



Eva Sifis: So I will start tonight's proceedings with a Welcome to Country. Here at the Arts Centre Melbourne, we stand on contested land and acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the people of the KulinNations and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging and also to any Elders that may be here today. Okay, so, with a running order of tonight, we're first going to hear from our Arts Centre representative, Tim Stitz, followed by CEO of Arts Access Victoria, Caroline Bowditch. Then we will hear about the amazing Disability Pride wall from Larissa MacFarlane, after which we'll hear from last year's winner of the Stella Young Award, Madeleine Little, and all the exciting thing that she's been up to this past year. And then, excitingly, we're all going to meet the new winner of the Stella Young Award. So, just orientation around here, if you want to head to the quiet room, just go out through these front doors, past the yellow glasses and into the yellow room that is marked quite obviously 'quiet room'. And then the toilets are through these doors just here, right to the end, past the kitchen and then there are toilets just there for you. I'd like to point out the Arts Access Victoria staff. If you could all just raise your hands or stand up. Everybody acknowledged them, good on you. There they are. And then we will thank Amanda Lawrie-Jones from the board of Arts Access Victoria over there with her moods. And I'd like to thank everyone for coming here. And I'd also like to thank the remote guests that are joining us over the iPads and also the guests that have come from interstate. Thank you so much for coming along. So, I would like you all just to take the next couple of minutes to turn to the person next to you, especially if you don't know them, and introduce yourself. Let's make this a convivial event. I'd like to introduce our first speaker who is Tim Stitz, from the Arts Centre Melbourne. He is a creative producer here. He's a theatre and contemporary performance, the creative producer of theatre and contemporary performance in the Arts Centre Melbourne. And he's an artist in his own right. His view that art plays a fundamental role within the cultural thread of this country is one reflected by Arts Access Victoria and is now here to speak and we are very excited to be collaborating with this institution at this time, here you go, Tim.

Tim Stitz: Hello everyone, I'm Tim and I'm one half of a creative producer for theatre and contemporary performance here. I'm covering Daniel Clarke's position. I know some of you know Daniel. There are two of us doing his position three days a week, part time at the moment. I know there's a wall, there's no one behind the.... If you need to move, please move. And hello to everybody who's accessing this session remotely. I just wanted to start by saying that I was born on the lands of the Darramuragal Clan up in the Northern suburbs of Sydney. And that is Ku-ring-gai Lands, but I feel very privileged that I've spent most of my life in Naarm, Melbourne on the land of the cooler nation and on behalf of Arts Centre Melbourne, I welcome you all, and acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and the Elders past, present and future. I also wanna acknowledge the disability and arts Elders that are here in this room that have paved the way for us here, for all the work you do now, but also that you've done previously. It's so great to be here with Arts Access's, CEO, Caroline and your staff and board members, and welcome to the channel. This



event is part of The Kiln, which is a month long series of events looking and we've really privileged access, inclusion and representation. And there's been workshops, panels, creative developments, and nights like this, which are about networking and artists being able to connect and talk to one another and meet, I just wanted to spend a brief moment talking about some of the things that we're doing here at Arts Centre Melbourne. You're all welcome here as artists, as presenters of work, as arts workers as well as audiences. It's the mandate of Arts Centre Melbourne and it's written into law, the Victorian Art Centre Act that we continue to quest to make inclusion and access the bedrock of our mission here. It's also a really great privilege to be hosting this event, but also where the Stella Young Awards being announced, it feels pretty special. Myself, I didn't know Stella, but I know a number of people who did. And she holds a very special place in their heart and I'm sure a number of people in this room knowing her too. She was so much loved and an amazing advocate and voice for arts and disability in this country and she was also a formidable artist and arts lover herself. So Arts Centre Melbourne's journey with access started many years ago with a focus on venue access and audience access with services such as audio description, Auslan interpreting, touch tours and captioning. And a dedicated access in community inclusion focus within programming has catapulted access into a new realm in Arts Centre Melbourne with an emphasis on programming and embedding access within everyone's creative remit. And I just wanna acknowledge Wendy and Cassandra who were here from our team, because really much of this work and how we embed is down to them, here in this place. So thank you very much. Four years ago we were presented with Australia's first relaxed performance and that's "Alice" the opera. We did so together with our long term partners, Arts Access Victoria, and at the time it felt risky and now it's just business as usual and there's a lens of inclusion that we apply across our programming, more generally, and that's across the board. We've gone from having two relaxed performances annually to over 18, and we present a programme and support up to 15 Australian and international companies annually. So such are the ripple effects with working like an organisation such as Arts Access Victoria. There are many other such examples, especially as we continue to journey, with the focus on programming, telling stories informed by lived experience of disability, presenting artists with a disability, supporting teaching artists with inclusive practice, supporting work that is led by artists with a disability. They are passions of ours and we feel are vitally important. Arts Access Victoria's Adapt Leadership programme and Open Your Eyestraining have ignited conversations about access and inclusion across this place. I also want to acknowledge that we don't always get it right. But we learn and we have a whole organisational passion to include all Victorians with and without disability. Our ambition and what our programming team are working towards, I know some of you in this room may know bits and strands of this. We're working towards a week long takeover in 2021 that presents contemporary performance and visual art by leading international and Australian artists with disabilities. And it tells stories informed by the lived experience of disability in a festival focused on artists, creatives, thinkers, and provocateurs from Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the Asia Pacific. And



