

MEL O'CALLAGHAN CENTRE OF THE CENTRE



CULTURAL MEDIATION TRAINING KIT



Top: Mel O'Callaghan, *Respire, Respire*, 2019, (performance rehearsal) and installation at Artspace, Sydney, courtesy the artist and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Zan Wimberley

Bottom: Portrait of Mel O'Callaghan with *Respire, Respire*, 2019, performance and installation at Artspace, Sydney, courtesy the artist and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Zan Wimberley

ABOUT

Centre of the Centre is a major new commission by Australian-born, Paris-based contemporary artist Mel O'Callaghan that traces the origins of life and its regenerative forces, iterated through video, performance and sculpture. The catalyst for this new body of work is one small mineral given to the artist by her grandfather, renowned mineralogist Albert Chapman. The mineral contains a small pocket of water, possibly millions of years old, which holds traces of the elemental forces responsible for all life on earth. Though the immersive *Centre of the Centre* video artwork, audiences are plunged 4km below the surface in the Pacific Ocean to encounter lifeforms sustained in extreme environments.

The alluring sculptural installation *Respire, Respire* is made up of convex and concave sheets of glass, manipulated to push material boundaries. A performance that activates these sculptures will bring the unifying life force of breath to the centre, capturing its powerful capabilities to create both calm and excitement through the depth and rapidity of inhalation and exhalation.

Mel O'Callaghan's Centre of the Centre was curated and developed by Artspace and is touring nationally with Museums & Galleries of NSW. Centre of the Centre is co-commissioned by Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers; Artspace, Sydney; and The University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane. With Commissioning Partners Andrew Cameron AM & Cathy Cameron and Peter Wilson & James Emmett; and Lead Supporter, Kronenberg Mais Wright. The development and presentation of Centre of the Centre is supported by the Fondation des Artistes; Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the US National Science Foundation. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.



ABOUT THIS TRAINING PACK

This training document presents a package of resources collated and developed by Museums & Galleries of NSW and UQ Art Museum, to assist tour venues, front-of-house staff, educators and volunteers navigate the themes and ideas in Mel O'Callaghan's touring exhibition *Centre of the Centre*. UQ Art Museum undertook cultural mediation during their presentation of this exhibition and the information in this pack is based on their research and experience that supported this practice -both UQ Art Museum in Brisbane and the Palais de Tokyo in Paris have been fundamental in assisting with the research, data and protocols for the cultural mediation theory outlined in this document.

Museums & Galleries of NSW (M&G NSW) has been researching and providing training on the practices of cultural mediation with the aim to equip gallery and museum staff with the tools to implement this engagement strategy across the sector. Cultural mediation is about deepening the engagement of audiences at a peer-to-peer level through personal opinions being shared, knowledge being discussed and visitors being given the freedom to arrive at their own interpretations.

Volunteer and front-of-house staff are often the first people met with a wide range of questions from audiences. Outreach staff and educators engage their communities through public programming, enabling safe spaces for discussion, creativity and enquiry for all visitors. Through this handbook, M&G NSW aims to help gallery staff develop an inclusive and culturally sensitive vocabulary to talk about the themes and ideas *Centre of the Centre* to the local community, to simply provide fodder for conversation, and allow meaningful connections, stories, experiences and ideas to lead interactions between the exhibition, the gallery, and its public.

Your staff may already be practicing aspects of cultural mediation organically - this handbook aims to provide a formal framework to support this type of engagement. This handbook is designed to be used as a reference point throughout the

exhibition of *Centre of the Centre* at your venue; it contains information on practicing cultural mediation as practiced and informed by UQ Art Museum in Brisbane and the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, as well as information and further research materials about the exhibition itself.

THIS RESOURCE OFFERS

- an introduction to cultural mediation
- cultural mediation in practice strategies
- insight into the conception of *Centre of the Centre*
- a vocabulary of important themes and ideas integral
- to communicating the exhibition
- detailed information on the practice of Mel O'Callaghan
- useful links and further reading

INTRODUCTION



Marion Buchloh-Kollerbohm, Head of Cultural Mediation at the Palais de Tokyo (Paris, France) facilitates a workshop

ABOUT CULTURAL MEDIATION

The term cultural mediation was first developed in the 1980s in Europe and North America. Initially associated with the transfer or transmission of knowledge, it has since become known more as an act of forming relationships of mutual exchange between the visiting public, artists, works, objects and the institutions charged with the collection, preservation, interpretation or presentation of cultural objects and material. Today cultural mediation is widespread across continental Europe. France has incorporated it into their tertiary studies and mediators are used in large institutions like Palais de Tokyo and the Pompidou Centre.

In Australia, institutions such as The Science Gallery, Melbourne and UQ Art Museum,

Brisbane have been implementing cultural mediation as part of their exhibition programs. We have been partnering with these institutions in our investigations into cultural mediation and have based some of this guide on principles and material they have developed to train their staff. UQ Art Museum define the cultural mediation model of engagement as:

‘ENCOURAGING VISITOR INQUIRY THROUGH CONVERSATIONS THAT PROMOTE CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT ART AND ENRICH THE VISITOR’S EXPERIENCE...’

‘CULTURAL MEDIATION IS NOT ABOUT CHANGING PEOPLE’S OPINIONS, OR MAKING VISITORS LOVE CONTEMPORARY ART - IT IS ABOUT CREATING A MOMENT.’

- Marion Buchloh-Kollerbohm,
Head of Cultural Mediation, Palais
de Tokyo, Paris

WHY CULTURAL MEDIATION

Traditionally, Western museums and galleries functioned as revered resources of encyclopaedic knowledge and high culture; a place where the public could passively and quietly contemplate the information presented to them by curators. In the 21st century, museums and galleries face the challenge of remaining relevant to a society that is saturated with choices about how we access and consume information, gain knowledge and spend our free time. Globalisation, the internet, technology, and contemporary politics has resulted in information, research and multiple perspectives being more accessible than ever before; furthermore, we now have abundant choices in how we spend our leisure time. This multitude of choice means that museums and galleries face the challenge of engaging visitors in new, active, compelling and meaningful ways to win visitors’ attention. Cultural mediation is one of the methods museums and galleries are using to tackle this.

