RED ROOM POETRY



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

same colour as ruin
as in take them from home
as in run songline to dust
same colour as ochre
as in deep within marrow
as in tied to umbilical
same colour as ocean
as in expanse to anchor
as in whisper to shore
same colour as silence
as in connective tissue
as in language body
same colour as sacred
as in name only you know
as in calling from bone
as in never going away again
as in never being taken
as in returning
to you

~ 'a song you can't unsing' by Lucy Norton, commissioned for Poetry Month

# CONTENTS


| | |
|---|---|
| Our Story | 02 |
| From our Chair | 04 |
| From our CEO | 05 |
| From our Artistic Directors | 06 |
| 2024 Key Achievements | 08 |
| Our Poets | 10 |
| Our Program | 12 |
| Baraya Barray - Whale Song | 12 |
| Poetry Month | 14 |
| Contains Strong Language | 16 |
| Poem Forest | 18 |
| Mad Poetry | 20 |
| Writing In Resistance | 21 |
| Woven Anthology | 21 |
| Other Projects | 22 |
| Artist Development | 24 |
| Red Room Fellowship | 25 |
| Emerging Poets Residency | 25 |
| Creative Education | 26 |
| Social Impact | 27 |
| Audience Development | 28 |
| Our Team | 29 |
| Our Supporters | 30 |
| Our Partners And Collaborators | 31 |
| Financials | 32 |


**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

*Red Room Poetry acknowledges the Elders and Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters, skies and languages where we live, work, write and share poetry. We are grateful to collaborate with First Nations people, and respect their continuing cultures as we move across Country.*

*Our First Nations Wisdom Circle and Truth & Reconciliation Pledge guide us in our work.*

Opposite: Aunty Lauren Chapman and Aunty Christine Finney, Baraya Barray - Whale Song. Photo by Tad Souden.

Cover: Baraya Barray - Whale Song workshop. Photo by Tad Souden.





Hani Abdile, Contains Strong Language.
Photo by Tawfik Elgazzar.

# OUR STORY

> You will make a life here,
> but it will not be yours.
> Your daughter will never consider this truth
> until one day, at the edge of the ocean,
> she will sense its vastness.
>
> ~ Lang Leav, from 'A Letter to my Mother at Immigration', commissioned for Poetry Month

Red Room Poetry is Australia's leading organisation for commissioning, creating, publishing, performing and promoting contemporary poetry in all its forms. We aim to make poetry vibrant, relevant and accessible for all.

Our program is available for everyone. We amplify First Nations voices, emerging and developing poets, and collaborate with communities to make positive change through educational, environmental, mental health and refugee programs.

We present live poetry performances in every state and territory, and offer forums and workshops online, mostly for free.

Over twenty years, we have produced hundreds of poetry events, published over 35,000 poems, helped launch the careers of several generations of writers, commissioned and paid well over a thousand poets, engaged over 200,000 students, and developed the world's largest library of contemporary Australian poetry.

You can meet our poets and read their poems any time at **redroompoetry.org**

# FROM OUR CHAIR


Photo by Tawfik Elgazzar

2024 was a momentous year for Red Room and for Australian poetry. In a unique partnership with the ABC and BBC, Red Room brought the BBC's Contains Strong Language poetry festival to Australia.

As curator and producer of the events, Red Room — and the poets we enlisted — reached 5.5 million people in the UK, hundreds of thousands in Australia through ABC Radio National, and (astonishingly, according to the BBC's own reporting) an estimated 80 million globally through the power of the BBC World Service.

For Red Room, Contains Strong Language wasn't just a one-off event, but a culmination of our many partnerships and programs. Poets and organisations who we work with across Poetry Month, Poem Forest, Baraya Barray - Whale Song, MAD Poetry and our Red Room Fellowships all took part.

We were also very proud to deepen our community and educational work with the launch of Baraya Barray - Whale Song — a major three-year project, led by our First Nations team with the guidance of our Wisdom Circle. Over three years (2024-2026), the workshops will engage hundreds of First Nations children and communities to create songs and poems in response to the migration of humpback whales between Lutruwita (TAS) and the Bundjalung & Yugambeh (QLD) coast.

There are many supporters and partners to thank for these achievements. The generosity of the Australian Office for the Arts and British Council enabled Contains Strong Language to take place, and Oranges & Sardines and the Australian Government's Indigenous Languages & Arts program came on board to ensure the sustainability of Baraya Barray - Whale Song over the next three years.

Of course, nothing we do is possible without our long-term supporters, our dedicated board, and Red Room's inspiring team. I thank them for making it all happen.

**Hon. MA Pembroke**

***Being part of Contains Strong Language felt like being part of a momentous and crucial time in Australian poetry and poetry in the English-speaking world, hearing and reading powerful work from the front lines and the fault lines of poetry, being moved and challenged by the strength of words. An experience I've taken home with me and taken to heart.***

~ Simon Armitage, UK Poet Laureate



# FROM OUR CEO

2024 was my first year as CEO of Red Room. Looking back, there are so many highlights to choose from. The privilege of joining our Baraya Barray - Whale Song workshops in Shellharbour, for instance, where First Nations Elders shared knowledge with students who, in turn, shared the poems and songs they were inspired to create. Or watching Sara Mansour, DOBBY and other Western Sydney poets broadcasting from the Riverside Theatres, Parramatta, to tens of thousands of people during BBC Contains Strong Language. Or seeing some of our youngest poets bravely reading their work at the Poem Forest awards ceremony on the shore of Lake Illawarra.

We continue to chart our performance through Culture Counts, an invaluable resource that consults poets, participants and audiences throughout the year. Red Room is recognised for its ability to increase the profile of Australian poetry (98% agreed), supporting a dynamic sector that is diverse and inclusive (98%) and enabling risk taking and experimentation in poetry (97%). Amplification, inclusivity and risk-taking. These qualities are at the core of our mission and it is a thrill to know we are delivering.

As for previous years, we finished 2024 with a modest surplus, enabling us to build our reserves. Poetry is a long game, even when the outputs fit on a single page, and we intend to be here to fire the creativity of many generations of poets to come.

