Acknowledgement of Country

Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre & Sydney College of the Arts would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and their ancestors past and present; the Cabrogal Clan of the Darug Nation.

We acknowledge that this land was also accessed by peoples of the Dhurawal and Dharuk Nations.

Cover image: Fiona Davies, Blood On Silk: Last Seen, 2017, installation view, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre. Photo: Ben Williams Photography
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The Space of the Biomedical Body

The Space of the Biomedical Body symposium investigates the intersections of contemporary art and medical science practice within and around the biomedical body. Bringing together artists, curators, researchers and scientists, this cross-disciplinary symposium will focus on the dynamic research, creative potentials, emotions and challenges inherent in working with live human materialities.

The symposium is presented by Sydney College of the Arts' New Materialism in Contemporary Art research cluster and Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre in conjunction with Fiona Davies' installation, Blood on Silk: Last Seen, the inaugural Turbine Hall Commission at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, curated by Lizzy Marshall.

Speakers

Introduction to the Turbine Hall Commission
Lizzy Marshall, Public Arts Officer, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre

Blood on Silk: Last Seen
Fiona Davies, Artist

The medicalised body as performance and spectacle
John A. Douglas, Artist

The End is a Distant Memory: Revisions of Dying
Helen Pynor, Artist and Research Affiliate at Sydney College of the Arts

Blood, bodies and the collision of arts and science
Dr. Ryan Jefferies, Creative Director, Science Gallery

Panel Discussion Chair: Danica Knezevic, Artist and PhD candidate, Sydney College of the Arts
Welcome from Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre

This extraordinary, epic and moving inaugural Turbine Hall Commission speaks volumes about the power of the arts to reflect and interrogate large themes and issues. The connections between Arts and Health are finally being taken seriously in Australia, and nowhere more so than here in South West Sydney. Blood on Silk: Last Seen is emblematic of this, and Casula Powerhouse wants to work with and around the work to truly fulfil the capacity of an arts centre to be both an educational facility and a driver of research, discussion and debate around the ideas and issues that are raised.

We are particularly pleased and proud that part of that process manifests in this symposium, which can bring together so many distinct yet complementary perspectives to create a multi-faceted lens. We appreciate the opportunity to partner with Sydney College of the Arts’ New Materialism in Contemporary Art Research Cluster and our esteemed guests to view it all from an intellectual and artistic kaleidoscope, therefore generating new synergies, new connections and tools with which to advance the discussion into the wider community.

Like the work itself, we aim at something far more powerful than a merely intellectual exercise. Blood On Silk: Last Seen draws from the real stuff of life, and death, and the peak moments of the human experience. Let’s do these justice.

Craig Donarski
Director, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre
New Materialism in Contemporary Art

The New Materialism in Contemporary Art research cluster is based at Sydney College of the Arts, the University of Sydney, and investigates how contemporary art practice can engage with New Materialist thinking and the agency of matter and the non-human. In this latest research cluster event we will learn more about the agency of matter from creative practitioners who examine inner space and the materials making up the human body.

As a theoretical discourse New Materialism connects to and colours many diverse fields of enquiry and engagement, like a transmutable lens that offers new ways of seeing the environment and the dynamic forces at play around us and in us. New Materialism can burst the bubble of human self-obsession and draw our attention to forces and forms of agency that offer new ways of looking at the elemental world.

This is a changing world in which we are participant. When viewed through the lens of the Anthropocene we see that it is a world we increasingly impact and are responsible for. And this vantage point leads us to questions of balance, health and wellbeing, to ecological systems and notions of stewardship, and to processes of healing and nurture.

When we ask these questions about biological life, the medicinal and the microscopic play a significant role in making us aware of the power of transformation at the nano scale. This is particularly compelling for the artist, whose persistent questioning and speculation can create consciousness-shifting knowledge, and whose ‘godlike’ role as shaper of the inanimate in the studio replicates energy transfer in the Universe at large.

The Space of the Biomedical Body symposium builds on four years of idea exchange initiated by the SCA New Materialism in Contemporary Art Research Cluster, designed to encourage ongoing discourse and interdisciplinary exchange. Our future promises even more opportunities for interdisciplinary exchange as SCA establishes itself as a Department in the School of Literature, Art and Media and increases its connections within the University of Sydney’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

Oliver Smith
New Materialism in Contemporary Art research cluster leader
Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney
Blood on Silk: Last Seen

“If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of ‘places of memory’, and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position. A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions…”

It is one thing to envision an environment and another to bring reality to that vision. This was the conundrum I faced when I was first inspired by Casula Powerhouse’s magnificent Turbine Hall. This process was resolved by thinking through how an overpowering context could be intersected with an equally powerful content. Our Turbine Hall is not just an iconic late Modernist relic of our industrial past, but a reminder of industry as working lives. As a former NSW Electricity Commission Powerhouse we are keenly aware that the history of our space was a public enterprise run by 227 men and five women in service of the public.

