

PANEL SIX: OUT OF SIGHT AND OUT TO SEA - TELLING STORIES OF CHILDHOOD LOST THROUGH THEATRE AND CREATIVE NARRATIVE

Children of the Sea is the culmination of a research project by Jay Emmanuel, a play that shares the journeys of young maritime refugees who came to Australia by boat. Using satire and humour, the play centres around the stories of four characters who struggle with ideas of home, identity, adolescence and love as they navigate the absurdities of the adult world in which they drift.

Join Jay Emmanuel, artists Lilly Blue, Jo Pollitt and Marziya Mohammedali in a conversation about voice and agency for diverse and creative voices to tell stories that make visible universal themes of childhood, profound loss and unexpected joy, and bring stories out of sight to front of mind in 2021, the 20th anniversary of the Tampa Crisis in Australia.

PARTICIPANTS

Lilly Blue is an interdisciplinary artist and educator with a background in pedagogical practice, studio research and community engagement. She currently works as Manager of Learning and Creativity Research at the Art Gallery of Western Australia collaborating on projects that amplify the experience of children in relation with the world as critical and valuable in developing culture for multigenerational public audiences. As Teaching Artist and Creativity Consultant for Sydney Opera House she was instrumental in the development of the Creative Leadership in Learning Program and The Creativity Framework. She is co-Creative Director of contemporary arts publication/platform BIG Kids Magazine, and has worked internationally delivering arts residencies, professional development, creative commissions and exhibitions.

Jay Emmanuel is the founder and Artistic Director of Encounter. Born in India and based in Perth, Jay is a performer, writer and director. A graduate of Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris, his works are distinguished by his unique methodology of collaborative theatre-making, melding contemporary theatrical forms with rigorous community engagement and enquiry into authentic storytelling often involving non-professional actors on stage. Recognised as one of WA's top 50 'Rising Stars' by The West Australian, Jay has worked and collaborated on international productions such as Mahabharata (Why Not Theatre, Canada), Heroes (Radhouane El Meddeb Pantheon, Paris), Biryani (City of Perth Winter Arts Festival), MAA (St Georges Theatre) and on projects with renowned theatre director Ariane Mnouchkine (Theatre du Soleil, France). His recent performances include Helpmann award-winning play Counting and Cracking (Belvoir St/Co-Curious) and The Midnight Run (Inua Ellams, Perth Festival). Jay currently has a number of new plays in development in 2021 and beyond.

Jay is currently a Lead creative at Performing Lines WA. He was part of Belvoir St's Artists at Work Residency and is a founding board director of Perth International Cabaret Festival. In 2019 he was awarded a Career Development Grant from Australia Council for the Arts and was recognised as a Future Leader the same year.

Marziya Mohammedali is a wordsmith, photographer, designer, educator and artist. Their creative practice focuses on narratives of dissent, identity, migration and transition, working for social justice. They have documented several protest movements within Perth and have been involved in creative and digital activism for

various issues. They are also the Arts Editor at Jalada Africa, an online pan-African publishing platform. They are currently undertaking a PhD focusing on identity, protest, and photography, and recently held their first solo exhibition, 'we are the ones we have been waiting for'.

Dr Jo Pollitt is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University. As an interdisciplinary artist and scholar Jo's work is grounded in a twenty-year practice of improvisation and dramaturgy across multiple performed, choreographic and publishing platforms. She is co-founder and director of the creative arts publication BIG Kids Magazine and is currently invested in methods of expanded embodiment and creative response in researching children's relations with climate futures. Jo also lectures in dance Improvisation at WAAPA, is artist-researcher with #FEAS -Feminist Educators Against Sexism, and co-founder of the feminist research collective The Ediths at ECU. Her novella "The dancer in your hands < >" was released by UWA Publishing in 2020.

EDITED TRANSCRIPT

Shaheen: Welcome, everyone, to this final session on this beautiful Sunday afternoon, on the third floor of Boola Bardip in the Connections Gallery. We have a gorgeous session for you today with some of my favourite people in the world, Out of Sight and Out to Sea: telling stories of childhood lost through theatre and creative narrative.