ABOUT MUSEUMS & GALLERIES OF NSW

M&G NSW runs the largest touring exhibition program in NSW. Through partnership and ambition, our program focuses on contemporary visual art and the development of audience engagement strategies for galleries in regional and metropolitan areas across the country. Our exhibitions and associated programs promote contemporary art and artists, benefit Australian audiences, balance regional gallery programming needs - supporting staff, sharing skills and professionalism, fostering collaboration and building connections, capacity and networks

for artists, curators and arts workers across distance. Vital to our success are the strong relationships we maintain with the Australian gallery network.

Our targeted program is tailored to reflect and enhance the capacity and diversity of the sector. We present a full spectrum of contemporary practice by leading artists, both emerging and established including Vernon Ah Kee, Justene Williams, Soda Jerk, Richard Bell, Mel O’Callaghan, Tony Albert, Raquel Ormella, Nell, Abdul Abdullah, Deborah Kelly, Joan Ross and Vincent Namatjira, to name a few. Each of our exhibitions engage with diverse audiences through a range of accompanying programs, interpretative material, digital resources and publications, written by curators, academics and experts in various fields. In the last three years M&G NSW has reached audiences of half a million through 13 exhibitions of visual art that toured to 88 venues across six states and territories. Our exhibitions presented 294 works by 96 Australian artists. 900 public programs were delivered, and 12,589 students engaged with M&G NSW’s exhibitions through educational workshops.

As a key service organisation, M&G NSW is committed to providing resources, tools, professional development workshops, and training to sector professionals to assist with audience participation, community engagement and volunteer learning, among other areas of museological practice.

MUSEUMS & GALLERIES OF NSW AND CULTURAL MEDIATION

Through our own research and via direct feedback, we identified a need to work closely with exhibition host venues and regional galleries more broadly to deliver their priorities in engagement - untapped

audiences, First Peoples, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Australians and young people - these are essential targets for the strategic vision of galleries across the country, yet they often lack resources to attract and maintain engagement with these groups.

In meeting this demand, we launched the [Engaging Art initiative](#) in early 2017, wrapping up in November 2019. Supported by the Australia Council, the pilot initiative focused on developing and engaging new audiences for touring exhibitions of contemporary visual art at regional galleries across Australia.

Through the initiative, the importance of quality and depth of engagement with an audience, rather than purely expanding audience numbers, became clear. The desire for more resources for community and volunteer-led audience engagement, as well as training in the facilitation of personalised encounters with contemporary art, also became apparent.

Our strategies further developed during discussions with artist Mel O'Callaghan, who is very experienced in the cultural mediation of her work, particularly at the Palais de Tokyo. In collaboration with O'Callaghan we proposed to roll out mediation alongside our tour of her exhibition *Centre of the Centre*. As a result of this partnership and in response to the outcomes of our Engaging Art initiative, we presented a trial workshop on the practice of Cultural Mediation last year during the initial presentation of *Centre of the Centre* at Artspace. We are also looking to extend the practice of cultural mediation across all of our tours and the sector more broadly.

Speakers on the day included, Head of Cultural Mediation at the Palais de Tokyo - Marion Buchloh- Kollerbohm; as well as Science Gallery Melbourne, Kaldor Public Art Projects and Mel O'Callaghan. This day further backed up our research on the types of support galleries need to sustain and grow audiences, as well as sparked inspiration for less didactic ways to improve the quality of audience engagement in galleries and museums.

You can watch these presentations, including one by Mel O'Callaghan discussing

the role of mediation in her artistic practice, here: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/support/cultural-mediation/cultural-mediation/>

Partnering with the University of Sydney's Museum and Heritage program and UQ Art Museum we are now delivering a suite of resources and training programs to help staff members and volunteers develop an inclusive and sensitive vocabulary in speaking to visitors, equipping them with the skills necessary to converse on any subject to anybody with confidence.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Cultural Mediation in practice (video): <https://youtu.be/11voVsITxJY>

Mel O'Callaghan presentation: Cultural Mediation in action (video): <https://youtu.be/2RYJyla5hrl>

Marion Buchloh-Kollerbohm presentation: Cultural Mediation at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (video): <https://youtu.be/qQCMv5v4i2U>

Emily Sullivan presentations: caretakers, cultivators and Cultural Mediation (video): <https://youtu.be/kNIOM7zQlbk>

What does mediation look like at the Science Gallery:

WHAT DOES A CULTURAL MEDIATOR DO?



Cultural Mediation in Practice workshop featuring Mel O'Callaghan's exhibition *Centre of the Centre*. Photograph by Document Photography

As theorised by UQ Art Museum, the role of a Cultural Mediator (or mediator for short) diverges from those of an invigilator, a gallery host or an educator yet has similarities with all three roles.

Mediators are encouraged to have an open-minded approach to art - there is no right or wrong answer or any one discourse to follow. To assist, Mediators are given broad resources on artists, themes, and exhibitions which can be used as springboards for a Mediator's research and approach.

MEDIATORS:

- Promote inquiry into an artwork.
- Cultivate a dialogue that is inclusive.
- Actively listen.
- Ask questions.
- Tell stories.
- Facilitate an experience.
- Bridge a connection between audience and artist.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF MEDIATION



Mel O'Callaghan, *Respire, Respire*, 2019, (performance rehearsal) and installation at Artspace, Sydney, courtesy the artist and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Zan Wimberley

'ART IS NOT A PROBLEM WE NEED TO FIND A SOLUTION TO'

- Marion Buchloh-Kollerbohm,
Head of Cultural Mediation, Palais
de Tokyo, Paris

ENCOURAGE VISITORS TO HAVE AGENCY

this means to equip visitors with the freedom to arrive at their own interpretations. We achieve this through inquiry-led conversations that encourage reflection.

ENCOURAGE MEDIATORS TO HAVE AGENCY

this means that to support Mediators to develop their own style and approach to engaging visitors. We achieve this by encouraging Mediators to experiment with and reflect on their approach.

ENCOURAGE PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING

this means that being willing to listen to and learn from visitors and peers. We achieve this by not presenting our visitors with 'facts', but through conversations.

