

## Beginnings - LECTURE GALLERY (Room overview)

The Galleries have black painted walls and dark grey tiled floors. The Theme of Beginnings is explored in the Lecture Gallery. The entrance to the Lecture Gallery has a number of soft grey coloured ropes suspended from curved black metal shapes attached to the ceiling, the ropes are of different lengths and hang like curtains dropping to floor level forming multiple archways like a rope tunnel that leads into the space. Emerging from the rope tunnel, the name of the exhibition is projected onto the black tiled floor, it's delicate uppercase yellow font reads: FOREVER. The letter 'O' is slightly stretched or widened in comparison to the other letters.

To your left and right are two identical curved grey rope curtains that separate the areas within the gallery space and encircle the space holding the first exhibit which is a series of four sculptures by South Australian artist Peter Syndicas. The sculptures are three-dimensional forms made of Stromatolites; they show our biochemical beginnings. Each of the artworks sits upon its own round plinth. The plinths are black, they vary in height and there is with some signage on them.

On the right is a **DIGITAL SIGNAGE BOX** Yellow text on black reads:

*When do we begin?*

Below is a still image of the upper part of the *Forever* exhibition logo, which features concentric multi-coloured rings within a circle and rays against a black void. This series of radiating circles in shades of blue and pinks overlap with short straight bursts of colour in grey, silver, yellow, green, blue, pink and orange that dart towards a low focal point on the circle from around the perimeter of the black space.

Beneath the image, white text on black reads:

*Does forever have a start or finish? Where do we begin and end?*

*For a long time humans have been searching for the meaning of the world and our place in it.*

*Examining our genetic code, neural networks, and shared stories, helps us understand our place within the vastness and continuity of time.*

The hanging rope curtains guide us to the left, south facing wall.

Above this exhibit, large white wall text asks:

*Where do we begin?*

Below is a 2-metre-high curved black wall that stretches across the 3-metre space. It is illuminated with a series of short looping animations that explore the blurry lines of our consciousness and how this helps us to create meaning. When does consciousness begin? And where do we go when we are not conscious? An accompanying soundbite from neuroscientist Associate Professor Lyndsey Collins-Praino accompanies these looping animations to provide additional context.

Opposite and to the north is the third exhibit in this gallery. The rope curtain changes subtly to an orange colour as it wraps behind and around a random weave sculpture by Artist Sonya Rankine which hangs from the ceiling. Below the sculpture is a tabletop screen which displays video showing her creating this object and discussing the weaving process.

Alongside is an Interactive weaving activity station, a round table and five small triangular stools, materials for the activity are available on the wooden stand to the east.

### **Website Text:**

How did we come into being, and where do we begin and end? These timeless questions drive our search for meaning, individually and collectively.

In this gallery, we explore the origins of life, consciousness, and what connects us to one another.

Our DNA, a code passed down through billions of years, links us to the earliest life on Earth like Stromatolites. These 560-million year old fossilised life-forms have been sculpted for display by Artist Peter Syndicas.

Our brains help us understand how we see and experience the world, but they also leave many aspects unexplained. Neuroscience can offer insight into how our brains work. But questions like 'where does consciousness truly begin?', and 'does consciousness peak and fade?' remain just out of grasp.

Culturally, we interpret the world through language, stories, and technology. Our objects can tell this story of connection through generations. In our space we invite you to participate in the creation of a random weave object in line with Ngarrindjeri, Ngadjuri, Narungga & Wirangu Artist Sonya Rankine's practice.

Examining our genetic code, neural networks, and shared stories, helps us understand our place within the vastness of time and the continuity that links us across the ages.

#### Artwork highlight (Complex artwork)

The group of four Stromatolite sculptures by artist Peter Syndicas are smooth, solid pieces of ancient rock that invite touch. On the top of the plinths in contour cut white lettering curved around each sculpture is the following text:

*You are looking at rocks that were once alive.*

*These are stromatolites from South Australia, the fossil remains of ancient microbial reefs.*

*We share similarities in key genes with these early life forms.*

*The way we encode meaning on a biochemical scale has been shared across billions of years.*

On the lowest or front plinth is *Life Form #3*. It is the tallest of the forms, tree like with three sections that branch from a central stand or trunk, the thick limbs end in a flat cut off fashion as if sawn off.

