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VERS: On Pleasures, Embodiment, Kinships, Fugitivity and Re/Organising

Initiated by Monash University Museum of Art

**Presented at Samstag Museum of Art and ACE
17–18 June 2022**

We recognise the Kaurna people as the Traditional Owners of the Adelaide Plains and humbly offer our respect and commitment to good conduct to Kaurna Elders, communities and Country. We dedicate ourselves to anti-racist, anti-capitalist and reparative ways of being and relating to your Country, peoples and Leaders in order that decolonised futures may be hastened. We recognise the Boonwurrung, Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin Nation as the rightful governments of territories spanning Naarm/Narrm—where this event was initiated—and pay respect to First Nations peoples attending and participating in *VERS*.



Versatility implies an ability to adapt or be adapted to different functions or activities. Its roots in language (*versatilis*, *versare*) hold meanings of turning and movement: revolving, bending or swinging physically, being engaged, being able to turn to something with ease, freely. Versatility is also a sexual capacity: a lover whose sexual role, or mode, is not predetermined, but dependent on the relational dynamics of the encounter—top, bottom and otherwise. To be versatile—or vers—is to sign on to an agile, responsive and creative process.

VERS emerged from our conversations about curatorial practices. Becoming and being vers, being able to turn, switch, shift, are capacities we associate with non-centred ways of knowing the world. If we focus on this notion (and how and why people in the arts are vers), do we find new capacities for surviving and growing pleasure in our work? Is being vers a neoliberal or a fugitive mode? How do queer, trans, non-binary, Indigenous-gendered makers and organisers come together beyond the purview of resilience and the roles assigned by dominant regimes of value?

For this program, arts workers, artists and curators have been invited to a conversation that attends to the topics of pleasures, embodiment, kinships, fugitivity and re/organising over the course of one afternoon. Performances and presentations taking place before and during the event contribute to these topics in ways not restricted to language. The rolling, roundtable conversation is intended to reflect on becoming and being vers through the lived experience of the invited attendants, whose work and practices reveal a plethora of modes of exchange.

We invite rigorous conversation and debate, speculation and questioning as a way to unpack these ideas and the conditions we find ourselves in. Be conscious of listening to each other, giving space for each other and respecting points of difference.

A vers is only vers for others. We invite everyone to come and go freely during the event.

—Frances Barrett, Archie Barry, Maddee Clark, Léuli Eshrāghi, Jeff Khan and Melissa Ratliff (Curatorial Advisory Panel for *VERS*)





Program

**Friday 17 June
Samstag**

6pm Samstag (Gallery 1)

V Barratt, Brian Fuata and Daniel Jaber in conversation, moderated by Frances Barrett

**Saturday 18 June
*Samstag, ACE**

1pm Samstag (Gallery 1)

Welcome to Country by Kurna/Ngarrindjeri man Robert Taylor
Introduction by Curatorial Advisory Panel
Reading by Dominic Guerrera
Conversation on the themes of Pleasures, Embodiment, Kinships, Fugitivity and Re/Organising with attendants:

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Troy-Anthony Baylis | Neika Lehman |
| Angela Bailey | Liz Martin |
| V Barratt | Jazz Money |
| Simona Castricum | Bhenji Ra |
| Debris Facility Pty Ltd | Nikki Sullivan |
| Brian Fuata | Verónica Tello |
| Kyra Kum-Sing | Emma Webb |

The attendants will participate in a responsive conversation that addresses the themes of the day. Each attendant has the discretion to contribute as much or as little to each theme as they wish and has been invited to consider a set of questions in relation to their practice or a specific project.

Intermission
Performance by Archie Barry
Conversation resumes

5pm ACE (Foyer)

Performances by

- Sione Teumohenga
- Harriet Fraser-Barbour

Closing drinks

Saturday’s program is being audio recorded and will be available as a podcast after the event.

*Coinciding with *VERS*, Daniel Jaber’s living installation *Rot* takes place over 73 hours between 18–20 June at Samstag (Gallery 2).





Themes and guiding questions

Pleasures

Finding joy in what we do—within ourselves and with each other.

- I. What does pleasure mean for you?
- II. What or where is the pleasure in your work?
- III. What are the obstacles to pleasure?
- IV. Is pleasure a re/organising force?
- V. If we focus on the notion of vers—able to turn, switch, shift—do we find new capacities for surviving and growing pleasure in our work?
- VI. Quarantined auto-eroticism has been the realm of meaningful touch during the pandemic. How could masturbation be destigmatised/reconsidered as a practice of self knowledge? Why does that already feel queer?

Embodiment

Foregrounding embodied experience as a mode of knowledge production. What are the lived realities of being in a body?

