

**THE REST IS
UP TO YOU
2062
MELBOURNE
FRINGE
FESTIVAL**

The Rest Is Up To You: Melbourne Fringe Festival 1982–2062

The Rest Is Up to You: Melbourne Fringe Festival 1982–2062 is a celebration of Melbourne's longest-running multi-arts festival. It looks back at 40 years of Fringe theatre, music, film, writing, visual arts, circus, dance, comedy, cabaret, performance and design. But we don't stop there. The exhibition speculates on the future of art-making on the fringe, at the edge of the mainstream. Embracing the local, Melbourne Fringe is part of the city's social history, which makes this exhibition both a time capsule and a time machine.

The Fringe archive, held at the Library, tracks the festival's shaky but determined beginning and illuminates the thousands of artists and productions it has hosted, through programs, letters, posters and flyers. The archive is administrative, strategic and stumbling, but it captures the impact of Fringe's open access attitude, and it reveals how a festival can also be a community. The archive is also a story of changing graphics and technologies: photographs, videos, film footage and TV news reports show acts of provocation and defiance, moments of fun and bravery, scenes of risk and experimentation – because failure *is* an option at Fringe. Public creation and participation are the point.

Artists, producers, directors and audiences who have participated in Fringe over the past 40 years have contributed stories to the exhibition and, consequently, to the Library's collection. These audio and video recordings comprise a funny, moving and thoughtful collective act and they are visualised as live transcriptions around the Gallery. Their words also appear as banner quotes and inside the display cases, helping us to 'hear' this multi-vocal, living archive.

The exhibition title – *The Rest Is Up to You* – is from a 1984 festival newsletter encouraging artists to practise and promote their work while advancing Fringe too. Nothing has changed about the intense labour of making art, but today we might read this instruction more broadly: that cultures thrive through everybody's participation.

Before you leave, consider adding your own ideas about the future of art on the fringe in our interactive recording room.

Want to know more about the festival and its many programs and performances? Download our free book, listen to our podcast series or visit the exhibition website. www.slv.vic.gov.au/fringe/

Exhibition storytellers (Storybank contributors and oral history interviews):

Adam Valentine

Alexina Coad

Amelia Seward

Andy Freer

Angela Bourke

Angus Cerini

Anna Nalpantidis

Arpad Mihaly

Ashleigh Morris

Barrie Kosky

Bernard Caleo

Bethany Macdonald

Betty Bircher

Bridget Bantick

Bron Batten

Bruce Filley

Cam Venn

Cameron Stewart

Carly Findlay

Cath Jamison

Crusader Hillis

Damian Callinan

Damien Hodgkinson

Dan Giovannoni

Dan Goronszy

Dan Mitchell

David Bridie

Emer Harrington

Emilie Collyer

Emma Knights

Emmet Nichols

Esther Anatolitis

Fiona Scott Norman

Francesco Minniti

Georgia Deguara

Gideon Obarzanek

Gillian Cosgriff

Glen Walton

He Huang

Ian Pidd

Jacci Pillar (Brady)

Jane Crawley

Janet A McLeod

Jason Marsiglia

Jean Tong

Jenny Joy Hickenbotham

Jo Waite

Joel Bray

John Hipwell

Johnny Hamilton

Josephine Fagan

Josh Hayes

Karen Hadfield

Kate Kantor

Kin Francis

Laura Milke Garner

Lisa-Skye

Lita Doolan

Liz Jones AO

Lou Wall

Luke McGregor

Madeleine Flynn

Madeline Pratt
Marg Downey
Margot Tanjutco
Martha Ackroyd Curtis
Matt Kelly
Maude Davey
Maxine Briggs
Michael Agar
Michael Nicholson
Michelle Buxton
Michelle Tseng
Mitch Jones
Moirra Finucane
Natasha Phillips
Nebahat Erpolat
Nick Barlow
Nick Caddaye
Noel Anderson
Palz Vaughan
Patrick Collins
Pauline Cady
Penelope Bartlau
Penny Baron
Philip Hayden
Philipa Rothfield
Rachel Edmonds
Ramesh Ayyar
Richard Higgins
Richard Watts
Rinske Ginsberg
Robert Reid
Robin Fox
Rove McManus

