590 hand-knitted Aboriginal-flag beanies, created in partnership with Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation. Each beanie symbolises a life lost – 590 First Nations people who have died in Australian prisons and holding cells since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Volunteers crafted the beanies as a visible act of grief and protest. They were distributed at the Royal Botanic Garden on Sunday, May 25, as part of a quiet, powerful tribute.

"Hopefully, Australian policy-makers will share our collective grief and begin to do something," said the Rev. Brian Woodhouse, co-founder of the initiative alongside Pastor Susan Russell.

Founded in 2019 as a tribute to their mothers and grandmothers, Hats for Homeless began with inherited wool and a simple goal: to loom beanies for people experiencing homelessness during the coldest months. What started with 350 beanies in its first year has now grown into a city-wide movement, producing over 20,000 beanies, scarves, mittens and blankets, thanks to the contributions of more than 1,000 members of its online community.

In addition to its outreach to those sleeping rough, the



Pastor Susan Russell with Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Senator the Hon. Malarndirri McCarthy and Kerry Blake. Photo: Sarah Malone

initiative fosters partnerships with organisations such as Uniting Residential Aged Care, local chaplaincy services and Men's Sheds. Its knitted goods are regularly distributed through support centres including Wayside Chapel, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre and St Stephen's Early Bird Café.

Pastor Russell, who also serves

as Chaplaincy Lead for Uniting in Sydney's Central Region, sees the work as a daily expression of neighbourly love. "Love your neighbour as yourself" is a guiding principle, one she lives by – recalling a moment when she gave her own beanie to a man in need. "I can feel the warmth of your head on mine," he told her. A simple sentence that captures

the essence of their mission.

Through projects like Hats for Humanity, Hats for Homeless continues to show how a community, armed with yarn and compassion, can knit together dignity, remembrance and hope. **SSH**

For more information, contact
hatsforhomeless@cootagirls.org.au
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Rugged up for winter. Photo: Elyza Vandenvenkamp

Stitch by stitch – my favourite crochet project yet

HUMAN AFFAIRS

ELYZA VANDENBOVENKAMP

This is not my first crochet project but it is by far my favourite.

I first got into crocheting because I always wanted to make

myself a blanket that I could be proud of. I eventually taught myself and have made multiple things since.

The aspect I have enjoyed the most about the project is getting to see the progress I'm making and watching it slowly get bigger.

On the other hand, the most challenging thing has most

definitely been learning a new pattern and being able to overcome mistakes I have made along the way.

I want the finished blanket to be about double the size that it is now.

I can definitely see myself crocheting more things as it has been such a rewarding process. I strongly support the work of Hats for Homeless and will be getting in touch with them this winter.

Volunteer Driver Wanted – Join the SSH Team!

The *South Sydney Herald* is growing – and we need a passionate local to join our volunteer delivery team!

We're looking for someone with a car who's happy to help distribute newspapers across our vibrant catchment area. You'll be joining a community-focused team committed to independent journalism and local storytelling.

Our Assistant Managing Editor, Andrew Collis, will personally show you the ropes until you're confident and on your way. A petrol allowance is offered, and you'll be making a meaningful contribution to keeping our community connected.

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To find out more or express your interest, please contact: editor@ssh.com.au





Bella Bain. Photo: Josh Brightman (Balanced Image Studios)

Chippendale’s leading innovator Bella Bain and the power of asking ‘why?’

LOCALS
GERRY SONT

CHIPPENDALE resident Bella (Isabella) Bain is the 2025 winner of the prestigious 7 News NSW/ACT Young Achievers Award. She has just returned from San Francisco, where she joined 10,000 designers, engineers and product leaders shaping the future of AI. But back home there’s only \$30 left in her wallet.

A multi-award winner in sportsmanship, leadership and innovation – all before 30 – Bella credits her drive to growing up on a rural farm. “I was riding horses, herding cattle, fixing fences – basically solving problems from a young age,” she says. “Dad would tell us to get outside and find something to do. So we did.” After being a semi-finalist three times, Bella finally cracked the Young Achievers code this year. “I think my ‘special

sauce’ this time came down to experience – projects like the COVID app at IBM and leading Macquarie’s Corporate Operation Group’s product design team helped me stand out.” When it comes to problem-solving, Bella applies a designer’s mindset: “Ask yourself ‘why?’ five times. Why is a product or service needed? Why is it important? If you go deep enough, you’ll hit the core issue – and that’s what we’re trying to solve as designers.” Beyond tech, Bella’s creativity shines. For Vivid Sydney, she and university friend Christopher Simpson created a light sculpture that went on to be showcased in Singapore. “I’m part computer geek, part creative soul,” she reveals. What keeps her in Chippendale? “It’s a great place to live, it’s close to the city, close to parks. I think if you google Chippendale, it comes up as one of Sydney’s trendiest suburbs. “And yes – it does, with Redfern not far behind.