My name is Shaheen, and I lead a wonderful team at the Museum of Freedom and Tolerance. This event is part of the In Visible Ink festival, the aim of which in this place of many stories is really to shine a light on some of the stories that perhaps aren't told in museums and in galleries, but some of the stories, difficult as they may be, that we really need to hear as a community. And our call to action is to invite people to see differently, to see some of the stories around us differently as we journey from places and cultural spaces like this into the world, to be transformed by those stories and to make change; and the artists we have here this afternoon, have a gift, a knack of creating transformation and change.

Welcome Jay, Marziya, Lily and Joe. I'd like to begin firstly by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we stand, and to pay my respects to elder's past and present. And I will hand the mic over to Jay to begin with, we'll introduce ourselves and then we'll come back to introduce your projects.

Jay: Kaya, my name is Jay Emmanuel, I am the writer and director of Children of the Sea, the work we'll talk about today. I'm a theatre maker born in India and migrated here about 11 years ago when I was 14, and that really left a lasting impression. And to the stories I wanted to tell, and the stories I wanted to bring in front of people.

And there was a lot I didn't understand about Australia. And so, my whole career is about understanding Australia, and who we are, who we are as a country. And we'll talk more about that. And when I work I like to involve community in my process, because there is usually a lot of walls between what we see on stage and what is actually really happening. And if we want to find out who we are as a nation, we need to actually, how do you say, crush that wall? How do you drop that wall? Yeah, so we'll talk more about that very soon.

Marziya: Kaya, I am Marziya. I'm also a migrant, although my story takes a little bit of a detour, in that I was born in Hong Kong and grew up in Kenya and then moved here. And I've been here for about 15 years now. And I'm an artist, activist and general troublemaker, I guess. But the works that I'm going to talk about are more in the activism sphere and how art and activism intersect in order to tell the stories that are usually untold. I'm also a PhD student at the moment. So, lots of different hats.

Lily: I'm Lily Blue. I'm a Jewish, queer, interdisciplinary artist, and also the head of learning and creativity research at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. I'm also the grandchild of Holocaust survivors, and the co-creator and co-founder of Big Kids Magazine, a contemporary arts magazine that publishes the work of children and artists side by side, and we'll be talking a bit more about a project that sits within Big Kids Magazine.

Jo: Kaya, my name is Jo Pollitt. And I am a dancer by trade and have a doctorate in that area, in writing as dancing. And I'm currently a postdoctoral research fellow in the School of Education at Edith Cowan University. So, I come with an interdisciplinary background as well. And together with Lily, we created Big Kids Magazine more than 10 years ago. And that's the story we're going to be telling today.

Shaheen: Thank you all. One of the reasons we put you together, your work has emerged in parallel over the last few years, and one of the unique characteristics of all your work is you are drawn to these very dark, very difficult human stories but you do it with such tenderness and empathy and grace and inter woven in these difficult plotlines, there's so much hope and sparks of joy and sparks of light that you draw people in with rather than push them away.

Talk to me a little bit about what drew you to this style of work? Starting maybe with Jay, so Children of the Sea has just premiered at Perth festival. Was anyone lucky enough to see Children of the Sea? It will come back. It will re-emerge, an incredibly powerful tale and a beautiful, beautiful cast of young refugees who have great futures ahead of them.

(video plays)

Jay: What you saw, the very first video was of the children who were in the show. And I'll go back, a little bit in back in time, just five years ago, I was given a letter by another director friend of mine. And that was a letter from somebody who was detained in the Villawood Detention Centre. This director received that letter in 2007, and she gave it to me in 2015. And that person was still in detention when I came to Australia in 2016. And that is what actually drew me back to Australia. That's where the whole journey started. And actually, Marziya was the first person I spoke to about this. I travelled around Australia for about six months to collect stories, to learn of those stories, on Manus, Nauru, in Australia, offshore, onshore detention centres, and people who had come by boat in the past, or at that moment of people who were still detained. And from there, we started collecting these stories, there were about 67 of them. And one of them was with a 14-year-old. At that moment, he was 19, 18-19 years old, Ali Reza, who is in Sydney now. He and I had a meeting and he arrived to Australia by boat, and he was only 14 when he did. And that was the first time that there was a sense of an adventure or perspective that we hadn't heard before. And that started a whole new journey of learning what this journey does to a young person. And how do children actually deal with tragedy? And how does this morph childhood,

and that was the whole interrogation of the Children of the Sea work. And while we were making this work, we wanted to make sure that it was actually told by the children who had either lived experience or the second-generation children, and that was a six-month process that went around giving workshops, theatre workshops around Perth, and then boiling down to about five kids who are in the show, and tell the story of coming to Australia by boat from Indonesia. And it's about five nights journey and how they make it, and how their childhood morphs into something else.