Samara Hersch
Sammy J
Samuel Gaskin
Sarah Collins
Sarah Kriegler
Sarah Walker
Sarah Ward
Simon Abrahams
Steph Urruty
Stephanie Lake
Susan Bamford Caleo
Talya Rubin
Tania Smith
The Huxleys
Tim Humphrey
Toby Sullivan
Tom Fryer
Vanessa Pigrum
Virginia Hyam
Wendy (Ceridwen) Suiter
Wesley Enoch AM
Will Dawson
Yumi Umiumare
Zan Griffith
Zane Trow

... and more, including many
anonymous contributors

1982–1985

This display includes materials from the Fringe archive held at State Library Victoria (SLV). Shown in their original folders, the material includes:

1. The first press release announcing the launch of the Fringe Arts Network
2. Newspaper coverage of Fringe founder Arpad Mihaly cutting the launch cake with a sword
3. Fringe Arts Network manifestos
4. Program guides for the 1982 mini-festival and 1983 festival
5. Fringe newsletters and magazines
6. Signed petitions supporting the Network
7. Fringe Arts Network membership card
8. A letter from SLV to Arpad Mihaly inviting him deposit Fringe materials with the Library
9. Two anthologies published by Fringe
10. A questionnaire sent to all sitting Victorian MPs: 'The Arts in Your Electorate'

Our mission was to not say no to anyone. Everybody had a place in the Fringe.

– Arpad Mihaly

We moved into our first office and there were people coming in to find out what they could do, how to participate. Then we started to get people coming in and leaving posters and leaflets of their events. So that meant the newsletter had to change from being just an administrative thing into actual content about who's doing what.

– Arpad Mihaly

We had our first meeting and three people came. But the most important person came, and that was Bill Garner from the Pram Factory [an alternative-theatre venue]. And he explained to us how meetings function in the arts. Within a couple of months, we were getting 100 people coming and we had a huge list.

– Arpad Mihaly

It was a Fringe of nothing. Melbourne didn't have a festival back then, which seems remarkable, but Melbourne was a pretty benighted place. There was still six o'clock closing like it was ... that postwar kind of post-50s oppressive kind of dull ... John Brack's *Collins St, 5p.m.* – that's what it was like. But then things got exciting.

– Maude Davey

There was a network, there were a lot of other artists that you could talk to and you could combine venues with. It really felt like it was much more collaborative. It didn't feel like we were out on our own.

– Patricia Cornelius and Susie Dee

We used to do the program by hand with a photocopier – just completely ridiculous. People would be appalled at how wasteful and how labour intensive was the nature of our collating this thing.

– Angela Burke

Too frequently does the media express the view that the arts in Melbourne are dead, dying or dormant. There is constant talk of the need for a new, vibrant movement in the arts. Such a movement already exists. We have always been here. We are the Elusive Arts, the Poor Arts. The quality of our work is more important to us than its profitability. We take risks. We experiment with new works and forms.

– Press release, Tuesday 3 August 1982

1986–1989

This display includes material from the period when Fringe was known as the Spoleto Fringe Festival:

1. Fringe Festival program guides from 1988 and 1989
2. An Anthill Theatre advertisement from 1986 referencing Picasso's *Weeping Woman*, which had just been stolen from the NGV
3. A La Mama Theatre handbill for *Lilly and May*, by Patricia Cornelius and Susie Dee, one of the most successful pieces to be presented at the first Women's Season of theatre-makers
4. A poster for New Short Works, a Fringe-produced theatre event
5. Publicity stills of performers Rinske Ginsberg and Darryl Pellizer and Back to Back Theatre

Everybody put something in because everybody would get something out of it. I went to your show, you came to my show: that helped you, that helped me.

– Arpad Mihaly

I think that the mainstream arts started to realise we tapped into something, that we tapped into an energy and an unmet need, which was for a place to be experimental, to be an outsider, to be an outlier to work with unconventional forms. There was a whole array of stuff which was trying to break away from a pretty stuffy Melbourne, a pretty mainstream, conservative Melbourne. But I also think there was another dynamic which was about people whose stories hadn't been told.

– Angela Burke

I sat there in the audience, and woman after woman jumped on the stage. Some of the work was funny and intimate, something you might think of as a kitchen-sink drama, and some of it was ridiculous and outlandish. Some of it was very, very painful and heartfelt. And it was just all smashed together. That day I decided I wanted to be a part of it.