as part of that, we'll also bring First Nations artists together to celebrate and foster artistic exchange and we hope to present the programme in partnership with a number of other partners. As I alluded to at the start, tonight's event is part of our biannual Kiln programme. It's a festival of workshops, creative development opportunities for those in Melbourne's amazing small to medium and independent art sector, to hone practice, really, that's the central focus. The very first Kiln programme started in 2017, it's biannual and it featured a series of stencils by Larissa MacFarlane, producer of the Disability Pride Mural that is being screened tonight. And that feels like a really lovely connection to have as we wrap up the 2019 edition. This year's event is also featured the Echo Collective, who were also involved in the 2017 edition and it was wonderful to have them back again. Nexus, with their public podcast series as well as Jodee Munde's curation of a series of fantastic and really in demand panels, actually, I have to say, I particularly loved The Future of Inclusive Leadership panel, which Caroline was part of and also The State of Deaf Arts, which happened last week. To have six deaf artists and hear about their practice was just hugely illuminating and quite special. Tonight's event is The Art of Pride, that's why we're here and I've been asked to reflect on what I'm proud of. And right now as we close The Kiln, I'm quite new to Arts Centre Melbourne in this position. I do feel really proud to be involved with a programme that has placed access and inclusion and representation as its focus, as its sort of focal points. I'm proud of the team that has delivered it, particularly Natasha, who's sitting right in the middle here, who has delivered all our events. It's really put these issues at the heart of our discussions and what struck me is, is how intersectional all those discussions are. And I feel like, you know, well "duh", but that I think for a big place like Arts Centre Melbourne, where cultural change takes time and I know that some of you are probably feeling like its time enough and it needs to hurry the hell up. That is very deep work and for those who are listening, change is happening, slowly but surely. I want to, please encourage you to connect tonight, enjoy the conversations, the celebrations that are bound to come from the award being announced and thank you all for coming and being part of the event, Cheers.

Eva Sifis: Thank you very much Tim. Now introducing our next presenter. Caroline Bowditch is a performer, maker, teacher and speaker. in her now famous self-description, a mosquito buzzing effectively in the ears of the art industry across the world. After having led residences around Europe and Australia. She's also a renowned consultant. Recently Caroline took up the position of CEO at Arts Access Victoria at last making the organisation to be disability led. Please welcome Caroline Bowditch.

Caroline Bowditch: Hi. Is it alright if I'm here? Great. Hi everyone, I'm Caroline, and I have almost been in this role as CEO for a year now. And it's been a year of learning and listening and observing and meeting amazing people and really getting a sense of the landscape that is in Australia, which is so very different to the landscape that I've been living in for the last 16 years in the UK. When I was thinking about tonight, I was trying to



identify when I really remembered finding my pride as a disabled person and I actually think that it was generated by somebody in this room. It was a moment when I was 26 and I was invited by Arts Access Victoria to be part of a project that was called Movable Dance. And it was a 12 week course in contact improvisation, which is not the wisest thing when you live with fragile bones to think about full body contact whilst moving with someone with your clothes on. But I did it anyway and it was in that process that was incredibly led by Janice Florence who is in the room. That I, for the first time, really felt like I'd landed in my skin and that I started to discover what this, what I perceived as being a strange and awkward body was actually capable of. It was the time when I discovered what it could do, what its joys were, what it actually had to offer the world, which at that time wasn't necessarily the water that I was swimming in. I was swimming as many of us still do in a space that tells us that we're not welcome, that we might be too hard, that this is not the thing to be proud of. But somehow, in finding my skin and landing in it through the process of art and dance, I found my pride and that was really the beginning of my journey, I suppose. My ambition now is that that can start much earlier for young people, young disabled people to find their pride, to really be encouraged, to be proud of who they are, to not shy away from having a disability, being disabled, being deaf. All of those things like be really proud of that as part of our identity because I think we're all intersectional beings. We are not one thing, I am a woman, I am disabled, I am gay, I am Australian, I'm all of those things and I think often we get divided. We get split up into which identity am I being today I'm all of those things and disability is integral to my identity and who I am and it shapes the world that I live in and how I move through it. Stella, as lots of you would know, was a very dear friend of mine. She was a bit like my baby sister and from the time that she was about 15, she would come to Melbourne, from Stawell, on a bus. Her parents would put her on a bus in Stawell, send it to Melbourne and I'd pick her up the other end and take her out and show her how to live a life. I'm incredibly proud of the role that I had in Stella's life and for the tiny, tiny bit that I might've had in shaping her into the incredible woman that she grew into. We miss it daily but she stays with us and I'm really excited later about talking more about the Stella Young Award 'cause her legacy lives on and it's really exciting to see it emerging in other artists so enjoy this evening. It's a joy to be here with you all and thanks for coming. And it's lovely to see lots of new faces that we haven't seen before and the old ones, of course. Thanks very much.

Eva Sifis:

Are you gonna ask your question to the audience?

Caroline Bowditch:

Oh, my question to the audience is, when did you get proud? Where did it come from? Who helped you find it? That's my question, that's kind of three.



Eva Sifis: Where did you find your pride? Ok everyone. I'd just like to ask is there anybody who'd like to volunteer their moment of their claiming of pride?

Audience Member: My moment of pride was very straightforward and it's on display right now. It's up there above Eva's head on the photo. That's my mucked-up brain, and that's using nice words, with its little holes where the red dots are and the way it doesn't actually connect. And so I thank Larissa very much for giving me my pride.

Eva Sifis: And I do have to say I think, I'm sorry to say that, but this is the most conducive introduction to Larissa so I'm just going to go ahead now and read my little intro to Larissa. So Larissa MacFarlane is an artist and disability activist based in Melbourne's West where she practices printmaking, artist books and street art, bringing it to others with her community arts practice. In this, her activism rings aloud and proud and her coming tale of the Disability Pride Wall will reveal more. A question for you, I'd love to hear your response now as Larissa makes her way up on to the stage. What does disability pride mean to you? And you have roughly 20 seconds. Does anybody want to volunteer? What does disability pride mean to you? Oh come on! Somebody?

Leesa Nash: Little bit shy.

Eva Sifis: What? Ok. Disability pride means, to me, an ownership of myself. I spent many, many years of course, because I acquired my disability, being something that I wanted to shun. And so disability pride means, to me, our reality in which I am ready to express and ready to stand in. And on that note, I'm gonna hand over to our beautiful, verbose, lovely lady, Larissa, to stun you all with her presentation.