Shaheen: Marziya, do you want to talk a little bit more, you sit more on the activist side of the conversation with Jay, but are also intimately involved in advocating for child refugees in particular. Do you want to talk a little bit about that, and some of your more recent experiences?

Marziya: I was doing activism before I knew what the word activism was, to be honest. You know, being involved in things that happen in Kenya, and then coming here, but sort of the actual step towards saying, this is what I want to do, and particularly around refugees was in 2013, when the offshore detention centres were reopened. The very first protest that I went to, was the really big one around that in Perth. And as someone who has used art, in particular, to mitigate experiences of really high anxiety, I took my camera along and discovered that when I was taking photos of what was going on, that was one way of dealing with my own issues, but also being involved and documenting how people were coming together to say, no, we don't want this to happen, this is not okay. And it was my introduction into how the power of activism can be used to draw attention to issues, to push certain narratives back into public consciousness that have been silenced. And I kind of went off on that track of being of becoming a protest photographer, and specifically taking photos at protests. Now, I'm quite familiar with the refugee narrative. I did mention in my previous talk, that my parents had experiences of displacement, so while I have not had that experience myself, if my parents did not get on a boat, I would not be here today, as simple as that.

Their experience was around the Indo Pakistan subcontinent. And specifically, the Bangladesh War of Independence. And, you know, even though the term refugee is not one that they necessarily identify with, the experiences are very, very similar. And so that's really impacted on my life. And it explains a lot about how I was brought up, the kind of stories I heard growing up, and how this now resonates with me in terms of looking at these stories, and it's still happening, people are still moving. And they were around the same age as the children and children of the sea. My parents, they were teenagers when they had this experience, but they didn't talk about it as much, because of all the trauma that they endured, that it was one of those things that came up from time to time. And it's really impacted on my knowledge around my own identity and my creative practice in wanting to help to amplify those voices that don't get heard. The ones that are silenced for whatever reason. So whether by putting them in detention centres that are placed deliberately where people can't access them, or, potentially not allowing media to report on things that are going on there. And that's really where I'm focusing a lot of my, I guess, installation art practice and other practices that I'm working on.

So in terms of children in particular, there was this campaign the kids out, all out campaign from kids on Nauru. But children are still in detention, even though they say they are no children in detention. And the biggest case that we know is the family that was taken from their homes in Biloela, three years ago, in fact, Friday was the third anniversary of that happening. And there are two children there. And one was just an infant when she was

taken. So, she's three now. And that's all she's known, detention. And so maybe later on I will actually play a clip from them. Because the two sisters are five and three and they are still in detention, and their families are being kept there as an example to, I guess, stop others, but stop others from what? Seeking safety from, you know, wanting a life for themselves and their families? And so, this is why there's so much push around that, to kind of acknowledge, and we hear so much all the time about how, you know, children are the ones who are the most silenced in the spaces. I want people to be able to actually hear their voices.

Shaheen: Lily and Jo, we had a beautiful morning downstairs in the courtyard with the two of you and your beautiful, beautiful narrative of perpetual arrival, you've taken a very specific and dark story and made it universal, made it one of perpetual arrival that all of us feel in some way, whether we've had these sort of direct refugee experiences or not. I'd love to hear how you arrived at your story.

Jo: Our entry is really specific into this world. And it began, Lily and I began a conversation in the middle of 2010, about creating a children's magazine that was for artists and children to disrupt hierarchies and, and it was really to do with art. About a month after we began that conversation on the 15th of December in 2010, there was a boat that crashed into the cliffs and on Christmas Island. And it was extremely significant moment, there were about 100 people on that boat, about 50 died, including nine children, four of whom were infants at the time.