This financial sustainability would not be possible without the bedrock support of Creative Australia and Create NSW, as well as the generous commitment of Oranges & Sardines, Bret Walker AO SC, and our wide circle of donors and partners. On behalf of all of us at Red Room, I thank these individuals and organisations from the bottom of my heart.

Red Room is supported by a board of engaged and experienced directors, and by our Wisdom Circle, who guide us on our journey through Australia's many cultures and languages. I am grateful to them all for the support they give us.

I also want to thank the Red Room team. Not only are they (nearly) all practicing poets, but versatile producers and administrators, who give equal time and dedication to every child we engage in a workshop as they do to millions of listeners through our broadcast partnerships. That breadth of activity seems to me precious and rare, particularly in an organisation of Red Room's (small, but beautiful) size. I learn from them every day.

**Jonty Claypole MBE**


Photo by Matt Burlem

***Sweatshop Literacy Movement owes much of its ongoing success and achievements to the wonderful collaborations and dreams we've shared with our sibling organisation, Red Room Poetry…Australian poetry would look very different, and far less inspiring, were it not for the incredible contributions of our dear friends at Red Room Poetry.***

~ Dr Michael Mohammed Ahmad, Director Sweatshop, CSL partner



# FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

we move on
not forward
trying to pick up pieces
also leaving some behind

~ Dominic Guerrera from 'cycle' commissioned for Poetry Month

Photo by Teschka

Reflecting on our first year as Artistic Directors, the first thing we want to express is deep gratitude to be entrusted with these roles and getting to lead the kind of expansive, accessible, daring, and at times intimate project work that Red Room Poetry delivers. Across 2024, Red Room Poetry has continued to thrive, driven by a mission to commission exciting work, engage new audiences, and create collaborative poetic projects with a wide range of partners. We continue to prioritise the presentation of varied perspectives in all our programs and believe in the power of poetry to foster solidarity and change, and respond directly to an ever-evolving and challenging world.

We are proud of the work Red Room has achieved this year, specifically through our strong underlying relationships with artists and arts organisations both here and across the ocean. Poetry Month grew new wings in its fourth iteration, including another sold-out Gala event. We also hosted the BBC's Contains Strong Language festival, which successfully showcased the power and possibility of Australian poetry to millions of people. We are honoured to have provided such a platform for marginalised and underrepresented voices, ensuring their stories are heard and amplified beyond these shores.

Similarly, the Baraya Barray - Whale Song project continued its collaborative work in connecting intergenerational knowledge-sharing of cultural songlines with communities on the east coast, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the rich teachings of our First Nations stories, people and Country through Elders, Custodians and future storyholders.

This year also saw us deliver another hugely successful Poem Forest with thousands of entries from students across the country; ekphrastic commissions with major galleries; experimental digital co-writing and audio phone projects; increased online and accessible workshops; new poetry learning resources; and the evolution of our flagship Fellowship to host multiple poets at Varuna the National Writers' House.

At a time of increasing censorship and the erasure of certain voices, the importance of backing the diverse range of artists we engage with — and the work they make — is as central as it has ever been to our roles as artistic leaders. Ensuring freedom of expression and solidarity with the communities we work with, as well as maintaining the independence of curatorial and programming decisions, all sit at the heart of safe cultural spaces and contribute to a greater sense of social cohesion.

Our commitment to our communities ripples through our work, guided by our First Nations Wisdom Circle, our Truth and Reconciliation Pledge, partnerships and the poets we serve. We encourage you to spend some time immersing yourself in the breadth of expression and experiences via our 2024 commissions and trust this will inspire conversation and an increased sense of connection to something bigger beyond the limits of a screen.

***Poetry is the first point of contact for Indigenous writers and writers from marginalised backgrounds. Red Room Poetry fosters and centres oral storytelling within the Australian literary scene.***

~ Winnie Dunn, Sweatshop General Manager



Photo by Tawfik Elgazzar

# 2024 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

**80M**

listeners globally



**14,621**

participants in online and live workshops, events and competitions

**471,887**

people reached through media partnerships and online platforms

**94%**

of survey respondents reported a good or excellent experience with Red Room's program and events.

**Poem library >** redroompoetry.org/poems/



**60**

partner collaborations

**3,018**

downloads of learning resources

**36**

creative learning workshops delivered



**107**

new poems commissioned and published



**293**

First Nations students, Elders, custodians and poets involved across projects



**215**

Poets and artists paid, performing and engaged

**5,400**

Student poems from 800+ schools for Poem Forest



# OUR POETS

Hani Abdile
Juran Adams
Christine Afoa
Sela Ahosivi-Atiola
Claire Albrecht
Victoria Alondra
Princess Arinola Adegbite
Simon Armitage
Mohammad Awad
Julia Baird
Timmah Ball
Ella Bancroft
Damien Becker
Tamryn Bennett
Pooja Biswas
Lyndon Blue
Merlinda Bobis
Bradley Bradley
Rudi Bremer
Pam Brown
Daniel Browning
Pascalle Burton
Kirk Cadiz
Shankari Chandran
Aunty Lauren Chapman Carpenter
Luoyang Chen
Grace Chia
Eileen Chong
David Clarke
Ali Cobby Eckermann
James Colley
Emilie Collyer
Jennifer Compton
Cooee
Brendan Cowell

Ivan Coyote
Rico Craig
Carody Culver
Freya Daly Sadgrove
Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon
Aida Darabi
Aloma Davis
Devaura
Didirri
Jelena Dinić
DOBBY
Lucy Dougan
Willo Drummond
Mary-Jane Duffy
Jonathan Dunk
Winnie Dunn
Kate Durbin
Marita Dyson
Robin M. Eames
Farz Edraki
Jodi Edwards
Sophie Edwards
Chloe Alison Escott
Natalia Figueroa Barroso
Toby Fitch
Warren Ngarrae Foster
Kat François
Helen Franzmann
Zenobia Frost
Aries Gacutan
Andrew Galan
Arantza Garcia
Rani Ghazzaoui
Ian Gibbins
Mindy Gill
Setayesh Golshani