– Moira Finucane

The '80s in Melbourne were extraordinary. There was an explosion of energy and exuberance and wild performance, pop-up venues everywhere. People were doing wild stuff. They were doing it on the streets – they were doing puppetry, crazy circus, physical things, music. It was eccentric and wonderful. Fringe was the perfect forum for people to try things out and have an adventure.

– Rinske Ginsberg

The highlight was the parade. It was open to anyone who had a show in Fringe. It had a few commercially things, the pubs would put a band on a truck, and then it always had things that were activist, the most powerful of which would have been in my second year, in '89, when Bruce Fentham – who was dying of AIDS – led the parade on the bonnet of a car. Everybody knew who he was and why he was doing that. It was powerful, but at the same time it was genuinely joyful, too. It was an act of extraordinary courage on his behalf, but also an act of defiance.

– Ian Pidd

We joined forces in a play that had its origins at Fringe and that I wrote, called *Lilly and May*. Susie played Lilly, and I played May. It travelled to Sydney, Edinburgh, Canada, Ireland, London, did a tour of regional Victoria and then travelled to the first international women playwrights' conference in America. It was a live wire of a play, with one proper pram and one lighting state; it was very unsophisticated but there was something vital in it.

– Patricia Cornelius and Susie Dee

1990–1993

1. Posters for the photography exhibition *Pitcha Mi Koori*, by Kim Kruger, Destiny Deacon, Maree Clarke and Lisa Bellea, and for the Victorian Indigenous Women Writers' Festival
2. A program for *Up the Road*, by Ilbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-op
3. Flyers for *Out of Line*, an exhibition of feminist cartoonists and the Women's Season
4. Newspaper coverage of the 1992 Fringe parade and the Waiters' Race
5. Program guides, including the 1992 guide celebrating ten years of Melbourne Fringe
6. Posters and flyers for Fringe programs presented during the 1993 International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples
7. Photographs at the parade taken by Peter Milne and others, including Aboriginal performers with Robbie Thorpe
8. An image of Bruce Fentham leading the 1993 parade (photo: Stephen J Williams)
9. Promotional photographs of artist Theresa Blake (photo: Lucio Grassi), theatre-makers The Woolly Jumpers, performers Fifi L'Amour and David De Most, and the band Rapunzel Gets Down

As artists we're always telling stories that the rest of society doesn't know enough about. We shine a light on it, we grow it, we expose it, and audiences grow because of this.

– Wesley Enoch

I very vividly remember my first encounter with Fringe. It would have been 1988. I was passing through Melbourne with Sue [Giles] and somebody took us to the street party on Brunswick Street. And it was just so ... Well, what was it? It was very joyful; it was very particular. There was something viscerally real and joyful and creative about what was happening there. There was something anarchic but without any kind of edge to it. It was very welcoming. The Waiters' Race happened, and then we were taken to the theatre. We came back and we said, 'We should live in Melbourne'.

– Ian Pidd

It was kind of wild and silly and not very impressive. And really bad music. But it was really exhilarating.

– Maude Davey

She is very nude. It's kind of become one of the iconic images to represent Fringe.

– Fiona Scott Norman

Stolen started in this little cramped space at Melbourne Fringe, and I can hand on heart say that play helped influence the way Australia thought about the Stolen Generations, about the politics and the thinking and the cultural impact.

– Wesley Enoch

The Teabags Marching Band was eight women. We were all about representing service women: women who worked in cafeterias, who cleaned, people who were not seen that much. And we wanted to celebrate them.

– Kate Kantor

We put out a call for all the dance groups across Victoria to come and take part in Cooroboree, as a part of our first program. We had people from Gippsland, Mildura, Warrnambool, Shepparton, everywhere. I can't remember how many dance groups came together, but it was the first time it happened since the invasion.

– Maxine Briggs

1994–1997

1. Fringe Festival program guides
2. Photographs and of performers Jill Orr (photo: Antonia Chaffey), Butchy Aketa and Circus Soup, and the Sprinkle Magic's car-tyre dress for Fringe Fashion
3. A booklet produced by Snuff Puppets
4. The program for the 1996 Maribyrnong Artists' Project
5. An exhibition flyer for works by artists responding to the cancellation of the Andres Serrano exhibition at the NGV
6. Program listings for Cyber Fringe events
7. Documentation of Fringe Fashion and Fringe Furniture
8. Flyers for Fringe Architecture and the Fringe Film and Video program focused on new short words from South East Asia

All these artists living and working down on the river came together as the Maribyrnong Artists Project, or MAP. It really served to bring attention to what was going on in the west and bring people to see where we were and what we were doing.