This was a very visual experience for both of us. Lily was at the time living in Sydney, and I was living in Perth, so we had never actually had a face-to-face meeting about the magazine, it was all made online. So, this conversation happened through letters and emails. And when that boat crashed, the whole of the magazine kind of shifted, and it did become much more activist in its pursuit, particularly from Lily's perspective. I'm the daughter of a folk singer in Kenya and I grew up with my father building houses for people and we left when I was about five. That kind of informs the journey. Lily's journey is a very different one. And together where we've arrived, that moment really sparked something. By way of introduction, we're actually going to just read that initial email, which we haven't done before. We just found it, printed it out. It's 10 years old. So here we go.

Lily: I'll talk a little bit later about the years that led to this moment for me and the history that led to the kinds of questions that were raised on this night when this email exchange happened.

Dear Jo,

I write to you late in the night, commission almost finished, cramp in my wrist and uneasy in the cathode ray warmth. Tomorrow I'll take a piece of ink to paper to a framer who will press it behind glass before lunch. So it can be exchanged for \$1,000 and hung on a wall in a house full of food and unnecessary objects. At the same time elsewhere, there are children who are starving, or being raped, or thrown against the rocks on the edge of a country whose people think boats have legs and hearts not worth knowing.

Right now, while my baby sleeps on cool sheets and the rains fall, there are children crying and I can't bear the sound of them calling for help. And me sitting here with my privilege wrapped around my shoulders. Jo, I want to rise up in an unbridled furious rage and yell full force into the faces of presidents and policemen and bystanders. I don't want to be contained, rational, no- judgmental, politically correct, unemotional, intelligent,

non-argumentative, civilised, soundless or apologetic. There are children suffering. I want to scoop them up hundreds and 1000s of them into my arms, wrap them up from the cold, fan them from the heat, feed them from my body and stroke their little heads until they sleep safe.

I want to rip out the eyes of the perpetrators with my fists, howling to the sky yelling, until the women the mothers are standing with me their fists in the air and the ground shaking with the force of their stampeding yelling, bellowing, chanting, singing, shrieking, spitting thundering raging. Enough.

My pathetic attempts to do something are embarrassing. And yet I don't know what, where, how. I can't put Tyler on my hip and head out into an unknown somewhere following the weeping and cries of distress. That's not possible. I can't reach out my arms for the 1000s of little ones to crawl into. My arms are already full, with the life of one little girl. And yet I lie awake in the dark and my rage burns, the children, the children are suffering. I think about sending our birds into the detention centres. So little fingers can fold up one and press it into their pocket, maybe give some hope, or a connection to a possible life. I want to go there with a truckload of birds drawn by children playing on the beaches and fold them into Paper Planes, stand at the fences and send them over and over and over and over. So the ground is covered in birds and wings. And the wind can take them again and again into the air. But they will end up trampled and covered in Red Dust. I feel helpless. I've searched for years for way to do something that can make a difference. And even make a difference. Sounds pathetic. So, we make the kids magazine. Big is born. bravery, imagination and generosity. I say the words over and over and wonder how much of this it can hold.

Jo: And my response was,

Hello, Lily,

How to respond. That hurts my head. I know the children. Kath worked at the women's refuge for the last few years. I don't know even how to begin or how to start. But I know I can feel. My way in is to be with my own three children, to fold them in, to reel them out to the world, to listen, to respond with compassion, empathy and generosity. But it's an insular world we live in. I live in. I can't bear to look at the babies I see in such unstable circumstances. I am not such a political beast as you perhaps.

However, I've just left the news that I did marry for 10 years. And now I am a political beast. So how to stem the tide of Mario Brothers in my own boys' young, young worlds, to shift the face of what's acceptable, to integrate magic back into the conservative childhoods of my boys' friends. I start from right here and go out. It is an overwhelming task, but I do think the work will take us there. I believe that working can do so much, Big Kids Magazine won't reach the children smashed against the rocks and to write that makes me want to be sick.

Actually, I don't pretend, I am prepared for discoveries we go. I'm open to challenge and crisis, to new ways, to this whole new world. I just want to offer somehow a different paradigm in all streams because knowledge and experience will make it possible to see more openly and the shift will shift the wider populace. This is what I actually do believe. I won't leave my own children to save others. But if I can do both, I will. Small steps. I don't want to break and drown because the leak is too big. It's already so big.

And so, I start to think about the boat bird series, the travelling boat bird, something to do with boat birds.