MAKE VISITORS FEEL HEARD

this means being an active listener and value our visitor's input to the conversation. We achieve this by asking questions that encourage visitor reflection, demonstrating the visitor is listened to by acknowledging what the visitor has said, and allowing for silence when needed to give the visitor time to contemplate and respond.

CULTURAL MEDIATION IN PRACTICE



Mel O'Callaghan, *Respire, Respire* (2020). Performance view: *Centre of the Centre*, UQ Art Museum, Brisbane (22 February 2020-16 January 2021). Reproduced courtesy of the artist and KRONENBERG MAIS WRIGHT, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Simon Woods.

One of the main benefits of cultural mediation is that it helps create a welcoming and safe environment for visitors. We all know that art museums can be intimidating for visitors; cultural mediation helps break down these barriers.

10 STEPS TO MEDIATION

Adapted from UQ Art Museum

- 1. Greet all visitors with a smile and a friendly 'hello'.** The aim is to make all visitors feel welcome as sometimes museums/galleries can be daunting.
- 2. Let visitors know you are willing to chat or help if they have any questions about the exhibition.** The most important thing is to make visitors aware that you are happy to answer questions or hear from them; this helps set a welcoming and safe environment.
- 3. You may like to draw on the questions posed in the 'conversation starters' section opposite to start a conversation (or even once you've entered a conversation).**
- 4. Pay attention to body language and verbal cues.** Know when visitors want to be left alone.
- 5. You may like to throw out a strange or wonderful fact about an artwork that a visitor is near.**
- 6. Be culturally aware:** for example, it is extremely rude to point in some cultures so remember to use your whole hand when gesturing.
- 7. Don't assume that a visitor doesn't speak English.** Try your best to communicate with them. They will let you know if they don't understand.
- 8. Be patient and experimental.** A mediator's style will develop over time.
- 9. If a visitor doesn't seem to want to talk, that's ok; they don't have to!** Leave them be but let them know you're happy to answer their questions if anything comes up.
- 10. Use the "no touching rule" as a segue into a conversation** - a lot of visitors may not know why it is so important not to touch artworks. If appropriate, you could use the opportunity to explain why and also start a conversation.

WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS NEGATIVITY OR CONFLICT



Cultural Mediation in Practice workshop featuring Mel O'Callaghan's exhibition *Centre of the Centre*. Photograph by Document Photography

There may be times where visitors express unfavourable, biased or discriminatory views. These situations can be challenging and confronting. If you find yourself in this situation, these tips adapted from UQ Art Museum may help:

- Remain calm and don't mimic their behaviour. Arguing back will escalate the situation.
- Acknowledge that everyone has different views and perspectives.
- Take the conversation back to what the artist is intending to say/question. If that doesn't work, move the conversation to another artwork or non-conceptual element of the artwork (e.g. what it is made from, how it was made, texture, etc.)
- Agree to disagree and move on.
- For those who argue a different perspective: "I appreciate your perspective. In [artist's name] case, she/he/they were approaching the topic from [this] perspective. I think it's great that art can be used as a vehicle for us to have conversations about the different ways we all view the world."
- If someone asks for your personal opinion on something: give it, but only if you feel safe to do so and can do so without controversy. If not, you could simply say, "I'm not sure what I think about it at the moment" and guide the conversation back to the artwork.
- If a visitor finds something confronting: you could say "sometimes art does makes us feel uncomfortable. But it encourages us consider the world from a different perspective"
- If you feel uncomfortable with the conversation: leave the conversation. You could say "well, thanks for chatting. I'll give you some time to explore the exhibition on your own."

Working in a public-facing role can be rewarding but challenging, and sometimes just plain difficult. You may have times where visitors share personal information, ask personal information, or make statements that are against your personal beliefs. This can be exhausting, so self-care at work and at home is important.

Here's some tips to help out:

- Don't share or talk about anything you're not comfortable with.
- Debrief with your supervisor or peers if you've had a difficult conversation with a visitor and need to chat. This is an important part of a safe working environment.
- If feel uncomfortable or need a moment to collect your thoughts, leave the space and ask your fellow mediators or a staff member to relieve you.

SETTING BOUNDARIES: DISTRESSED VISITORS

There may be times visitors may show signs of distress when in conversation with you. We are not trained mental health professionals, so it is important that we respond within our means and do not act as counsellors. You wouldn't stitch up a visitor's wound if they cut themselves in the gallery (because you are not trained too!), so likewise, it's not appropriate for you to attempt to provide counselling for visitors who show signs of mental health related distress.

You can support distressed visitors by:

- Listening, acknowledging and thanking them for sharing their experience.
- Be upfront about the fact that you aren't trained to provide support. However, if you feel appropriate, you can encourage them to seek support from professional services
- If the visitor is visibly upset, offer to help them find a quiet and comfortable space in the gallery to reflect alone.
- If you are concerned that a visitor is in crisis, alert another staff member or security and follow any procedures your gallery may have for such a situation.