– Pauline Cady

It was my intention to suggest it, but not to organise it [Fringe Furniture]. The people at Fringe were very persuasive. Ultimately, they convinced me that I could do it with their support, and sure enough, that happened.

– Bruce Filley

I was living in Melbourne and there was a queer and underground club movement that was really exciting. It was the mid-1990s, and there were all kinds of political performances going on; there were a lot of ACT UP performances and HIV-AIDS performances. But there was also an incredible body-positive identity, positive sex, positive women's performance movement. It was all in nightclubs, and I got swept up into it.

– Moira Finucane

It was 1997 and there was this new thing called the internet. Fringe got onto me because they knew I had radio experience and wanted to set up an internet radio station. Now, the funny thing is that because it was '97 I don't know who would have been listening, because it would have cost you a fortune to even get onto dial-up a little bit, let alone stream or do anything like that.

– Laura Milke Garner

If the puppets are coming to you, then you're not being stopped by feeling that you don't belong in a theatre or by not being able to afford to go to a theatre.

– Pauline Cady

The street parades were kind of remarkable, rambunctious, sloppy, weirdo filled.

– Maude Davey

That's what Fringe celebrates – it's not TV, it's not normal, everyday things. It's celebrating the political, the dark, the outrageous, the things that you never usually see or hear.

– Patricia Cornelius and Susie Dee

The audience came knowing that they were taking a chance. They might see something absolutely amazing that they would never forget. And then they might see a show that really didn't work and maybe hadn't been rehearsed properly, or just never found its feet. But that was part of the deal.

– Emer Harrington

Back in those days the publicity was very, very analogue. You printed posters and flyers, and you spent a lot of time at night with sticky tape, sticking posters around poles and onto walls in Smith Street and Brunswick Street and all around Carlton, just to get the punters.

– Kate Kantor

1998–2001

1. Fringe Festival program guides
2. A media kit for the 1999 festival, provided to journalists in the form of a meat tray
3. Photographs from the parades, which stopped in 2001 after 17 years, including documentation of *Twixt* by Desoxy Theatre from 1998, and an image by Rennie Ellis from 1999
4. Flyers, posters and documentation of Fringe Fashion, Fringe Architecture, Fringe Film and Video and Fringe Visual Arts programs
5. Photographs of the Fringe-produced The Lane Event in 2001
6. Promotion and documentation of Spencer Tunick's 2001 visit to Melbourne in which 4000 people posed nude for a photograph on Princes Bridge
7. Copies of *Buzz Cuts* which printed quick-response reviews by emerging writers

Fringe, to me, has always been a place where you can be provoked.

– Fiona Scott Norman

There was an element of a communal wave of response to what had happened in New York, that our public spaces were no longer safe. As a community, we wanted to claim them again, to say these events will not stop us enjoying our open space, being in the street, claiming our city.

– Vanessa Pigrum

As I drove into town before dawn on the morning that we were going to shoot it, I knew we were in some kind of trouble because people were running through the city, towards the bridge. Afterwards, we all came back and there were maybe 20 or 30 people who couldn't find their clothes. For a good half an hour afterwards, there were people wandering around just going, 'I can't find my clothes. I don't know where my clothes are.' That was interesting because, suddenly, when most people are clothed nakedness is a thing.

– Ian Pidd

The Herald Sun wrote this review of our show, which said, 'This is possibly the worst Fringe theatre show I have ever seen'. Of course, we were mortally wounded. But then we thought, oh my god, this is just too good. We've got to use this! So, we actually blew up a photocopy of that article and made it into a big poster that said: 'How can you afford to miss this show?' And all of a sudden, we got masses of people coming.

– Kate Kantor

Fringe was a little bit of an umbrella over us as newbies, which was really important.