Bella also believes Sydney as a whole is on its way to becoming the next big tech hub, ‘Sydney Silicon’. “Silicon Valley has had its day. Here in the city, you’ve got Canva, Atlassian, and other major tech companies relocating their HQs. Of course, we need the right government funding to support this growth, but there’s already a real sense of community here.” Asked what advice she’d give to young women leaving school, Bella doesn’t hesitate: “Trust yourself. Stay curious about how you can make the world better with the skills you’ve got. If I ever wrote a book, I’d call it *The Curious Investor*,” she grins. She closes with a favourite analogy: “Most people live to about 80. That’s like having \$80 in your wallet. You spend \$20 on school, \$20 on retirement – so you’ve got \$40 for your working life. I’m 30 now so I’ve just spent another \$10. That leaves me with \$30.” “I’m looking forward to spending that \$30 wisely,” she says with a smile.

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Palestine solidarity filled Sydney these last few weeks

From the Greens’ call for justice at NSW Parliament on 6 May to a powerful Nakba Day rally at Sydney Town Hall on 15 May to the Free Palestine rally on 1 June.

Photo: Michelle Haywood

JENNY LEONG MP
MEMBER FOR NEWTOWN



Greens Abortion Access Bill Becomes Law!

Six years on from the decriminalisation of abortion care in NSW, the Greens in NSW Parliament have secured landmark reforms to further improve access to abortion care in NSW.

Late last year, research by the University of Sydney found that only 3 of 220 public hospitals are routinely providing access to essential abortion care services. We have heard far too many instances where women have been forced to travel hours, wait weeks, or spend hundreds to thousands of dollars to access the essential care they need.

The Abortion Law Reform Amendment (Health care Access) Bill 2025, introduced by Greens MP Dr Amanda Cohn, will expand access to abortion in NSW by enabling highly-trained nurse practitioners and endorsed midwives to prescribe early-stage medical abortion medication.

This Bill will make it easier for those in rural and regional communities to access the care they need, and help to address a key healthcare inequity impacting communities across NSW.

My Greens colleague Dr Amanda Cohn has campaigned on this issue for many years first as a practising country GP herself, and now as a Member of Parliament. In her words: “The Greens are incredibly proud to have put abortion access on the political agenda and driven this needed change for women’s rights and reproductive rights in NSW.”

At a time when women’s rights and reproductive rights have been under fire both at home, and overseas, it is so significant that the NSW Parliament has not only safeguarded reproductive rights, but strengthened them.

The Greens are unapologetically pro-choice, and will always stand up for one’s right to choose.

Thank you to each and every one of you who has rallied in support of women’s rights and reproductive rights over so many years – this is a landmark reform and a significant win.



Authorised by Jenny Leong MP. Funded using parliamentary entitlements.



Dear SSH readers

Thank you Sydney electors for allowing me to serve you for another term.

Our re-elected Albanese Labor government is getting right to work tackling immediate cost of living pressures and building Australia’s future.

Australians voted for fairness and opportunity for all and the voted for a strong, responsibly managed economy.

We are getting on with the job of building a stronger Medicare, more affordable housing, free TAFE and fully funding public schools.

We’re also determined to revive our flatlining productivity, one of the biggest challenges facing our nation.

Please also remember that you can contact my electorate office if you need help with a federal issue.

Best wishes

Tanya

TANYA PLIBERSEK MP
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SPONSORED

MARK SCOTT

THE University of Sydney is proud to be the Exhibition Partner at the 2025 Venice Architecture Biennale, where students from the School of Architecture, Design and Planning are currently exhibiting work in the Australia Pavilion.

The international stage of the Biennale now hosts HOME: Country as Creative Process, a landmark exhibition exploring the concept of belonging through the eyes of 125 students from 11 Australian universities. At the heart of this cross-university initiative are the University of Sydney’s very own students, who are not only exhibiting their work but also actively shaping global conversations around home, culture and identity.

Led by Dr Michael Mossman and Elle Davidson from the University of Sydney’s School of Architecture, Design and Planning, the project has offered students a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to contribute to one of the world’s most prestigious architecture events. So, what does home look like to a student today? For First Nations Bachelor of Architecture and Environments student Cilicia Christy, it’s a living, evolving concept. Her work, now on display in Venice, uses weaving and natural materials – maireener shells, seed pods and plant fibres – to explore her Palawa

and Ngāti Kahungunu heritage. “Home is something we carry, shape, and keep building over time,” said Cilicia. “Weaving has become a meaningful way for me to reconnect with my culture and reflect on the art of where I come from.” Fellow University of Sydney student Candace Dinkha, a first-generation Australian, explored the role of language and memory in defining home. Her piece, also selected for exhibition, honours the cultural thread carried through the Assyrian language – often in non-verbal ways. “My work examines how language lives on through gestures, rituals, and domestic labours. It’s a tapestry of shared experience, passed down by the women in my life,” she said. As Exhibition Partner, the University of Sydney has played a central role in not only curating the Australia Pavilion but in shaping an educational experience that goes beyond the classroom. Over months of workshops, cultural immersion and collaborative making, students engaged deeply with the concept of Living Belongings – physical expressions of personal and cultural connections to place. Each piece reflects the maker’s story, identity, and ties to Country or heritage. Dr Mossman, who is also the Creative Director of the Australia Pavilion exhibition, said involving students in this global event was integral to the project’s vision. “We wanted students to be at the heart of HOME. The Biennale offers them an unparalleled