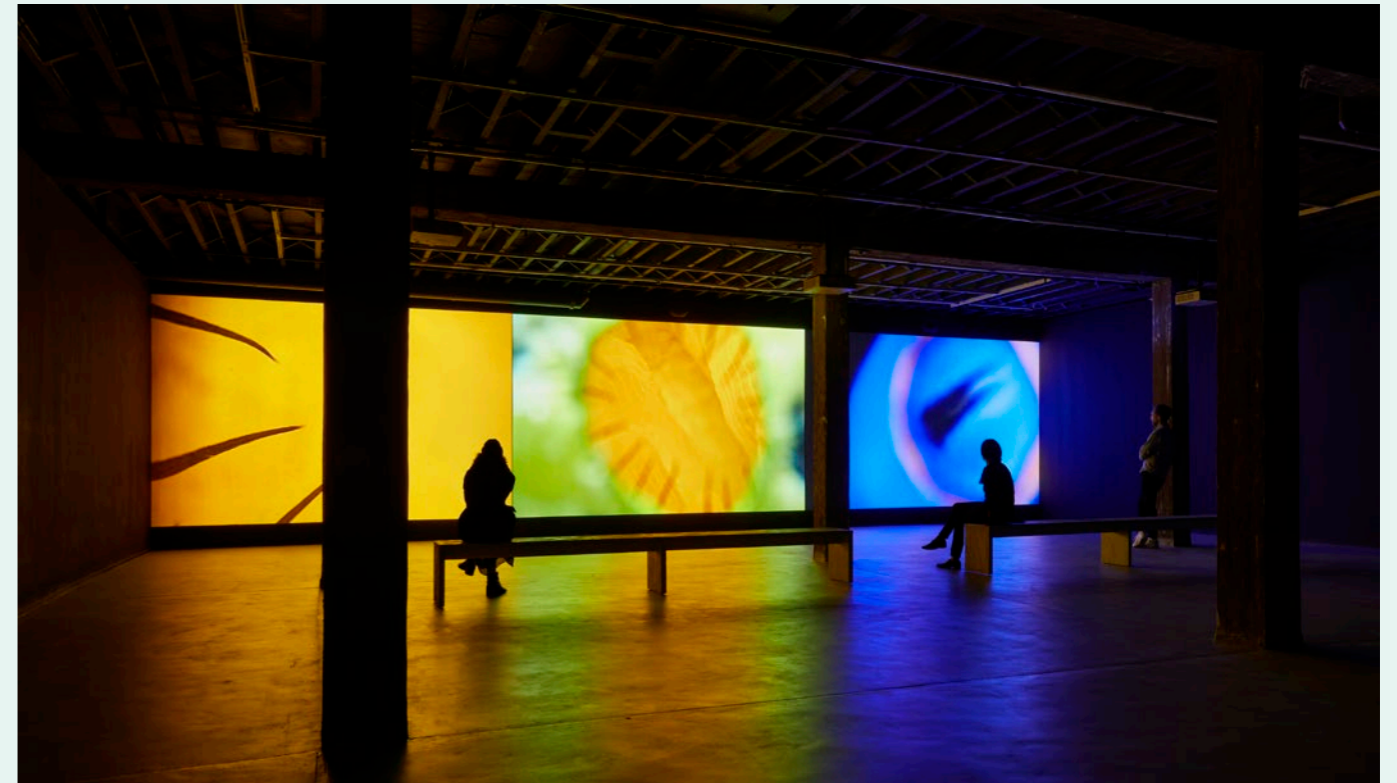
OTHER USEFUL WEBSITES THAT EXAMINE VISITOR EXPERIENCES

1. Kids in Museums: <https://kidsinmuseums.org.uk/>
2. Know your own bone: Colleen Dilenschneider: <https://www.colleendilen.com/>
3. M&G NSW resource - How to engage with young people: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/exhibition/howengage-young-people/>
4. Museum 2.0: <https://museumtwo.blogspot.com/>
5. Museum Hack: Redefining the Museum Experience: <https://vimeo.com/366902006>
6. Museum Hack: What is a Museum Hack Tour: <https://www.facebook.com/MuseumHack/videos/304361927009776/>
7. Museum Hack: Storytelling (video): <https://www.facebook.com/MuseumHack/videos/2110136089297152/>
8. Museum Hack: Use of language (video): <https://www.facebook.com/MuseumHack/videos/279589469341413/>
9. Museum Hack: Giving agency and scaffolding experiences (video): <https://www.facebook.com/MuseumHack/videos/281092502547857/>

‘AIM TO KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT EVERYTHING. HOWEVER, NOT ALL ARTWORKS WILL RESONATE WITH YOU AND YOU DON’T NEED TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYTHING! GET TO KNOW YOUR FAVOURITE ARTWORKS INTIMATELY...’

- Quote from UQ Art Museum Cultural Mediation handbook

ABOUT THE TOUR



Mel O'Callaghan, *Centre of the Centre*, 2019. Installation view, Artspace, Sydney, courtesy the artist and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Zan Wimberley

Centre of the Centre is a major new commission by Australian-born, Paris-based contemporary artist Mel O'Callaghan that traces the origins of life and its regenerative forces, iterated through video, performance and sculpture. The catalyst for this new body of work is one small mineral given to the artist by her grandfather, renowned mineralogist Albert Chapman. The mineral contains a small pocket of water, possibly millions of years old, which holds traces of the elemental forces responsible for all life on earth.

Though the immersive *Centre of the Centre* video artwork, audiences are plunged 4km below the surface in the Pacific Ocean to encounter lifeforms sustained in extreme environments. The alluring sculptural installation *Respire, Respire* is made up of convex and concave sheets of glass, manipulated to push material boundaries. A performance that activates these sculptures will bring the unifying lifeforce of breath to the centre, capturing its powerful capabilities to create both calm and excitement through the depth and rapidity of inhalation and exhalation.

The exhibition was initially presented at Artspace, Sydney in 2019 and at The University of Queensland Art Museum in 2020-2021.

Centre of the Centre will tour to 9 venues nationally to venues in NSW, SA, QLD and VIC from 2021 - 2023. Find out more here: <https://mgnsw.org.au/sector/exhibitions/coming-soon/mel-ocallaghan-centre-of-the-centre/>



Portrait of Mel O'Callaghan with *Respire, Respire*, 2019, performance and installation at Artspace, Sydney, courtesy the artist and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Zan Wimberley

ABOUT MEL O'CALLAGHAN

Mel O'Callaghan's practice explores many different mediums, including film and video works, performance, paint, and installation. Within her practice, Mel seeks to examine the human condition, particularly human behaviour and psychology, in response to physical resistance and endurance. Her most recent works are concerned with ritual and human resistance and their relationship to extreme states of life and altered states of consciousness. In addition to seeking these extremities of life within her practice, Mel has also implemented Cultural Mediation within her most recent works to decipher her concepts and facilitate discussion about the viewer's experience.