– Stephanie Lake

I was in the room when we decided to cancel the parade and the street party. We didn't want to, nobody wanted to. It was a cool thing and people loved it, but there were things that were problematic for us. The whole public liability insurance was just completely galloping out of control, and the amount of money that the police and the trams were charging us to have the street closed for the day was just skyrocketing. We'd always justified it by saying, 'We do it because it publicises the festival'. But when we did the market research, something like 85 per cent of the people said 'no' when they were asked, 'Has this got anything to do with the Melbourne Fringe?' It was so hard to justify that spend when we wanted to spend the money on the artists and the program.

– Ian Pidd

It was a messy show. You know, there were four litres of milk and two litres of tomato sauce. There was water. And it was a show that people loved because of that.

– Moira Finucane

2002–2005

1. Fringe Festival program guides and promotional material, including for 2002, celebrating 20 years of Fringe in an event called *Fringe Vintage* that involved a public call out for ‘stories, relics, and photos’
2. Festival Hub guides, from 2001 the festival begins to focus events around precincts
3. Documentation of the 2003 Fringe-produced *Shrouds* project, which wrapped public monuments along Swanston Street in fabric
4. Fringe Furniture and Fringe Fashion programs
5. A newspaper article from 2003 on the ‘axing’ of Fringe Fashion
6. Flyers for Fringe Inventions, promotion for *Human Momentum* at Federation Square, *SOIL*, an installation of art and design by Indigenous and East Timorese artists, and *The Black Swan of Trespass*, written by Lally Katz

I felt like it was always clear that part of going to Fringe was that you were kind of taking a risk. Based on reading a little blurb, you might see something that, you know, changed your life.

– Emer Harrington

If you want to be in the theatre in Australia, there are two ways:
you can audition forever or you can make your own work.

– Richard Higgins

You're like, okay, we've got ten minutes to bump in this show. So what if the costume is also the set? What if we just pin something to the wall? Chuck a projector on it? Okay, great. We've bumped in. It makes you very efficient as a thinker, and as a maker and as a performer.

– Sarah Walker

Everyone paid \$1 to watch a one-on-one performance.

– Matt Kelly

So, the *Shrouds* project was essentially a sort of a Cristoesque project where we wrapped up all the public monuments and public artworks down Swanston Street and into St Kilda Road. We did it over two nights as a sort of a guerrilla activity. To do ambitious projects you get together with a bunch of incredible Fringe volunteers; we had about 40, we had cherry-pickers, and we ended up with about five kilometres of calico. It's the sort of incredible strength of the volunteer army that Fringe would draw on because it was a vehicle for people to enter the arts industry and learn about being a helper. These sort of projects wouldn't be possible without that incredible support.

– Dan Mitchell

For *The Black Swan of Trespass* we met at the front of North Melbourne Town Hall. We were led down the street, then into a side street, then into a laneway, then into a backyard, then you had to crawl through a little hatch into a basement. By which point I was like, 'Where are we? I have no idea!' And then we sat in a basement under a shop and watched this amazing piece of theatre. And that will always live with me; both the show itself and the experience of getting there.

– Richard Watts

Fringe is about inciting the curiosity of the public to go and see something that they don't know anything about, or to take a risk on the boundaries of what they find safe or known.

– Vanessa Pigrum

I remember my parents coming. My mother said: 'You went to drama school for that?' But my father just said, 'I didn't understand it. But I thought you're great.'

– Rinske Ginsberg

2006–2009

1. Fringe Festival program guides and reports
2. Flyers for Digital Fringe, Fringe Furniture and the programs *Site Unseen* and *Fringe Framed*, celebrating 25 years of the festival
3. Signage for the project *Looking Up*
4. A flyer for the project *Small Revolutions*
5. Promotion for Hannah Gadsby's *Kiss Me Quick ... I'm Full of Jubes*
6. Photographs of Moira Finucane (photo: Tanya Voltchanskaya), Snuff Puppets (photo: J Forsyth), Sammy J's *50 Year Show* (photo: John Sones), and *Last Tuesday Society* by Richard Higgins and Bron Batten (Katie Harmsworth)

A work that really stands out was in the 2008 program, called *Scattered Tacks*, by Silvertree and Gellmann. Those artists abstracted circus down to its fundamentals. The lighting was torches that each performer held in their hands or in their mouths, and nothing else. In a culminating moment there was darkness, though you saw a performer lying down, almost nude, with a dinner plate on his belly. The lights went off, the lights were on again. There was a performer holding up a bowling ball, which was about to drop onto the belly of the performer lying down. We saw the hands let go of the bowling ball and all the torches were switched off. We heard the plate break and we all felt it in our bodies. We felt *their* bodies. I've never forgotten that performance.

