

Resolution of Council

27 October 2025

Item 3.1

Vale Fiona Winning

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

Australia's artistic community was greatly saddened by the passing of arts leader and creative producer Fiona Winning on 22 August 2025.

Fiona forged her arts practice in Brisbane's independent theatre scene, working with 2 street theatre companies: the Popular Theatre Troupe, agitprop ensemble, and the Street Arts Community Theatre Company. In the early 1990s, she relocated to Sydney, becoming artistic director of Death Defying Theatre, where she pioneered an era of socially engaged arts development. This led to its evolving into Urban Theatre Projects, now a national leader at the forefront of site-specific, community-centred, contemporary performance making. Projects undertaken during her tenure included Trackwork, a large-scale performance on trains and platforms across Western Sydney.

During the 1990s she also directed and wrote for projects such as Don't Die on Friday for the Queensland Nurses Union, Kin Tucka Tiddas for Ngoroe-Kah Aboriginal Theatre Company, and Say It Out Loud for women in the Hunter region, and worked as a dramaturg, lecturer, consultant and facilitator.

Her strong community focus continued in subsequent leadership roles with many prominent Sydney arts organisations, including PACT Centre for Emerging Artists and as Director of Performance Space from 1999 to 2008. At Performance Space, Fiona oversaw its transition to Carriageworks and the launch of the inaugural LiveWorks festival. Equally important was her work in nurturing and mentoring a generation of artists at the cutting edge of interdisciplinary and experimental performance practice, and a generation of resourceful, purposeful producers and arts workers.

After Performance Space, Fiona established her own arts consultancy and worked as a programming consultant for the Bundanon Trust, co-curating Siteworks – a conversation between artists, environmentalists and scholars. She was also an artist in residence, creating a solo performance drawing on published and unpublished texts from her personal archive.

In 2012, Fiona was appointed Head of Programming at the Sydney Festival, a role she held until 2017 when she was appointed Director of Programming at Sydney Opera House. In these roles she championed artists who sat outside of the mainstream, and work that gave voice to the often unheard.

Her visionary Opera House programs saw Sydney's more unique, experimental, marginalised and under-represented artists elevated and celebrated in Australia's greatest performance venue. Her signature event for the Opera House's 50th anniversary was a loving embrace of the contemporary, diverse communities of Sydney rather than venerating European masters of the past. *What is the City but the People?* saw local community members, some notorious, others unknown, along with volunteers, local leaders, story tellers and survivors, invited to walk a giant catwalk in front of the Opera House, cheered by a crowd of onlookers. This humble spectacle was described by some as being as "beautiful as the Opera House's great sails" and illustrated Fiona's approach to art making – for, about and by the people.

During her career Fiona served on many boards, committees and panels, including the then Australia Council's Theatre Board, Accessible Arts, Performing Lines, Critical Path, ReelDance, AsiaLink, Ensemble Offspring, OMEO Dance, Live Performance Australia, the NSW Ministry for the Arts, the Queensland Community Arts Network and the City's own Cultural and Creative Advisory Panel from 2022 to 2024.

Whether as a leader or a collaborator, Fiona was responsible for some of Australia's most enduring and impactful artist development programs: Time_Place_Space, Mobile States and Breathing Space; and establishing the Pacific Wave Festival, Liveworks Festival and cLUB bENT. A legacy etched deep in Sydney's cultural memory.

Fiona's passing was met by dozens of tributes from across Australia's cultural sector, with people sharing their stories of Fiona's influence on arts projects, arts organisations and artists' careers and lives. They remember her as a person who always led with kindness, was always aware of the voices not in the room and who found ways to include them. She was described as someone who delighted in amplifying the power of others, who challenged boundaries while demonstrating enormous patience in the face of bureaucracy, and always knew how to find the fun.

On Monday, 13 October 2025, hundreds of artists, arts workers, and representatives from all levels of government gathered in the Joan Sutherland Theatre at the Sydney Opera House to pay tribute to Fiona's achievements. The memorial included performances by William Barton, Angela Goh and Ensemble Offspring, and reflections on Fiona's unwavering nurturance of our artistic community and culture. A life's work for which we are very grateful.

THE RT HON CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor of Sydney

Moved by the Chair (the Deputy Lord Mayor), seconded by Councillor Arkins –

It is resolved that:

- (A) all persons attending this meeting of Council observe one minute's silence to commemorate the life of Fiona Winning and the significant contribution to Australia's arts community as a cultural leader, creative practitioner and producer and valued mentor;
- (B) Council express its condolences to Fiona's partner, Harley Stumm; and
- (C) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to Harley Stumm to convey Council's condolences.

Carried unanimously.

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Note – all Councillors, staff and members of the public present stood in silence for one minute as a mark of respect to Fiona Winning.