On the left plinth, *Life Form #1* is shaped a little like body parts, it is smoothly curved and has a bit of red colouring.

On the right is *Life Form #5* which balances on a smaller base, it has a greenish colour.

On the tallest plinth at the back of the group is a sculpture that allows us to feel the difference between the highly polished surface of the finished sculptures and the bare rock in its natural form.

This is a roughly triangular shaped stromatolite with a flat, angled polished front surface. The surfaces of the rocks are covered in small concentric circles and occasional straight pale lines that run through the rock. The back of this piece is rough by comparison with the finished sculptures, and you may be able to feel the ridges of the bare rock and some indentations that show where some of the small circular shaped material has fallen away.

On round bubble labels on the side of the back plinth, text reads:

*This collection of sculptures were created by artist Peter Syndicas from stromatolites estimated to be between 500 - 750 million years old.*

*On this plinth is an example of a stromatolite before it is carved and polished.*

*Stromatolites were the first living things to use sunlight to make energy over 2 billion years ago. This boosted the level of oxygen in the Earth's atmosphere, leading to the evolution of completely new forms of life.*

*These sculptures can be lightly touched.*

### **Delve deeper: Biochemical beginnings**

Stromatolites are evidence of some of the earliest forms of life on earth. Even though they are billions of years old we share similarities in key genes with these fossilised remains.

Stromatolites formed from cyanobacteria, a type of blue-green algae that evolved about 2.7 billion years ago. These tiny organisms were the first to use sunlight to produce energy, releasing oxygen as a byproduct. Over millions of years this process changed the Earth's atmosphere allowing new forms of life to evolve.

To create the fossilised remains we find today, layers upon layers of these cyanobacteria formed 'reefs'.

### **Artwork highlight (Complex artwork)**

On the left of the gallery against the south wall is a high curved black display. Across its surface is a graphic of meandering blue lines, that have occasional small circular shapes or nodes along their length, and link with round portholes featuring inset screens. Nine of these show short looping animations that explore the themes '*Where does consciousness begin?*' and '*How does it help us make meaning of our experiences?*' These two questions appear in large white text on blue and purple edged circles in the display.

The animations are simple linework in black and white on a coloured background. Close to each circular screen, is text that poses further questions relevant to that animation. In the largest of the round porthole like circles on the left of the display, is the animation that accompanies a soundbite from neuroscientist Associate Professor Lyndsey Collins-Praino. The background is red, and the animation begins with the drawing of a brain, that spins in a shaft of pale red light. The pictures illustrate the words we hear, they show a small figure with a large head and tiny arms and legs, who is joined by a small fish and later by other small figures and jigsaw puzzle shapes. Above this animation is the white text '*What is consciousness?*'.

The next query is '*How do I do things I'm not conscious of?*' Here a green coloured animation shows a walking figure that is like a brain on legs, with a sweet face, large

eyes and a small mouth. White text above the animation reads, *'Many things your body does unconsciously, like control your heart or breathing rate, to more complicated actions like walking or driving.'*

On the left is a blue circle that reads *'Where does consciousness come from?'* In this sequence a petri dish of cells multiplies, and we follow its growth on random days from Day 1 to Day 40. *Images: Centre for Cancer Research Uni SA. This is a brain organoid, a 'mini-brain' grown in a lab that can speed up drug discovery.*

The line to the right asks *'Where does consciousness start?'* This prompt shows a yellow animation of a small baby sucking a dummy. The baby wears a set of black earphones and black musical notes flow from the headset to the outer edges of the circle as the baby floats up and down. White text with the animation reads, *'Some evidence suggests we are conscious before we are even born, babies can remember music they heard in the womb.'*