- I. How do we think through and with bodies?
- II. Is the body as important to curators/organisers/historians as it is to artists?
- III. How do we think the body outside of performance practices?
- IV. Who has corporeal self-determination?
- V. What is a body in isolation? How have we been co-regulating our central nervous system during isolation?
- VI. What isn't a performance, when connection increasingly replicates an intimate form of being looked upon (panopticon social media, unidirectional attention)? How does this help us understand Judith Butler's notion of 'performativity'?
- VII. We are simultaneously the most interconnected and separated as we have ever been; how do we metabolise these 'dichotomies'?
- VIII. How do we make gender and sexual self-determination a possibility (or at least a consideration) for all people?

Kinships

Building relational infrastructures of support, care and intimacy. How can we initiate new ecologies and non-extractive connections?

- I. What is kinship when not biological?
- II. What histories and ethics of kinship have been erased/delegitimised?
- III. How do queer, trans, non-binary, Indigenous-gendered makers and organisers come together beyond the purview of resilience and other neoliberal ideologies invested in the forever under-remunerated worker?
- IV. What new kinship structures are necessary?
- V. Is friendship an infrastructure?
- VI. Is friendship possible within our current labour conditions? Is it a false economy propping up the arts?
- VII. When does kinship become nepotism?
- VIII. What is kinship in curating and/or art history?





Fugitivity

A mode that is not strictly oppositional but seeks a different position. What are our various modes of flight, opting out, shadowing or escape?

- I. Who has the choice to be invisible? Who benefits from invisibility? Who suffers from invisibility?
- II. How do we balance the need for access—visibility—with the desire for fugitivity?
- III. Why would someone choose to be less recognisable?
- IV. How to escape the idea that seeing is knowing? (David Getsy et al.)
- V. What histories of fugitivity can we learn more about? E.g., the underground railroad, queer abstraction, beats and cruising.
- VI. How do you recognise a queer space?
- VII. What is the potential in fugitivity in relation to the disciplining nature of institutional contexts?
- VIII. What happens when queer work moves from more subcultural and experimental social worlds to institutional contexts?

Re/Organising

Developing the conditions for doing things differently, where we replace, redistribute, queer the systems that govern cultural production.

- I. What does it take to move beyond our assigned roles into a plethora of modes of exchange that are dignifying and realising who we have always wanted to be?
- II. Do we need new spaces?
- III. What new ecologies of space are forming AC (after-COVID)? E.g., becoming mentally attuned to distance, rent freeze, occupying empty housing, ‘fluid-bonding’ mentality
- IV. How do these relate to the ways that queer/trans people have historically created and found community? I.e. minor oral histories, social codes, the internet, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its attendant histories of connection in isolation.
- V. Who and what is feeling limited by the art world?
- VI. What roles can we let go of?
- VII. Power bottom and service top: where is the authority? How do we play with power?
- VIII. What is an act of service as opposed to servitude?
- IX. Who do we want to serve and where do we find grace and gratitude in the art world?
- X. How are we switching roles? E.g., stepping down, offering opportunities, circulating capital (social, financial, resources), inviting others in, communicating across difference.
- XI. Where do things sit now—recent organisational turns towards conditions that look like socialism (renationalisation of companies) or nationalism (closed borders, regional production)
- XII. What role have community heritage organisations (like the Australian Queer Archives) played in creating cultural representations that more broadly reflect society?
- XIII. How do you queer a museum? Is it better to keep heritage in community hands?
- XIV. Organising, re-organising, or burning down and starting over?





Biographies

Angela Bailey is a curator, photographic artist and President of the Naarm/Narrm-based Australian Queer Archives.

V Barratt is a trans-media artist, researcher, writer and performer living on Kurna Yarta, Adelaide.

Troy-Anthony Baylis is a Queer-Aboriginal artist, curator and writer with Jawoyn (Northern Territory) and Irish ancestry living on Kurna Country.

Frances Barrett is an artist and curator living on Kurna Country and a lecturer in contemporary art at University of South Australia.

Archie Barry is an interdisciplinary artist currently living and working in Naarm (Melbourne).

Simona Castricum is a multidisciplinary creative, academic and broadcaster working in music and architecture on Wurundjeri land of the Kulin Nation.

Maddee Clark is a Kombumerri/Yugambeh writer, editor and researcher residing between Naarm, on the lands of the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung, and Rubibi (Broome) on Yawuru country.

Debris Facility Pty Ltd is a para-corporate entity founded in 2015 and institutionally affiliated with Liquid Architecture and the Victorian College of the Arts.

Léuli Eshrāghi is a Sāmoan/Persian/Cantonese artist, writer, curator and researcher working between Australia and Canada. Eshrāghi is Curator of the 9th TarraWarra Biennial in 2023 and Curatorial Researcher in Residence at the University of Queensland Art Museum.

Harriet Fraser-Barbour is a Tarntanya/Adelaide based multi-instrumentalist whose moniker Millenium Cowboy creates meditative, ethereal synth scapes.