Larissa MacFarlane: That has to be the best introduction I've ever had! Good evening. I'd like to acknowledge that we meet this evening on the stolen lands of the Kulin Nation and that sovereignty has never been seated. And I pay my respects to Elders and also to any First Nations people in the room today and any who are around Australia watching us online I'm not quite sure where to wave to, but, hello to everybody out there. I also want to acknowledge all the disability activists and self-advocates who've come before us because they've paved the way for us to be here today and they've certainly paved the way for me to be here. And I also wanna acknowledge all the disability leaders who are in the room today. It's just so awesome. So as Eva said, I'm Larissa MacFarlane, and for purposes of access for everyone, I'm a white, 50-year-old woman wearing colourful, faintly ridiculous clothes with a hat, sunglasses, dreadlocks and a decorated flip



stick, walking stick. I did indeed lead the process to make what turns out to be Australia's first Disability Pride mural. And the photo that's here on the screen, was taken at the end of the making of the mural and it's some of the many artists who were involved on that day. This mural was years in the making. I'm the owner of a 20 year old brain injury. And along with that came a mental illness diagnosis and a chronic pain syndrome. But thanks to my brain injury, I'm also an artist. I literally came to be an artist after my brain injury, having had no interest in the visual arts before. My favourite medium is printmaking. And I started doing street art a few years ago specifically because I wanted to explore my own disability identity. And I also became, I'm also a community artist and I realised now that I've been doing that for a number of years with members of my disabled community. I just didn't know that's what it was called. So I've been trying to do this disability pride mural project for several years. But as with all art projects, I needed time to develop my art skills and to develop my networks in the disability community, develop the idea, but most importantly to develop the confidence to be able to publicly stand up and identify with Disability Pride. Because it is not easy to stand up and say that you are a proud, disabled woman, but it should be easier. It should be a lot easier and I want it to be a lot easier. Hence why I persisted. So what is Disability Pride? I know that you all have an idea, but it's really very different for each of us and it's so complicated, but it's also really simple. Disability Pride is about trying to change the way people think about disability and it's promoting the idea that disability is actually a natural and beautiful part of the human diversity. And so that as people with disability, we can take pride in our experiences and our lives and our bodies. So I asked a friend recently what disability pride meant to her, and she said, "It's lifting the lid on shame" which is so true. It's lifting the lid on shame. Disability pride is about challenging the stigma and the shame that so many of us experience when we identify with disability. This is called internalised ableism and pretty much all disabled people have this to some extent. So this is when people, disabled people, in fact, all people take on the negative attitudes that society has about disabled people that sees people with disability as lesser and not worthy and the things that Caroline mentioned. And because we've internalised these attitudes, we then see ourselves negatively and it can be really hard to shift these deep seated beliefs. So for me, that's what disability pride is about. Trying to change my own attitude towards myself and sharing this with others so that we can all grow stronger because I believe that when my community is strong and my friends are strong, I will be stronger. So, I only really started thinking about the value of disability pride a few



years ago, which was also when I discovered that it's a real thing in the U.S. Way back in 1990, was the first disability pride parade. And then there were a few more after that. Details are a bit sketchy. Our history hasn't been documented well. But then, in 2004 things really kicked off mostly in Chicago and there's been annual disability pride parades ever since. And I was like, "I wanna go to one, "I want to go to one here in Melbourne." But Australia doesn't have yet the same Disability Pride history. Although since I have started work on this mural behind, Adelaide has now had two disability pride parades, organised by the awesome Kelly Vincent and there's also been other disability pride events mostly here in Melbourne, I think. So back to the mural, I knew I couldn't organise a parade I wanted to, but I did think it was possible that I might have the skills now to do a mural and maybe enough for willing friends to help me do it. I just really wanted to create a space, in public, where we could gather under our own control without disability services directing us and be proud of our lives and create an artwork with images that we defined for ourselves. This mural was never going to be something I could do myself because the point was to create a space for all of us and you can't create collective spaces if you don't involve people from the start. I just feel like I should say at the moment this point nothing about us without us. So 2017 the idea of this collective disability pride mural popped into my head yet again. And this time it coincided with a burst of clarity and energy. And before it could disappear, I rushed off to meet up with two disabled artists, friends in Footscray, told them my idea again, and this time I said, "Will you do it with me?" And they said yes, and we were off. So I got in touch with a whole lot of my friends who I thought might be interested. And it was interesting because not that many were, and they weren't the ones that I was expecting to be, but enough of them were interested. So then I submitted the project to my local council to be part of their upcoming evening festival. Yeah, so I started by, I asked friends to send me a photo. I started out as send me a photo of your walking stick because I was obsessive making liner cuts of walking sticks at that time. But then I realised that's a bit limiting. So I broadened it out to your mobility device, but then again, that's a bit limiting. So then it became 'send me a photo of something that represents your life or your interests' because disabled people are really diverse. So the visual artists sent me images of their artwork. The writer sent me words, the performers sent me photos of themselves. And then I spent time collaborating with the non-artists to come up with something unique that represented them. And that ranged from a collage, Facebook memes about brain injury from a friend who was obsessively posting Facebook memes about brain injury, to a



collection of photos and words about one person's ongoing campaign to access transport to a letter from an assistance dog about his job alongside this huge image of this same dog. And there were also historical photos from the eighties about the fight to close institutions. So all in all, over the next two months, about 40 people contributed artwork. And so my process was that I rescale these images, got them printed out on to large paper, and then we cut out the images, we coloured them in. And we had a mass paced up party at this evening Footscray festival. We paste them up on this huge, great, beautiful wall in Footscray and then high above these images we spelled out in large letters using my liner cut walking sticks, the words, Disability Pride. It was awesome, it was exciting. It was adrenaline pumping. It was so hot, it was so much work. There were tears, from me, and there was laughter. It was scary for some of us who had never identified as disabled in public before and it was joyous and people with different disabilities met for the first time and it was amazing and it looked pretty good too and we were so proud. Sadly, as most of you will now know, the mural was destroyed just over week later in the early morning of December 4, just hours after International Day of People with a Disability. It was heartbreaking, and so now is probably a good time to show you the film because we did in fact recreate the mural. It took a long time it was really hard. We faced a lot of resistance. And because we didn't get to document the first one we did before it was destroyed. This time when we made it, we took photos and then we also made this little film, which is directed by the awesome Naomi Chainey. And yeah, after we see the film, that's going to be a chance to ask me some questions. So think about that. So Jason, roll the film.