opportunity to connect with international audiences and contribute meaningfully to the architectural discourse on culture and identity.” The collaboration also deepened students’ understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems, emphasising learning through making, place-based research, and storytelling through materials. “Creating this unit of study across 11 universities required careful coordination, but it built a truly special learning community,” said Dr Mossman. “Students embraced Indigenous ways of knowing, which shaped a powerful and shared experience of belonging.” Running from May to November 2025, HOME: Country as Creative Process invites thousands of international visitors to reflect on the diverse meanings of home. The student contributions from the University of Sydney form a core part of this rich, layered exhibition – offering personal narratives that transcend borders. As Exhibition Partner, the University of Sydney is proud to champion student creativity, amplify First Nations perspectives, and foster cross-cultural learning on one of architecture’s most important global platforms.



Authorised by Vice-Chancellor and President Prof. Mark Scott.
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The Australian Pavilion. Photo: Peter Bennett

University of Sydney students showcase cultural identity at Venice Architecture Biennale



Ban, baby, ban! Why words still matter

EDITORIAL

SSH

REMEMBER when Donald Trump made “Drill, baby, drill!” a campaign slogan? Today, a new chant seems to echo across some US states: “Ban, baby, ban!” Thousands of books are being pulled from school shelves for the most surprising reasons. Titles like *The Diary of Anne Frank* have been banned over “inappropriate content”, while books about race, gender or even historical truth are being silenced under vague accusations of being “divisive”.

So why are books still being banned in 2025? Because – even in the digital age – words still carry power. They challenge us,

open minds, spark empathy. And sometimes, that’s exactly what makes them targets. That’s why the Sydney Writers’ Festival, held at the end of May, felt more important than ever. It was a vibrant celebration of storytelling with a strong spotlight on local and Indigenous voices, but also with a global outlook. Most importantly – and we can’t stress this enough – Gaza. Our journalists and photographers were there, capturing the energy, listening to the stories and witnessing just how alive literature is in our communities. (Read Lucy Gleeson’s interview with guest curator Nardi Simpson on the front page and see Karina Kreminsky’s full coverage of the festival on page 7.) The same spirit is showing up in a quiet but powerful movement

in Sydney libraries: read-ins. These are gatherings where people meet in libraries with a book and read together – silently, side by side. It’s a peaceful act of solidarity, a celebration of the freedom to read and a subtle stand against censorship (see below). Words can still change the world – and sometimes they simply make our day better. So check out our book review by our very own editor, Melinda Kearns, along with our takes on films, food, sports and the work of emerging young writers and creators – the voices of the future. Whether you’re looking to be informed, inspired or entertained, we’ve got you covered. Words matter. Let’s keep reading them – and fighting for them.

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A quiet revolution?

BOOKS

KARINA KREMSKI

THERE seems to be a change from the usual Sydney noise and buzz these days. Instead, you can hear the sounds of people quietly turning pages, sipping on tea and getting home early to continue reading a good book.

Silent reading parties or read-ins are gaining popularity in our city at a time when, more than ever, people want connection and welcoming places to hang out. Bookshops – especially those with cafés – seem to be the ideal setting. Silent reading parties are gatherings where people are welcome to bring a book and sit, quietly reading – together. Usually there is a break in the middle for people to share thoughts, connect and perhaps even hear small portions of books being read out. Some events also have planned performances of poetry or singing. The basic rule of each gathering seems to be, “No phones allowed”. In a world that is high-tech and addicted to scrolling, this is a welcome command. Bondi-based bookshop *Gertrude and Alice* recently hosted a Silent Reading Party organised by *Bookish*. *Sappho Bookshop* in Glebe has also embraced this latest trend. Cathal, a bookseller at the store, says



Photo: Karina Kreminski

these gatherings are a great way to support your local bookshop. He adds: “People have a low social battery today, especially post-Covid. But they still want social connection.” *Berkelouw Books* in Paddington will also host a Winter Read-In in July. Whatever the reason for this new trend, it’s obvious that books, reading and the desire to connect will never go out of style.

SSH

Mass honours legacy of Father Ted Kennedy on 20th anniversary of his passing

RELIGION & ETHICS

ANDREW COLLIS

REDFERN: Under the stained-glass light of St Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, the spirit of Father Edward “Ted” Kennedy (1931-2005) was unmistakably present on Sunday, May 18, as hundreds gathered to mark 20 years since the death of the beloved priest and social justice advocate.