Doug Graham
Phoebe Grainer
Dave Graney
Kerry Greer
Alice Grundy
Dominic Guerrera
Patrick Gunasekera
Adam Hadley
Jaala Hallett
K.J. Hayward
Grace Heyer
Dan Hogan
Sonya Holowell
Lulu Houdini
Hasib Hourani
Defne Huzmeli
Chika Ikogwe
Intwari
Holly Isemonger
Eleanor Jackson
Anna Jacobson
Ella Jeffery
Gareth Jenkins
Rebecca Jessen
Gabrielle Journey Jones
Lakshmi Kanchi
Aamani Kanda
Paul Kelly
Sara Kianga Judge
Tim Kinsella
Raelee Lancaster
Klare Lanson
Tyberius Larking
Hau Latukefu
Jacinta Le Plastrier
Nam Le

Jeanine Leane
Lang Leav
Cheryl Leavy
Kelly Lee Hickey
Patrick Lenton
Luka Lesson
Nyaluak Leth
Bella Li
Liliane Lijn
Kate Lilley
Rozanna Lilley
L-FRESH The LION
Elizabeth Luland
Cass Lynch
Caitlin Maling
Sara Mansour
Mark Mariano
Yleia Mariano
Joseph Matthews
Laurie May
Chloe Mayne
Teena McCarthy
Laura Jean McKay
Andrew McLellan
Ian McMillan
Mitch McTaggart
Kate Middleton
Heather Mitchell
Michael Mohammed Ahmad
Elijah Money
Jazz Money
Aunty Kerry Bulloojeeno
Archibald Moran
Adrian Mouhajer
Lorna Munro
Melanie Mununggurr
Sawako Nakayasu

Asha Naznin
Amelia Neylon
Aunty Barbara Nicholson
Maddie Nixon
Lucy Norton
Damen O'Brien
Bebe Oliver
Jules Orcullo
Laura Panopoulos
Gemma Parker
Luke Patterson
Felicity Plunkett
Jacob Polley
Wallis Prophet
Vidya Rajan
Daley Rangi
Kathryn Reese
Aunty Anjilkurri Rhonda Radley
Tikari Rigney
Wilfred Roach
Sue Roberts
Izzy Roberts-Orr
Aunty Robin Young
Clement Rukundo
Mike Russell
Fig Russon-Jorgensen
Trevor Ryan
Jacqueline Ryan
Theresa Sainty
Omar Sakr
Sara Saleh
Ben Salter
Aunty Joyce Saunders
Kirli Saunders
Joseph 'Butch' Schwarzkopf Jnr.

Brooke Scobie
Sandra Selig
Katie Shammas
Nathan Shepherdson
Elfie Shiosaki
Nicole Smede
Jonathan Sriranganathan
Waverley Stanley Jnr.
David Stavanger
Svetlana Sterlin
Father Stretch My Dad
Zainab Syed
Snack Syndicate (Andrew Brooks + Astrid Lorange)
Taitu'uga
Anne-Marie Te Whiu
Jeet Thayil
Tayi Tibble
Daniel J Townsend
Thabani Tshuma
Ellen van Neerven
Dylan Van Den Berg
Rob Waters
Gary Watling
Jen Webb
Kaitlen Wellington
Arlea Whelan
Moran Wiesel
Jessica Wilkinson
Misbah Wolf
Emily XYZ
Joanna Yang
Hodan Yasin
Grace Yee
Manal Younus
Ouyang Yu
Zohab Zee Khan

**Poets and poems >** redroompoetry.org/poets



# BARAYA BARRAY - WHALE SONG

In 2024, Red Room launched Baraya Barray (*Sing Country*) - Whale Song, a ground-breaking, three-year program for First Nations school children and communities, interweaving language, Country, culture and art. The program journeys to east-coast communities in celebration of saltwater songlines, following the migration of humpback whales from Lutruwita (TAS) and the Bundjalung & Yugambeh (QLD) coast.

Baraya Barray - Whale Song invites intergenerational knowledge-sharing, connecting First Nations children to their traditional language and cultural stories. Students learn from, and connect to, Community Elders and Custodians, First Nations artists, scientists and conservationists in on-Country, face-to-face workshops.

In 2024, Red Room delivered five three-day workshops across Yuin, Wodi Wodi and Dharawal lands in three language groups — Dhurga, Gumea Dharawal and Dharawal — with important cultural partnerships formed and nurtured, including Aboriginal women's health organisation Waminda, Coomaditchie Aboriginal Arts Corporation, University of Wollongong - ANCORs, and local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (AECGs).

Hundreds of poems, as well as new whale dances and songs, were created and shared.

***I felt that this was an amazing opportunity for young Aboriginal students to get in touch with their creativity and express themselves.***

~ Custodian Participant, Baraya Barray - Whale Song

***This program made me feel great about our Aboriginal culture. There is nothing I would change - maybe to learn more language and different dances.***

~ Student, Baraya Barray - Whale Song



***On day one we made a poem, on day two we worked on cultural dances, and on day three we finished poems and completed the dances. I felt happy and excited when we were done ... My favorite bit was everything.***

~ Student, Baraya Barray - Whale Song

Baraya Barray - Whale Song workshops.
Photos by Tad Souden



Performers, National Poetry Month Gala. Photo by Joseph Mayers.

# POETRY MONTH

Poetry Month is Australia's largest showcase of poetry, celebrating a spectrum of poets, forms and perspectives. It is an immersive experience for poetry enthusiasts, and offers a warm welcome for anyone curious about poetry.