[Video plays]

Video Audio:

When the wall was removed last year, a week after it was put up on international day of people with a disability, it was pretty devastating. It was just removed by council, by mistake. It's still hurts so much to think about it because it's just felt like that way our voices are continually marginalised and that I've experienced in so many ways in which I've been dismissed. And it just felt like that all over again in such a big public way.

Larissa MacFarlane:

Okay. I like you because you keep smiling at me. I'm feeling a bit emotional. It's 18 months now since it actually first came down and I'm glad to reach this milestone. Have you got any questions?

Caroline Bowditch:

Is the Pride Mural still up in Footscray, where it was?



Larissa MacFarlane: You mean, you're surprised still up?

Caroline Bowditch: No no no, is it still up?

Larissa MacFarlane: It is still up! And what they're so amazed, so it's 9 months now since we put the second mural up in September last year and it is still there. And not only is it still there, it still looks good. Paste ups don't usually last this long. We were extra magic at putting them on. But the most amazing thing is that it has not been tagged. And that, I have been doing street art for a number of years and I am amazed. And I think it's really interesting the taggers can recognise it as art and yet the people who cleaned it off, can't. Yeah, there was actually one person who came and visited the wall the week after it went up and did add, with a black text, a lot of words. And my first thought was, "Oh my god! Some defacing has happened!" But it was this beautiful addition where somebody had written words about being too sick to work but not sick enough to get the dole, to get the pension. And it was all this in between bits about disability. It was a really beautiful addition. I do recommend go and visit the wall and have a look and give yourself an hour because there is a lot there.

Audience Member: Would that be the taggers respect for having a disability? Them not tagging on the wall?

Larissa MacFarlane: Yeah. I can't explain it. I can't. It's just respect I think.

Audience Member: Yeah it's almost like they saw you put it up and they thought, hang on a sec, there's something happening here.

Larissa MacFarlane: Maybe they did, I mean, the community, the tagging people do communicate and maybe they all saw us doing it that day and went, we'll leave it alone. I don't know.

Audience Member: Well I can fill a little bit of the gap with the non-tagging. When the wall was going up there was a couple of people that were going through and one of them did make a comment about it and I'd been talking to the friend that they were with and the friend basically said to the guy, kind of about leaving it alone back then.

Larissa MacFarlane: Oh wow! I didn't know that. Yeah.

Audience Member: That was part of the story.

Larissa MacFarlane: Wow! I'd just like to mention that you were very involved in the process of putting it up because it did actually take quite a long



time to put up it was over many days. We got a scissors lift as you saw in the film and yeah it was a big job. But it was good. And I can say that some of that detail I have written a bit more about the story and I've put that in my blog finally after 9 months, it went up yesterday.

Leesa Nash: I've got a question to the audience. I'm just wondering if anyone who is an artist in the audience uses their art form to express their pride around their experience and whether you wanted to share that with us at all? Yes?

Leesa Nash: Would you like to introduce yourself as well when you start?

Audience Member: My pride... what was the question again, sorry?

Leesa Nash: Do you express your pride in your artwork in the same way as pride is expressed on the wall?

Audience Member: Probably, not so much, I'm a motivational speaker and I speak to people about life choices and my pride, and I love the fact that I have a brain injury. I don't love how I had my brain injury but I love the fact that I've got one now and it's allowed me to become a motivational speaker, speaking to people about smart choices and it's more post injury and my love for life at the moment. So I pride myself very much. And I do that in talking and I do love talking, but I'll give back the microphone.

Audience Member: Hi.

Larissa MacFarlane: Hey there.

Audience Member: I was just going to talk about how I express my art with, or my disability with my art. I guess it's sort of, well the last project that I did, of actually, it started before that. It started with Kath Duncan's workshop and I heard for the first time audio description. And it reminded me so much of my experience with schizophrenia and hearing voices and just that kind of echo in the space in between things. So I kind of thought it'd be cool to kind of incorporate that into, you know, live art, live theatre. And you know, I guess it comes around to that intersectionality in some sort of bizarre way is that we are all connected in some way and that was the sort of the thing for my project, 'Woven'. Yeah.

Larissa MacFarlane: Wow.



Audience Member: Yeah, but I really, you know, to acknowledge what you've done, I feel really inspired by you in coming, making it easier for people like myself to come out and feel proud. You know? It's taken a long time for me to be able to do so and it hasn't been easy but it's people like yourself and a few others that make it all the worthwhile. Thank you.

Larissa MacFarlane: Thank you. Yeah I get to go and see the Pride Mural often because I live near it and it's always a great source of comfort for me to go there and see so many of my friends on the wall and see a place that belongs to us and that speaks of disability in such a different way.

Audience Member: Would you be kind of enough to take me on a tour one day? That would be good.

Larissa MacFarlane: I'd love to!

Audience Member: That'd be great, let's set it up. Finally!

Larissa MacFarlane: And we'll do our own but if anyone else would like to come on a tour of the Disability Pride Wall, I will do that, do that for you.

Audience Member: Just another...

Larissa MacFarlane: Oh, another question?