The occasion was both solemn and celebratory – a liturgy of remembrance that echoed the values Fr Ted lived by: compassion, conscience, and a radical solidarity with the poor and dispossessed. Presiding over the Mass was Jesuit priest Fr Frank Brennan, whose homily offered both a tribute and a challenge. He spoke warmly of Fr Ted’s enduring legacy – his embrace of Aboriginal people, his prophetic witness against injustice, and his vision of a church grounded in humility and inclusion. Brennan drew from Pope Francis’ encyclicals on creation (*Laudato Si’*) and the call for a church of the poor (*Evangelii Gaudium*), linking Ted’s grassroots ministry in Redfern to a global gospel imperative. But it was no uncritical eulogy. Brennan, with characteristic candour, lamented the Church’s ongoing failures – particularly its hesitance to pursue justice for women. “Ted would want us to be brave,” he said. “To speak plainly. To keep pushing the Church toward genuine communion.” The parish community responded with grace and hospitality that many described as “quintessentially Redfern” – friendly, unpolished and deeply human. Songs, prayers and

heartfelt tributes flowed alongside quiet gestures of welcome and remembrance. Musician Peter Kearney’s original song for Ted, performed with pianist Kevin Hunt, moved many to tears: “You were always there, Father Ted.” Former federal minister Linda Burney, a long-time supporter of Kennedy’s work, was present as an honoured guest. Her quiet presence reflected the depth of connection between Kennedy’s Redfern and the broader movement for Indigenous justice. Behind the altar, the enduring words of Pope John Paul II (Alice Springs, November 29, 1986) – “For thousands of years you, the Aboriginal people, have lived in this land with a culture that endures to this day” – remained a sacred backdrop to the proceedings. Ecumenical ties were honoured too, with representatives from South Sydney Uniting Church present, a reminder of decades-long collaboration between communities of faith committed to justice and peace. Fr Ted Kennedy’s vision of a church shaped by conscience continues to inspire, especially through his revered book *Who is Worthy?* His legacy – as a friend of social worker Mum Shirl, a supporter of the arts, an ally for LGBT people, and a fierce critic of exclusion – was alive in every ritual moment and remembered story. What remained most palpable was joy. Not a saccharine optimism, but a defiant, gospel-rooted joy in the face of resistance (reactionary forces both ecclesiastical and political). A joy in community. A joy in truth. A joy in honouring one who lived, as someone whispered, “so close to the ground, and so close to God”.

SSH



Lighting up history: David McDiarmid’s legacy shines at Vivid LIVE 2025

Vivid LIVE 2025 lights up the Sydney Opera House with the bold, joyful legacy of David McDiarmid, honouring queer history, activism, and the enduring power of art to demand justice, beauty and remembrance.

Photo: Michelle Haywood

The Art Trail – Glebe to Globe: Local Edition’s creative revolution

ART ANNA JAHJAH

I was walking along Parramatta Road, minding my own business on the way to visit a friend in Camperdown, when fate stepped in. The light turned red at Glebe Point Road, and not wanting to wait, I took a detour, thinking I’d cross further down.

That’s when I saw it: *Local Edition*, a shop filled with beautifully curated items. Though the door was closed, the “Open” sign invited me in. So I pushed it and entered a world of artistic magic.

A sign mentioned an art gallery at the back and live music events. Intrigued, I began exploring. The front of the shop featured a stunning collection of ceramics, jewellery and accessories – ethically sourced from around the world and surprisingly affordable. Then, I stepped into the gallery space. A note informed me the current show featured artists from Berlin. The works were small but captivating – just enough to stir curiosity without overwhelming. I guessed this was also where the concerts took place. I had to know more.

Back in the gift shop area, I struck up a conversation with the man behind the counter, Majid Shahrabi, the owner. Just then, a young man emerged from the gallery. He introduced himself as Iman Irannejad, the art gallery curator, and offered me a tour. Majid added that their live music coordinator and PR manager, Hamed Ebrahimi, would be arriving shortly. The stars had aligned!

As I connected the dots, it became clear: *Local Edition* wasn’t your typical concept store – it was something much more vibrant. Run by Majid and his partner Shimana Sadeghi, with artistic



Curator Iman Irannejad in the art gallery section. Photo: Anna Jahjah

direction from Iman and musical programming by Hamed, the place is the opposite of pretentious. It’s welcoming, curious, and open – a cultural haven for experimental ideas. The shop opened a year ago and has thrived ever since. Iman, who had artist residencies in Berlin, brought back strong connections from the scene. The current exhibition, *Berlin Sydney*, features work by artists based in Berlin, originally from Ukraine,

Spain, France, Iran, and more. From painting to video, the pieces explore the brilliance and difficulty of being an artist in the German capital. Iman also contributes his own work. He calls Berlin the new global art capital – and this show brings a slice of that world to Glebe. As for Hamed, the music curator and PR manager, he focuses on world music and boundary-pushing, innovative sounds. What began with bands from his network

grew by word of mouth. Now, the space is booked three months in advance, mostly for Friday and Saturday gigs every second week. Artists have come from Korea, Poland, Mongolia, India. More than 2,500 people have attended events in the past year. Hamed notes that while spaces like this are common in Europe and Iran – where Majid, Iman and Hamed are originally from, they’re rare in Sydney, especially in the inner city.