Find out more about Mel here:
<http://www.melocallaghan.com/index>

KEY INFO

- Australian artist born 1975 in Sydney.
- Lives and works in Paris.
- Bachelor of Science Architecture and Bachelor of Visual Arts with Honours, University of Sydney.
- Master of Fine Arts in Research, College of Fine Arts, University of NSW.
- Founded Galerie Allen in Paris in 2013 with her husband Clemens Habicht and curator Joseph Allen Shea.
- Collections: Artbank, Monash University Museum of Modern Art, Musee National d'Art Moderne/Centre Pompidou, National Gallery of Victoria.
- CV: <http://www.melocallaghan.com/cv>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ABOUT THE EXHIBITION AND ARTIST

- How to Keep Breathing: Mel O'Callaghan's Rituals for the Anthropocene - book extract in Art Guide, by Dr Edward Scheer: <https://artguide.com.au/art-plus/mel-ocallaghan-centre-of-the-centre>
- Mel O'Callaghan, discusses how her grandfather's mineral collection served as part of the inspiration for the creation of 'Centre of the Centre' (video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqC85YvMpiE>
- Mel O'Callaghan and Dr. Daniel J. Fornari: In Search of Life - Conversation on Ocula with Curator Peta Rake: <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/mel-ocallaghan-and-dr-daniel-j-fornari-an-art/>
- Mel O'Callaghan: *Centre of the Centre* - cover article in Art Almanac, by Emma-Kate Wilson: <https://www.art-almanac.com.au/mel-ocallaghan-centre-of-the-centre/>
- Exploring the origins of life itself- Art Guide Australia, by Tiarney Miekus: <https://artguide.com.au/exploring-the-origins-of-life-itself>
- UQ news article: <https://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2019/12/new-exhibitiondives-deep-origins-of-life-uq-art-museum-0>
- Review of Centre of Centre when it was at Artspace, Sydney. Explores the exhibitions relationship to Cultural Mediation: <https://www.art-almanac.com.au/melocallaghan-centre-of-the-centre/>
- NGV interview with Mel about her practice: <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/melocallaghan-interview/>
- Interview with Mel about her life and growing up in Sydney: <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/my-secret-sydney-20140313-34nbe.html>
- *Centre of the Centre* Educational resource (MCAD, Manila): <http://csw2018.unols.org/chief-scientist-workshop-2018-home-page/index.html>
- Art and Education article on the *Centre of the Centre* exhibition: <https://www.artandeducation.net/announcements/317533/mel-o-callaghan-centreof-the-centre>
- Interview from Popsart with UQ Art Museum Curator Peta Rake: <https://www.latest.facebook.com/becmactv/videos/511200006485904/>

ABOUT ALBERT CHAPMAN



Left: Chapman Mineral Collection on display at the Australian Museum. Photo courtesy of the Australian Museum.

Right: Albert Chapman. Photo courtesy of the Australian Museum.

Albert Chapman's career as a mineralogist started merely as a hobby when he was 12 years old with a gift from his father who was a sea captain and developed further while he was training as a cabinet maker and carpenter. His reputation for collecting specimens soon saw him travelling overseas to trade with collections and museums in Europe and America, and established him as an 'authority on Australian minerals'.

KEY INFO

- Albert is Mel O'Callaghan's grandfather.
- Born 1912 in Mackay, Queensland. Died 20 July, 1996 in Sydney, NSW.
- Founding member of Mineralogical Society of New South Wales.
- He was one of the leading authorities on Australian Minerals and played a major part in introducing Australian minerals to the rest of the world.
- It was well known that Albert would travel to collect minerals and was one of the first to attend trade shows overseas.
- Albert's own private mineral collection consisted of about 2,000 specimens by the time of his death in 1996 and as a result, has been regarded with international significance as one of the top ten private collections in the world.

- His wife was also a collector. Together, the pair stored the minerals that they collected in specially made cabinets, under beds, and the linen closet, as well as a select few on display around their house.
- In 1988, the Albert Chapman Mineral Collection was purchased by the New South Wales Government for a fraction of its true value, as Chapman wanted to see this collection remain in Australia.

Additional resources about Albert Chapman:

- Biographical information about Albert Chapman (website): <https://mineralogicalrecord.com/labels.asp?colid=1770>
- Information about the Albert Chapman collection at Australian Museum (website): <https://australianmuseum.net.au/learn/collections/naturalscience/mineralogy/albert-chapman-the-collection/>

CENTRE OF THE CENTRE, 2019

Three-channel HD colour video, 48:9, with 5.1 surround sound, 20 min. On loan courtesy of the artist, Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney, Galerie Allen, Paris and Galerie Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon.



Mel O'Callaghan, *Centre of the Centre*, 2019, installation view, Artspace, Sydney, courtesy the artist and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Zan Wimberley

MEDIATOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Key points about submersible Alvin:

- Commissioned in 1964.
- Alvin collects data and allows two scientists and a driver to observe the deepest parts of our ocean floors.
- Alvin can reach 4,500 (2/3 ocean floor) meters during dives that can last up to ten hours.
- Can dive for up to 30 days in a row.
- Will be able to reach 6,500 (98% ocean floor) in the next few years.
- On his 50th birthday had a retrofit out to update the technology and the observation sphere.
- Alvin has his own line of merchandise including socks, pens and coffee cups.
- Images of the Titanic wreck are taken by Alvin are featured in start of James Cameron's 1998 film *Titanic* featuring Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet. Daniel and James Cameron are good friends!
- Alvin is named after Allyn Vine, a WHOI engineer and geophysicist who helped pioneer deep submergence research and technology.
- R/V Atlantis, owned by USA Navy and operated by WHOI, is the ship specifically outfitted to carry Alvin. R/V Atlantis has 6 science labs on board.



Mel O'Callaghan speaks about her work *Centre of the Centre* at Artspace Sydney. Photo: Zan Wimberley

Q&A RELATING TO CENTRE OF THE CENTRE (FILM)

What is Alvin and how does it work?

Alvin is a Human Operated Vehicle with the ability to explore depths of the ocean that humans cannot physically reach.

What is a mid-ocean ridge?

A mid-ocean ridge is an underwater mountain range formed by plate tectonics. Find out more here: <https://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/facts/mid-ocean-ridge.html>

What is a hydrothermal vent and how does it occur?

Hydrothermal vents are natural occurrences that emit streams of water 3-4 times the temperature of boiling water in an oceanic area that otherwise has freezing temperatures. Find more here: <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/vents.html>

What is an extremophile?