Audience Member: What I wanted to say is, growing up for me I felt like a bit of a disconnect within the community. I was trying to figure out how to fit in I suppose, and I didn't know if I was deaf or where my background kind of intersected. My parents are from Greece and they don't speak English, so that kind of compounds with intersectionality and I wondered how do I fit into this? And the third is my sexuality. So all those things interplay, and it makes it difficult for me to find my space, to find my way in to society. But moving ahead I didn't know how to get into that society and there is no visibility of those deaf people I couldn't see them, where were they in the paper? Where were they in the media? So I felt embarrassed and I felt shame and I thought, why do people ignore deaf people? So I struggled through that and I started working and I ignored those problems and I felt like... well, I started to think more about my identity. I felt very lost at the time. So when I finally stopped working, that was really a turning point for me, it made me really realise what my identity was and who I am. At that point I started writing and that was I suppose a way of helping me discover my identity. And that's been a massive help for me. It's been very cathartic. So I think being involved in a



deaf writers' festival a few years ago was a big point. That was through an organisation called Deaf Eyes so I was able to tell my story then, and that was a fantastic experience for me. And we talked about what it was like to be deaf and what it was like to be visible as a deaf person. And I suppose at that point it started to roll from there. And I thought, ok, wow, this is what I'm meant to do. I'm meant to be creative, I'm meant to be a writer. I'm working on a novel and it was just a massive breakthrough I suppose. But at the same time I felt like there were still barriers. There are still barriers for deaf people to show our identity and I think that's because people don't think of deafness as a disability as such. And so I don't feel disabled enough I suppose in a way and I think that's confusing sometimes. Where do I fit? You know, there is nothing wrong with me. I just can't hear. And I do understand why people, you know, people aren't afraid of deafness and people feel like they have to fix it, and that effects our culture, and it restricts our culture. For me as a deaf person, from my perspective, it's very muddled. It's very confusing. I mean on one hand, I am deaf, yes, I feel good about that and I try and show people that it's ok to be deaf. But on the other hand, it's almost like it's a negative. That people want to fix it, people want to be hearing. From my point of view, I find it very difficult.

Larissa MacFarlane: I can...

Audience Member: Sorry I rambled on a little bit there.

Larissa MacFarlane: Thank you so much for sharing. You touch on so many things there that are really important. One being I think that finding your community is really important to finding your identity, your disability identity and finding a sense of pride in yourself. And I know for a long time, I was proud of who I was within my brain injury community or within my friends with mental illness. But stepping outside that became hard and the other interesting thing you talk about is whether you are disabled enough. Or are you really disabled, or not. And that became very apparent to me after the mural came down and then I tried to put it back up again because people did say to me, "But you're not really disabled. Do you have the right to do this mural?" And it made me think about what is disability. And that disability is an identity, it's about community, and now I've lost my train of thought. But! It's something do with... It is true that I am not as impaired. I don't have the same impairments that I had 20 years ago or 10 years ago. But I still have the experience of disability and it is deeply embedded in me. I also, since I now actually have a lot of privilege, in terms of being able to speak and having a voice, is



that I really, I sort of have a moral obligation now to use my voice to explore these issues for people who can't. For people who are still struggling, for people who are locked up in institutions. And, yeah, in many ways too this mural was made for my younger self. I wonder what it would have been like if I was 10 years, 5 years post brain injury and had seen this mural and had been able to access this amazing community of so much diversity and so much difference. So much amazingness. Yep. I think I probably... is there a time check? Cause... Oh! Ok. Alright then. You don't know about it. I just think, one more thing, and I won't say long, but I just think disability pride is actually the reason why I've been so... I have kept going with this and I have persisted is that I actually really feel deeply that this is the way forward to make change in our society and to actually get society embracing disability because at the moment they don't. They don't see us as... we're seen as this problem and something... and people... Change is happening but it's happening because people feel like they should include disabled people or the rules say we should. But they're not saying, "Hey look! There's all those disabled people! They're awesome! We want them to come to our event." And they should be. Because we are awesome. But they don't know we're awesome because we are not yet standing up and saying what we're doing.

Leesa Nash:

Who said that?

Audience Member:

We're awesome!

Larissa MacFarlane:

Yep. Alright.

Eva Sifis:

Okay. So we'll just talking now about Stella Young and Stella Young's impact on Australia's consciousness called, in no small way, for the population to investigate their behaviour in relation to those disabled by our society. As allowed proponent of the social model of disability, her speaking and writing work introduced this seismic attitudinal shift to Australian consciousness. By her assertion, the awareness of disability in Australia stepped up more than a few notches. When Stella unfortunately passed in 2015, Arts Access Victoria honoured both her involvement with the organisation itself and her outside work in the media and the arts, onstage and onscreen. And they did this with an award in her name, recognising a disabled artists between the ages of 16 to 30 whose work reflects so Stella's ethos. And we're going to be joined now, on our screen, by Madeleine Little, as the inaugural winner of the Stella Young Award, in other words, she won last year, an actor and theatre maker based in Brisbane. She wears her disabled artists tag loudly and proudly. After



participating in some very exciting things in the past year, other than the staging of one of her own pieces of work, named "Hold", she is here to let us know more. There is a bit of a delay, so, please bear with me if I stumble, we're working on it.

Madeleine Little:

Hello! There is a bit of a delay so please bear with me if I stumble, we're working on it. Thank you, Eva, for introducing me. Where do I look? There, okay. My name is Madeline Little. I'll quickly describe my appearance too, I'm a young, white woman, I'm in my early twenties. I have my long red hair pulled in a ponytail. I'm wearing a denim dress and a black cardigan and some very cool headphones, I could be a DJ. My sign name looks like this. It's long sexy hair with an M. Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land in which I live and work the Turrbal and Yugara people. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land. So as Eva said, I am an actor and theatre maker based in Brisbane. I have been part of the IndelabilityArts Ensemble since it began in 2015, making work here in Brisbane. And I recently, as of yesterday, finished working at La Boite Theatre Company as Ticketing and Administration Officer. So I qualify as an arts administrator as well as, as an artist. I hold a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drama from QUT. I'm due to finish a Master of Arts this year. I'm researching accessible theatre practice, but I'll talk more about that in a second. I also worked with the Last Avant Garde research team at University of Melbourne with Kath Duncan. So last year I had the incredible privilege of receiving the inaugural Stella Young Award from Arts Access Victoria. And when Eva called to tell me, I was completely shocked. I'm pretty sure I cried and I'm pretty sure I was eating chicken nuggets at the time. It was a very strange phone call. So Eva, thank you for bearing with me then. But the call happened to come at a really difficult time for me, creatively and professionally but from that point onwards I had some momentum. So I was successful in receiving an Arts Access Australia travel grant to attend Meeting Place, which is where I met Larissa. Hi Larissa, miss you. I was also asked to speak on the Leading to the Future panel and it was that experience at Meeting Place where I became reacquainted with Kath Duncan. We a lot at the airport and a couple of weeks later she emailed me and asked me if I'd be interested in joining the research project team, which has been the most amazing experience. So since then I've gone to Perth and Adelaide with the national workshops. I co-produced a week long residency here in Brisbane as part of the Brisbane workshops as well. And it's just been the most amazing, fantastic experience to boldly get into that research. And I never would have been able to do any of those things if it hadn't have been for the Stella Young Award.