One hundred thousand steps from home he'd carried his boat.

His head was flat and his heart full of too many days and too much water.

He was tired.

Finally at the edge of the ocean, they stood, the barnacles attached to their wings slid off one by one in a little procession, a fleet, a flotilla.

And from there boat bird was born. And that's how it all began. And it's about to be published in about two month's time. And just to say that that work of boat bird, originally did go out about seven years ago on the Caravan of Courage and was thrown over the walls and fences of detention centres. We kind of did get there for a moment.

Shaheen: Thank you both for sharing that incredibly intimate and compassionate correspondence. I think we all feel greater for it. And you have this knack of turning unbridled rage, the unbridled rage of a mother into something so incredibly beautiful.

Talk to us a little bit about what led you this morning, those beautiful moments in the sand as you read. Why was it so important? And I guess, all through In Visible Ink, we've talked to artists and makers and producers who have consistently taken this unbridled rage we feel that the state of the world and turned it into art and the most incredible expression and a place that we can meet.

Why is art so important in this journey? Shaun Nannup led us yesterday, in a session on cultural healing and he talked about art and song, and dance and language and story being the way we are going to communicate with each other these difficult truths. So why is art for you, the place you do this work?

Lily: I'll just give a tiny bit of background about the lead up to that moment when that email was sent. My mum was born two years after my grandmother was emancipated from Auschwitz. And two years later, they came to Australia on a boat and, and arrived in Australia with papers that identified them as stateless. They had no state, they were Jewish, so they weren't allowed to have citizenship in Poland where they had been born. And they arrived in Australia without a state. And I was born into a family where the trauma of the Holocaust was a very normal part of our lives. My grandfather would tell very, very, very graphic stories around the breakfast table about his experience in the Holocaust. And so I grew up, not really knowing that those stories were not a normal thing to grow into. And the biggest question for me as a young child was, how could people have let this happen? As I grew, I discovered that the Holocaust was not the only genocide, and that I was actually born in a country that had its own genocide. And so, as a child who had been saturated with stories of trauma, and really couldn't absorb much more, I think the question for me became, so what now?

And so the potential of ambiguous, poetic, emotional, flexible, open ended space to be able to sit with very, very complex and often divisive stories became increasingly and profoundly important.

Also, as someone who did not land in this world as someone who was going to be a doctor or, you know, to do a profession that was able to go to one of those places and do the things that I felt had value. I had always been an artist. And suddenly I recognised that there was something in those poetries and ambiguities and the beauty of a story that could be universal, that might make it possible for us to address those unspeakable things in a slightly different way.

And so, the birth of boat bird and my commitment to the importance of the arts in telling stories and in terms of social impact, sits across a much wider breadth, but certainly in terms of boat bird, and stories of displacement and diaspora and leaving home and losing ground.

It felt like the story of boat bird, tiny little naively drawn bird who carried a boat on their head, who had barnacles on their body that had grown from difficulty, those barnacles slid off into the ocean and became replenished and became turtles. And the idea that we might hand ink and hand cut tiny turtles that we might place into people's hands might make space for the telling and feeling of stories, of all our stories and of all our stories of displacement and of all our stories of coming home in a slightly different way, that for me made space within the epigenetics of my own kind of inherited trauma and the way that those stories might just keep increasing to the point where I couldn't contain them or tell them anymore, it might it might create an alternative to that.

Jo: I think I mean, pretty much dealing with kids in the commercial world, that they're attached to you know, as a young mother starting out, my baby, my firstborn is now just started at university himself this week, so it's been a long time since we began, but we just couldn't locate how to make it possible to have stories as part of children's narratives that were meaningful that, you know that you, you would go to go to the supermarket and get a magazine with a free thing that you then you had to go to Target or Kmart or somewhere for to pick up the plastic thing that went with it.

And, and we just couldn't, I couldn't believe that that's what, where we spend our money and time, and that's how we raise these kids, and everything's connected to a shop or you buy something and it still is, but how just if you offer this turtle, and even this morning in the tiniest child, when we put this little barnacle in their hands and, and it becomes something other, you know, these stories emerge differently. And conversations are then being able to be held differently across generations.