– Esther Anatolitis

I remember this lady in the front row, and she was writing the whole time. I thought that she was so bored that she was writing, that the show was so bad. I didn't realise she was a reviewer taking notes and she turned out to be the hugest champion of my work.

– Sarah Collins

One of the things that Fringe does best is it allows people to just try things out and give them a go. You'll see people who've never done comedy say, 'I'm just going to do a comedy show and see if that's for me'. You'll see people who've never designed before say, 'We can't afford anyone else. So how about I give it a go?' And that 'give it a go' encounter means that people can actually find modes of working that suit them.

– Sarah Walker

In 2008, I started a show called *The 50 Year Show*, which was basically me trying to ensure I had work for half a century. It was a very canny business decision. The idea was that I would get people together, a bunch of comedians and friends, and every five years we would come together for this one show only and see how it evolved. Fringe was the perfect home for it because it was just so out there, outlandish and ambitious.

– Sammy J

I've got a lovely review from 2009, which I think properly sums up what you're allowed to do at Fringe: 'The Snuff Puppets latest is a bit like catching your best friend urinating on your other best friend. And both of them seem to be enjoying it. It's really very eeeewww. But these are your friends, right? And they're not actually intending to cause any harm. It's just an unfortunate fact that your friends turn out to be a bit more scary than you'd realised.'

– Pauline Cady

Generally, there are at least three different perspectives on the Fringe Furniture exhibition. One is my type: idiosyncratic, silly, humorous, adventurous furniture. Then there are people exhibiting finely crafted pieces, and then there are the people that are prototyping something that could be mass produced. So, the exhibition keeps going and people love it and want to exhibit in it.

– Bruce Filley

Every time I open up the Fringe program or look at the Fringe Festival website there's a delicious sense of anticipation: What am I going to discover? What am I going to fall in love with? About what am I going to urgently text friends, saying do not go and see this show!

– Richard Watts

2010–2013

1. Fringe Festival program guides, reports and postcards
2. Event flyers and postcards for Fringe Furniture
3. Promotion for the Festival Club
4. Fringe awards
5. Promotion for Sammy J's second *50 Year Show* and Bron Batten's *Sweet Child of Mine*
6. Photographs of the Fringe-produced project *Crowd Play*
(photo: Katie Harmsworth)

You'll go out and see a Fringe show where there's a comedian who's dressed up as a shovel salesman, who's trying to convince you not to murder him and his brother. And then you'll go and see this extraordinary cabaret performed by a man who is playing both a pirate and, at the same time, the mermaid that he falls in love with. And then you'll go and see this kind of incredibly intense confessional piece of work.

– Sarah Walker

In 2011, I did a show called *Sweet Child of Mine*, which debuted at Melbourne Fringe, with my father and mother, but my father on stage. It was a conversation about what they thought I did for a living. It was about parents, expectations, the ridiculousness and the wonderfulness of art. That show toured all around Australia, New Zealand and the USA, including Chicago, and I did a version in Edinburgh. But it started as four nights at Melbourne Fringe.

– Bron Batten

So, Fringe went through an identity restructure in order to garner different and new audiences – we needed to have greater appeal. One of the things that Fringe was really known for was zany, wacky performance. And we, they, we, they needed to alter that to show that there was wild performance, but performance of a particular quality that you couldn't label wacky, zany. It would be eccentric, challenging, pioneering, innovative, brand new, but not the wacky, zany thing that was sort of associated with anything goes.

– Rinske Ginsberg

It's not just about the kind of energy that comes with having been knocked back 1000 times. It's about the kind of energy that comes with having been knocked back 1000 times and having the power and the strength to still take work forward.

– Moira Finucane

One of the great strengths of Fringe is that regardless of what kind of provocation is being put out, it's going to be what is appropriate to the current climate. So, you will be getting artists doing work that responds to what's going on right now. Fringe still provides a place for that work.

– Fiona Scott Norman

Melbourne Fringe is also unique in terms of fringe festivals around the world, in that 90 per cent of the work in Melbourne Fringe is by and for Melbourne.