So I'm so eternally grateful. On a personal and professional practice level, I have the task of creating a production for my masters that tested some of the accessible theatre practice that I was researching. I created my show, "Hold", which is based on personal experience and uses personal poetry interspersed with scenes of four friends hanging out with the girls at night and catching up. It was really important to me to make a show that was disabled led, had a disabled character. But it wasn't about disability, it was actually about dating and boys and work and all that other stuff that 20 year olds are kind of doing at the moment. Those young whippersnappers. I wrote the first draught in August and September, produced the first season in November at the festival of Australian Student Theatre and it was like a first work in development showing situation. And then I redeveloped the show and presented a second season just in April at the Roundhouse Theatre. So, that was the most amazing experience. The second development of the show featured a 50% deaf and disabled cast and a coder on stage as an integrated characters, so child of deaf adults, as an integrated character in the work who also worked as a shadow interpreter. It was really important to me that these relationships on stage felt authentic just as it would be in real life. We also attempted to provide open captioning of every single line of dialogue in the show, tech issues aside, and we presented the show in relaxed performance format every time. We tested integrated audio description for the first time and we're still tweaking that I've learnt a lot from that experience as well. We had easy English summaries of the box office, comprehensive warnings about the content of the show. We gathered audience feedback and I'm using all of that to analyse how well we integrated these accessible theatre practice conventions because filming, it's not just about making sure that the art is accessible to one component of the deaf and disabled community. It's about making it as accessible as possible to as many people as possible, but also to myself and my other artists who actually make the work. So, in short, the process of making the show was key component of establishing my creative practice as I test what makes a show accessible, but also what makes a bloody good show. I wanted people to laugh, I wanted people to cry and I wanted people to just feel all of the feels. This show never would have been possible without the Stella Young Award. I wanna emphasise that as much as possible. I put the \$3,000 dollars aside for the show and I used it on artist fees and venue hire fees, which has made a world of difference. It made producing, writing, directing and performing in a show possible and it made testing the research possible. I'm trying to establish myself in an industry that does not cater for me and does not welcome me in.



And so to do that, I'm trying to create a resource for professional theatre companies to increase deaf and disabled representation in professional main stage theatre. I'm so much closer to achieving that goal. Thanks to the Stella Young Award and to Arts Access Victoria and to Stella's example. So that is a brief rundown of what I've been doing this past year and if you wondering if I've slept, no I haven't, but I'm working on that. And to wrap up, I do have a question for all of you to kick start, if you do have a couple of questions for me also. My question to you, everyone in the audience, if you are at a place where you don't feel that Disability Pride yet, what do you need, what do you think you need to start your disability pride journey? Thank you.

Eva Sifis: Okay Madeleine now we're waiting for the audience to come forth with their response to that question. What do you need to feel disability pride?

Audience Member: I think you need to have acceptance for having a disability to start with. Or like, mine was acquired and it took me about three or four years to actually accept it. But yeah, and now I have the pride and I love the fact that I've got a disability and I feel like I'm a better person because I have or I've become a better person because before I wasn't a really good person. A lot of bad choices. Party boy. Woohoo!

Eva Sifis: Anybody else? What do you need to feel pride?

Leesa Nash: I've got a microphone.

Eva Sifis: Great! Why don't you use it?

Leesa Nash: I thought I might answer.

Eva Sifis: Okay.

Leesa Nash: For me personally I think it takes courage and I work at Arts Access. And since I started working there, it feels emotional, last September I have been rubbing up against my own experience that... you know it's that thing am I, you know, the question... I've never identified myself as having a disability, but I have an experience of mental health and chronic illness but I've always been able to go to work even though sometimes that's challenging and working in this field for a long time but then not feeling like. You know, I can still do everything. Or if I couldn't I just went home. You know what I mean? So it wasn't a thing where people necessarily knew what was going on so... yeah, and that's a practice. I relate to it being a practice where you



accept who you are and courageously speak. So I'm feeling that right now.

Eva Sifis: Excellent. Larissa.

Larissa MacFarlane: The question again was? I know what it was. What do you need to make yourself feel proud? I know for me it's about having friends around me and so sometimes I'm now good at thinking if I'm going somewhere where it's going to be an unfriendly environment towards disability I'll take someone with me. Because I do think I feel better strength in numbers. I've also got another secret weapon and that is that I spent last year making disability pride badges and giving them out to everybody.

Eva Sifis: I've got one!

Larissa MacFarlane: And wearing them. And obviously sometimes you walk into places where it isn't cool to wear it or you're not quite proud enough to wear it on the outside so I'll wear it on the inside underneath a jumper. And I've got this sort of secret armour going on. So I am proud, I'm remembering I'm proud I'm just not necessarily sharing it with everybody at that moment.

Eva Sifis: That's great. Come on! Yes.

Audience Member: I guess I'm looking at it from a different angle, from the grassroots I guess. I'm a parent, I have three children with disability but I'm also a school teacher and worked with kids on the autism spectrum disorder for over 10 years. I guess what I'm hearing from everyone is that you guys have taken a long time to develop your pride, how amazing would it be if we started when kids are young and make that part of the curriculum and part of their school life so they're not growing up and going through their mental health difficulties and all that sort of thing as they reach their teens. I'd like to see pride being taught or encouraged in little kids. So they get to this age or their adult life and not have as many difficulties and feel proud of who they are.

Eva Sifis: Great idea. Did you want to say something Madeleine?