I think the intergenerational conversation is what we were most interested in provoking, that you can have conversations with children, and, you know, that is as meaningful as any other conversation and how that might change our perspectives, and what we can use as artists, and thinkers to ignite those ways of telling stories and being in the world a little differently.

Shaheen: And talk a little bit about the sand, because I was watching you tell this story, and you invited everyone to sit in the sand. And as you read, people were fidgeting and you know, in traditional practice at school, you had to sit really straight and not move and listen to the story. And if you moved, you'd get in trouble and you know, I wonder if that sort of given birth to this style of un receptivity to listening and learning. And you read so differently this morning, and you invited people to dig their feet in the sand and run the sand through

their fingers. And I felt like it was almost the story was going into their pores. I mean, Jo, you dance to tell stories, you know, what is it about movement that inspires us to receive more information?

Jo: I have been, in my new day job, desk job. I mean, you know, at a table in the School of Education. And I'm shocked by the kind of conservative drive that is still there that I did not expect would be their coming from WAAPA, coming from the arts. I could not believe that that's actually what is happening in 2021. I was really shocked.

So the idea that actually you learn by feeling things and that it's okay to fidget, to move to shift, to take in stories in other ways, I think is just, you know, it's like 101. I feel like that's a strange, I can't quite get the leap, how it's possible that, I understand that it was from, industrialization and that we were training for certain jobs. But now that does not exist, we don't live in that world anymore. So how to upend and to introduce that actually moving, being, talking and this kind of interaction can really make room for, for different conversations. So yes, that embodied learning, I think is connects back to the boats, and all of it.

Shaheen: And I sense you know, we are all at a point where we often talk about compassion fatigue, you know, we're all scrolling through our phones, and we're seeing stories, and it might be refugees dying at sea, and it might be refugees not being picked up. And we're just scrolling and we're scrolling and we're scrolling. We don't know how to receive the information and at a point, it just becomes too much.

And in fact, we then sort of, you know, internalise that hurt and throw it back out at each other in these very polarised political conversations. And I feel we need to take this debate back into the arts and to humanise it, and Jay throwing to you, watching Children of the Sea, apart from the fact that you know, I wept from beginning to end, it was this long, long journey that you took that played out with such humanity on stage and you took people out of weariness. Talk a little bit about the audience reaction to Children of the Sea, that space, that energy that was felt at the end of each show and what sort of, how you created it?

Jay: That's a big question. I guess it's all about balance, really. First of all, I think young people and children have an incredible sense of resilience, innocence, and also curiosity and adventure for life. And I think that energy, the vibration of childhood is what we kind of like we actually brought into the play.

Yes, children are in a tragedy, but at the same time we need to keep the hope to keep going forward, and to find a home because it's, they've just left their home behind. And there is this always this, when I was talking to people and interviewing children, especially, there is always the sense, we need to find a new home. And we're going to bring our family here.

And that hope is what has actually kept them going. And I think that's what kept the work going. But at the same time, as the audience, we realise that that isn't as easy as they think it is. And I think in that innocence, and our knowing this, our knowingness, I think that's where the tragedy was really of the work, that a dream might not never be fulfilled. And I think that is a powerful, powerful thing in there. Because it's been years, some of the children have grown up here, some of the children have sort of grown up in a detention and still living with that

dream, you know, and they have spent their entire childhood dreaming. And I guess, still care carrying the hope because there is nothing else. There is no other option.

Shaheen: I was just going to ask you to talk a bit about hope, because I think hope is the flip side. That's why we're all here and why we are committed, and you are committed as artists, are working through this kind of unbridled rage and injustice. How does your particular artistic practice, your photography, capture, and reflect hope? What hope is there in some of your work, can you talk to and then after that, I'd like everyone to, to comment on what your personal and societal hope from your work is.

Let's talk about hope, because this is the 20th anniversary of the children overboard crisis. The Tampa crisis, this period of time, August to October 2000, that sort of offset these, you know, human rights defying policy and, you know, pieces of legislation that have kind of determined our Border Protection Policy. Marziya tell me about hope, and then tell me about change.

Marziya: That's a big order. You know, tell you about hope. Look, I think, compassion fatigue is very real. And there have been moments where I've just gone, it's too much, we're not getting anywhere. And then what really brings me back is going back to who it is that I'm working with, and their stories, and even going back to my own story, and my family and my parents, and what they did, to get to a certain point.

