



Mama Alto:

All right, we might get started. Hello everybody and welcome today. Welcome to Arts Centre Melbourne. Before we begin today's session here at The Kiln we would like to acknowledge the owners and custodians of the lands and waters where we meet, the people of the Kulin nations. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded, and we acknowledge elders past, present and emerging of the greater Kulin nations. Welcome today to Arts Centre Melbourne. This is a special programme as part of The Kiln which as some of you may know is a sector development programme for Melbourne's independent arts community to explore, hone, and develop professional practice. Today's session is being curated by Jodee Mundy, who's just over there. It'll be hosted by myself, Mama Alto. And today's session is entitled 'The Future of Inclusive Leadership.' Today is a unique opportunity to learn about some of the processes this group of amazing leaders have developed and gain practical insights into arts inclusivity and the future of inclusive arts leadership. So, before we begin, it is gonna be two hours together. So, we'll just do some brief housekeeping. As a fierce brown woman of colour, I usually refuse on political principle to do housekeeping. But for you, I will make an exception. So, it is two hours. As you can see we've got couches around the edges of the room, we've got chairs in the middle, we've got beanbags and we've got lots of open space towards the back of the room. Feel free to move around as you need, as your body needs and for your comfort. Two hours is a long time to listen to the sound of my voice. There's water at the back there at that urn at the back of the room. And through door two, just over there at the back of the room, you'll find bathrooms including accessible bathrooms. I believe that's all the housekeeping for now. Today is, of course, being Auslan interpreted with interpreters from Auslan Stage Left, it is being audio captioned and audio described. So to begin, I'm gonna introduce you to our amazing panellists. And we're gonna hear from each of them a response of about 10 minutes to two key themes that Jodee put together for today. After that, we're going to deep dive into some more specific questions and panel discussion before the opportunity for an audience Q&A. Unfortunately, one of our panellists is not attending in person today, but has provided answers via video link, because she is facilitating an incredible conference in Sweden. We won't hold it against her. So, our two key theme questions for today, "How have you practiced inclusion "and what have you learnt?" And, "How has inclusion enabled the arts?" Our first panellist who's gonna speak to that topic is Kamarra Bell-Wykes from Ilbijerri Theatre. Kamarra Bell-Wykes is a Yugara, Butchulla, and European woman who has been a



playwright for over 15 years. Combined, her community target works have been seen by over 50,000 people across Australia. In 2012, she graduated with honours in a Bachelor of Education, and in 2014, worked with Ilbjerri Theatre Company to build their new arts education programme now established as a groundbreaking innovator in the sector. In 2017, Kamarra was appointed Ilbjerri's creative director and works as a playwright, performer, director and dramaturg across main stage and community productions. Kamarra is dedicated to the development of First Nations ways of working across all of her practices. So, to begin today, how have you practiced inclusion, what have you learned, and how has inclusion enabled the arts?

Kamarra BW: Okay. Hello? And in 2019 resigned from Ilbjerri Theatre Company and is now working as a freelance artist, just add that to my bio as well.

Mama Alto: Nobody sent me that!

Kamarra BW: It's a pretty recent development. I don't know if I went a little bit conceptual with this, I tend to just kind of respond with whatever comes through at the time. So, we'll see how it go. And then obviously, there's gonna be an opportunity to speak more specifically to things. I was recently invited to direct a reading of Jane Harrison's iconic play "Stolen" with a group of First Nation community members from the Albury-Wodonga region in Wiradjuri country. This group of about eight people ranged from ages 14 to 45. All with very diverse lived experiences and all coming from different mobs from across Australia. For many of the younger ones, it was the first time that they had heard of the play, and the first time that they had discussed the emotional truths of the stolen generation in such depth. Unpacking issues of child removal, sexual, physical, spiritual, and emotional abuse, forced labour or slavery as it's otherwise known, identity theft, mental illness, suicide, and of course, the gift that keeps on giving a transgenerational trauma. For the older cast members, these issues were all too a part of their lived experiences. For one woman, who had only found out just some five years before her family's deepest and darkest secret that her great grandmother aboriginal and stolen at the age of two. This woman had lost most of her family to addiction, suicide, prison, and the humiliation of running from their past. A past that they were programmed to be ashamed of. And she now, the only one left standing, left to hold this truth on her own, only still processing it and now stepping on the stage to re-enact it, all for \$15 a ticket. For most of this group, it was only



their first or second time performing on the stage. And it was the first time they had performed together. A couple were naturals, whilst others could barely lift their face or voice from the page. And with only a couple of hours a day to rehearse before two sold-out shows at the end of the week, I wasn't sure how much we were going to be able to achieve. My biggest concern was placing this mob in an unsafe position in both the rehearsal room and on the stage. The least of my concerns was that their nervous would get the better of them. The most of my concerns was that we were bringing up issues we didn't have the space and time to unpack with the care that they deserved, that the historical burden and collective traumas expressed in the play would be too much too quick and too close. Especially for the younger ones having to portray children not much younger than themselves caught in the horrific circumstances of childhoods no one should have to bear. But that every single Aboriginal person in this country has been directly or indirectly affected by. Of course, as per usual, my fears and anxieties were completely unfounded. Not only did we pull off a top-notch performance a hundred and twenty one lighting cues is not a reading. It was one of the most powerful and truthful performances of "Stolen" I've yet to see, and I've seen and acted in quite a few. Over the course of the week, this eclectic crew transformed into a tight and dynamic ensemble. Their faces and voices filled with honour and pride as they told the stories about old people, embodying the emotional truth of these characters with a care and integrity that cannot be taught. But believe it or not, that was still not the highlight of the experience. Even more than this, the thing that really astounded me, astounded but not surprised because I continue to see it again and again, was the way this group came together. Their willingness to share, learn, give, work, teach, forgive, laugh, cry, and hold each other through this experience and all it brought to the surface. The way our people always do, always have and always will, because we have no other choice if we are to survive. When I'm working with my mob, whether they're professional artists, community groups, prison populations, drug users, or young people in care, my people, my community, are innately and instinctively inclusive. We've been raised to sit in our inconvenient and uncomfortable truths together. Not only without judgement, but with complete and full acceptance of where each of us is on our journey. And the battle wounds we got getting there. Because we know the war. We are all fighting it in our own way. We're in the trenches together. And as they say, no one left behind, no one. As a First Nations woman and artist, inclusivity is a holistic practice and really just an extension of daily



life. In our community, many of our disabilities are worn on the inside, the trauma, the triggers, the anger, the hurt. We are the walking wounded. Wounds all designed to be kept raw and open. To be reinfected daily by the ongoing cycles of dysfunction, poverty, addiction, abuse, racism, displacement, inescapable systems of power. The ball and chain of colonisation doesn't stop when we step outside our homes or into the office or onto the stage. We can't just leave it at the door. We bring the pain and loss of our history, ourselves, our families, our communities, our ancestors, everywhere we go. This collective cultural load, actually, no, this is their culture and not ours. This collective colonial load is huge, and it's overwhelming, and sometimes it's so heavy, it feels like we can't carry it anymore. So, then, we make art about it. And the art is hard and the art is healing and the art has high stakes and the art is life and death. The art is a burden of truth that must be shared, if we are to ever heal these wounds. All in the hope that one day we can make work that doesn't always have to tell these stories of oppression and survival. That doesn't always have to ensure Australia doesn't forget us, and what happened to us and that we're still here and we still haven't gotten our reparations. But in the meantime, we must actively create spaces for this colonial load. We must make work in a way that not only acknowledges it exists, but builds on it and transforms it, turns our wounds into weapons. We must name our triggers and how they manifest, we must practice care, we must practice patience, must be willing to be vulnerable and forgiving of ourselves and each other. We must value the voice and experience of all of our community members. We must keep the window open and keep pulling our mob through. We must make room on the platform. We must never say that it's too hard or too damaged or too far gone. We meet people at their entry point and address their needs as they occur. We must remember who we are, where we came from, how we got here, and why we're doing this in the first place. Because the arts, quite honestly, saved my life. I'm so damn lucky to have the privilege and responsibility to keep throwing that lifeline as often and to as many of my people as I can. Art is and always will be my preferred weapon of war, my weapon of survival and thrival, because it levels the battlefield. It gives power to whoever uses it. And it changes shape to the hands of the holder. It doesn't care about what you look like, where you live, your sexuality, physical ability, education, social standing, addictions or traumas, doesn't even care about the bad things done to you or the bad things you have done. Art by definition is inclusive. It doesn't discriminate and it doesn't exclude. Only people have the power to do



that. Inclusion doesn't enable the arts, the arts enables inclusion. Thank you.