Madeleine Little: Yeah, I agree with starting younger. The younger the better. Very, very briefly, my journey started in Perth where actually met Eva, at the Jenny Sealy Residency and I arrived late, and couldn't find a chair that worked for me. And I immediately went into apologising because I had to ask for a different chair and it was an instinct, and I was like, "Oh, I'm so sorry for the trouble, I'm so sorry." And Gaelle Mellis just put her hands on my arm



and said, "No, that's your access." And in that moment, it just blew my tiny 20, 21 year old mind that I was allowed to take up space and I was allowed to ask her what I needed to exist in that space. So that's where my journey began there, and I guess that's my encouragement. If anyone in the room might be feeling a little bit uncomfortable or not quite there yet, you are allowed to take up space. You're allowed to ask for what you need to take up that space. And you do get proud by practicing, I'm still practicing. It's a daily thing, but it's amazing. As soon as you start that journey, it is like a weight off your shoulders and so many doors open to you and I'm just so grateful for Stella and her legacy and for this beautiful, wonderful award that is going to a very worthy person this evening.

Eva Sifis:

Thank you so much Madeleine Little. The Stella Young Award panel met on Saturday, just gone to comb through the many worthy applications for this year's award. Our panel, our panel, who all knew Stella personally are Sarah Barton, from Grit Media. She was Stella's friend and collaborator. Maddie Little, Stella's sister. Also George Taleporos was part of the panel and he is an academic and he was a close friend of Stella's. And CEO of Arts Access Victoria, Caroline Bowditch. After much discussion, it was decided the winner would be someone Stella would have loved to have sit down with over drink, more than likely, to discuss their similar ethos and viewpoints. With that in mind, here to present our 2019 winner, is Caroline Bowditch.

Caroline Bowditch:

I get all the best jobs. It was a really amazing conversation that we had on Saturday. So we had 14 applicants, from all over Australia. There were some incredibly strong contenders and as we read these applications, we just kept thinking, what would Stella do? How many of us in this room ask ourselves that, in this room, ask ourselves that every day, what would Stella do? It's a constant question for me. So we kind of had that moment of saying, what would Stella do? Who would she want to spa, interact with? Who would she want to have those conversations, the juicy conversations with? And what it came down to was the winner was someone who we really felt is continuing Stella's legacy. They are a person who is absolutely interrogating the things that Stella started. They are continuing the conversation. They are continuing the challenging, they are doing all the stuff that's Stella did and I really feel like the winner picks up the mantle and is going to continue to run with it. So I'm very proud to announce the winner of the 2019 Stella Young Award is Vanessa Jo Di Natale. Woo-hoo! Congratulations, congratulations!



Vanessa Jo Di Natale:

Hello! I did write something, but I'll try and wing it for like a few minutes until I can't, and then I will get my phone out. When I found out about this, I kind of went into shock. Everything I've read that Stella has written has made me go, "Oh, shit! "That's hitting the nail right on the head. "That's really cutting through the bullshit." I really admire writers and artists who can do that, who can see past all the crap that gets smeared along things and it really cuts through that and shows people, "Oh, wait, that's actually really stuffed up." And that's why I really respect and really admired her ability to do that in the things that she wrote and spoke about. And now I will refer to my phone. So I didn't realise that I was a part of the disability community until 2014. Most women on the autism spectrum slip under the radar, because of just sexism in the diagnostic criteria. It's been thought of as exclusively male experience and we're only starting to realise now that women, as well as non-binary and trans people, are also neurodivergent. So I kind of feel like I've just discovered a community, that have welcomed me in with open arms. That feels really, really great. In the last four years I've come to really identify with being a disabled woman. For some people who have known me, they wanted me to be reluctant about using, or hesitate about using the word disabled, because I thought if I came to over identify with the term, that would make me focus overly on the challenges autistic people would have and it would mean that I would alienate myself from communities that I perceived as able bodied able minded spaces, and I don't think that's true at all. I think, embracing that identity, has made me become more in tune with the fact that there are places that I'm not accepted and to sort of, I think we have that recognition of spaces where we're not accepted, we can sort of prepare and sort of protect ourselves much better. An idea of Stella's that I really, really liked, and you probably know this, her idea of disabled people as being sort of inspiration porn, and I took this idea and I applied it to how we speak about autistic people. And, you've often probably, you mainly only ever hear, about autistic people when they have a really great talent. They can draw a picture by memory in three minutes, or they can do coding in three minutes, or they can play piano the moment they sit down at it, and like we're just super humans. I'm here to tell you that I can't do any of those things. So, when I heard Stella talk about that, that was the way I thought about it. Getting a Disability Arts Award, it feels strange because I'm just very new to the arts world and in the short time that I've been in it, I've kind of sat back and I've looked at how much nepotism there is and I thought with my autism, I'm not gonna get anywhere. But, I think that that's why organisations like Art Access Victoria, which recognise that there are parts of the art world which are quite



conservative and they kind of see disability accessibility and they consider it really as an afterthought. Like, "Oh, yes, some people need this, "I didn't realise that." That's why organisations like this one are really important. I also have to admit that I did deal with a lot of feelings of imposter syndrome leading up to tonight. I'd ask myself questions like, "Have I done enough in disability arts and activism "to deserve this?" Because up until a point in my interactions with others, I do have passing privilege. I am white and I am educated and these were all the sorts of thoughts that I had. And when I shared this with my mom, she told me the story about my brother who also has autism as well as an intellectual disability. And she told, and I think this story really highlights some of the challenges of when your disability is invisible. She said, "Do you want to know how many times, "when your brother was younger, "how many fines ticket inspectors gave me "and how many people yelled at me and said, "'You're not disabled, he's not disabled. "Get out of that car parking spot.' "And I would have to contest fine after fine just because your brother looked like he wasn't disabled." I study politics, at Melbourne Uni and in those classes, as you can imagine, I'm frequently spoken over. I'm often the only disabled person in the room and sometimes in these classes I give up altogether trying to communicate because these politics students, they really aren't listening to anyone other than themselves. That's when I kind of realised that these are probably going to be the people who get into politics. I try and keep sitting in these classes although I realised that this is a taste of what's to come. And through being part of the disability arts community, it's kind of helped me better be able to exist in these spaces that I'm really not meant to be in and in the hope that maybe by me being there, it will, often, like politics tutors, it's their first ever encounter with someone with autism. So hopefully that in itself is doing something. I think being given this award, since people don't often take me seriously, because I really struggle with my verbal communication. I think the symbolism have of having this to my name will probably maybe make people start taking me a bit more seriously. Recently, I'm jumping everywhere, I'm sorry. Recently someone said to me, "Vanessa, you are not your autism. That's just something you have, that's one part of you." And while this person had good intentions, I'm a bit tired of the rationale they had good intentions, because this explains a way and doesn't give us full permission to feel the hurt and power of listeners. Statements like these can often evoke in us. For anyone else who has a disability, who has had a similar statement added to them you probably might feel similarly that disability isn't just some small facet of our identities, which we can tune in and out of as we please. We often can't walk out the front door with that anxiety, it's about what