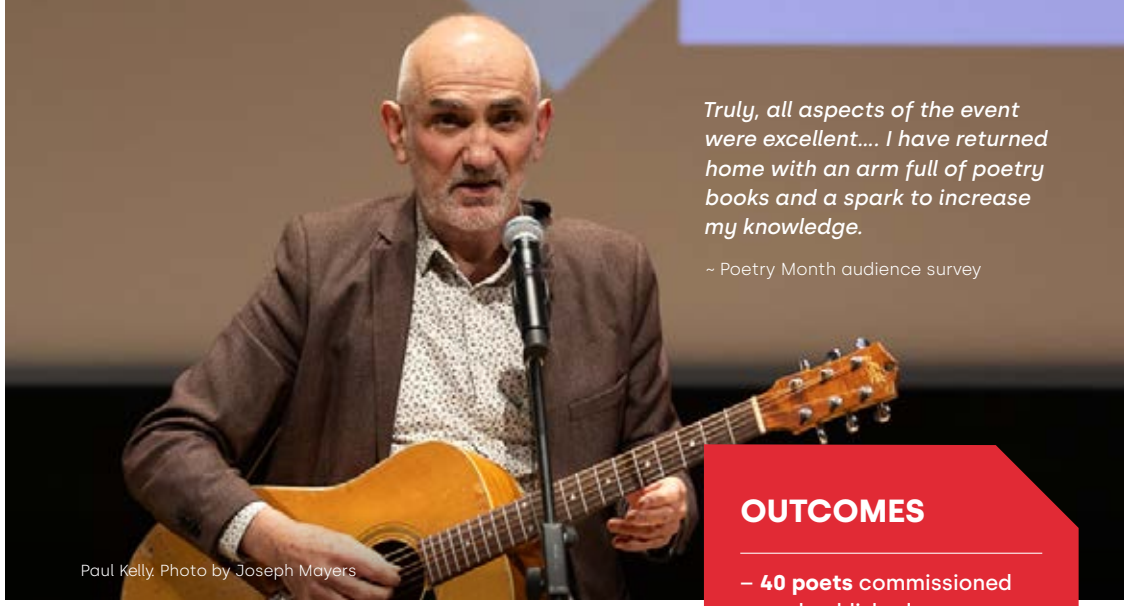
Our fourth Poetry Month in August 2024 included high-profile commissions, Poetry Ambassadors, national and digital events, readings, residencies, showcases, publications, professional development, public initiatives, workshops, competitions, and community-led activities. Events took place in every state, and online. Most were free and accessible.

Every day in August, we published a newly commissioned poem from a prominent poet or public figure, with writing prompts for the public to participate and share their work. Our Poetry Ambassadors included actor Heather Mitchell, AWGIE-winning satirist Mitch McTaggart, actor Chika Ikogwe, acclaimed author Nam Le, best-selling Insta poet Lang Leav, and author James Colley.

As always, the tentpole event was the National Poetry Month Gala, held at the State Library of NSW on 29 August. The sold-out event featured Paul Kelly, Chika Ikogwe, and Julia Baird alongside some of our commissioned poets as part of the Contains Strong Language festival. It was also live-streamed.

Online events included the popular Online Accessible Open Mic for Disabled Creatives, showcase livestreams, and a five-week workshop series with poets including UK Poet Laureate Simon Armitage.

We are proud to work with cultural and community partners across the country to create vibrant events and reach new audiences for poetry. This year they included The Wheeler Centre, NGA, MONA, Red Dirt Festival, Queensland State Library, City of Fremantle, Bendigo Writers Festival, Byron Writers Festival, NZ Poetry Day, and the State Library of NSW.



Paul Kelly. Photo by Joseph Mayers

*Truly, all aspects of the event were excellent.... I have returned home with an arm full of poetry books and a spark to increase my knowledge.*

~ Poetry Month audience survey

*Being a part of Poetry Month was a joy. The Red Room team's support and flexibility allowed me the creative freedom I needed to produce authentic work that I could be really proud of. I also really enjoyed the diverse lineup of artists at all the events and it made me proud to showcase them and share them with my friends. I'd love to collaborate again.*

~ Adrian Mouhajer, Poetry Month artist



Princess Arinola Adegbite, National Poetry Month Gala. Photo by Joseph Mayers

## OUTCOMES

- **40 poets** commissioned and published
- **72 artists** professionally employed and 7 Poetry Month Ambassadors engaged
- **25 events** delivered, including showcases across every Australian state and a sold-out National Poetry Gala
- **4,787 participants** and audience at live and online events/workshops
- **1 million+ reach** across radio, digital and live platforms
- **30+ media features**, including The Guardian, ABC RN, NITV Radio, Sydney Morning Herald, The Saturday Paper
- **100% of participants** and poets surveyed rated their experience as Good-Excellent

# CONTAINS STRONG LANGUAGE

***I attended Contains Strong Language with my mum, she is 46, I am 12. We were so excited about this program, we travelled all the way from Apollo Bay, Victoria, for it!***

~ Contains Strong Language audience survey

The culmination of Poetry Month 2024 was Contains Strong Language, the UK's largest poetry and spoken word festival, which was presented in Sydney — for the first time — through a partnership between Red Room, BBC and ABC. Across four days in late August, over twenty live events (some also live-streamed) were presented in Sydney and Western Sydney, and then broadcast to the UK and across the world.

Events were staged at iconic venues across Gadigal and Dharug lands in Sydney including the State Library of New South Wales, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney Theatre Company, Riverside Parramatta, and the Royal Botanic Gardens, and included performances, readings, films, masterclasses, poetry slams, panels, live and online workshops and international writing collaborations.

The BBC broadcast five events and a series of five radio essays — all curated and co-produced by Red Room — to a combined audience of 5.5 million in the UK. An hour-long special celebrating First Nations poetry was broadcast through the World Service to an estimated 80 million people in over 200 countries around the world. ABC Radio National broadcast all these programs to a domestic audience of 100,000+ in Australia. A special program, produced by Radio Australia, showcased poets of Pacific heritage.

Contains Strong Language brought to Australian stages some of the UK's premier poetic talent: the UK Poet Laureate Simon Armitage, BBC's Ian McMillan and Princess Arinola Adegbite (known as P.A.BITEZ) alongside a superb selection of local poets and creatives including Jazz Money, Paul Kelly, Ali Cobby Eckermann, Brendan Cowell, Omar Sakr, Sara Saleh, Rob Waters and Eileen Chong. In total 73 Australian artists were professionally engaged and featured across the program.