Mama Alto:

A fantastic starting point from Kamarra for us today. Our next panellist is Fablice Manirakiza from Kamanse, Burundi. Fablice Manirakiza has established himself as an artist of influence in Melbourne's cultural landscape. Working as a community cultural development worker to create connections between CALD, culturally and linguistically diverse youth and communities across Victoria. He has drawn heavily from his hip-hop and rap practice, to create interactive workshops for young people from marginalised communities, focusing on song composition, beat making, music video production, and performance skills. He commands a commitment to traditional Burundian drumming styles with a passion for contemporary music to create new and engaging platforms for experimentation, community building, and performance. Fablice, how have you practiced inclusion? What have you learnt? And how has inclusion enabled the arts?

Fablice Manirakiza:

Cool, thank you. I'll just put my phone here so I can just refer to the questions. And most of my respond, I guess, will be based on my life story. I guess that's what got me here. The power of stories, the power of my story. And I'm just trying to focus on the question, I guess. It has always been a journey of really capturing the opportunities that I've seen in my way now. Myself, I come from a nation where I've had so much struggles within my growing up, such as becoming a refugee on the age of two, and then being kidnapped when I was 11 years old to become a child soldier and losing my parents on a very young age. And I guess to the stage where I was lucky enough, I was lucky enough to come to Australia to be rescued by Australia. And coming in Australia, I guess, has become more like a door opening for me. It allowed me to find my voice. And I guess, it has been the right time for me to really set myself as a leader. Now, among the communities, among my community, it's really hard for us to speak out based on what we have faced. We come from a very war-torn nations and coming to Australia where everything it's just right, it has become what I call intergeneration. And this is something that you would see even in communities of the same people I shared the same background with. It becomes a really hard road for us to overcome just in a tick of time. It takes time for us to recover. It takes time for us to get back on track. And because I guess one of the biggest gaps that have been observing in between, we don't... we don't get in... the government or I would say



they don't provide us with counselling, therefore, we live with great trauma. And because the society is so new, the society is so different from where we come from, it becomes very different. It takes a very strong person to overcome what we have went through and be able to set he or herself as a leader within the community. So I guess for me, I was lucky enough I would like to acknowledge Multicultural Victoria, which is a great organisation that has helped me from the beginning to realise my potential. And I think what happened, it has always... It was the way... As a young person who's humble, who's hungry for opportunity, who want him to make a change, for me, it really became like a... It was like a bone throwing out to a dog and then jump to it. You know? And from then, it has allowed me to realise what I can do. So, I have strongly involved myself into making a change within the Australian society pretty much realising, realisation of the powerment of the arts. But also, carrying my culture. Now, one of the thing I like to highlight it's that Australia is a great multicultural country. And I think the best and the way we should always look at it is in that way of realising that it's a multicultural country, therefore everyone is different, everyone is different. So, how do we create the environment of respecting each and every one's culture? Respecting each and everyone's background, which is something that I've seen that it's a bit failure that has appeared. Because I remember when... I mean I've been here for only 10 years, and I came here with no English at all. And one of my music mentor in the beginning, when we were sort of practicing music, blah, blah, he would always tells me that this country belongs to a black culture. And because that's not something we was learning at school, it became confusing to me like, "What do you mean black culture?" That he would then take on and tells me that this country belongs to an indigenious which then became a very great route for me to realise the potential for Australia and realising why it's a multicultural country, and to be able to take the advantage of that. Because... I mean, I don't know if we all appreciate that fact but for me, it has become golden. Even when I go back to Burundi, I tell them I live in a paradise, in a country where it's welcoming to everyone. So, going back to the question, for me, the way that I feel like that I've been practice the inclusion, it has always been taking the opportunity. It has always been open to everyone that I see around. Now, as I said, my respond will be based on my stories. When I say this, I will give you an example. One of my music work that was my latest music project was lucky enough to do with Paul Kelly. So, the song that I did with Paul Kelly, how we all came across. I remember one of my music mentor, Paul Stewart He... one day



we went to a community cup which is on the other... I can't remember what it is. And we supposed to play on the end of the day ended up being the bill was loaded up and they say, "Would you mind the boys jumping up "and do bundling empires?" Which we had no idea what that was. So, he asked us and we're like, "Yeah, yeah, we'll do it, cool." And I remember during the game, Paul Kelly happened to be in the audience and he would hear the host talking about us, how we are trying to make a change. And then Paul Kelly requested us the next day to go and have kick to kick with his mates. And when Pauly told us that we're going to have kick to kick with Paul Kelly. I was like, "Yeah, just another guy, who is he?" We didn't know who he was. And we went and I remember it was after that practise, when Paul Stewart did then started telling us how Paul Kelly's like Bob Marley in Australia, how it's great. In fact, we went to see his documentary and one of the ladies says, "Paul Kelly's like Jesus." Seriously, we then started realising what we have out there. So we started approaching Pauly Stewart and say, "Hey, you should tell Paul Kelly "to help us on a song or something." And he's like, "Do you realise how big this guy is? Maybe you should do one of his cover." And I went like, "No, no, no, "maybe he should do one of our song." Which he then was so surprised. And I say, "You know what? I'm gonna ask him." So, we went back to have a kick to kick with his mates, which resolved this radio hostage which we had no idea who these guys was anyway. And I approached him and I say, "We would like to do a collaboration, "would you jump on one of our song?" And he said, "Yes." So, I was like, "That wasn't hard." So, we did a project on a song called "Child Soldier" and it was really successful. Now, going back to the equation, I think for me, if we didn't say yes to the opportunities, even though it wasn't what we was looking for, it wouldn't have led us to that. You know? So, the inclusion of the arts, I mean, the inclusion of really opening up to the opportunities that you get can lead to something huge. So, for me, that's what's been life changing. So, ever since I have try to set myself up as empowering my community. I started leading the Burundian community in 2013. Now, I was really young. Within the African community, there is always this mindset where they think young boys or young ones can't lead and all that. And for me, I wanted to challenge that. And I say, "You know what? "I'm gonna go for it," and I was lucky enough to be elected as the president. So, being a leader of a community, it has taught me so much. It was pretty much where I got to learn different skills, it was pretty much where I got to deal with people who I would say about my mom's age. And I think what helped me has always been me opening to the elders of the



communities to get them involved, which I'm... So, believing in the power of inclusion, getting people involved within what you're doing, it's something that I think has helped me to be who I am. So, I'm just trying to be conscious of our time, I like to talk. So, "How has inclusion enabled the arts?" Within the arts, I mean, when I look at how much I have done I'm so lucky, I'm so lucky. I do inspiration and motivation speaking at schools, which I have been at more than a hundred schools, all across Australia, East Timor, and in Africa. And I'd go out talk about my story and all that. And I think for me, it has been the power of stories, and also having a common ground where people can sit down and share skills. When you look at what has been happening within the... among my communities, there're so much young people who's been sort of misled or who's been sort of not be able to recognise the opportunities out there. And that's why you ended up hitting all those apex and all that, which is crazy. Now, I'll tell you what, I remember when we got accepted to come to Australia there was, in the refugee camp, there was a roommate of those who got rejected telling us that we shouldn't come to Australia because white people eat black people. So coming to Australia, it was terrifying for us, but then it became the answer for us. And looking at what was happening a couple of years ago for all those dramas, all that, it really created a great fear to the people, I would say to the Australian community, to the point that we started hating people we don't even know exist. You know? I mean, it became so crazy that I remember in the streets of Dandenong when I'm walking this way, and there is a white person walking towards me, he or she, there was more chance of he or she going on different footpath. Which created, for me, it was chaos. And then, for me it was more sort of "What do we do? "How do we change this?" So, then I guess it was more sort of knowing the power of the arts, because the power of the arts is a universal language. And for me believing that each and every one has a talent. It's more sort of how do we use arts to change the future? What future do we wanna see? Because I arrived here in Australia 10 years ago when we were using those little Nokia phones where you can't even take a photo. And right now we have iPhone Z, iPhone X where you can hologram somebody here. So, my question now I gotta leave it up to you is where do you see ourselves? Or where do you see this world in a hundred years to come? When you understand... When you get that, then you start shaping on how do we save the future. And how do we use arts to save the future. Thank you, thank you.