So, what’s next for the team? “A bigger space,” says Hamed with a smile. With their vision, energy, and the support of a growing community, it’s the least we can wish them. Local Edition 279 Broadway, Glebe Open Tue to Sat, 11am – 7pm (Thur pm) Berlin Sydney runs until June www.localedition.com.au

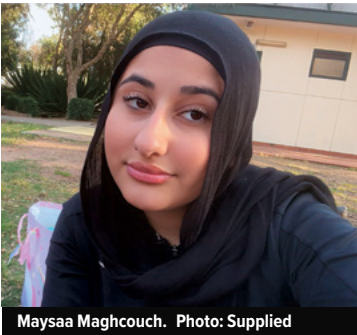
From art to writing – the many layers of creativity

Writer Profile: Maysaa Maghchouch

BOOKS ELIZABETH ARRIGO

WITH a little encouragement from her older sister, Year 10 student Maysaa Maghchouch first came to Story Factory last year to join the regular after-school workshops in creative writing.

This year, she is embarking on a journey to write her very own novella – plus sequels. “I used to do a bit of short-story writing, and my sister saw that I had this interest in writing,” says Maysaa. “She saw a post from Story Factory on Instagram and suggested I



Maysaa Maghchouch. Photo: Supplied

join their program. I came here every Monday last year from Term 3 and did the term-long workshops. Story Factory gave me new ideas to use in my writing.” These term-long programs helped give Maysaa the time and skills to

create the story for her upcoming book, a “romantasy” (a blend of romance and fantasy) novella which follows a young woman who discovers she has special powers and embarks on a journey of self-discovery and adventure. “I’ve got all the details planned out,” says Maysaa. “The main character’s storyline – that’s already five books, and then her mother’s storyline, that’s another three books. I already had this story when I started with Story Factory – I’ve been building on the idea since 2022. I actually go out of my way to come to Story Factory to work on it. I’ve been here every week this year because I really, really enjoy it.”

Something that inspires Maysaa’s writing is her art. All of her characters and storylines start with her own original drawings. “To write, I’ll start with drawing something, and then I’ll either discard it or I’ll move into a new idea,” Maysaa says. “From that idea I’ll start a new storyline. There will be new characters, new personalities and new powers – all from a tiny drawing. I can really branch an idea out from a drawing.” “Story Factory encourages me to use my art to create my book. Whenever I get bored in class at school, I come back to my story for Story Factory.” Her debut novella (yet to be

titled) will be published by Story Factory in December. We can’t wait to see her amazing writing and illustration work come to life. Excerpt from *Maybe a truth*, a short story by Maysaa Maghchouch: We went bowling, I won like always. We ordered more and more food – milkshakes, slushies, curly fries, nuggets. It was all so pre-French Revolution coded – greasy, excessive, like the world was put on pause and no one else mattered. We played games, went on go-karts, and finished the night with a tense game of laser-tag. This gathering was the first of many, the start to a bittersweet end.

An antidote to the algorithms

FESTIVALS

KARINA KREMSKI

THE theme for The Sydney Writers’ Festival 2025 was *In this Together*. In a world of echo chambers, polarisation and fragmentation, this was a timely choice.

The opening session introduced this theme from a range of perspectives. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander author and activist Thomas Mayo spoke of the need for us to unite and keep moving forward, despite the painful referendum result.

Yuwaalaraay musician and author Nardi Simpson shared her experience of being trolled on social media and of wanting to retreat, hide and escape from the vitriol (Editor’s Note: Read our full-length interview with Nardi Simpson on our front page.)

British poet Lemn Sissay poked fun at the writer’s ego, which forgets that it takes a community to publish a book.

Finally, Jeanette Winterson, author of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, encouraged us to think about what it means to be human today. “We cannot



Anna Funder. Photo: Michelle Haywood

go back to old ways, but need to imagine ways to creatively navigate the treacherous paths that lie before us, in the hope that we become better, not worse, humans.”

Imagination was also a theme in author Anna Funder’s closing ceremony address, in which she conveyed to the audience the need for humanity in an age of AI. Referring to her critically acclaimed book *Wifedom*, she quipped, “AI would know Orwell but not his wife”. Festival CEO Brooke Webb also spoke about the popularity of the Writers’ Festival and wondered whether people are looking

Billy and crew at the Abbotts Hotel

FOOD

ADRIAN SPRY

WATERLOO: Sunday afternoon at the Abbotts Hotel. Outside, it’s raining, winter’s on the way. We gather at a cosy corner table, remove jumpers and jackets, settle in for a hot plate of fried rice and lemon chicken.