An extremophile are organisms (an animal, plant or single-celled life form) with the ability to thrive in extreme environments such as hydrothermal vents. Find our more here: <https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/extremophile.html>



Top: An image of a tardigrade, or water bear, at a magnification of 400x, when printed at 10 centimetres wide. (Eye of Science/Science Source)

Bottom: Mel O'Callaghan, *Centre of the Centre*, 2019., digital still, courtesy the artist and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon.

SPOTLIGHT ON EXTREMOPHILES (ALVINELLA POMPEII WORM)

An Extremophile is “an organism that thrives physically (temperature) or geochemically (acidity, alkalinity) in extreme conditions, which was detrimental to most life on earth” - Dr Daniel J Fornari @woodshole_ocean. The word roughly translates to “extreme love”.

The small, red Alvinella Pompeii Worm (or Alvinella Pompejana) are found in the hydrothermal vents almost 2,500 metres under the surface of the ocean. These Alvinella were imaged at the Easter Pacific Rise, a fast-spreading portion of the global mid-ocean ridge system, during a three-week mission in the Pacific, where artist @mel_ocallaghan and Dr. Fornari filmed hydrothermal vents in the depths of the ocean using the submersible Alvin (<https://ndsf.whoi.edu/alvin/>).

Effortlessly moving in and out of freezing temperatures as low as 2-3°C to hotter than 250°C, Dr. Fornari explains that “The Alvinella live with its head in an ice box and backside in the oven”. A stunning feat for any living creature to survive in that temperature range.

The Alvinella Pompeii Worm is featured in several scenes of Mel O'Callaghan's film '*Centre of the Centre*' currently installed at UQ Art Museum.



Mel O'Callaghan, *Centre of the Centre*, 2019., digital still, courtesy the artist and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon.

UQ ART MUSEUM — SPOTLIGHT ON GOLD WORM OR POLYNOID SCALE WORM

The Polynoid Scale Worm shown in the video lived at near freezing temperatures at the seafloor on a volcanic seamount in the eastern Pacific Ocean.

This creature (which is this luminous colour in real life) along with the extremophiles that live at such depths are so significant to us because, as Dr. Daniel J. Fornari @woodshole_ocean explains, ‘The biology and genetics of this group of animals likely holds many keys to better understanding how life evolved on Earth. Perhaps they can give us clues about how we can treat certain diseases, as well as what we might expect to find if we explore for life on other planets and moons in our solar system.’

COLLABORATOR: ABOUT DR DANIEL FORNARI

Dr Daniel Fornari is a leading researcher in mid-ocean ridges who has participated in over 150 research cruises, and has significantly contributed to over 100 scientific publications dedicated to volcanic and hydrothermal processes along mid-ocean ridges. Daniel has nearly 45 years of ocean exploration experience, and with the support of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) was able to collaborate with Mel in filming her video work.



UQ Art Museum Curator Peta Rake, artist Mel O'Callaghan, and Dr. Daniel J. Fornari Emeritus Research Scholar, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. *Centre of the Centre* publication launch, 2020. Courtesy UQ Art Museum, Brisbane. Photo: Simon Woods.

Q&A WITH DR DANIEL FORNARI

What has been the most memorable of your dive experiences? And why?

Truly all of the dives that I have had in research submarines (over a hundred in the past ~50 years) have been memorable. The experience is as close as you can come to living the fantasy of Jules Verne, one of my favorite authors as a child and adult. His books are all about exploring mysterious worlds (mostly parts of planet Earth); environments that in all ways are intimately linked to our mundane terrestrial life, but regions that are normally inaccessible.

In the case of diving to the bottom of the ocean – a recurring theme throughout literary history and in modern times through movies – you are usually going to a place that no human has seen before and may not see again. It is a truly unique and powerful experience.

When one is carrying out science in the deep ocean – some of the 'mystery' is replaced by focused observations and thinking while immersed in the deep-sea environment, but it is still always an experience where you can make discoveries – that is a very strong motivating and captivating feeling. One of the many memorable experiences diving in Alvin was in 1991. It involved being in the deep ocean, 2500 meters down, and witnessing the ongoing or immediate after-effects of the first witnessed volcanic eruption on a mid-ocean ridge – in this case the East Pacific Rise about 1000 km west of the coast of southern Mexico. That field area has turned out to be a major focus of my research into volcanic and hydrothermal processes in the global ocean over the last ~30 years.

Why is it important that we explore the deepest parts of our oceans?

Exploration of the natural environment is deeply embedded within the psyche of all living things. Humans have evolved in large part because of their innate desire to go beyond their physical boundaries to satisfy their quest for knowledge. Historically, exploration has been pursued above sea level, or throughout the global ocean on ships over millennia. The development of advanced technologies – starting in the late 19th century, and through the 20th and into the present, has permitted humans to explore the deepest depths of the ocean using submersible technologies. This deep-sea exploration in part seeks to better understand our global environment, the metabolic and genetic range of animals that can exist in harsh environments (e.g. depth, temperature, chemical), and to better understand how Earth has evolved. Knowing the full characteristics, inhabitants, and physical settings of all regions of the global ocean, from the shallow coastal margins to the deepest trenches, is essential for us to truly understand our Earth/Ocean system and how unique it is within our known Universe.

What do you find interesting about extremophiles? And how they link to humans?

By definition, an extremophile is: "an organism that thrives (the last part of the name means love in Greek) in physically (temperature) or geochemically (acidity, alkalinity) extreme conditions, which are detrimental to most life on Earth". Much of what we know about extremophiles in deep ocean hydrothermal vents has been learned only in the last ~43 years, since the 1977 discovery of low-temperature hydrothermal vents in the Galapagos Rift. We are just starting to learn about how these animals can sustain normal metabolic processes while experiencing ranges of temperature over their body length of >100°C, something not possible in humans. The biology and genetics of this group of animals likely hold many keys to better understanding how life evolved on Earth and perhaps can give us clues about how we can treat certain diseases, as well as what we might expect to find if we explore for life on other planets and moons in our solar system. But it is important to recognize that we are still in a very basic stage of understanding life on planet Earth. That the global ocean, which covers 2/3rd of our planet's surface, is the crucible of life, with scores of unknown life forms that undoubtedly rival any 'alien' life we might find in outer space. The deep-ocean and

seafloor is now accessible thanks to 21st century technologies and the ever-curious minds of scientists and students who want to continue the long tradition of exploring Inner Space.