Mama Alto:

Fantastic commentary that cuts right to the heart of our themes today about the power of the arts as a universal language. Our next panellist who's going to speak on this topic is Veronica Pardo from Multicultural Arts Victoria. Veronica Pardo is the CEO of Multicultural Arts Victoria, the state's leading organisation on diversity in the arts. She comes to the role after 10 years of leading Arts Access Victoria, with a focus on cultural participation by people with disability and those experiencing mental health issues. Veronica is an experienced leader, who has led an ambitious agenda of social and artistic transformation in the creative industries, working alongside people who have been marginalised through their identity as the other. She has spearheaded campaigns relating to social justice, equity, and the inclusion of all people in arts and culture, as audiences and as cultural innovators. Veronica has held senior roles in the non-government sector and in academia, leading significant research projects aimed at embedding meaningful and lasting change towards equality. Veronica, how have you practiced inclusion,? What have you learnt? And how has inclusion enabled the arts?

Veronica Pardo:

Thank you, Mama Alto. Those of you who know me know that I really accept invitations to be on panels. And it's not 'cause I don't like to talk 'cause I can talk underwater, but it's really because I've never thought it was very appropriate for me to centre to myself and my thoughts and opinions in relation to the work that I've been doing all these years. There were so many better people to be talking about these things than me. But I accepted this invitation partly because Jodee Mundy asked and I do love Jodee, and also because I've a new role with Multicultural Arts Victoria. And for the first time in my career, the answer to that question lies in part in my own story. So, I'm going to tell you a little bit about myself, which makes me incredibly uncomfortable, because I don't think I've ever spoken about myself in a kind of work context in this way, so please forgive me if I suddenly become sentimental and cry. No, I'm not gonna cry, but I may be sentimental. Look, I'm often asked to talk about inclusion in the arts. But I'd rather speak about belonging, which to me, is the byproduct of inclusion, whose presence or absence is the ultimate test of whether inclusion was ever really there in the first place. And I'm going to start by relaying an anecdote about a conversation. A recent conversation with a friend, a woman recently turned 50. And she was sharing with me her frustration, that as a middle aged woman, she had become invisible. In her work and in her community, she perceived a loss of power, influence, and relevance. And she was raging. I was too for a while, and then I realised that my



anger had a different source to hers 'cause it had melded with the frustration of knowing that while the loss of power may be hard to accept, how different it is never to have had it in the first place. I think invisibility is a consequence of a lack of power. And it was all too familiar. So, I first learned about invisibility at school. Who wants to be friends with the kid that can't speak English? Doesn't know any of the rules to any of the games. And this was the clincher, eats a hot lunch every day brought to the school gate by her mother, who was convinced that a Vegemite sandwich was an abomination. And heaven help you if despite all of that, you've got a mind that wants to learn, and a personality that is never satisfied by the banal explanations of a teacher desperately short on imagination and patience. Seriously, my arm could have withered and fallen off before the teacher would ever acknowledge my presence. The truth is, a diverse identity can be a complex thing. Shrouding you in invisibility when you most want to be seen, and forcing unwanted attention on you, and whatever your difference is when you desperately want to fit in. But it isn't always a bad thing being invisible. I was going to learn this the hard way and many times over in my life and career. The clearest memory I have of desiring invisibility was again at school, those beacons of love and acceptance. I was in my year 10 English class, expounding passionately, as I do, about a subject that I can no longer recall when my teacher cut me off by asking me to sit on my hands. Because according to her, no one could take me seriously and think that I was saying something worth hearing whilst waving my hands about in the air like a peasant. And aside, if I am anything, I'm a contrarian. Those of you who know me know that I went on to specialise in Australian sign language, and spent my formative years working with amazing deaf people, waving my hands around with abandon, in the glorious language that is Auslan. And that teacher, I seriously cannot remember her name. But there you go. When you are other, you are at times beneath notice. You may try to distinguish yourself all you like but the forces of assimilation are strong, whispering to you to lean in, lean in as much as you can, so that it's not your distinctive qualities that grant you attention but the extent of your conformity. When you can't or won't conform, because everything in you is shouting that it's wrong, you pay a price. And I think that price is belonging. I started working with deaf and disabled people when I was 19 years old. I was not deaf and disabled, and therefore not of their tribe. They knew it and I knew it. My proximity could only be so close as they allowed given the shortcomings of my lived experience as an able-bodied hearing person. But every hurtful experience of exclusion and



marginalisation that I had as a young person growing up in mainstream Australian society was undone by this incredible, generous, complex community. Who knew I was not one of them, but welcomed me anyway. I was not invisible to them, nor were they to me. I worked with, for, and alongside this community for the next 27 years, that's how old I am. It wasn't always perfect and I wasn't always perfect. I made a lot of mistakes. I learnt a lot and I gave a lot. I learnt what it meant to be an ally, and sometimes an accomplice. Occasionally, I was an interloper, and I had to learn my place. These lessons were hard and amazing. We had conversations every day, every day about power, privilege, identity, rights, society, community. I got to witness the best of humanity and sometimes the worst. But mostly the mundane and ubiquitous struggle to break through structures of oppression. Structures that this society has created, and that this society upholds. And together, we created spaces for making art that were expansive, challenging, and inclusive. You may be surprised by this, but in my almost decade with Arts Access, we worked with more than 10,000 artists with disability to make an enormous body of work and build significant careers in the arts. This work is part of a major social and artistic movement, and it largely bypasses the mainstream. So, have a think about that. One of the things I take with me is a sensibility about belonging. What is essential to me, to the experience of belonging is to be seen, to be spoken to, interacted with, to be asked ones thoughts and opinions, to be offered employment, friendship, an invitation, to sit and have a cup of tea, and to inquire about a person's life, to accept with humility that our good intentions do not preclude us from hurting others. These are not hard things, and yet, they appear immeasurably hard to so many people, because it seems that we have to have forum after forum on how to build a culture of inclusion in the arts. If I was a teacher, a similarly mealy-mouthed, tactless type as was inflicted upon me so many years ago, I might venture to say that if you don't know how to include people, you should probably let the experts have a go. First Nations people, deaf and disabled people, people of colour, those who don't need a course on inclusion because inclusion courses is in their veins need to have opportunities to lead. And those who do not identify with these groups need not fear your exclusion, because in inclusion, there is room for everyone. I can't speak for anybody else. But for me, this is the work of our times, and I'd like the experts to be in charge.