My mum was more open about the stories as we were growing up, but my dad didn't actually share his exact experience of what it was like to get on a boat as a teenager, until I was about 27. We knew it had happened. It was always alluded to, but the actual story and it's horrifying, but at the same time, it's like, but you made it and not just made it, you helped other people make it. As a 15 year old, he would drive people to the docks to escape because his family was one of the few that had a car, he was under age, but you know, would do that, he helped other people. And he was 15. And, you know, he had to get on a boat, which was one of the last ones out of the city, the town he was living in. And, people were throwing lit torches at the boat to try and burn it.

And he survived and not just survived. He, he thrived beyond that. And I kind of come back to all of that, that there is hope in that sense that, you know, he's, he's still here today. He's gone through so much, but he's here today, and he's raised myself and my brother and you know, he's moved to accomplish that dream that the way you were saying, you know, have that family and, be there for people and I think I get a lot of that drive from him. Like my own personal drive comes from there, that you know, that there is always hope and then talking with people, learning more and, being witness to all of this, because there is so much devastation.

So much of my work does deal with, for example, death, you know, but then there's also so much that deals with life that, yes, this has happened, how do we work towards something that is going to, we can't make it unhappen, but how do we stop it from happening again?

I think that's one of the really key drivers in a lot of the artwork is to remind that we're not alone. One example that I'm thinking of is when I was taking photos around protests that were taking place, around what was happening in Gaza in 2014. And my photos were sent to someone who lived there. And who messaged me on Facebook saying, thank you, at least we know, people haven't forgotten us. And, you know, I just go, this is why

I'm doing this, this is the hope; that they're thinking, people haven't forgotten us, we are still here. And every time I feel like this is too much, what am I doing? Is this even having any impact whatsoever, I come back to messages like that.

In terms of any particular images or pieces, there's one picture, my most favourite pictures that I've ever taken. But it's the invisible stories that happen in protests that we don't necessarily see, or they're so hyper visible, that they become invisible, that people just go over them. And it's a picture of an activist, quite well known activist who, in the middle of an invasion day rally sat down on the stage in Forrest Chase, and started to nurse her child. And to her that's part of her protest, being in that space, knowing that just a few decades ago, she wouldn't have been allowed to be in that space, you know, she would have had to have a pass to even walk through that space. To be there to actually nourish that generation, the new generation, literally and figuratively, in that context, and what really clinched it, and you can't see this in the photo, but I think the mood still prevails, is that while she was doing this, the song They Took the Children Away was playing.

And it was just that whole moment of being in there, and talking about what happened, but then bringing up the new generation, giving them the tools to fight, giving them the tools to live, and to thrive is such an important thing. And this person is known as an activist, but she talks about how people don't necessarily know all the different parts of her and that image, encapsulate that she is an activist, she is a mother, she's, you know, she's all of these things in one go.

And it's probably my favourite photo that I've ever taken. But it's also one of the most hopeful photos I've ever taken, just because of capturing that moment, and no other photographer did. And other photographers did see that, but they felt uncomfortable, they felt like you know, is it voyeuristic? Is it appropriate for us to take a photo of someone nursing their child, and there's all these questions, but in that hyper visibility, she became invisible. And so, in that to being able to take that photo, and obviously I went up to her and said, you know, I've taken this photo, and we wanted to make sure that she's okay with it. But that's her favourite shot as well. Like she was very, very pleased, because she's saying it's one time where I felt like people are seeing all of me, not just one part of my life.

I think that that really speaks to why I'm doing this, and what was the hope, it's in those hidden moments that, you know, yes, you can have people going, you know, shouting on megaphones. And I take 10s and 1000s of images of that. But it's those small moments in between that really drive the protests, the invisible moments. Yeah, I think that's speaking to hope.