It’s a good place to meet. Warm, friendly, lots of familiar faces. And nothing fancy. Cold beers, footy on the big screen, and hot, good-quality Chinese food – cooked up by Billy in the kitchen, served with a smile.

The fried rice is fluffy and tasty, with egg, prawns and veggies. The lemon chicken is light and crispy. I also recommend the short



Billy in his kitchen at the Abbotts Hotel in Waterloo. Photo: Nicky Lamsong

soup, Peking pork chop and mixed vegetable chow mein.

Billy has been resident chef at the Abbotts since January. Formerly at Club Redfern and the Erskineville Bowling Club, he cites love of customers as reason for continuing to work in the area.

His customers appreciate it, too. “Billy’s food is mad!” enthuses Matt. “He’s here six days a week. You get a full plate of clean-tasting, beautiful lunch or dinner.”

The Abbotts is owned by Steve, who also owns the Lord Raglan. He knows the locals and treats everyone with respect.

Shout-outs to Da Da, Amy, Christian and Sandy behind the bar, and to Mihir and Nicky, whose favourite cooking show host is Uncle Roger. “I have to say, though, my favourite dish is Billy’s Mongolian beef,” she says. “And as a bartender, I love all the customers!”

**Billy’s Kitchen Chinese Bistro
Abbotts Hotel
47 Botany Road, Waterloo
Phone (02) 9395 0000**

Film Review by Lindsay Cohen



Sinners
Director: Ryan Coogler
Starring: Michael B. Jordan, Miles Caton, Saul Williams
Genre: New blues news

Films can be fascinating, interesting, historical and topical, but that doesn’t mean they’re great. At least not all parts of the film. *Sinners* is a perfect example of this.

Set in 1932 in the Mississippi Delta, *Sinners* is initially an awesomely creative and artistic insight into the then southern Black community. They are passionate, work hard and party hard. The first half of the film is, in effect, a celebration of blues music. The local Black community sings, dances, plays lots of amazing songs and has fun. It’s highly entertaining.

And then the Irish vampires arrive and the film becomes grotesquely over-the-top violent – lots of people are killed or vampired – and the plot doesn’t make any sense.

However, in retrospect, and admittedly subject to my post-viewing research, it turns out that there is a historical background to this. The interactions between the various communities were complex – some supportive of each other and others aggressively and viciously involved. Even the role of the few Chinese and Native American characters in the film was based on facts. This actually explains the title of the film as nearly all the characters are sinful to some extent.

If you’re not across the specific details of Southern U.S. history then treat *Sinners* as two storylines or mockumentaries. In that regard, the first one is fantastic and well

worth watching. The second one is ridiculous – shockingly horrible!
Rating: One to Five – your call!



Bring Her Back
Director: Danny Philippou,
Michael Philippou
Starring: Billy Barratt,
Sally Hawkins, Mischa Heywood
Genre: Shocking horror

Even if an Australian film has excellent acting and direction, shows highly impressive, realistic special effects, holds your attention and gets your blood pumping, that doesn’t mean it’s good or makes any sense.

Bring Her Back is a great example of this. It’s a horror film. According to the Neil Chase film review website, there are 17 horror subgenres. I’ve categorised *Bring Her Back* as Body Horror and Splatter Horror because the film features lots of bodies that get splattered. Now that’s probably enough to explain what the film is all about. And if that’s a thing that you don’t mind watching then I highly recommend it to you.

If that’s the case, then I suspect you will also claim that horror films are only about scaring the audience. But there are plenty of examples of great horror films where intense, meaningful storylines are actually the focus. *Psycho* (1960), *The Shining* (1980), *Alien* films 1-3 (1979 – 1992), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *The Sixth Sense* (1999) are great examples, though curiously, all are decades old. This begs the question, has the nature of films changed or the nature of young audiences?

So if you like your film to have a meaningful storyline, such as where supposed insightful cult videos logically explain why someone was killed, and it is

clear why chewing one person sometimes transfers a personality and sometimes just seems delicious, then give *Bring Her Back* a miss.

Rating: Two and a half living corpses

Book Review by Melinda Kearns



Sunburn
Chloe Michelle Howarth
2023

It is the late 1990s, and Lucy, reaching the end of school in the rural Irish village of Crossmore, is leaving her childhood behind.

Her world is small and narrow – family, school, friends, boys – the intrigues of growing up and rites of passage absorb her desires for conformity and fulfilment. Lucy is one of the village girls, closely knit in a circle of friends that she has been ensconced in since infancy, and she has little thought of deviating from the well-worn path trod by many before her: marriage, motherhood, and life on the farm with her teenage sweetheart, Martin.