Mama Alto:

Thank you to Veronica and later on in the panel discussion, we do have a question that I'm very eager to get to hearing about Veronica's



experience of leaving that role for a different role. Our next panellist, as I mentioned earlier, has submitted an answer to this question via video. Caroline Bowditch from Arts Access Victoria, who is currently overseas in Sweden, leading an international disabled arts lab. Caroline Bowditch, after 16 years living and working in the UK, has returned to Australia to take up the role of CEO at Arts Access Victoria. She's best known as a performer, maker, teacher, speaker, and mosquito buzzing in the ears of the arts industry in the UK and further afield. She held the role as Scottish Dance Theatre's dance agent for change from 2008 to 2012. She was awarded an unlimited commission to create 'Leaving Limbo Landing' in 2012 for the Cultural Olympiad. And in 2014, created "Falling in Love with Frida" which was awarded a prestigious Herald Angel Award. In 2016, she collaborated with Laura Hook to create two works for young audiences, 'The Adventures of Snigel' and 'Snigel and Friends'. Caroline has been an associate artist with Paragon Music in Glasgow, Dance4 in Nottingham, and Imagnate Scotland, and was visiting professor at Coventry University. She has been a regular consultant on accessibility and inclusivity to Skånes Dansteater in Sweden and the British Council. She has led international residencies in Italy, Switzerland, Mozambique, and Germany, and is regularly invited to be mentor to local, national, and international artists at all levels of their artistic development. We're now gonna hear a video response from Caroline.

Voice in Video: How have you practiced inclusion and what have you learnt?

Caroline Bowditch: I think it's really interesting for me as a disabled artist, as a facilitator, to even think about not teaching inclusively. I'm sure there's still lots of things that I can learn but I always find it fascinating that people have an inclusive practice. And then a not inclusive practice because I didn't have any idea how to not make my practice inclusive. And maybe that's the style of art that I work in in that I very much make for the bodies that are in the room, but I'm really interested in the movement styles and stories that come out of the artist that I get to work with. So, I don't impose movement on bodies, I very much... Yeah, I make offerings. I like to think that I'm making offerings to people, for them to respond to rather than being really directive. I suppose in more recent years, I've started to use techniques around universal design in dance. So, taking the principles of universal design that get applied to buildings for example, which are all about everybody finding, hopefully being able to access whatever the space is independently and it's not specific about if



you have this access requirement, you go this way or whatever. But actually everybody can move through a building independently in a hopefully a way that works for them. And so, I have been learning over the past few years with a dance teacher and academic called Yurg Kok about universal design in dance, which is very much about you meet the style, the technique where you are and you work it for your body. So it is, I suppose a collection of guiding principles, and again offerings, structures to work within rather than it being a codified or a descriptive, no maybe prescriptive dance technique. And that, when I first encountered universal design and dance, for me, it was the first time that I found a dance class after six years of training with a professional company that actually made my body work in a way that worked for me, rather than trying to emulate a body that was standing at the front of stage, or the front of a room. That was never ever going to, my body was never gonna do what that body was doing. So, I suppose universal design and dance demands that everybody is adapting material rather than me adapting material. And I really like that. What it does demand is responsibility and it asks that every artist is working at their 100% wherever that is. And often when I work in that way with people that I haven't met before it takes huge amounts of trust because I don't know what their 100% is, and their 100% today might be completely different to their 100% yesterday. So, yeah, it requires a lot of responsibility.

Voice in Video: How has inclusion enabled the arts?

Caroline Bowditch: I think inclusive practice is probably the most underutilised artistic medium that we've got. I think it presents huge opportunities and it's a hugely untapped area. I find thoughts about access and inclusive practice as really exciting at what they can creatively throw up. Because I think it just allows so much lateral thinking. It allows different conversations to be heard, different stories to be told. And, yeah, I think at the moment, the mainstream kind of arts community just aren't tapping at all. So, in a way, I feel incredibly privileged that that's the space I've always worked in, and I've got, there's always ways to get better at it and improve it. But for me to be able to go into a dance studio or into a making space with no fear of the bodies that I meet there and just to really be able to take an artistic idea to a group and say, "How do you respond to this? "What's your physical, emotional, vocal, "whatever it might be, response to this as a concept "as a thought?" Is really exciting. I think the thought for me always of being able to create work that is accessible to a hundred percent of an



audience rather than a tiny percentage is the bit that always excites me. And I think we don't focus on that enough. We very much focus on a tiny percentage of the audience and making sure that they're served the way that they're used to being served and that we maintain the status quo. Rather than kind of going, "We could broaden this and tell much more interesting stories. And we could deliver it to a much wider audience." But we never... I don't think the mainstream arts industry has embodied that or got that at all. So, I feel very privileged because I have, and I'm very, very happy working in an inclusive space. But I think there's loads of room to play. So, I very much invite anyone who wants to come and play in that space because it's fun and it's challenging, and it's curious, and it's interesting, and it's vibrant, and it's alive, and it's human, and it demands that you are the person that you are and that's what I love. So, for the last few years Arts Access Victoria has been working on a project in collaboration with the University of Melbourne and the University of Sydney called "The Last Avant-Garde", which has been examining, interrogating, exploring inclusive practice with disabled artists all over Australia. And the outcomes of that research, and the findings are gonna come out later this year. But it's been really interesting for the team looking at that, to really see whether Australia has its own disability arts aesthetic in Australia and is it different to other parts of the country or other parts of the world. Really finding out about the different practices of disabled artists all over the country in a way that hasn't necessarily been investigated before. And all of that's been incredibly well documented and will be brought together later in the year. So, we're really excited about that as an outcome, and seeing where it gets to, and then determining how that informs our practice as an organisation and also the industry more broadly.

Mama Alto:

Some wonderful answers from Caroline Bowditch. Now, we're gonna dive into the panel discussion and some questions. Before we do, you've been looking at the video screens just then and without us sitting here, I'm sure you got a better chance to look at the amazing painting behind us. So, I just wanna acknowledge today that this is incredible painting entitled Tingari Men at Palinpalintjanga. It's by the artist Tjumpu Charlie Tjapangati who's a Pintupi artist, and it was painted in 1984. It's here as part of the Arts Center's art collection. Because I felt very uncomfortable with the idea of that just being the background scenery to the panel today, so let's give that artist and that work its due as well. All right, so the panel have given us kind of an overview or survey of the lay of the land or this will be the last pun today I promise, the state of



the art. And now, we're gonna delve into some more specifics. The first thing I would like to talk about is in ideas of inclusive leadership, in ideas of radical inclusion, something that is an emerging global discussion, are ideas about surrendering leadership, ideas about the intersections of privileges, identity, who represents who, and people being demanding that you are the person that you are as Caroline put it. So, I wanna start, specifically with a question to Veronica, to talk a bit more about, and I think the reflection that you gave us delivered some of the answers to this. In a landmark moment in arts leadership, Veronica, you held the role of CEO Arts Access Victoria, and you left that role with the aim for the organisation to be led by a person with lived experience of disability, and now Caroline, who we've just heard from, holds that role. Can I ask you for some perspective on that experience, and on the importance of surrendering certain privileges or amplifying and platforming people who have been traditionally minoritized or marginalised or excluded, and what that looked like from the inside? It's a very complex situation. But what it looked like for you from the inside as a person who made that decision, a very rare decision in our arts culture, to surrender that privilege to ensure that leadership went to someone from that community, and on the flip side, what it is like now working as CEO at Multicultural Arts Victoria, which is one of the lived experiences of your own.