Brian Fuata is a Samoan-Australian artist and improviser living on Gadigal Country (Sydney).

Dominic Guerrera is a Ngarrindjeri, Kurna and Italian person. Dominic is a poet, podcaster and First Nations producer.

Daniel Jaber is a dancer, choreographer and artist of Lebanese and Māori descent who works independently and with the Australian Dance Theatre on Kurna Country.

Jeff Khan is a curator, writer and Artistic Director and CEO of Performance Space, Sydney, on Gadigal Country.

Kyra Kum-Sing is a Malera Bandjalan and Mitakoodi woman, artist and curator working at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative on Wangal/Gadigal lands.

Neika Lehman is a writer, artist and member of this mob collective who descends from the Trawlwoolway peoples of tebrakunna Country, lutruwita.

Liz Martin is an arts and disability advocate, award-winning musician and CEO of Accessible Arts, the peak arts and disability organisation in New South Wales.

Jazz Money is a poet and artist of Wiradjuri heritage, currently based on sovereign Gadigal land.

Bhenji Ra is a trans femme Filipinx interdisciplinary artist who makes collaborative performance work with Warrang/Sydney-based collective Club Ate and is the mother of Western Sydney based collective and ballroom house SLÉ.





Melissa Ratliff is Curator Research at Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA) in Naarm/Naarm.

Dr Nikki Sullivan is a Project Coordinator at SAMESH, an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of South Australia and co-author of *Queering the Museum* (Routledge, 2020).

Dr Verónica Tello is a Chilean-Australian art historian and writer based at UNSW Art & Design, Sydney.

Sione Teumohenga is an artist and musician best known for their pop-oriented music with experimental production influences, created under the moniker Lonelyspeck.

Emma Webb is Director of Vitalstatistix, based in Port Adelaide, South Australia.

Staff and support

MUMA

Hannah Mathews, Senior Curator
Melissa Ratliff, Curator Research
Warisa Somsuphangsri, Communications

Samstag Museum of Art

Erica Green, Director
Gillian Brown, Curator
Emily Clinton, Curatorial Assistant
Teresa Busutil, Public Programs Coordinator

ACE

Patrice Sharkey, Artistic Director
Grace Marlow, Public Programs Coordinator

Curator performances

Frances Barrett

VERS identity

Hana Shimada

Auslan interpretation

The Deaf Butterfly Effect

Audio setup, technical support and recording

Mosaic Audio Visual

Podcast editing and production

Tilly Balding, Solstice Podcasting

This project was commissioned by Monash University Museum of Art and presented on site and in association with Samstag Museum of Art and ACE.

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Adelaide



Contemporary

Experimental

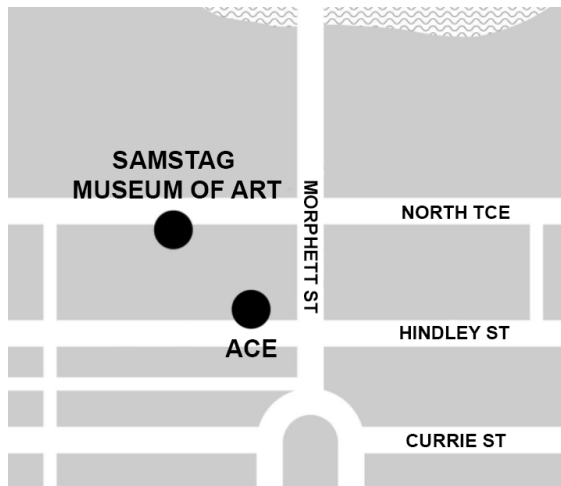


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Venues/Access

This is an Auslan interpreted event. Samstag Museum of Art and ACE are located in the west of the city within 400m of each other and are accessible by wheelchair and pram. Both venues have accessible toilets.



Samstag Museum of Art

55 North Terrace, Adelaide
University of South Australia City West campus
Corner of Fenn Place and North Terrace
Access: Entry ground floor Hawke Building.
Galleries over 2 floors, lift and stair access

ACE

Lion Arts Centre, North Terrace, Adelaide
Entry from either North Terrace or Morphett Street

Access: Access ramp in front of neighbouring JamFactory. Venue on one level

Arrive by:

Free city trams (exit at the City West stop, 100m from Samstag, 70m from ACE)

Adelaide Railway Station (10 minute walk or 600m from Samstag and ACE)

Bus (the closest bus stop is X1 North Terrace; various Grenfell Street bus stops nearby)

Bike (bicycle parking on Morphett Street at the Lion Arts Centre precinct entrance, in front of JamFactory and Mercury Cinema)

Car (Samstag has 4 access car spots directly out the front; ACE has an access spot located at the Lion Arts Centre's Morphett Street entrance; limited amount of ticketed on-street parking; Wilson Parking located one block away on the corner of Hindley Street and Clarendon Street; other commercial car parks located on Hindley Street)