

Lucinda Strahan: One of the key questions we've been thinking about in this program is just very simply, how do we as writers change our position, with regard to writing *with* art or *from* the exhibition themes, rather than *about*. And that very simple shift has produced this range of responses that you have seen tonight.

There were no set rules, if I can put it that way, each of these writers come from a very different perspective and background, and this [writing] program really allows all these writers to explore their own responses from a range of positions from the poetic to, as we saw tonight, movement based or enacted or musical. We explore as we go and we see where we end up.

So now I'd like to open the floor to questions...

Audience member: Thank you so much, all of the readings were so beautiful. It brought to mind a book of George Steiner's that I read one time called *Real Presences* and in the first chapter he imagines a city where there is no critical writing.

Audience: [Laughs]

Audience member: The only acceptable response to a work of art is to make another work of art in response. This is the first time that I've really experienced that, in a direct sense, and it was incredibly moving for me as a listener, and I wondered if there was a shift that any of the writers experienced from a position of critiquing to a position of engagement and creative response?

Ava Amedi: Hey. Just quickly something that was very paradigm shifting for me was the thought of, as Lucinda just mentioned, *from* work rather than *about* work, being explicit about that type of position and really running it home with meditative practices that we did, was a shift. That was fundamental for me. The whole idea of the expanded field...pretty big, pretty big influence for me in the last couple of months. Great times. Thanks.

Shu-Ling Chua: Thanks for your question. I struggled for a while to respond to the work, because I felt like it had to be...actually I didn't know what I wanted to write. So I went on this really great guided tour by Beatrice at ACCA, and then I started looking at the edges of those prints and the imperfections there. Then I kind of realised that my work was allowed to be imperfect. I've been a writer for a few years now and I thought that I would know this. It's kind of like a lesson you have to learn every time. And my background is in memoir so I don't generally write poetry, as the one the lines

in my poem was *fear of writing poetry*, so I literally tackled that fear. So yeah. Thank you.

- Sholto Buck: So, um, for me, in response to your question, I don't generally write about other people's art and I sort of didn't do that here either. For me, I sort of started the project by wanting to, kind of, write around my relationship to objects which sort of move me in some way. And then from that, it kind of became about just engaging with the general premise of the show which is vulnerability and doubt, that's kind of how it flourished for me and my process.
- Martina Copley: I tried to take some sort of oblique approach to the work and the exhibition itself as text. So I wrote a score for, there are ten of us so, ten voices, in 19 numbered fragments and I used the words and phrases of other writers, like Maggie Nelson, Anne Carson, Joan Didion, Nathalie Sarraute, Sappho also though the voices from the exhibition catalogue text, as a kind of form dispersed authorship. So this idea of positionality I guess, in a way refusing that or restating that in a decentered way as a sort of series of asides to the main text of the exhibition.
- Lucinda Strahan: Would it be ok to hear from everyone? It's such a great question.
- Melody Ellis: I just wanted to say it's really nice to hear that it was moving. It was moving for me as participant as well, and it's really nice to have that feedback so thank you for being here and for giving us that space to hear what it's like to perform these works. So, that's not really, a kind of answer to the question...
- Pia Ednie-Brown: I think I might just add that one of the beauties is, and we did talk about this a little bit, of the theme of the show is that...whenever you produce anything, it's up for critique. We were doing that too. But the thing is because the show was about vulnerability and doubt, we thought well it doesn't really matter if we fail, if you like. It doesn't really matter if we feel awkward, if we trip, if things fall over. That kind of vulnerability would be perfect. And so everybody was a little bit, able to relax I think, and people did become...I mean I was pretty moved by many people's pieces. I think it allowed people to open up quite in sometimes quite raw ways.
- Lucinda Strahan: Can I just add there that one of the key things about the theme of the exhibition which makes it perfect for this program, is that kind of critical writing position—I sometimes think of that objective writing position is an invulnerable position, even though

it's difficult to do and you're very vulnerable while you're writing anything. But engaging vulnerability and doubt I suppose, everyone was really encouraged to put themselves on the page more. And engage that vulnerability that is always a part of writing. Opening up the vulnerability that's always there in any kind of writing attempt.

Anna Westbrook: Thank you for your question, I really appreciate it as well. I haven't read what you referenced but I was thinking a lot about ekphrasis as a poet and fiction writer generally. So I was looking for something that, I think that I respond to analogy and metaphor, and when I saw Charlie Sofo's zipper work it just really resonated with me. That was a great brief you know, if you stuff it up it's intentional vulnerability.

Lucinda Strahan: Yeah. Zara did you want to say something?

Zara Siggelkow: I suppose I'm from that conventional position of writing, in a kind of critical and journalistic way. I feel I'm kind of expanding, though maybe still writing in the essay form, but critique myself, how I'm writing, but then opening it up to become a bit looser, a bit more poetic, of an art form within itself. But I'm still kind of in a safe space, I think.

Lucinda Strahan: Yoko?

Yoko Akama: Oh, no... Well I'm an academic, but I never thought of myself as a writer. I kind of write because I have to - it's my job. And so the excuse that I had in joining this program was to try and write about things that I don't normally write about. One of the curiosities I had was about our relationship with the non-human, hence the stone. And what voice means and how we listen and I'm not sure whether I'm there yet but at least this is my toe into that thing.

Lucinda Strahan: So Koulla did you want to say...

Koulla Roussos: I'm a lawyer by trade. I'm a barrister. I'm required to communicate and to be understood. I have a formulaic approach to that, writing affidavits, making submissions, etc. I practice the art of reasonable doubt. The dark art of reasonable doubt. I'm also a student, a Masters of Art Curating student and I write exhibition reviews. I've got to assume that there is an audience that wants to know about the art that I'm describing. I've got to assume that... well, I find myself wanting to assume an authoritative voice. Taking part in this workshop is allowing me to

realise that there are multiple ways of writing about and talking about art, singing about art, not talking about art, being vulnerable and bringing in your own personal history that the artwork may conjure up as worthy of talking about. So in taking part in this workshop, I am learning from my colleagues here and letting myself trust that there are multiplicities of ways of engaging, talking and understanding art.