Veronica Pardo:

Thank you for that question. My answer is that I didn't leave the job I orchestrated leaving the job in conversation with the entire organisation. So, the entire organisation from board, staff, everyone had conversations over a period of two years about me leaving the organisation, which sounds kind of weird, but in fact, actually, it was a really fantastic process. We all knew that we wanted to be disability led. The board absolutely knew it, there was no question about it. The question was, how would we do it in a way that ensured the success of the organisation going forward, and that the person coming in would be the right person to take the organisation forward. And I think we've done such an amazing job. Because Caroline is absolutely the kind of person that we all wished for. And we had to go and get her from Scotland. But it was an orchestrated decision that these organisations, in this moment in time, can no longer continue to be run in a manner that was acceptable a decade ago or whatever, when these last kind of recruitment decisions were made, but no longer. You know, times had changed, the conversation had moved on and we weren't going to be ignoring that conversation. So, I think that it was about decision like



really deliberate decision making, but... maybe it seems kind of like... An unusual thing to do. But I just don't understand why everyone doesn't do it. Everybody leaves their job, right? At some point, you will all leave your job, your bosses will leave their jobs, most likely go work in another arts organisation. And then, the merry go round continues. But imagine if one turn of the merry go round, everybody left their job with a deliberate and orchestrated decision to hand power to people who your organisation has been working in partnership with, and representatives of those communities that they would lead. So, if everybody did that, when they decided to leave, what a different sector we would have overnight. We wouldn't have to have any more conversations about it. We don't need recruitment processes and workshops and blah blah blah, all we need is for leaders to actually make a deliberate and orchestrated decision to actually hand power to people who they already know. They already know. They're already in relationship with these people. So, I just think it's time that it happened. I don't think we need to put some kind of myth status over it of, "Ooh, look what Arts Access did." I think it was just kind of like plain, simple good planning and off we went. And, next please.

Mama Alto:

Such a fabulous response. And it makes sense because all responsible corporations, financial corporations, governments, organisations should have a degree of succession planning built into their organisation. I think what's really interesting is the way that that decision embodied the idea of built-in access and inclusion rather than add on by building it into the succession planning. I'm actually really sad that Caroline's not with us today and is in Sweden because I also wanted to hear Caroline's perspective on that question. But I'd like to ask the panellists more generally, to talk about experiences and the importance of being leaders who embody the approach of say "Nothing about us without us." Or "If you can't see it, you can't be it." What it means to be someone who takes on a role for and by the community that you are that aligns with your lived experiences, and what kind of empowering effect or what kind of results would you like to see from those processes?

Fablice Manirakiza:

My take? Cool, cool. I think for me, it's more sort of having a voice into the mainstream. And as I reflect in to the community that I do represent, yes, it has been hard a bit. But there is a saying that says that those who get to know the truth, it shall set you free. So, it's about recognising you as a leader within that community. And it's about really recognising the changes that you wanna make and how you wanna lead



the community that you're representing. So, reflecting to my community as a Burundian community, we've got such amazing artists in it. We've got the Burundian drummers, we've got all these amazing young people who have great talents. But it has always been a challenges on how do we cross the bridge, how do we get to the other side? And it's hard because the other side sometime don't wanna respond to those artists. So, me giving myself out there and trying to break into the scene, it put me in a position of understanding what the leadership in the arts the role that can play into the arts. And it really shows also how Australia as in a country's accepting because looking at how much changes we have made is because that Australia has opened the arms, it has opened the door to such communities. So, I think my main thing is more sort of focusing into the leaders, into art sectors, on how are we acceptive into the art community. Do we understand that each and everyone, no matter where they come from, no matter who they are, we all share the similarity into the talents similarity. As soon as you can recognise the talent, give out the voice because when you look at how much people has changed the world, especially through the arts, it has been a challenging. So, being in that position of leaders in the arts sector, I feel like it's the time we need to understand, as I said before, the universal common ground of it. And I think the main, the most important thing is more sort of have a common ground like this where we can hear what unites us together rather than what separates us. Because I feel like that most of the time we trying to focus on what separates us. You're coming from different nations, you are this, you are that and it's more sort of look beyond what we have been presented to or what do we see. And give the voice to the people who deserve to be heard, yes.

Mama Alto: Kamarra, do you have some thoughts on that one?

Kamara BW: Sure, I think... trying to work out if my response is, anyway, I'll just talk. I think that one of the things that happens within the First Nations sector that I've kind of observed a little bit, and I think this happens it's kind of a two way thing that can happen sometimes is that we get kind of stuck in this figurehead thing a little bit, where somebody becomes, and rightfully so talented and is able to speak very well and has all the things that make someone an iconic artist. But then they become the person or the people that everybody looks to as the expert of First Nations art making, theatre making, whatever the sector may be. And I think that there is a danger in that happening because then I suppose that person



becomes the expert in everything can so what they say becomes so golden. But really, at the end of the day, they're still only representing themselves and their point of view and their viewpoint. And then, I think that power comes into play in a sense of that once you get used to power, no matter what your background or experience is, it can sometimes be a hard thing to let go of, because without it then who are you? And so, I think that we really have to make sure that we keep interrogating ourselves around what we're doing with that power and with that privilege and are we continuing to create space on the platform? And not just for those of us that have gotten through, and have been lucky enough to be able to have the opportunity to access the people that we know or whatever it is that has brought us to that place. It's like then you can't keep on saying, you have to then keep on reaching back. And being able to sometimes step to the background and to the side, because then otherwise you're gonna become a gatekeeper. And then, now, you're just a... I used this analogy the other day, like a strap-on of what they've been tryna do to us the whole time anyway. So, we have to constantly interrogate ourselves about that. And I suppose... I think that... And arts is a personal opinion, you know what I mean? We all like and enjoy different things, and so, just because one person says, "well, I don't see that as being a certain type of art" or "that's community art" or "that's main stage art" and suddenly one thing is more valuable than the other. Well, who said? You know what I mean? And so then, I guess for me, the ultimate thing is, I just wanna start making work with my mob in a way that it's like... when I take work into prisons and stuff, and I've noticed this over the years, they're just the best audiences. But then I'm like, "Man, youse have got the stories. Why are we coming in here telling you the stories when I know the stories that you've got are more than anything?" And if we could then put that tool to them, and go, "Hey, this is how you do it. Let's all create this together and we're all storytellers." Our mob, we are artists. We are born creative and born to create. So, this power dynamic of the audience sits there and you shut up and you listen and be still because we are up here doing our amazing thing. It's like, inherently, there's something wrong with that. And I think that I just wanna make art where everybody has the power and gets to be the performer, and the listener, and the teller, and the creator. And it doesn't matter if five or 500 people come and see it, or whether this person says it's great, or we get a review, or who's acting in it, whatever, it doesn't matter. Because really, the power is in the process and the outcome's just an artefact of



the magic that we had while we were making it. So, I guess that is the thing that I wanna do is I just wanna take art back to the people, yeah.

Mama Alto:

That's such an exciting answer. And it's especially an exciting answer, because my next question was gonna be to Kamarra about the nature and risk of leadership, which you've kind of answered just then. And it's an interesting situation, I think, where for minoritized people, I like to say minoritized people, not minorities, because we're not minorities, but the powers that be have oppressed and marginalised us. We're not actually in the minority, but we've been minoritized. For minoritized people, when you get into those leadership positions, there's that risk of becoming a token or becoming the go-to expert, and almost a burden of having to represent your entire community instead of just representing yourself. And I think that's something that artists and arts leaders of non-marginalized backgrounds, non-minoritized backgrounds don't necessarily have to carry that burden. They're not called upon. When you say something on Twitter as an Anglo-Saxon decent Australian white artist, you're not representing the entire British Isles, with your opinion on this colour or that colour that you've used in your work. But the instant you do it as a minoritized person, you're representing, and often representing people who actually nothing like you, but who have been constructed as being similar to you by outdated ideas. I wanted to talk about that risk, but also about the importance and the necessity of community members leading projects, but also beyond artistically, having leadership positions within organisations. I think what you've just said, Kamarra, is fascinating about you risk just becoming that same oppressive structure that you were trying to resist. What can it look like if organisations, if hierarchies not just as playwrights, directors, curators, project leaders, lead creatives, but on boards as CEOs, as the boss, as the decision makers, as the gatekeepers, what does it look like in terms of agency, in terms of autonomy, if minoritized people hold leadership positions? But also how can we use that to change the ways of working, the ways of knowing? How do you begin to dismantle those kind of oppressive structures, oppressive forms of leadership, exclusive forms of leadership? It's just a nice, easy question at this point in the day.