As she enters her final year of high school and things start coming into sharper focus, Lucy is also intrigued by the alluring Susannah, who – with her wealth, family dereliction, and otherworldliness – is already a step beyond the village that Lucy is increasingly frustrated by. As the summer heightens, Lucy and Susannah grow closer, sunbaking in the garden of Susannah’s house where she is left mostly alone. Lucy understands her love for Susannah, and they both find the rigid confines and expectations of the village restrictive. However, Susannah is much more willing to pursue

a more open vision of a possible future for herself, Lucy, their relationship, and all the countless others who seek diverse potentials for themselves as the world changes.

The novel is beautifully written, using many images of sunlight, enlightenment, firelight, and warmth to describe the love between Susannah and Lucy throughout. The story is highly engaging and gives a vivid portrayal of a world in rapid change, not so long ago. The characters are incredibly well-rendered and authentic, and Lucy’s attempt to placate many powerful and persuasive demands will resonate with many readers.

Theatre Review by Catherine Skipper



Heaven
Writer: Eugene O’Brien
Director: Kate Gaul
The Loading Dock
May 17-31, 2025

A very clever and engrossing play, Eugene O’Brien’s award-winning *Heaven* reveals the quiet desperation that underlies the marriage of middle-aged Irish couple Mairead and Mal. As Mairead cries, “Surely these 50 years must lead to something?” the answering response in the audience is palpable. Surely. While heart-wrenchingly sad, at the same time *Heaven* is outrageously and irreverently funny.

An unadorned two hander, progressively revealing the extent of each spouse’s longing for a more fulfilling, impassioned life through alternating monologues, the play is completely reliant upon its two actors, Lucy Miller as Mairead, and Noel Hodda as Mal, for its impact.

Both do complete justice to

try to control us. She ended with an informal “blessing”, inviting the audience, after a frantic week of festivities, to go into a contrasting week of exploring the world of ideas by quietly reading the wonderful books they had just bought.

their roles, Mairead as the former tearaway for whom marriage was an escape into calmer waters and Mal who married to quiet his homoerotic fantasies. While they value each other, Mal finding strength in Mairead and Mairead finding friendship in Mal, when attending a lively weekend wedding celebration in their hometown, they both are confronted by other possible – and more intense – directions their lives might have taken had their choices been different. Mairead’s encounter with a former lover reawakens her passion for him and Mal is inspired to imagine a different life had he had the courage to follow his initial religiously inspired urges.

There is an observable difference in the way the husband and wife are characterised by the playwright as Mal who generates most of the laugh-out-aloud moments – and Hodda is hilariously ingenuous – is a less developed study. Mairead, however, is a more complex self-aware character and Miller, striking in a red dress, conveys through gesture, stance and tigerish walk a sense of frustrated, pent-up energy. “Who am I?” she questions, and even sitting quietly, she vibrates. At times, however, her enunciation is difficult to understand.

Both Mairead and Mal pepper their confidences to the audience with comments about the wedding guests and the events of the evening – Mairead’s often biting and Mal’s more impressionable – that the bare stage seems fully and often drunkenly peopled. No words can describe O’Brien’s mastery of language – rich and raw, raunchy and poignant – the audience are caught up in the magic of it.

The director, Kate Gaul, wisely chose a very simple staging with basic lighting changes, as while the action is placed in the Irish midland, its location is in the inner and hidden life.



Photo: www.rabbitohs.com.au

Souths find winning form

SPORT
JOHN LANZKY

I think the Rabbitohs are a much-improved team, thanks largely to the return of senior players from injuries and suspensions. Cody Walker is set to return soon, which will only strengthen the side further.

It looks like the attitude has changed to a winning mindset. We're back in the top eight after victories against the Tigers and the Broncos.

Brandon Smith's arrival will bring even more positivity. He's a brilliant player and with super coach Wayne Bennett steering the ship, Souths are looking well on track for a top-four finish. Congratulations to Latrell Mitchell and Campbell Graham on their well-deserved selection for the Blues. They earned it with strong performances in recent weeks. My prediction is for NSW to win big time in Brisbane and set up for a clean sweep this year. The team simply has too much talent. [ed. NSW took the series opener with an 18-6 win].

SSH

Community spirit shines at 19th Counterpoint Volunteer Awards

LOCALS

SSH

THE 19th Counterpoint Volunteer Awards took place on Tuesday, 20 May at Alexandria Town Hall, celebrating the outstanding contributions of volunteers from across Waterloo and Redfern.

Held as part of National Volunteer Week (20-26 May), the event highlighted the vital role of over 6.5 million Australians who generously give their time – contributing an estimated \$17.3 billion to the national economy each year. This year's awards were proudly sponsored by the City of Sydney and Homes NSW.