Lucinda Strahan: I think we've gone through everyone. Yes. Another question?

Audience member: As someone who is absolutely terrified of public speaking, I just wanted to know if there is a particular approach from writers to the fact that the combination of this workshop was a public performance, and speaking their words out loud to be heard by the general public?

Lucinda Strahan: Did you hear that? How did you all feel about the public performance aspect, as writers?

Sholto Buck: I didn't really think about it until it was upon us...I don't know. I guess this isn't the end of the workshop, so I think for me, I just didn't really think about it that much.

Melody Ellis: Thank you, that's a great question. I thought about it a lot actually. There was a refrain in the first draft I wrote which is *this is not a performance*. Because I was thinking about what do you do when you read a piece of writing in gallery space, and that just is immediately performative. And there were all kinds of desires to refuse that. I wanted to read behind a screen at some point, or to turn into the corner or something. And even as I was reading I didn't feel particularly comfortable physically, which is something to work on. I think it's a good question and I think it's particularly relevant to reading in a gallery space. There's no real solution to it, it is a performance. It is an embodied kind of experience. And the fact that there are the number of you here today also influences how we read and be in the space as well – if there had been fewer people, or more people or whatever, so in that way I think it's a bit of a dialogue as well. Somehow. Thank you.

Pia Ednie-Brown: I think for me it actually did impact on what I wrote, because I knew we were going to be doing that and because I am really interested in, like Yoko, non-human agency, the things in the gallery and also the gallery itself. I wanted to draw attention to their presence as things in the space in which I was speaking. And to speak to them a little, and to extend their presence beyond what might be immediately evident. So it did really

impact upon...like if think if I wasn't going to be speaking it aloud, I probably wouldn't have been so concerned with that presence of the space, and where we were.

Martina Copley: I was thinking about not reading. I was thinking about having a conversation, a conversation with the work, a conversation with you. And that time when the reading space becomes the listening. So it's as much about reading as it is listening.

Lucinda: We probably have time for one more question and the bar is open, so.... Is there one more question?

Audience member: Writing is normally considered a very solitary activity. Here you are trying to put together a piece as a group, almost. How did that change the way you wrote? How did the collective change the way that you wrote, as opposed to the solitary experience of writing?

Lucinda: Did you hear that? How did the collective change the way that you wrote as opposed to the solitary experience of writing?

Martina Copley: [Inaudible]

Sorry. I just said that we didn't really write collectively. We worked as a group, we worked together, and read each other's work. We explored that space. And then, I guess the collective activity, the first emanation of that is here, now. And so we, well I, haven't quite reflected on that. But in terms of my own work, I am interested very much in that co-authorship and that collective sense of listening.

Koulla Roussos: I think the writing pieces are individual at this stage. The performance was developed as a collective and the workshop is ongoing. During which, we will, I believe, influence each other. And it will be interesting to see what comes out of the collective experience.

Yoko Akama: Um, so I'm a designer that's come into an academic field and I was reflecting on how the way I wrote reflected the way I design, in a sense of being immersed in this amazing group of people. I think that the most amazing experience I've had is that you don't really know where your ideas stop and theirs end. As soon as we started reading each other's work and commenting on it, that was really quite powerful for me. And I really relate that to how I design, I'm sure that's not just design but creative practice in general, you're inspired, also invigorated by, also challenged by things that people say, to the point where you don't really know

where those thoughts come from in the first place. So I'm really interested in, not particularly the separation of the individual's practice, or the boundaries around ownership - they're important - but for me I wanted to be a sponge, and nick ideas as much as possible and incorporate them into mine...but in an ethical way, of course.

Audience: [Laughs]

Lucinda Strahan: Can I just say something on that, I've been reflecting on this a little bit, because this program is really super, and in convening it I've really brought to it the ethic of the non/fictionLab. The non/fictionLab at RMIT, we have a really strong kind of collective relationship with each other. And thinking about how we're running this, actually made me think of my colleague, Francesca's WRiCE program, which is similar. It's completely kind of unconscious but I realise we're kind of doing a similar thing. Bringing writers together to kind of write and workshop together, which is quite a different model, from...if I wanted to do a journal, a kind of 'send in your pieces in response to the show', you would get a whole bunch of different pieces from different writers, but it would be a whole different thing, actually, from just sitting in the room together and generating things together, and just kind of feeling this, to go to this expanded field or spatial metaphor, feeling the kind of relation or the kind of shape of us in relation to each other. I think that's actually really different model from just, say, an editor sitting in an office somewhere and receiving singular pieces. So I think the collective is quite central but very subtle. There are no set instructions around it. To me it would be a very different thing if we hadn't all sat together from day one.

Pia Ednie-Brown: I was just going to follow on...when you were talking Lucinda, I was reminded of the very start of the workshop. When we started, Lucinda had us all sit around, close our eyes for some time and she read, and I think that laid seeds that lead to quite a lot of... they're all individual pieces but I think there are quite a lot of connections across them. And also, a sort of comfort, related to the vulnerability, that came from that first moment. It was a really important opening move, that was a collective experience that we kind of unfolded from there.

Lucinda: It's also quite unconscious - this is the last thing that I'll say - it's also quite unconscious. So none of it... you know, it's an evolving thing. One method that is very strong in the

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workshop....is the idea of *essaying*, which is finding form as you go. Finding form as you go, which means that...you find form as you go.

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