In celebrating the many ways poetry touches our lives, Contains Strong Language helped the world wake up to the idea of Australia as a poetic nation, a place where poetry is enjoying a renaissance driven by a wide range of voices and cultures.



BBC broadcast event. Photo by Jamie James.


Ali Cobby Eckermann with audience members. Photo by Jamie James.


Mark Mariano. Photo by Tawfik Elgazzar.

## OUTCOMES

- **5.5 million+ listeners** in UK
- **80 million+ listeners** globally
- **168,000+ listeners** domestically
- **77 artists** engaged to perform live
- **20 Australian poets** broadcast internationally by the BBC
- **5 Australian writers** commissioned for the BBC Audio Essay series
- **2,500 attendees** at live events and workshops

**Watch and listen >** redroompoetry.org/news/csl-roundup

# POEM FOREST

Poem Forest is a positive climate action program that encourages students and teachers to write nature poems. For each poem received, a tree is planted in Dharawal Wodi Wodi Country in partnership with Wollongong City Council to restore endangered habitats.

Red Room's digital resources and free online workshops offer poetic inspiration, environmental knowledge and poetic techniques to fire the creativity of students, many of whom are writing poetry for the first time.

In 2024, the program expanded in Wollongong to plant over 6,700 trees to address critically low canopy cover. Local students received a seedling to plant at home, and poetry and tree-planting workshops were offered both locally and digitally for a national audience.

The program commissioned new nature poems from poets Jacqueline Suskin, Didirri, Philip Bunting, and student poet Fig Russon-Jorgensen. Judges for the program included Ali Cobby Eckermann and Deadly Science's Corey Tutt OAM. The Poem Forest learning resource was distributed to over 10,000 schools, and a national USA Poem Forest program was piloted by Turnaround Arts and The Kennedy Center, with support from Red Room.

*"I love the concept of Poem Forest because it is not only a competition. It is an invitation to be aware of who you are as an individual, and where you are in your surrounds. Poem Forest is an invitation to grow, as nature grows. Sit in the quiet of the natural world and write down your thoughts. Be as free as the air. You can do it. Trust yourself."*

~ Ali Cobby Eckermann, 2024 Poem Forest judge

## OUTCOMES

- **5,400+ student and teacher poems** created and published
- **5,400+ trees** planted with Wollongong City Council
- **8,900+ students** attended workshops
- **200,000+ digital reach**

**Student poems >** redroompoetry.org/projects/poem-forest/




Poem Forest tree planting, Wollongong. Photo by Tawfik Elgazzar.

# MAD POETRY

> Redbull doesn't give you wings
> (at least not like the Mental Health Act does)
> the end of the world is closer than you think
> (mine ended once already)
> if you want to be a saint, you must first become
> a child (yes, saints too tell lies)
>
> ~ Arlea Whelan from 'The Poem Where She Absconds From The Psych Ward'

MAD Poetry is all about creating a safe writing space for emerging poets with a lived experience of mental health issues to express how they see the world, to define themselves through their creativity not their diagnosis, and explore by pen and page their experience of illness, institutions, recovery, self-care, and beyond. The project has become a key creative gathering and sharing space for the broader lived experience community.

In partnership with Wellways, Red Room presented a national online workshop series during Mental Health Month in October with five poet facilitators: Adrian Mouhajer, Jonathan Dunk, Arlea Whelan, Pooja Mittal Biswas, and Brooke Scobie.

Two Tasmanian MAD Poetry online workshops were also held in partnership with Wellways Hobart.

***I think this series of MAD Poetry workshops is unique in Australia and a very valuable contribution to the Arts Literature scene. It's particularly good that they are free to attend and available on zoom. This makes them accessible for a much wider range of people than an in-person event would be. It's wonderful feeling part of the disability writers community that Red Room Poetry fosters.***

~ MAD Poetry Participant

## OUTCOMES

- **8 lived experience poets** commissioned or engaged
- **5 online national workshops** delivered
- **193 lived experience workshop** participants
- **100% of MP participants surveyed** rated their workshop experience as Good-Excellent
- **88% said it enabled them to access an activity** they would not otherwise have been able to attend

# WRITING IN RESISTANCE

Led by poet, journalist, and scholar Dr. Saba Vasefi, Writing in Resistance amplifies the voices of women and non-binary people who have experienced detention and exile.

In 2024, the program commissioned poems from three young people — Aida Darabi (18), Hodan Yasin (24), and Seti Gholshani (14) — who had endured offshore detention on Nauru as children and adolescents,

The poems were published by Red Room Poetry and performed as part of Poetry Month at a panel event at Parliament House, Canberra, hosted by Greens Senator Mehreen Faruqi. The poets were joined by legal experts to discuss the harms arising from Australia's asylum policies.

Our thanks to the partners who supported the program.



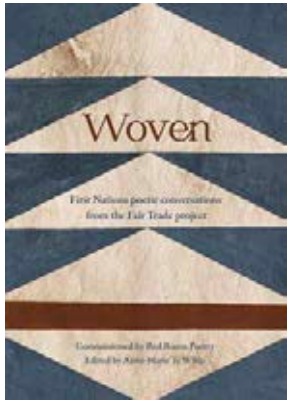
Poets with Saba Vasefi at Parliament House, Canberra. Photo by Sami Harper.

# WOVEN ANTHOLOGY

*Woven* is a ground-breaking poetry anthology born from Red Room's Fair Trade project (2021- 2023), and edited by Anne-Marie Te Whiu. Published by Magabala in February 2024, it received rave reviews and featured in festival sessions in Australia and overseas.