Kamara BW:

I guess for me, it's just about an awareness that it exists and that we also are not immune from falling into these systems. And that sometimes we have to look... we have to actually go back down to a ground level to interrogate whether or not that's working or not? And



actually, go into those hard places and be okay to look at ourselves and go, well, that's not working. And what are we gonna do to address it? And I think part of that is, there's a lot of fear and not enough time to do those things. And the pressure of trying to keep ahead, ahead, ahead or smashing it out, or you know, we're at the head of game, or look how much work we've put out, or look what we've done, or look like... You know, all of that kind of stuff, that product-based kind of stuff. Which, you know, that's a part of making art that we kind of can't avoid. How do you make time and space to really look at what you're doing? And how do you be brave enough to open the door and actually say, "Yeah, we want community in here with all of their varying opinions, with all of the things that they're gonna say and point out." And it's being able to sit in those places and have those conversations. And the time and space to do them, I think is really important. I'm a terrible role model. I'm not the like... Anyway, we won't go into that, but it means that I'm a leader for the unleadable in a sense of because if I can be a success story. Like, I'm a success story, right? Wrap your head around that. If you knew my story and where I'd come from, and then I look at my family and mob it's like, "Man I'm the success story." But then that means that that can give people hope that have been to the lowest places that I've been that have made the kind of choices that I've done, the things that I've... If I can do it, then you can do it too. And I guess that for me is the only kind of leader that I wanna be. And please don't quote me on anything, and I'd much rather not have my photo taken and all of that stuff. I don't think I answered the question. I'm gonna--

Mama Alto: No, you did. One of the things in the question was that philosophy of if you can't see it, you can't be here. And then, you have concluded by saying if I can do it, so can you. I love it.

Kamara BW: Yeah.

Mama Alto: And it very interesting that in your approach to dismantle those structures you've chosen the freelance route, which I think is really empowering and great.

Kamara BW: Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

Mama Alto: Very inspiring for a fellow freelancer. Do either of you have some answers to this?



Veronica Pardo:

Yeah, I'm happy to have a go at it. I guess I'm really keen not to romanticise oppression though, and say that oppressed peoples aren't capable of lateral violence, yes. So, it's not that we're going to have these utopic organisations that never transgress, if they're full of culturally diverse people, people with disabilities or First Nations people. I think that we are just as capable of getting things wrong as anybody else. The issue that I have is simply that only white middle class usually blokes but increasingly women get to lead. And there's no reason for that other than structural oppression and structural inequality. So I don't think that we'll... I'm not saying that we're going to be better or amazing or fantastic or revolutionary, but maybe we might be. When do we get the chance to actually test our mettle? When do we get the chance to be anything beyond developing, emerging, in need of further development, in need of professional development, and residencies and the internships and these sorts of things that are structures intended to keep certain people in their place so that you don't contest power, you don't contest money, you don't contest resources because the message that you get is, "You just gotta develop a little bit more." I mean, when I started my job at Arts Access, God's honest truth, I had no idea what was in a budget. None. But I had other skills and obviously the board recognised them 'cause they gave me the job. But how many times I've been on recruitment panels, where I hear, "This person just isn't well rounded, "they don't have this skill, "they need to develop a little bit more." Actually, I think we're all fully developed. We're all adults in the room with capacities to take on these roles. The issue is that it's discriminatory, ongoing discriminatory practises that are keeping us out of those leadership roles. And that's something that I think that the sector needs to deal with and stop throwing these lines about development. I think Kath Duncan always says, "I've had enough development, "I'm now developed, bring me the job." Amazing. And just also to pick up on something you touched on at the start of that answer. It would never be utopic partly well, I believe that utopia is actually a dystopia for most people, except for the person who thinks it's a utopia. But it would never be a utopic situation. But as we've touched on a couple of times in the panel discussion, the big difference is that if a person who's been minoritized, or marginalised makes a mistake, even if they apologised for it and fix it, it's seen to represent an entire group of marginalised people, minoritizes people, and our innate or inherent flaws or lack of capability. Whereas when someone who is more powerful, more mainstream, which is my very diplomatic way of saying, white upper class male cisgendered and able



bodied makes a mistake, it's just one little mistake. At the worst, it's one bad egg who needs a slap on the wrist. But it's never attributed to be an inherent skill of an entire group of people based on obscure genetic or cultural reasons that go back to 19th century social Darwinism. So, I think that's worth touching on from the start of your answer because that was a gem hidden in there. Fabrice do you have some ideas on... I also wanted, as part of this, to hone in on how your experiences in this model of inclusive leadership of trying to break down gate keeping and include and let in community members. Could you talk a bit about how that has positively impacted more widely, building and nurturing community and connection for people who might feel disaffected, who might feel oppressed, targeted, and left out by mainstream society. Because I know your work has done a lot of that, particularly for marginalised youth, or youth who otherwise would be characterised as being trouble. Your work in the arts and community building has reached out to those people to create a sense of community where otherwise there was exclusion.

Fabrice Manirakiza: Thank you. For me, I think it's more sort of being welcome and opening to everyone. And I'm saying that because I remember I was even talking about it before. There is a huge number of young people again, who has tremendous talents, but they are afraid of coming out because they see people as they would put the talent to as people who share completely different culture with them. Therefore, they're afraid of speaking out. And again, as I said before, most of the young people that I've worked with comes from disadvantaged background, therefore, it's hard for them to completely sort of get exposed into the, I would say, middle class or upper class sort of art sector. And it draws back to where do we look at it as the leaders in this art sector, as understanding that these people have a different culture, these people comes from a different background. How are we acceptive to them? How do we give them a voice? How do we treat them? And for me, it has been... I'm lucky one again, I'm a lucky one, given a fact that I've tried to give myself all out of hard work cross. And there are so much barriers within that such as, language barriers, such as, pretty much how much we've been deceived by media, thinking that these people comes from a very dangerous background, therefore, even here, they are so dangerous. And also, having that kind of inspiration from the other side such as, give us a common ground. Give us a common ground where we can speak our stories, where you can learn about us, where you can understand about us. And now, coming into the leadership side of it is that the failure that



I've been observing within it is that we think we are capable of what we are designing for others, or we think what we design for others is what they can act on. But how about giving them a voice? How about giving them the space? How about you being a leader by coordinating that platform, give them a space where they can curate, where they can rearrange what they want to see into the community, into the arts. And I guess as a leader, it's about focusing on how am I empowering these people? How am I empowering this sector? By passing on the voice. I mean, reflecting to my experience throughout the way. I remember when I started performing my music I mean, I pushed to my limit on how can I make music that is more understandable for English speaking even though my English was very low, was zero. It was later then when I got somebody who told me that I can actually play music in my own language with intent to be a breaking point for me. People loved my music in my language then it became a sort of indication on how multiculturalism it's effective, and how multiculturalism Australia can be. So for me, it's more sort of, when you understand or when you see yourself into that leadership role. Where you are representing different people from you or where you representing the people with different talents is about understanding the environment. And for me, as always, Australia is a multicultural country, how do we embrace that? And how do we make it really effective by giving voice out there? Yep.

Veronica Pardo:

Can I respond to that? I reckon one of the big issues is that we've got structures all over the arts. They're intended to perpetuate these systems of power and privilege. And in order for arts organisations to do what you're suggesting, Fabrice, which is to devolve decision making, creative agency and control to communities, there need to be structures that enable that to happen, because we are enamoured with this idea of the kind of artistic director. The savant who comes up with the vision and the company then falls into line behind his vision. So, I mean, do we really even need artistic directors anymore? It was one of the things I absolutely refused at Arts Access ever to have anyone called artistic director, least of all me, because it was absolutely about creating structures that empowered communities to direct their engagement with the organisation, and that's how the resources flowed. And I just think we need to challenge some of these structures in the arts that place power and privilege in the hands of a select few who don't represent the community and are playing with public funds for their own entertainment, and not for the benefit of communities. And I think we need to call that out too.