Some of the most memorable works I've seen at Melbourne Fringe have been among the strangest and most unique.

There was one, it was a birthday party condensed down to five minutes, held in a cupboard with two artists. You walked in and suddenly there are confetti and candles and things popping and whistles being blown. It was baffling and overwhelming and absolutely delightful.

– Richard Watts

Melbourne Fringe was the first festival here in Melbourne to really make central 'live art' as a part of the program, and to list it as an art form in the festival guide. But, of course, as soon as something like that happens it institutionalises certain things; it's as if the festival is saying to people, this is what art forms are. It really impacts on the way that an artist thinks about their own practice, which, unfortunately, is so informed by what box the artist ticks on the festival program, what box they tick in the funding application. There would have been many aspects of past programs that had live art components, but this was the first time that live art was there as an art form and was promoted and championed.

– Esther Anatolitis

2014–2017

1. Fringe Festival program guides, maps and reports with festival statistics
2. Booklets for Fringe Furniture, including the 30th anniversary edition of 2016
3. Fringe Hub and Club information and awards
4. Photographs of *1992-1-Oh!* (photo: Theresa Harrison) and *Biladurang* by Joel Bray (photo: Pippa Samaya)
5. Promotion for *Kids Vs Art* by Field Theory, *Sky Light* by Robin Fox, *The Children's Party* by Ben Landau and Alex Walker, and *Congress* by All the Queen's Men (photo: Gregory Lorenzutti)

There's this incredible networking that happens where people are like, 'You've got a bar, can I do the show at your bar. Hey, we've got a share house, let's do the show in our share house.'

– Sarah Walker

I've done Fringe every year since 2016. It's just such a core part of my artistry and I feel like I've really found my voice at Fringe. I don't always love it. I wish I could just fully glow about it, but it's challenging and difficult. There are some really hard times and stressful times. But at the end of the day, when my season finishes at Fringe every year, I just have a really satisfied feeling, which is lovely.

– Lou Wall

I was in a paroxysm of fear that *Sky Light* was going to be completely invisible, right up until I was coming down the elevator on opening night and I was heading to this thing where I was going to have to make a speech. And I just thought, it's a complete failure. And then I walked out of the elevator and looked up and there was this light rain, and it was really beautiful and my shoulders dropped 12 inches.

– Robin Fox

I was doing my show where I date someone from the audience.

– Bron Batten

I put my head through the wall of the hotel and I'm there among the audience, literally among them. You could see everyone go, 'Oh, is that a part of the show?'

– Joel Bray

Field Theory had a show called *Kids Vs Art*, which I really loved. The concept was quite simple: they would invite a bunch of kids to a Fringe show, and they would have a facilitator who was an artist who would be an expert of that art form. It was essentially a review of Fringe Festival shows through children and their perception of it. Their critiques of the work were really interesting, and the dialogue between them and the artists was funny and problematic, and actually exposed a lot of what art was about, or whether it was ridiculous or not.

– Gideon Obarzanek

[At La Mama] Betty Burstall used to always announce [in '60s and '70s]: 'Coffee is available and the artists will come down to join you shortly'. And we still announce that the bar is open and the cast will be out shortly, to encourage that interchange, and that's what a Fringe Hub is about, and Fringe clubs. I think it's very important that we create those safe places, and that Fringe shows are socially safe spaces as well.

– Liz Jones

There's definitely been a real shift in terms of all the ways that artists can push or provoke audiences. You might find yourself spattered with blood or something, or water or God knows what. Or there's nudity and, obviously, profanity. It's not that you don't get those things now, but there are warnings. You have to let people know. There's a whole lot of provisions in place. However, I think that's led to a bit more evolution in the work. There have been artists just trying to get a cheap shock and that really doesn't fly anymore.