***[Our] editorial code... reserves a five-star rating for work that genuinely challenges the boundaries of an art form. Woven is the only work I have ever reviewed at that level. It is the first work of its kind, anywhere in the world.***

~ Elizabeth Walton, Arts Hub



# OTHER 2024 PROJECTS

## A LINE IN THE SAND AT SYDNEY WRITERS' FESTIVAL

Red Room's anthology, *A Line In the Sand* (Pantera Press, 2023), brought together over eighty works from leading poets and public figures in a retrospective covering twenty years of the best commissioned Australian poetry. In 2024, we presented a live anthology showcase, featuring ten contributors, as part of the 2024 Sydney Writers' Festival. We also engaged poets from the anthology within our Poetry Month and Contains Strong Language programming.




Red Room Poetry session, Sydney Writers' Festival. Photo by Jason Nichol.

## AUTHOR UNKNOWN

how to capture a frame
to filter the contents of shared existence
cups of warm liquid poured out for both of us
we tilt the lip to our lips without speaking

~ Sawako Nakayasu and Vacant Dragon à la Subverted Lips from 'I'm bored... but you like it, don't you?'

For Author Unknown, we invited 40 practicing Australian and international artists across various mediums (poets, authors, musicians, visual artists) to co-create a poem. The project leads, Pascalle Burton and David Stavanger, used a selection of poetic constraints created in the spirit of experimental play, reciprocity and connection. In total, 60 new collaborative poems were created and published by Red Room.

## LOUISE BOURGEOIS AT ART GALLERY NEW SOUTH WALES

I remember the dreams deferred
And the longing originating in the back of my throat
All the times we swallowed the sea
Sputtering the plastic our parents inherited us

~ Sara Mansour from 'You Must'

Partnering with Art Gallery of New South Wales, we commissioned two ekphrastic poems by Sara Mansour and Lucy Norton. Sara Mansour also delivered on-site workshops and hosted an Art After Hours poetry performance in association with the exhibition *Louise Bourgeois: Has the Day Invaded the Night or Has the Night Invaded the Day.*

## PHONE-A-POEM

Phone-a-Poem invites audiences to pause, pick up a handset and listen to a newly commissioned poem or a piece from our vast audio archive. In 2024, we piloted the project in regional Victoria, with publications and public installations planned across 2025.



# ARTIST DEVELOPMENT

Whether it's a child writing a poem for the first time, an adult building the confidence to share their work more widely, or a professional poet taking their career to the next level, Red Room Poetry supports poets of every age and background on their creative journey.

Culture Counts reports that 96% of survey respondents strongly agreed that Red Room contributed to the development of their arts practice or business in 2024.

As well as commissioning over 200 poets in 2024, we also provided longer, structured support — including residencies and commissions — for seven poets through the Red Room Fellowship and Emerging Poets Residency programs.



Haiku workshop presented by Lulu Houdini (left). Photo by Jason Nichol.

***Red Room is an engine room of Australian poetry that radiates with energy. I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience reading and collaborating with them.***

~ Ouyang Yu, Poetry Month 30in30poet

***The Varuna Residency was one of the most fulfilling writing experiences I've had in my life!***

~ Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon, 2024 Red Room Poetry Fellow

## RED ROOM FELLOWSHIP

In 2024, Red Room entered an exciting new Fellowship partnership with Varuna, The National Writers' House, and extended the Fellowship to multiple residential positions to increase development opportunities and build a stronger sense of connection and community. Seven writers joined us this year as Red Room Poetry Fellows. Natalie Damjanovich-Napoleon (WA), Theresa Sainty (TAS), Gabe Journey Jones (NSW), Ella Jeffery (QLD) and Aloma Davis (VIC) participated in a week-long residency at Varuna. Kerry Bulloojeeno Archibald Moran (NSW) and Phoebe Grainer (QLD/VIC) were selected for the inaugural 'Anywhere Remote' residency, designed to ensure greater accessibility for all poets.

Felicity Plunkett and Jeanine Leane supported the writers as mentors for the program, and all of the writers had a poetic commission published as part of Poetry Month in August. Red Room held a successful showcase in Katoomba on Saturday 31 August as part of Poetry Month and Contains Strong Language.

## EMERGING POETS RESIDENCY

Each year, the Emerging Poets Residency provides a creative space and paid stipend to support the professional development of two emerging poets. In 2024, 89 writers applied, from all over the country. The successful poets, Lucy Norton and Aries M. Gacutan, were each invited to Moonrise on the River on Yuin Country (Bermagui) for a week of creative development during June. Their commissioned poems were published as part of Poetry Month in August.

***As a person with familial responsibilities and a full time job, uninterrupted time to write is not something I get often.***

~ Lucy Norton, 2024 Emerging Poet in Residence

***I don't think I could have asked for a better first residency. It was uplifting and inspiring and humbling.***

~ Aries M. Gacutan, 2024 Emerging Poet in Residence

### OUTCOMES

- **7 fellows** in residence
- **2 Anywhere Remote fellows**
- **9 new commissioned poems** published



Baraya Barray workshop.
Photo by Tad Souden.

# CREATIVE EDUCATION

The ability to read and write poetry is a precious skill, proven to increase empathy, life chances and wellbeing. Yet creative learning opportunities for poetry in Australia are few and far between. Our programs fill that gap, providing workshops, competitions and mentoring across all ages, levels of literacy and access.

In 2024, we delivered over 35 online and in-person workshops attended by over 9,000 people. Some were specifically for school children, others for unique groups, including First Nations communities and individuals with lived experience of mental illness. Many were open access, for anyone, of whatever age, to learn and share.

Through our competitions, learning programs and prompts, 8,000 Australians (two-thirds of them under 18) wrote and submitted poems, often for the first time. Our learning resources were downloaded 3,018 times, with our flagship education program Poem Forest providing opportunities for both student learning and professional development for teachers.

The numbers tell a strong story, but we take greater pride in the quality of engagement. Our First Nations programs engage in First Nations pedagogy, creating culturally safe spaces for intergenerational knowledge transfer and community learning, while our MAD Poetry workshops are led by poets who have lived experience of mental health challenges and can provide a safe framework for participants to create. All our workshops and events embody Red Room's core value of care, providing a safe space for individuals to create and share work.