This tradition is continued today within Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, and in turn our Turbine Hall, is a reminder of public service that now functions as a public space. Rather than becoming a memorial, the Turbine Hall Commissions are aimed at offering our visitors new perceptions of the physical and intrinsic fabric of the public space through site responsive artworks.

Through this framework, Fiona Davies’ practice was an intuitive choice for me to establish the commissioning programme. Blood on Silk: Last Seen aimed to investigate transitional points of human traffic flow and how public and private spaces can intersect. Drawing on the industrial heritage of the site, Last Seen is also a reflection of how hospitals become intensely private and emotional spaces that are experienced in a public working environment. Blood on Silk is Davies’ ongoing practice since 2009, and had its foundations in a cross-disciplinary collaboration with the late physicist, Dr. Peter Domachuk from the University of Sydney’s School of Physics. Domachuk’s research was to develop an implantable silk biophotonic chip allowing the properties of blood cells to be measured whilst still within the body. Through these experimental and innovative techniques, the ancient properties of silk became sited within contemporary biomedical concerns. Davies has continued her investigations.

of Blood on Silk for over eight years and it now informs her PhD candidacy at Sydney College of the Arts. Medicalised death in ICU has been central to the theoretical concerns of Blood on Silk. It is, however, with a new lens, that we experience Last Seen, as the focus is less on the patient and more on the carers’ experience of the hospital environment. “Last seen” refers to the movement of people through closing doorways - and the deeply personal reflections of the artist on whether the patient will return to view. Within this work Davies has successfully reconciled the personal with the universal, as the artist’s materials become our emotional landscape under the most extreme of circumstances.

Physically the work consists of five floating temporal hospital rooms that move in the space creating slippages of partial views. Onto these are digital projections of figures that move in and out of a visual continuity. Through these spectral projections, the viewer engages with the psychological landscape of liminality that the hospital experience evokes, that is, the waiting and inertia within a cycle of endless activity in which one is never fully allowed to participate.

Spatially, site and installation combine to provide multi-layered intersections for our audiences. Playing with perspectives, the work is first encountered from the floor of the Turbine Hall, then, by ascending to the viewing platforms of the Upper Turbine Gallery viewers find themselves looking inward where one can even touch the silk paper in some instances. Transitional perceptions of being both inside and outside are symmetrically experienced through the installation’s extension via a corridor created within the upper Turbine Gallery. Replicating the harsh exterior of hospitals, our Upper Turbine Gallery has become emblematic of the liminal spaces that carers can experience within a hospital site. Inside or outside, you never really detach from the internal environment, which is both physical and psychological through the anxiety of waiting, which for a carer is at the core of our hospitals. Last Seen’s capacity to evoke metaphorical interiors recalls Paul Auge’s seminal theory of “non-places” in which Auge describes non-places as devoid of identity, circulation and transitory dwellings.

Blood on Silk: Last Seen is a powerful agent for cross-disciplinary discourse incorporating temporality, liminality, new materiality, bio-medical concerns, intersections of the public and private, the cultural to the emotional landscape. More poignant is the capacity for Davies’ work to create a transaction between the artwork and active audience engagement creating lasting resonance through internal dialogues.

Lizzy Marshall
Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre
About the Presenters

Fiona Davies is a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney.

Davies' works are multimedia installations encompassing both the real and virtual. She holds a Bachelor of Science (UNSW) and Bachelor of Visual Art (UWS), and a Master of Fine Arts (Monash).

Her current theoretical practice examines ICU medicalised dying, intertwining the emotional landscape with contemporary medical practices – specifically, definitions of death, the materiality of blood and processes of surveillance. Her ongoing project, Blood on Silk (2009 - ) included working in collaboration with the late physicist Dr Domachuk.

Davies exhibits in both formal institutions and non traditional spaces nationally and internationally. She has recently presented her work at University of Melbourne Science Museum; Das KloHäuschen, Munich, Germany; Tufts University, Silk biomedical laboratory, Boston, USA; Tbilisi State Silk Museum Georgia; Whitebox Gallery, Griffith University; Maitland Regional Art Gallery; Farnham University of the Creative Arts, Farnham, UK; Riddoch Gallery Mt Gambier SA; Stockholm University, Sweden; and Beaney House of Art and Knowledge, Canterbury UK.

fionadavies.com.au
About the Presenters

Born in 1960, John A. Douglas is a Sydney-based interdisciplinary artist working across video, performance, live art installation, photomedia, sound and objects. His practice investigates his ongoing experience of chronic illness through scientific and collaborative, immersive performance approaches.