What do you miss most when you are out at sea?

At sea I miss my family, our dog, our gardens and home-cooked meals. Life at sea on research cruises is intense – people work 24/7, and often for over 18 hrs per day accomplishing their research tasks because time at sea is precious. The ship and vehicle time is costly – being primarily supported by public funds (i.e., taxes), so it is important to be efficient and to do as much science while at sea as possible. Funding for research programs is provided in the USA by The National Science Foundation, the US government's primary agency that supports basic scientific research in all fields.

KEY INFO:

- Lives and works United States of America.
- Emeritus Research Scholar for Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI).
- Completed over 150 research cruises. The first one taking place in June–August 1970 as an undergraduate student
- Over 100 dives in Alvin and other Navy submersibles
- Emeritus Scientist in Geology and Geophysics at WHOI

Q&A WITH MEL O'CALLAGHAN CENTRE OF THE CENTRE (FILM)

How does the breath performance relate to hydrothermal vents and extremophiles?

Again, it is breath that connects these because we could say the vents breathe life into the sea through a chemosynthetic process. (I will let Dan explain that!) Life there exists in the most extreme of circumstances. Extremophiles are microorganisms that live in conditions of extreme temperature, acidity, alkalinity, or chemical concentration - from the vents gas plumes spew out at approximately 350 degrees and are hitting 2-degree water with a pressure that is immense. Somehow, I felt like we could all relate to this in a universal sense as we are increasingly as we are challenged environmentally, politically and emotionally in these extreme times.

How did your process influence the work of Dan and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution?

I hope so! Dan is himself very interested in the metaphysical questions that science provokes and has a naturally creative sensibility towards image making. More immediately though on the Atlantis I worked closely with all the scientists and Alvin pilots in developing ways we could collect the best images possible. This was an evolving process and required that we worked out ways to capture video whilst practicing the best science possible. There was a great moment in the process that I will describe to you when I am there, these include developing methods to best film under serious time restraints and a series of interviews I undertook with all of the scientists and many of the crew to find out what each of them was particularly passionate about.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES RELATING TO CENTRE OF THE CENTRE AND DR DANIEL FORNARI (FILM)

- Dan's bio: <http://www.scienceforthepublic.org/speakers-guests/meet-daniel-fornariph-d->
- Information on the R/V Atlantis cruise used to film *Centre of the Centre* (website): <http://csw2018.unols.org/chief-scientist-workshop-2018-home-page/index.html>
- WHOI: hydrothermal vents footage captured during cruise with Mel (video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZ7ppZ1fupA>
- Oceanography Podcast by Dan Fornari: <https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/danfornari/>
- Article on hydrothermal vents: <https://www.whoi.edu/feature/historyhydrothermal-vents/impacts/view.html>
- Study on the hydrothermal vent activity on East Pacific Rise: <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1029/2005GC001094>

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What does the film footage remind you of?

Have you heard of an extremophile?

Have you heard of ALVIN machine before?

Do you know how a hydrothermal vent works?

Did you know the deepest parts of the earth's oceans has volcanoes that regularly explode?

Did you know the deep ocean sea floor is helping UQ scientists to learn more about how our eyes work and repair themselves? More info: <https://qbi.uq.edu.au/marshallgroup>

Mel O'Callaghan speaks about her work *Centre of the Centre* at Artspace Sydney. Photo: Zan Wimberley

RESPIRE, RESPIRE, 2019

Performance, sculptures. Dimensions variable



Mel O'Callaghan, *Respire, Respire*, 2019, (performance rehearsal) and installation at Artspace, Sydney, courtesy the artist and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Zan Wimberley

ABOUT RESPIRE, RESPIRE

Respire, Respire is a series of works comprising sculpture, performances and a choreography of breathing. These were drawn from the protocols for breathing developed in collaboration with Sabine Rittner, Associate Researcher and Music Psychotherapist, Institute for Medical Psychology, University Hospital of Heidelberg.

ABOUT THE SCULPTURES

There are three sculptures:

- *Respire, Respire (Arc)*, 2019
- *Respire, Respire (Dome)*, 2019
- *Respire, Respire (Three Arcs)*, 2019

The sculptures act as ritualised objects and performance tools. Their shapes are inspired by the extremophiles captured in the film and are translated into monumental, abstract forms.

The glass is thermo-formed at temperatures similar to those found at the hydrothermal vent openings, provoking mutations in shape and colour. Performers will use the sculptures as props during the performances. This may include touching and breathing on the sculptures.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

What do the sculptures remind of you of?

Do you recognise them the shapes of the sculptures from anywhere else in the exhibition?

The shapes of these sculptures are inspired by the extremophiles featured in *Centre of the Centre*.

Have you seen a performance yet?



Mel O'Callaghan, *Respire, Respire*, 2019, (performance rehearsal) and installation at Artspace, Sydney, courtesy the artist and Kronenberg Mais Wright, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Zan Wimberley

Q&A ABOUT RESPIRE, RESPIRE SCULPTURES

How and where were the glass sculptures made?

In the north of France at Goude Glass. Goude is the third-generation company and I worked closely with Yvon Goude over two years to develop large forms that could amplify sound and also to create a glass that would be reflective, iridescent and translucent at the same time. We made dozens and dozens of samples to get to the final finish of these works. At a smaller scale this would have been achievable but at this scale it had not been done before. Goude glass is very rare in that it can produce its own glass and bend it using traditional steel moulds in large furnaces whilst also undertaking artisanal methods that are sadly a dying tradition.

How much do the glass sculptures weigh?

Arc: 60kg each Dome: weight: 40kg 3
Arcs: 108kg each (Semicircular) (Circle) (Wavy)

RESPIRE, RESPIRE: PERFORMANCE INFORMATION



Mel O'Callaghan, *Respire, Respire* (2020). Performance view: *Centre of the Centre*, UQ Art Museum, Brisbane (22 February 2020–16 January 2021). Reproduced courtesy of the artist and KRONENBERG MAIS WRIGHT, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Simon Woods.