***I didn't read or join conversations but was happy to sit, listen and write. I enjoyed not feeling pressured to talk or read and staying private if I so chose. I have some confronting material to write about and also like exploring dark subjects and feel encouraged to do so by the workshops. Keep up the good work!***

~ Workshop participant



# SOCIAL IMPACT

Red Room strives to ensure that Australian poetry is representative of our many communities, opening the artform to different voices and stories, and empowering anyone to participate, whatever their background.

Of the poets we worked with in 2024, a third identify as CALD, almost a quarter as First Nations, and 10% as Disabled or d/Deaf. Our audience skews young and female, and comes from a wide range of cultural backgrounds

Each of our projects has a social impact target. Poetry Month focuses on universal access to poetry, and now delivers events in every state. Poem Forest cultivates appreciation of nature among school students. Baraya Barray - Whale Song connects First Nations students with their Elders and languages. MAD Poetry and Writing In Resistance focus on mental health and refugee experiences respectively.




Sweatshop session, Contains Strong Language. Photo by Tawfik Elgazzar.

The social impact of our program is reflected through our audience and artist surveys. Over 90% of respondents agreed that Red Room focuses on inclusive programming and engages with marginalised voices. Our trust within First Nations communities has risen year-on-year with over 90% of respondents approving of Red Room's role in celebrating Indigenous languages and supporting First Nations poets and collaborators. Of the young people we engage, 89% felt inspired by Red Room to play a leadership role and an astonishing 100% felt more positive about their community.

Poetry contributes to a more literate, creative, empathetic and healthy society. As Australia's most active poetry organisation, we take this responsibility seriously.

***The poetry showcase reminds us that spoken word really does soothe the soul (and makes our view of the world that bit deeper).***

~ Joanna Yang, Northern Territory Poetry Month Showcase



L-FRESH The LION, Contains Strong Language.
Photo by Tawfik Elgazzar.

# AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Red Room's primary purpose is to 'make poetry highly accessible, visible, vibrant and relevant for all'. Over the last five years, we have placed less emphasis on physical events and objects, and more on the use of digital and broadcast media to deliver this mission — a pivot initially driven by the pandemic.

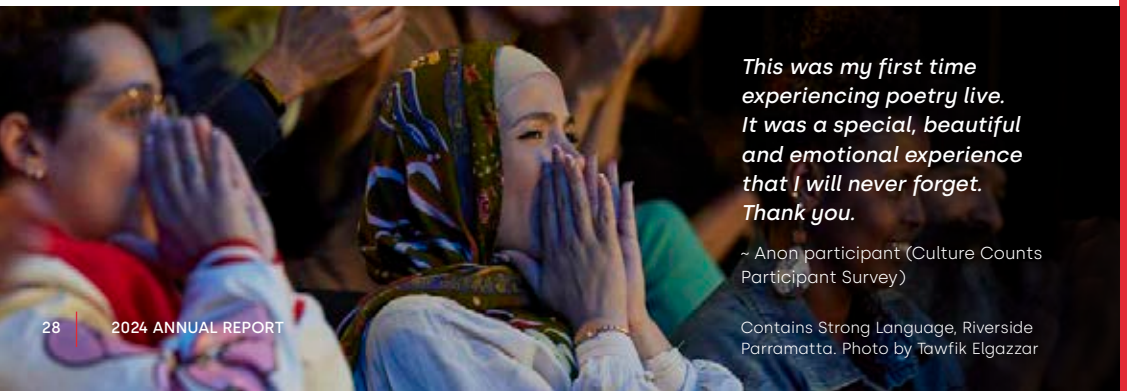
While the page and stage will always remain important to Red Room's work, the fact that we don't have a venue or a publishing label to run allows us to be nimble, going to our audiences, rather than demanding they come to us. We also maintain a wide range of venue and producing partnerships across Australia (including every state), allowing for bespoke events throughout the year.

This approach is most evident during Poetry Month, which launched in 2021 and has grown its reach year-on-year. The 2024 season was marked by a new media partnership with The Guardian, an expanded partnership with the ABC, and the National Poetry Month Gala filling the State Library of NSW for the first time.

Red Room also delivered a unique partnership with the ABC and BBC to bring the UK's Contains Strong Language poetry festival to Sydney. Red Room curated and co-produced the broadcast events, testament to the working relationship we have developed with both broadcasters over the years. The collaboration resulted in a combined reach of tens of millions of listeners around the world — a turning point not only for Red Room, but Australian poetry as a whole.

While some parts of our program target millions, others retain an emphasis on face-to-face engagement with communities who aren't particularly engaged with publicly-funded arts organisations. The focus of Baraya Barray - Whale Song, MAD Poetry and Writing in Resistance isn't scale, but building an audience with underserved communities through depth, care and trust.

Our audience development plan hinges on digital campaigns, broadcast media, a large network of venue and producing partnerships, and deeper face-to-face engagement. As a consequence, some of the strongest results through Culture Counts testify to Red Room's ability to increase the profile of Australian poetry (98%), broaden accessibility of poetry in Australia (98%), and make poetry visible and accessible to all (97%).



*This was my first time experiencing poetry live. It was a special, beautiful and emotional experience that I will never forget. Thank you.*

~ Anon participant (Culture Counts Participant Survey)

Contains Strong Language, Riverside Parramatta. Photo by Tawfik Elgazzar



# OUR TEAM

## Board

**Chair**
Hon. Michael Pembroke
**Member**
Tamryn Bennett
**Member**
Daniel Browning
(elected Sep 2024)
**Member**
Ann Caro
(elected Dec 2024)
**Member**
Jodi Edwards
(elected Sep 2024)
**Member**
Andrew FitzSimons
(retired December 2024)
**Member**
Judy Foster
(retired March 2024)
**Member**
Sophie Gee
(elected June 2024)
**Member**
Martin Green
**Member**
Emma Maple-Brown
**Member**
Chi Ouyang