Another prompt asks *'Could a clump of cells become a conscious brain?'* Inside this porthole a blue circle surrounds a black and white image of a neural network, the animation zooms slowly in and out. The veins of the nerves appear like the branches and roots of a tree. *Image credit: Google Research and Harvard University. Text reads, 'Brain connections are critical to consciousness. This is a single neuron showing 5,600 nerve fibres that connect to it.'*

To the upper right the next question is *'Can we alter our states of consciousness?'* Here in a green circle our animated figure meditates in a yoga pose, eyes closed, lips smiling, fingers closed in a mudra of thumb touching forefinger. Legs crossed, the figure levitates up and down in the air. White text reads *'A 2024 survey found 4 in 10 adults have experienced an altered state of consciousness through practises like meditation - without using drugs.'*

The next circle asks *'Are dreams conscious experiences?'* A pink animation shows our sleeping figure dreaming of flying. A thought bubble shows our dream figure with outstretched limbs flying buoyantly against a moving background of white fluffy clouds. White text reads *'Some areas of the brain associated with consciousness are quite active when dreaming, while others show reduced activity. This helps explain why dreams feel real but lack aspects of waking consciousness.'*

Another circle asks *'Am I conscious when I am asleep?'* This shows two brain wave patterns with Image credits: Cognitive Neuroscience Laboratory – Uni SA. The first image shows quite regular zigzag lines across the screen, white text reads *'Your brain maintains awareness of your surroundings even during sleep.'* The second image highlights a deep drop and steep rise in the line, with a blue oval highlighting the zone, white text reads *'The K-complex is your sleeping brains way of suppressing information that comes in while you're asleep - to keep you asleep.'*

A final circle asks, *'Where does my consciousness go when I am anesthetized?'* In this last yellow animation, our little buddy goes on holiday! They wear a wide brimmed hat, large sunglasses and sip a drink from a coconut shell. They lean back on an inflated tube and the animation shows ripples in the water and changing reflections across the sunglasses. White text reads *'It doesn't really go anywhere, it stops being organised and integrated like it is in normal waking life.'*

#### Artwork highlight (Complex artwork)

Suspended from the ceiling in the gallery space, is a 3D irregular shaped, woven mass, made from *Ghania filum* plant and copper wire. The mass is hollow, allowing the viewer to see through the object, as it casts gentle dappled light.

A circular plinth with an oval screen plays a film: a woman's slender hands, skillfully separate strands of reeds and dried plant strands.

A text bubble reads: *Culture is what gives us shared meaning and connects us. Objects can tell the story of connection through generations.*

Another text bubble reads: *The artwork above you is ALL is Connected, by Ngarrindjeri, Ngadjuri, Narungga & Wirangu Artist Sonya Rankine.*

A third text bubble says: *Here she used Gahnia filum plant collected on Narungga country and copper wire. The Gahnia filum is a plant Narungga people used for making string, fishing lines and fishing nets. These materials are combined with the contemporary method of random weave.*

#### WEBSITE TEXT - Culture

We don't just exist as brains in jars, we need culture to shape us as well. We understand the world through culture, language, stories, technologies. These start before our individual existence and extend past us. Culture is one of the enduring "superpowers" of human beings to make meaning from our world and each other. Culture is what gives us meaning together and connects us.

We wanted to explore the concept of making meaning through culture with Ngarrindjeri, Ngadjuri, Narungga & Wirangu Artist Sonya Rankine, who specialises in weaving. Her practice combines traditional materials with contemporary methods like random weave. Her woven object hangs in the gallery space. As an extension, we ask visitors to engage in their own act of weaving, their own act of marking a beginning.

*How do we share meaning?*

To your right are two freestanding wall panels which read *Connected through Weaving*, with pictorial instructions on how to learn to weave. Please help yourself to

the provided material to experience weaving for connection. There is a small table with wooden chairs for your comfort.

If you require assistance, please seek a moderator.

#### WHERE TO NEXT?

This concludes the audio description track for “Beginnings” in the Lecture Gallery, by Access2Arts for MOD. Exit through the door to the south and turn left to the UNIVERSAL Gallery where you will find the “Time” exhibit.