Lily: Hope and small moments, certainly small moments. I think I grew up aware that I had survived against all odds. There was a moment where my grandmother, sister, and mother and nieces were sent to the left and my grandmother was sent to the right and so because of that moment in time, she survived, and the rest of her family didn't. I was very aware of the, I guess, the hopefulness around and the responsibility around having survived. I think for me, hope is a verb. It's not something that I look towards in the future. Hope is micro actions and moments and recognitions now, and I'm just thinking now I wonder if that's why we've done so much work with tiny, tiny things, because I think the importance of slowing down, of noticing interactions of taking care of, of being aware of the smallest, unseen unacknowledged moments is enormously important. I

think for me, there is hope in the connection I might randomly have with someone at an event or a conversation that opens up a possibility. I think, for me, it's overwhelming to try to find hope, in places like refugee crisis and environmental crisis and those places, it feels thwarting. And I don't know that I will ever get the answer to the question. Why did no one do anything? Why are not enough people doing something in order for this to change? Why am I not doing enough in order for this to change? I think for me, there is something profoundly significant in the minuscule, micro, very sensitive, tiny moments of a hand carved paper turtle, and what that might make possible in feeling. And I think also, at times, I replace hope with love, because love is something that we can do now. And that's often not something that we talk about in our professional lives or in our social impact work or in our advocacy. But I think it's profoundly important thing to encounter and to exercise our muscles in that space.

Jo: I think hope is in the collective and in that it's collaborative, and that, even today, the kind of Zeitgeist movement of boats, that that all of our projects have ended independently arrived at this moment of folding these boats or creating boats in very different ways.

And that Shaheen, has kind of seen this, and I think ordinarily artists would potentially balk at that kind of Zeitgeist of being swept up in the tide of being one of millions of things, but in these cases, it feels like actually well, what if this flotilla can grow? And what if that can become something? What if we do say yes to the collective? What if we do say yes to being a little bit more humble or a bit more, you know, something, letting go of something.

Lily's been creating boats for since 1994, the first exhibition of 1000s of folded boats that were dipped in wax and then hidden under sand and all kinds of things happened. So that's a very long, long time ago and a long lineage of this boat folding that has now come into boat bird and how we fit with the practice of Marziya's way of these boats and with Jay's way of seing this kind of liminal space, you know, the, between; how we can make some small object potentially open up these conversations again. For me hope is in the collaborative, and it's also in, in sometimes a reverence, in just going actually, it's so heavy, it's so dark, these conversations are so deep. What if we can flip it a little bit? And what if it doesn't matter if the kids in the sandpit turn the thing upside down or turn it into a paper plane, like that, to me, that is great, you know, this idea that we have to be so reverent, I think can also stop things from moving forward. So you know, whether we can change the ways of communicating like that, I'm not sure but we'll try.

Shaheen: We've got half an hour left, I'd like to make some space for active hope, I would like to make some space for conversation, and we have two small activities that we'd like to invite you to participate in. Firstly, we have the boats, of course folding behind us.

We'd like you to take some time to grab a tea or coffee or water. We'd like you to think about what you've heard and to kind of fold that intention into the boat that you make and to take a pen and to write a hope or a feeling or a need for change or a sentiment or something you feel from listening to these amazing people talk about their work. We'd like to, we have been collecting these boats. We will continue to collect boats over the next six months, and we do intend to have a display of our collective hopes and in sort of, you know, intentions to commemorate to mark the 20th anniversary of border protection in Australia, the Tampa crisis later this year,

we will be popping back up in the WA Maritime Museum, in Fremantle Art Centre, your boats will be on display, and your boats will be worked on. And we will send the boats to a place where they are needed. We'd like to invite you to participate in that activity, to talk to the panel and to talk to each other.

I'd like to hand the mic to Marziya to end this part of the panel with a sort of collective intention, hand over to you to explain what you're going to do and I'll be on hand to record it.

Marziya: So, when you're talking about hope and talking about collective, I mentioned the family that was taken from Biloela and are still on Christmas Island with two young children. On Friday morning, I received a recording of the two children singing the little one's favourite song Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star and this song. It's a nursery rhyme but it's actually become a song of protest in its own way because of its importance to Tharunica, the little girl, activists have been singing this at events and at vigils. And it's been recorded and sent to the children as a message that, we hear you and we are singing in solidarity with you.

And what I would like to invite people to do is, I'm going to play the clip, and then I would really like people to also sing along with it and that will be recorded and we'll send that clip to them on Christmas Island as a reminder that they're not forgotten, but also it's such a universal song everyone knows it no matter where you're from, so I'm just going to play that and then I would like you to also sing once that's played.

(song plays)