South Sydney Herald was proud to be nominated for a group award. Managing editor Anna Jahjah and news editor Lyn Turnbull joined around 80 other volunteers at the heartwarming event. The afternoon began with a beautiful and respectful Welcome to Country delivered by Uncle Michael West. Certificates of appreciation were then handed out to all nominated volunteer groups, including the Cycle-Recycle Club, the Red Cross, REDWatch, the Cantonese

Opera Group, Action for Public Housing, among others. Counterpoint once again outdid themselves with a joyful and well-organised celebration. The event featured lively Chinese cultural dancing, uplifting singing, and a delicious lunch served by volunteers. Last but not least, congratulations to 17x16CDP, the Volunteer Awards 2025 Founder's Choice winner. This 100 per cent youth-led movement, based in Waterloo, brings together Aboriginal young people from Waterloo, Redfern and surrounds through fitness, community and culture. Named after the local postcodes (2017 and 2016) and inspired by the fitness acronym CDP (chin-ups, dips, push-ups), the group began on 24 February 2025 with just 18 participants and minimal gear. Within a week, over 100 youth had joined, creating a powerful sense of belonging and pride. Now training three nights a week, 17x16CDP thrives on community donations and volunteer support, proving the transformative impact of youth leadership and grassroots action. A perfect example of the spirit we celebrate during National Volunteer Week.

SSH

Volunteers' News

PAT CLARKE

Artisans in the Park, Dr H Foley Rest Park, 140 Glebe Point Road, Glebe on June 7, 10am-3pm
This a not-for-profit market showcasing new and upcoming local artists and designers taking place four times a year. It's a 'meet the maker' market managed by a volunteer committee with proceeds donated to local Glebe charities. Next markets are: September 6 and December 6 2025. More information at artisansinthepark.org.au

Archibald Prize, Naala Nura, Art Gallery of NSW – May 10 to August 17
The "Archies" are back with the usual offerings ranging from the beautiful to the wildly eccentric. One of my personal favourites, Vincent Namatjira, is among the entries with a self-portrait entitled "King Dingo". Tickets are \$25 for Adults and \$22 Concession, Youth 12-17 \$13. Family of 5 is \$63 or 2-for-1 Wednesday evenings from 5-10pm. Open from 10am-5pm (last tickets available at 4pm). The Young Archies are free and on display in the Kaldor Hall on the ground level. artgallery.nsw.gov.au/whatson

Refugee Week, Sunday June 15 to Saturday June 21
Finding Freedom: Diversity in Community is the theme this year emphasising the importance of the community in welcoming and supporting refugees. Check with your local Council for events in your area or go to refugeeweek.org.au

Edible Gardens for Renters Workshop, Sydney Park Pavilion – Saturday June 14, 10am-12.30pm .
Cost is Adult \$80, Concession \$60. While the costs for this workshop seem high, if you have a small space, or live in an apartment, the tips and guidance from this workshop

will set you on your way to growing your own herbs and vegetables. Booking is essential at: whatson.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/events/edible-gardens-for-renters

Harbour to Harbour, Concourse Concert Hall, 409 Victoria Ave, Chatswood – Monday June 9 .
The event brings together Iran's Lian Band and Indigenous Australian artists William Barton and Auntie Delmae Barton. Experience the fusion of the ney-anban (Iranian bagpipe) and didgeridoo live. aucentury.sales.ticketsearch.com/sales/salesevent/146746

Sydney Outfielders Pride Month Double Header, Erskineville – Saturday June 14 and Saturday June 28
Organised by the Sydney Outfielders Softball League – Australia's longest-running mixed-gender, all-abilities LGBTQIA+ league. There is a Pride Open Day on Sat 14 June at Alexandria Park Oval – casual games, BBQ & fun for all. Then, Drag Bingo with Coco Jumbo at The Imperial on Sat 28 June – prizes, performances & four fabulous rounds. sydneyoutfielders.org.au

Legally Blonde the Musical, Ascham Packer Theatre, 188 New South Head Road, Edgecliff – July 2-6, 7pm
Join Elle Woods in this fabulously fun, feel-good musical packed with big song-and-dance numbers as she defies stereotypes and proves that staying true to yourself is the key to success.

Dates for your Diary

Vivid Sydney continues until June 14

Sydney Film Festival starts Wednesday June 4 to Sunday June 15.

Pat Clarke
volunteers@ssh.com.au

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WELLNESS AT THE CHURCH

Drop in \$15

OPEN LEVEL YOGA
With Cynthia Casal
Wednesday 6pm / Saturday 9am

Book Online

BREATHWORK (monthly)
MEDITATION (weekly)
with Geoff Rupp

Book Online

SOUND BATH
Fortnightly Thursday Evenings With Harry French

Drop in

CONSCIOUS DANCE
Monthly Sunday Mornings with Harry French

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PARENT- INFANT, TODDLER RIE INSPIRED PLAYGROUP
Thursday Mornings with EduCare Nannies

Book Online

MUM & BABY YOGA
with We Are Mothers Club
10am Tuesday & Wednesday Mornings

Paddington Uniting, 395 Oxford Street

Contact: georgie@paddingtonuca.org.au

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