[Audience applause]

Mama Alto: For a moment there – oh.

Kamara BW: Yeah, I just wanted to say that I guess that I saw that model operating at the Theatre of Wales, with the... I can't remember the name of what the actual programme is. I mean, obviously, they still have somebody that's kind of sitting there to help make final decisions about things. But they're moving through a process where they have... And generally, they're young people that are representative of each of the kind of nations or mobs that the language that they use in Wales. And these young people are getting to participate in leadership development programmes. But also they get to interview people that are coming for jobs. They get to vote on the programmes that are happening so that they are going through these processes of interrogation and that there is a multiple voice that is happening and really healthy conversations around, is this the work that represents this community? How should it be made? Who are the people that need to be a part of this conversation? And that that stuff works really, really well. And once you've actually put the structure in, it's not that difficult. I think we keep on being made to think that it's so hard. It's actually not. I don't actually think it's that hard.

Mama Alto: I was just going to that interjection before I wanted to bring up again, from Caroline's answer earlier on about the principles of universal design that she works with, and the linked idea that's become very popular in the arts and design sector of co-design and community co-design, and how that might be an alternative as Caroline suggested in her video presentation. How that might form an alternative model of arts governance. But also during Veronica's--

Veronica Pardo: Rant.

Mama Alto: Oh, I was gonna say, I was looking for the right word or something. This word is overused in diversity and inclusion, but in inspiring and insightful speech. This begins to link to one of the final questions I wanted to ask before we open it up to an audience Q&A. We've been talking about embracing the talent of ourselves and of communities and of minoritized and marginalised people. Of platforming those talents, of celebrating those talents, of giving those talents a voice, of recognising



the artistic excellence, the undeniable artistic excellence beyond ideas of simply inclusion or quotas or targets and actually recognising the talent there. One of the really pressing issues regarding inclusion in the arts and culture sector, I find is the difference or the tensions and similarities between tokenism and genuine inclusion. And linked to that, what we discuss and what we enact as organisations and companies. And I note that Veronica recently authored an ArtsHub article on this topic, which I think was released after I prepared this presentation, but I wanted to mention it so that it didn't seem like I was pinching your ideas. That's for academics, not artists. Veronica's paper was really of great about the difference between inclusive rhetoric and inclusive action those were the words that stuck out to me there. Could each of you speak a bit and you can take it in any direction that you like, 'cause it's such a broad topic, the tensions and negotiating the spaces between real inclusion versus tokenism of empowerment versus ticking boxes or reaching quotas, equity versus equality, real diversity versus what we would often call 'poster child' diversity. And of actual inclusion and accessibility versus paternalism, or at worst being patronised in the negative sense of the word. Another nice easy question.

Veronica Pardo:

I'm happy to kick it off. 'Cause I think about this all the time. It's such a huge tension in this work. What I wanna talk about is the difficulty of positioning good intentions as a kind of motivator for this work, and that being all that's required to do good work. I haven't come across an arts organisation yet who doesn't have good intentions. Generally, arts organisations aren't really fascists. Mostly, especially in the small to medium sector, they're well-meaning people, generally progressives, who have very good intentions. But they're still perpetuating structures of disadvantage, harm, at times cannibalization of communities, of work, of individual creative ideas. All of these harms are being perpetuated by people with very good intentions. So, I really feel like we need to park our good intentions and talk about our process. What is your process to engage with communities? What are you going to do? And I think that we, who are representative of communities, need to get better at interrogating process, and not being seduced by frickin intentions all the time. 'Cause we hear the values thing and the heart starts to patter and we just think, "Aww, this is gonna be a great organisation to work with "'cause they've got fantastic values and we're all aligned." But they've got shit process, and we need to have better conversations about process in order to be able to sniff out tokenism, symbolism, cannibalization, all the things that are happening across the



sector at the moment, because, of course, the work of these artists is amazing. And they've just woken up to it. So, now they want it. So, I think it's a two-way street. We've gotta ask better questions about, "What's the process? What sits behind all these so-called values?" And that's where the nexus of decision making is. It's not about whether we like them, whether they good people, whether they've got good intentions and we like their values. Have they got a good process? Are we gonna be safe with them? And if not, don't touch them. Let them wither on the vine. 'Cause that is what's gonna happen to mainstream organisations that don't get on to this stuff.

Mama Alto:

And I love what you mentioned too, about artists whose work or communities have suddenly become fashionable. Because from an artist's perspective and a freelancer's perspective, working with organisations there is always that extreme and sometimes debilitating anxiety and doubt about whether you have been selected or given an opportunity or a platform or a show or showing or this or that or the other because of your talent, because of your artistry being worth seeing and being good, whatever that means in all of its subjectivity, or whether you're there because your identity or one part of your complex intersecting identities happens to be in fashion at the moment. And particularly regarding, although it's an often misused phrase, intersectionality and Kimberlé Crenshaw, who kind of coined or started popularising the use of that term has spoken about how it's often misused. But from the point of view of many intersecting identities where you cannot cancel out or just prioritise one of those identities, as an artist who has experienced this, where an organisation might come to you because your artistry or your artist identity is in fashion. Sometimes, you will actually be asked, "Oh, but can you make a work about this segment of your identity 'cause that's the bit that people are buying tickets to at the moment? But don't bring in that other stuff." Sometimes people saying, "Can you talk about being queer? But not about being trans, that's too out there." Or more recently with the trans moment on the cover of Time. "Can you make a work about being trans, but don't put anything about being brown in it." And this is also one of the problems with tokenism. And I just wanted to touch on that with this idea of, if your art or identities become fashionable, what effect that actually has on the well-being of artists and communities.

Veronica Pardo:

And what we can do, I think, to strengthen our conversations about the dangers of this? 'Cause I think that sometimes what happens is that



some of our perhaps more experienced peers who've already been down that road and they know what's coming, don't have the opportunities to come and talk with those younger emerging artists and say, "That's not a road that you wanna go down because there's a world of hurt down this road." But it can just seem like such an opportunity and I don't know if I'm gonna get it again." And, "Are they going to invite me? And, "If I say no this time, they'll never ask me again." And all of these things, and I think the sector needs it. That's why I've got a shopping list of things for the sector to do. But I think we need to get better at having really critical dialogue within our communities, all of those intersecting communities to say, "Don't go there." And, "This might not look like an opportunity, but they actually are really good to work with. Why not think about this instead?" We have to do that. 'Cause no one's doing that for us. And I don't even think we're doing it with each other.

Kamara BW:

Yeah, I guess one thing that I'll kind of add and I'm kind of blanket no commenting myself, just for lots of reasons. But I guess also so often I feel like we're kind of converting preaching to the choir, preaching to the converted. Often these conversations kind of stay within our echo chambers, and are bouncing back and around to us. But also, I suppose I feel like sometimes there's kind of like, within the First Nation sector it's like, we're making work with mob about us and for us and by us, et cetera, so the story goes. But that also we should be able to be working more with each other. And sometimes I feel like we kind of get in these silos of like, well mob gotta stick with mob. We should also be able to have the choice to be able to break that down and work with each other more. And I'd like to see that happening more. And I think that's the thing you were talking about before the things that separate us. Well, what is the stuff that we share? And I think that that part of the campaign around kind of keeping us a bit like segregated and all of that is 'cause, man, at the end of the day, they are the minority. And if we all started combining and just bringing our conversations together rather than separately, that's gonna be a force to be reckoned with, yeah.