obstacles, judgements, misconceptions we're going to have to just tolerate or decide that we're gonna have to educate people that day and just putting out with having to sort of choose between, do I just put up with this or do I educate you? And that can be really exhausting. We are reminded usually very rudely that we don't meet the criteria of normal, healthy, able, competent throughout multiple spheres of our lives. For myself, as I kind of touched on my difficulties with verbal communication, have meant I've often been written off as an idiot, someone unworthy of giving a go. I find it harder to sell myself and ideas to others, to pique people's interest, to get others to come on board with my projects or see value in what I'm trying to say or do. But being here with you all tonight and receiving this, really does make me feel quite valued, so thank you. Here are some cynical observations I've made about the art world. It's one of collecting friends in high places who are held in high esteem by organisations and usually, if you want to be taken seriously, you need to pick the interests of someone who is a somebody, so you have to have connections, or if they've got a disability quota, it's paid to the disability perspective card, which appeals to their need to include various perspectives in their organisation. I think I mentioned more about the tokenistic way politicians and organisations tend to go about diversity. I think we really risk becoming, sort of patting themselves on the back. Let me find the line. We're often ad-ons ticking a diversity quota box so they can pat themselves on the back and say, "Oh, look at us, we included a disabled person. We've dismantled centuries of othering, marginalising, experimenting on neglecting and killing disabled people by hiring this one disabled person. I think we've earned ourselves a lunch break." I also was thinking about the disabled people who don't access art and who don't recognise that their experiences are experiences that people would want to hear about. And this is where I say that it's the disability movement primarily benefits white, middle-class, disabled people, people like myself, and if we think of it at, just recently, these indigenous restrains with psychosocial disabilities, in watch houses, and the children with disabilities abused in police detention. All the citizenship claims that have been rejected because a child in the family had a disability and was considered an economic burden. These are the sort of, disabled people that, they're not going to get that access to art and find that pride. I think about that a lot. So, I am very grateful for this award. And while I endeavour to seek out and be conscious of the intersectional nature of disability, I recognise that there are things that I cannot say because there is discrimination and mistreatment I have not experienced. I really hope that disabled people will expect more and more when it comes to how and



who is representing us in the arts and politics. And to touch more on the theme of art and pride, I didn't start writing about being autistic with the aim of being an advocate or improving attitudes held about neurodivergent people. I started writing about being autistic because I had internalised so many narratives about how we are socially defective, incapable of empathy, robotic and undesirable. That I had to get all those stories down on paper. And once I had, I was able to hold them up and look at them and realise I don't need any of these. And then from there, that's when I started to look into the disability movement. And the last thing I will say is I really hope I've managed to say things here tonight that go beyond empty virtue signaling and wanted to point out that I really appreciate this opportunity and there's still a lot that still needs to be addressed about how we treat and think about disabled people in Australia and abroad. Thanks for listening to me and feel free to approach me after this and I was supposed to end on a question. My question had to do with, how do you feel proud of yourself and your art when others outside your community aren't?

Eva Sifis: Thank you so much Vanessa. I just wanted to say that Madeleine Little, she just wanted to say she's extending her congratulations to you too even though she's watching from the ether. There you go, Madeleine, there she is. Do you wanna say in person Madeleine?

Madeleine Little: Sure, congratulations so, so much. This opportunity has been life changing for me and I know it will be for you too. And you are right, just having it on your name makes a world of difference. Congratulations, make the most of it and I hope to talk to you soon.

Eva Sifis: Yay!

Eva Sifis: Does anybody want to answer Vanessa's question? Do you want to say it again? Just one more time.

Vanessa Jo Di Natale: When people outside your community aren't proud, or interested in your art, how do you reconcile that with being proud of your art in disability?

Audience Member: I've been thinking about it while these questions have been asked: what sort of carries me through and allows me to believe in myself and what I do? And it's a sense of human rights and social justice that I've had since before I got my disability. It's sort of always stayed with me. And a sense of what right have you got to say that my rights are any less than yours? There's sort of



a general – pardon my language – “Fuck you” sort of thing that I’ve always felt when people launch those attitudes at me. I guess that makes me feel even more determined to keep going. And as far as with my art, I’ve had a lot of doubts. Not only because I’ve got a disability, but because of the kind of performance work that I does pretty fringe and always has been. I’ve had to think, “Well, this isn’t acceptable for certain people in the art world but it’s what I do. And along the way I’ve had to come to the conclusion that it’s what I do and I’m going to keep doing it. Even if both inside and outside the disability world it’s not sort of lauded in the way some other art is. So I guess it’s the art itself and really believing in it.

Eva Sifis: And the eternal middle finger.

Audience Member: Exactly.

Eva Sifis: That was completely unintentional! Alright, I'd like to wrap up tonight please, it is 9:30 and this is the time that we were meant to finish. So I would like to thank the Arts Centre Melbourne, of course, Arts Access Victoria, together with the artist engagement team of which I am par., Description Victoria, who was doing the audio description of tonight and Auslan Stage Left, who are to my stage left. And I'd like to just inform everybody that there is a monthly networking meeting held at Arts Access. Please get in touch with the artist engagement team and come along mix with your peers, let's get together. Nothing about us without us! Let's do it. Thank you very much for coming tonight, thank you.