Douglas offers a unique and personal perspective as both artist and patient that intersects with biomedical science, clinical treatment, and his own human and emotional experience as a renal patient. His work seeks to map a psychological geography of the patient subject, via the narrative structures of mythologies, as a parallel world of existence in which he cycles between places of healing, regimentation, wellness and suffering.

Douglas has been artist in residence at Museum of Human Disease at UNSW, Symbiotica Lab, at UWA, Fraser Studios and The Bundanon Trust Douglas is the recipient of numerous Australia Council Grants. He has exhibited in Australia, UK, Germany and Spain and his work has been acquired into notable private and public collections including Cato Council and Artbank. Douglas has been a finalist The Blake Prize, Fishers Ghost Prize, John Fries Viscopy Prize, Bowness Photography Prize and the Josephine Ulrick photography prize. His work has also been featured in numerous publications and on radio and television.

johnadouglas.com.au
Danica I. J. Knezevic is an artist working with photography, video, and live performance. Informed by psychology and philosophy, her practice examines her intimate relationships, her experiences of being a carer for her mother, grandmother and late grandfather, and her cultural heritage. By using her body, objects from her world, and visual metaphors, Knezevic creates experiences and actions that centre the internal self and balance one’s rhythm.

Knezevic is a PhD candidate at Sydney College of the Arts, the University of Sydney. In 2013 she completed a Master of Fine Arts at Sydney College of the Arts, and was the co-recipient of the Dominik Mersch Award. She completed her Bachelor of Visual Arts and Design with Honours at Australian Catholic University, Strathfield, where she was awarded the Arts and Science award for the video installation, Bermuda 2009. In 2015 she presented her practice-led research at the Australasian-Pacific Post-Polio conference.

Knezevic is currently a sessional lecturer in contemporary art at Australian Catholic University, Strathfield and University of Technology, Sydney.

dijk.com.au
Ryan Jeffries is Creative Director for Science Gallery Melbourne's inaugural season Blood and Curator of the Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology. After completing a PhD in infectious disease research, specialising in molecular parasitology, he conducted postdoctoral research at the University of Western Australia and the University of Bristol, before working with Museum Victoria and The University of Melbourne.

melbourne.sciencegallery.com
Lizzy Marshall is a Western Sydney based curator, educator and writer. Her curatorial practice focuses on the subversive layers of resilience in the individual under the pressure of imperceptible “small compromissions” of society.

Working collaboratively with artists through conceptual frameworks Marshall curates responsive exhibitions that play on resonance and active engagement through the audience experience. Investigations include site-responsiveness and the permeability of the museum walls and of collections. Her exhibition making extends beyond traditional frameworks to encompass heritage buildings, object dense museums, a pristine rainforest, architecturally significant homes, the interior and exterior of regional built environments, and most recently a former industrial site.

She has held positions with The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin City Gallery – The Hugh Lane, The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland, Sculpture at Scenic World, as well as consulting positions for Macquarie University Art Gallery and The National Trust – NSW. As Public Arts Officer for Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre she is the Curator of the inaugural Turbine Hall Commission featuring Fiona Davies’ Blood on Silk: Last Seen.
Helen Pynor’s work explores philosophically and experientially ambiguous zones such as the life-death boundary and the inter-personal nature of organ transplantation. Her practice spans large-scale installations through to small intimate works using photography, sculpture, video, wet biology, media art and performance.

Pynor has exhibited widely nationally and internationally, including at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts; National Centre for Contemporary Art, Russia; Science Gallery Dublin; Ars Electronica, Linz; ISEA2013, Sydney; Wellcome Collection, London; Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester; Centraal Museum, Utrecht; Powerhouse Museum, Sydney; Galerija Kapelica, Ljubljana; The Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney; Performance Space, Sydney; Leonardo Electronic Almanac, online; FACT – Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, Liverpool UK; and Science Gallery London.

In 2012 Pynor’s collaborative work The Body is a Big Place was awarded an Honorary Mention at Prix Ars Electronica, Linz and she has been a recipient of national awards in Australia including the Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Photography Award and the RBS Emerging Artist Award. Pynor’s work is informed by in-depth residencies in scientific and clinical institutions such as The Max Planck Institute of Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics, Dresden; The Crick Institute, London; The Heart and Lung Transplant Unit at St Vincent’s Hospital, Sydney; and SymbioticA, University of Western Australia, Perth.

Pynor holds a Bachelor of Science (Macquarie University), a Bachelor of Visual Arts, and a PhD (both Sydney College of the Arts, the University of Sydney). She is represented by Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney.

helenpynor.com
Acknowledgements

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Wednesday 23 August 2017
11am – 1pm
Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, 1 Powerhouse Road, Casula NSW

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