Fablice Manirakiza:

And if I could add on just a little one, it's more sort of empowerment. Because what I've seen within the art sector, most of the time we fail to have people working organisation who's more passionate about arts. It's more sort of I'm looking for a job. There is a job there. Let's go for it. And it's a great failure because when you go to a wrong space, when you're in the wrong position, you don't know what's going on. And I'm



saying this because I've experienced it where people has... I felt like I has been labelled to be like, "This is just a dude with a good story. Let's send him here. We create money, he goes on." I'm not saying that it's in every art sector, but some. So, I think it's more sort of focusing on the key people who want to make that change, who's curious about that change. So, it is coming back to the structure of, let's go back a little bit and really look at what we wanting to put out there. It's not about what people see at the front of it, but what's the ideology of it? And I think for me, the most important thing it should be about empowering those artists no matter who you are. When you start your career in the art sector is this motivation or is this sectors or is this organisation helping to see you in 20 years at least? Are you growing? Are they helping you to grow or are they just wanting you to tag along? So, it's more sort of... everything is career. You know, arts. My talent is my career, so help me to grow it. Don't just help me to think I'm a good artist, no. Help me to paint the future of it.

Kamara BW: I think there's definitely a lot to be gained from keeping people in boxes and at a certain level. And it's like we'll pull you off the shelf when it suits us. Now, we'll put you back there. And that's something that we have to really look at, as well.

Mama Alto: In the couple of comments, we've just had segue quite neatly, almost as if I planned it but I assure you I didn't. Into the last question I wanna ask before we have some Q&A with the audience. This one might be a very difficult question, but it's about lessons. Could you each share, maybe from the perspective of talking to someone who wants to follow a similar practice or career trajectory as yourself, who might be, as much as we hate that word, emerging, or new in their arts practice or just leaving school or starting to dabble in the arts world. Could you share what you think from your own experience is the most important lesson that you've learned about inclusive leadership? And you thought the questions before this were difficult.

Kamara BW: No comment.

Kamara BW: I might be needing more alcohol for that question.

Mama Alto: It is a tough question. When I looked at the list of panellists who we would have today, and I thought- what is the thing I want to know most from them if I got to ask a question, personally, rather than asking from



a professional, "I'm moderating an insightful conversation path" question. This is what I wanted to know. So, I thought other people might want to know, too.

Veronica Pardo:

I think you said this really beautifully before about always holding up the mirror to your own practice and your own behaviours, no matter how hard it is, inviting that critique, keeping communities really close to you, and showing that you can have the hard conversations that practicing non-defensive listening, and being able to hear the difficult things about yourself, the stuff that you did wrong. And if you can do that, I think that the opportunities to learn and grow in these roles are incredible. I think, just allowing yourself to acknowledge your own vulnerabilities as a leader, and that you're not going to get it right all the time, that you don't have to put on a pretence of being perfect all the time, of knowing it all. And the more that you can reveal to people about your self-doubt, you're all those sorts of things that you have in your life as a leader. I think the more those relationships just teach you and teach you and there's enormous learning to be had. I never got a professional development because the job is a killer. It teaches you everything that you want to know, but you have to be open to it. And the first thing you have to say to people is that, "I know I'm gonna get it wrong. And I want you to tell me when I do. And I'm never gonna be upset about that, I'm only gonna thank you with deep gratitude in my heart for your comments." Because you can't pay for that stuff to be honest with you.

Fablice Manirakiza:

And for me, I think coming from the perspective of an artist and a young person is being determined, having a dream, and wanting to fulfil the dream. It's that in every success, there is millions failure behind it. And it's more sort of you fall down, get back and continue, get back and continue because development in the art sector, I guess we all agree that it's, especially coming from the artists point of view, it's really hard. I've been a musician for quite long and every time I've been told there's no money, there's no living in music, you gotta have another side career and this and that. And I really, really hated that. I was like, "I wanna live on my music. I wanna be able to look after myself on music." And when I look at the path, it's been a bumpy road. My first gig I did, do believe it or not, it was playing for these old people course and going to a venue. And was in the rain where they ended up giving me food and it was like, "Oh, cool." So I



mean, right now, right now I've done this thing, I've done my first TEDx Talk and have done a song with Paul Kelly and all that. So for me, it has paid off, it has paid off. And for the lesson that I guess I've learned throughout insights in leadership or in music is about you knowing exactly what you wanna see or where do you wanna see yourself at, and really being determined and know that in every road there is bumps. You gotta go down and up, but on the end of the day, you have to know that you gotta stand up for your right. Stand up for your right! And stand up for your dream. And it's the same thing within the leadership side because within the leadership also it's more sort of knowing that you are changing people's lives. And I guess for me, there is nothing feels good, than knowing that you've changed someone's life. So being in that position, it's about empowerment. How are you empowering others to cross the road? And this can be done through mentoring, but also just getting close to them and listen, because I feel like we fail to listen to the stories of our people and I can... I've walked away. I remember when I was at school on my young age, it was hard because I started school with no English and every time other kids would laugh at me, even if I make a little mistake, it was more like they being discriminated against me. And there wasn't much support around it, given a fact other kids had translators in class that would help them to understand. And because I come from a very small community, there wasn't anybody who translate my language. So it has been a challenging throughout the way, but on the end of the day, it's about you know where you wanna go, make sure you stick on it. Yeah.

Kamara BW:

Both great answers. I think for me, if I was talking to my younger self, I guess fear has always been such a huge block for me and sometimes really debilitating. And so, I guess being able to kinda have that fear and then do it anyway. And know that you're gonna fail sometimes and art is an opinion. But also... And living in your truth, no matter what and whatever that is, and not ever changing your truth because you think that that's what people want to hear or what you need to say, to be the version of who they think you need to be. You know? You keep on speaking your truth. For one thing, you got nothing to hide. But also truth attracts light and truth allows other people to live in their truth and valuing the gift and the voice and the truth and the person



that you are because there is no one else more qualified to be you. So don't ever doubt that. And I think that the only times I've really ever kind of gone off my path is when I've tried to kind of mould what I'm supposed to be into what people have told me it's supposed to be. Well, that's not theatre, that's not what it is. And then, I try and change and I'm like, "That's not me!" And so then I start to go "Maybe I'm not really talented. I'm not really supposed to be here, I'm a fraud. I'm not supposed to be doing this," and then it's like... But then somebody connects with your work in a way. And it only has to be one person that comes up and says, "You were telling my story, when you said that." And that's all it takes to make you go, "Nah, this is the reason why I'm doing what I'm doing." And I think that ultimately, the thing I've worked out now is that if I know what my measure of success is, and my measure of success is gonna be different to every other single person in this room. But we get convinced and we get programmed to think that success looks and feels and is one certain type of thing. And that you gotta get that success at the cost of sometimes your soul. And for me, nup, that's the bottom line. So, I think those are the things that are most important to me. Everybody else's is different.

Mama Alto: It's fantastic.

Mama Alto: Well, thank you, everyone for coming along to our panel on the future of inclusive leadership. Before we finish we've got some thank yous and acknowledgments for a lot of the people who put today together and made today happen. First, I'd like to thank our Auslan interpreters from Auslan Stage Left, Anna Vaustin and Teal Nichols.

[Audience applause]

Mama Alto: Description Victoria, today we have Will McRostie here as well as some of the board members including Ross of Description Victoria.

[Audience applause]

Mama Alto: Our captioning has been provided by The Captioning Studio.



Mama Alto: And we also have to thank Arts Centre Melbourne, The Kiln Programme, and the curator of this series of talks, Jodee Mundy. And the people who put together this program from Arts Centre Melbourne- Holly Woolard and Natasha Phillips as well as our operators Cale, Realm, and Brett.

[Audience applause]

Mama Alto: And here is Jodee Mundy.

Jodee Mundy: And I would like to thank Mama Alto for doing such an amazing-- facilitating role.

[Vibrant audience applause]

Jodee Mundy: And what an awesome panel that was just like... Food! It was brilliant. Can we give one big round of applause 'cause it was Veronica's birthday yesterday.

Veronica Pardo: Oh my god!

[Audience applause]

Jodee Mundy: Don't worry, I won't make them sing happy birthday. And thank you all for coming. Thank you. Thank you, thank you.