ABOUT RESPIRE, RESPIRE PERFORMANCE

Watch a recording of the performance: <https://vimeo.com/356543373>

Mel's breathwork performance titled *Respire, Respire*, is a 20-minute ritual performance developed in collaboration with Dr Sabine Rittner.

The research for this performance began when Mel was making the film *Dangerous on the Way with the Orang Sungai*, an Indigenous group in Sabah, Malaysia, who Mel was able to collaborate with. Twice a year they perform a ritual harvest of the edible nests of swiftlets, a migratory species in Southeast Asia. Suspended hours upon end in the lethal void of the caves, the Orang Sungai induce an ecstatic, trance-like state as a necessary means to transcend everyday consciousness and to perform their laborious act. Mel was invited into the family-owned cave over two years to witness and document this otherwise inaccessible space and the transcendental experience that takes place there.

In this performance for *Centre of the Centre*, Mel aims to push the performers into a trancelike altered state of consciousness to test the human condition and its limits in extreme circumstances. The performers will guide visitors in cyclical breathing, which could potentially trigger altered states of consciousness. Transformative altered states of consciousness can range from meditative, hallucinatory or even ecstatic states.

You can watch Mel talk about her development and research into this performance here: <https://youtu.be/2RYJyla5hrl>

The breathwork performance was originally choreographed by Mel and Psychologist Dr Sabine Rittner and accompanied by a harp, but other instruments have been used to accompany the performance. For example, UQ Art Museum Curator, Anna Briers (who learnt to play the organ when she was growing up) will play the Art Museum's organ for some special performances, including the exhibition opening.

MEDIATOR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

COLLABORATOR: ABOUT DR SABINE RITTNER

- Born 1956.
- Psychologist and researcher in the Institute of Medical Psychology at Heidelberg University, Germany.
- Qualified psychotherapist.
- Over 100 publications.
- Freelance lecturer and seminar coach.
- Co-organiser of four international convention on "Worlds of Consciousness".
- Co-founder of the Felicitas Goodman Institute in Germany.
- Also an artist - performance and sculptural practice.

Additional resources relating to Sabine Rittner:

- Website: <https://www.sabinerittner.de/en/>
- Article: <https://www.sabinerittner.de/en/trance-and-altered-states-ofconsciousness/>

Q&A WITH MEL O'CALLAGHAN ABOUT THE RESPIRE, RESPIRE PERFORMANCE

What does someone in an altered state of consciousness experience?

This varies depending on the method and experience of the performer. The more practiced they deeper the trance will be. In the case of this performance it has often taken the form of more physical experiences where the performer felt they were being touched, and depending on their experience visual hallucinations may occur. There is also often an emotional release that can occur during and particularly after the performances.



Cultural Mediation in Practice workshop featuring Mel O'Callaghan's exhibition *Centre of the Centre*. Photograph by Document Photography

PERFORMER INTERVIEWS — AN INSIDE LOOK

We conducted short interviews with some of the performers of O’Callaghan’s work *Respire, Respire* to hear what they learned from the experience and how it has influenced their own practices.

Q: CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THREE WORDS?

“Enhanced, exhilarating, lost” - Trae Allen

“Euphoria, release, grounding” - Keia McGrady

“Raw, vulnerable” - Stephanie Palmer

“Powerful, Transformative, Lightness” - Torie Tink

Q: WHAT HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED DURING YOUR TRANCE STATE THAT SURPRISED YOU? A COLOUR, AN IMAGE, A FEELING?

“Touch and smell were heightened. Felt relief” - Trae Allen

“I often found myself giggling like a child. It removed all barriers and brought me back to my childhood self.” - Kelly Hodge

“A curling of the lips and swelling of the eyes, instability in my feet, a lost sense of awareness of my physical self. A few times I felt as though I was only air - a state of bliss and letting go completely.” - Nadia Milford

“A full body reaction: Waves of orgasmic energy, cramping in the hands and neck, feeling dizzy, abstract visions (an archway, two piercing red eyes).” - Stephanie Palmer

Q: WHAT DOES THIS TYPE OF PRACTICE MEAN TO YOU NOW THAT YOU HAVE HAD SOME TIME AND SPACE AWAY FROM IT?

“To me it is a reminder of the equal value of our body, mind, and heart. Their interconnectedness between each other and our connection to the planet.” - Nadia Milford.

Q: WHAT KIND OF FEELINGS DID YOU NOTICE AFTER ENTERING A TRANCE STATE?

“I felt super light and elated. I felt more connected to myself and the present moment than I have ever before.” - Kelly Hodge

“The first few times I felt energised, happy, more alive, other times I felt quite reclusive and in need of a hug.” - Nadia Milford

“I wanted to be silent and still after the intensity of it. I had lucid dreams every night for the first few weeks, it felt like Pandora’s Box had opened and it was quite overwhelming.” - Stephanie Palmer

Q: WHAT HAVE YOU NOTICED ABOUT BREATHING IN A COLLECTIVE?

“We all breathe but to breathe in synchronisation is very powerful.” - Stephanie Palmer

“Breathing as a collective group was amazing, the energy that you feel in the room during the performance was so powerful...” - Torie Tink



Mel O’Callaghan, *Respire, Respire* (2020). Performance view: *Centre of the Centre*, UQ Art Museum, Brisbane (22 February 2020–16 January 2021). Reproduced courtesy of the artist and KRONENBERG MAIS WRIGHT, Sydney; Galerie Allen, Paris; Belo-Galsterer, Lisbon. Photo: Simon Woods.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

How did you feel while watching the performance?

Did the performance remind of you anything you’ve seen or experienced before?

Did you know the breathing technique used in the performance mimics that of the extremophiles features in the *Centre of the Centre* film? Have you seen the film yet?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES RELATING TO THE RESPIRE, RESPIRE PERFORMANCE

- *Respire, Respire* performed at Artspace (2019): <https://vimeo.com/melocallaghan>
- *Respire, Respire* performed at Le Confort Moderne, Poitiers, France: <https://vimeo.com/349167336>
- *Respire, Respire* performed at Labanque, Bethune: <https://vimeo.com/320492702>

**MEL O'CALLAGHAN
CENTRE OF THE CENTRE**

CULTURAL MEDIATION TRAINING KIT