– Fiona Scott Norman

2018–2022

1. Fringe Festival program guides, reports and newspaper articles
2. Promotion for Fringe's new home at Trades Hall
3. An image from *Midnight Mess*, Fringe's post-lockdown event
4. Photographs of programs at the Fringe Club, including artists Jandruze and Lou Wall
5. performing in *Fuck Fabulous* (photo: Duncan Jacob) and Yuck Circus (photo: J Forsyth)
6. Images of Margot Tanjutco, *Discordia* including The Huxleys (photo: Mark_Gambino), *ICON* by Field Theory (photo: J Forsyth), *Colossus* by Stephanie Lake (photo: Pippa Samaya) and *Multiply* by Stephanie Lake (photo: Gregory Lorenzutti), *Pivot* by Madeline Flynn and Tim Humphrey (photo: Fringe Wives Club on *Pivot* by City of Melbourne)

Melbourne Fringe has taken over its identity and made its own. It's not fringe to anything; it's central to itself and it has a proud history.

– Moira Finucane

But it was just such a lit. Like the most lit five minutes of my life.
Like I don't think that audience could have gone wilder had it
actually been Janet Jackson.

– Margot Tanjutco

There's so much power in terrible art. If shows are terrible, I remember them. I remember the messy shows that I've seen at Fringe over the years, and I've learned so much more from them than I have from just solid shows.

– Lou Wall

I think that into the future it will have to find a new language. Maybe it's going to be called the Melbourne Tassel because fringes are over.

– Wesley Enoch

I live in my parents' house. I am in my bedroom that I've been in forever. I'm in this deep suburbia. I wrote for my bedroom and that is the stage ... Probably with every show I've done with Fringe I've learned a lot. Because you are able to go for that weirder thing, or the thing that you're not sure about but are just interested in. And so you learn what you want to fight for.

– Margot Tanjutco

People are being held to account all the time. I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing. Make better jokes. Everyone's paying a lot of attention to content, and what you say and who's allowed to say it. And obviously, back in the early days of Fringe, there wasn't social media, there wasn't the internet. No-one was online, being scrutinised in that way. So, when you went into a space you had an experience, and that was the experience.

– Fiona Scott Norman

Fringier aspects of Fringe have increasingly become either more acceptable or been co-opted by mainstream society, so there's a certain aspect of its glitteriness that is no longer that weird ... To call it a stepping stone I think misunderstands what Fringe is there to do.

– Jean Tong

I was trying to think of a way that the name or the meaning [of Fringe] can be reclaimed. Normally it is pejorative, but you can wear it with pride. And actually, it becomes something that people aspire to. In that way, perhaps the name can endure.

– Tim Humphrey

My hope for the future would be, almost, that the Fringe Festival is not necessary because we actually celebrate all creation and we celebrate the arts in a much more holistic way.

– Robin Fox

I think part of the appeal of the offer was that no-one had to prepare anything. You don't have to rehearse, you don't have to watch any YouTube tutorials or learn any moves, you just turn up on the day. And we'll guide you through it [*Multiply*]. There'll be dancers there on site and you just follow the leader. And by following the leader, we will make this artwork together. So, it was really low commitment and the potential to be part of something out of the ordinary. I think people were really up for that because our lives were so ordinary and repetitive at that stage [in lockdown].

– Stephanie Lake

We were a bit cheeky, because we knew if we did it at midnight we were officially the first show back out of the lockdown, in 2020. Even on the night it was a real mix, to be honest. Essentially, it was electric. People were excited. It was emotional, though, in the sense that something was unlocked. All of a sudden, I was back doing what I was meant to be doing, in terms of producing and running events and programming, and it was just like a piece of me came back together that night. And that's a feeling I'll never forget.

– Laura Milke Garner

We delayed our 2020 festival and moved it to November to try and buy ourselves more time, which ultimately didn't work, as we were still in lockdown. And in 2021, we had a full festival ready to go; there is a printed program that has never seen the light of day. The entire festival was launched and on sale. We had to cancel three weeks before we were due to open. What I found astonishing in those two years was the ways in which the artists just continued to create work. We cancelled roughly 900 events in two years and proceeded with roughly 400. I think that's pretty extraordinary in the midst of lockdown.

– Simon Abrahams

I was determined that we would put on a festival, so we developed our own digital platform and turned Trades Hall into a TV studio. We were interested in developing work that was home delivered; art that you could listen to on your phone, or that happened in public space or on billboards. There was work that was delivered on a USB. We commissioned a series of works in 2020 that were designed to respond to the pandemic, one of which was *Multiply*. It is the Spencer Tunick work that I've been setting as the bar for us to reach. And I think we did with *Multiply*. It was the most profound and important work that I've ever been a part of in my life.

– Simon Abrahams