## First Nations Wisdom Circle

**Language Mentor**
Daryn McKenny
**Language Mentor**
Gulwanyang Moran
**Cultural Mentor**
Jacob Morris
**Language & Cultural Mentor**
Theresa Sainty
**Artistic & Poetic Mentor**
Kirli Saunders

## Staff

**CEO**
Jonty Claypole
**Operations Manager**
Claire Albrecht
**Program Administrator**
Natalie Bühler (to Dec)
**Development Director**
Rebecca Cuschieri
**Marketing & Communications Manager**
Rani Ghazzaoui
**Creative Producer**
Izzy Roberts-Orr
**Program Support Officer - First Nations**
Luke Patterson (from April)
**Artistic Director - First Nations**
Nicole Smede
**Artistic Director**
David Stavanger
**Marketing & Communications Coordinator**
Annie Yoshida

and our dedicated interns and volunteers

**Our team >** redroompoetry.org/about

# OUR SUPPORTERS

Thank you to the supporters, communities and partners who helped us spark the creativity of poets and audiences in 2024.

### Government Supporters

Red Room Poetry is assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body, and proudly funded by the NSW Government in association with Create NSW. A Line in the Sand was supported by Creative Partnerships Australia through Plus1.

### Principal Supporters

Bret Walker AO SC

### Media Partners

### Major Supporters

### Supporters

**Diamond Supporters**
The Albert Fisher Family Foundation, Tim Game SC, Peter Mason AM and Kate Mason

**Sapphire Supporters**
Phillip Boulten SC, The McLean Foundation, Emma and Andrew Maple-Brown, The Serpentine Foundation, Kim Williams AM

**Ruby Supporters**
Margie and Michael Arnott, Tamryn Bennett Annabel Baxter, Liz Cuninghame and Andrew FitzSimons, Rebecca and Nick Cuschieri, Rowena Danziger AM, Chris and Phoebe Hoy, Justice François Kunc, Professor Kate Ogg, Hon Michael Pembroke, Judith Pini, Mary Preece, Seamus and Sabrina Quick, Paul and Connie Ruiz, David and Jenny Turner

**Garnet Supporters**
Jessica Block, Ian Gibbins, The Goddard Family, Bob Hefner and Peggy Daroesman, Neroli Hobbins, Liz Nield OAM, Greeba Pritchard, Mark Wakely

**Topaz Supporters**
Hugh Allen and Judith Ainge, Margaret Burke, Arthur Charles AM and Prue Charles, Natalie Cooke, Gillian Corban, Christopher Dawson, Sara Dehm, Tawfik Elgazzar, Ashley Hay, Anne McLean, Susanne Nelles, Penni Russon, Anthea Vogl, Richard Walsh

**Opal Supporters**
Nicole Abadee, Antoinette Albert, Melonie Bayl-Smith, Marc Bennie, Sara and James Carlisle, Arjun von Caemmerer Maryanne Cuschieri, Yvonne Gray, Michael Harrison, Wendy Haynes, Joanna Hughes, Dr Linda Kirk, Joan Lai, Peta Landman and Michael Bogle, Miles Merrill, Kate Pennington, Miranda Purnell, Ekta Sharma, Nigel Spence, Stephanie Tonkin, Annie Woodham, In memory and honour of Xavier Patrick O'Grady

**Jade Supporters**
Dr Claire Albrecht, Andrew Bassett, Howard Cassidy, Anne Curran, Tricia Dearborn, Heather Duthie, Stephen Edgar, Susie Fagan, Zae Greenwood, PJ Haben, Victoria Jennings, Joan Lai, Heidrun Lohr, Pam Maitland, Mark Marusic, Gwyneth Ottrey, Chi Ouyang, Di Parsons, Wayne Perkins, Joel Roast, Stephanie Roe, Tim Sinclair, Tom Stodulka AM, Sue Walden

**Donate to Red Room >** redroompoetry.org/donate

# OUR PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

Red Room Poetry works with poetic partners and collaborators across the country to make poetry vibrant, relevant and accessible. We thank you for inspiring and encouraging us.

107 Projects
ABC
AECG - NSW, Bay and Basin
ANCORs - UOW
Apples & Snakes
Art Gallery of NSW
Australian Poetry
Asia Pacific Writers & Translators Inc.
Australian Botanic Garden Mount Annan
Australian National University
Baker McKenzie
BBC
Byron Writers Festival
Bundanon
Canberra Writers Festival
City of Fremantle
Clickview
Corban & Blair
Coomaditchie Aboriginal Arts Corporation
Community Radio Network
DART Learning
Darwin Festival
Enough Said Books
Frazer's Shellharbour
Human Rights Law Centre
Magabala Books
Miromaa Language and Technology Centre
MONA
Moonrise on the River
Murdoch Books
National Gallery of Australia
New Zealand Book Awards
Pan Macmillan
Pantera Press
Poetry Sydney
Readings
Red Dirt Poetry Festival
Riverside
Royal Botanic Garden Sydney
State Library of NSW
State Library of QLD
Storybox
South Coast Writers Centre
Survivors Of Suicide and Friends
Sweatshop
Sydney Writers' Festival
Sydney Theatre Company
The Kennedy Centre - Turnaround Arts
The Suburban Review
The Wheeler Centre
University of Technology Sydney
Upswell Publishing
Varuna, The National Writers' House
Waminda
Wellways
Westwords
Wollongong Botanic Garden
Wollongong City Council
Wonderground Journal
Word Travels
Writers SA
Young Identity

**Supporters & Partners >** redroompoetry.org/supporters-partners/

# FINANCIALS

## STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

**For the year ended 31 December 2024**

| | Year ended 31 December 2024 $ | Year ended 31 December 2023 $ |
|---|---|---|
| Donations and non-government grants | 438,754 | 624,002 |
| Government grants | 594,345 | 605,106 |
| Income from partners | 105,866 | 73,205 |
| Finance income | 49,315 | 35,296 |
| Other revenue | 9,857 | 6,723 |
| **Total revenue and other income** | **1,198,137** | **1,344,332** |
| Employee expenses | (349,327) | (369,018) |
| Business development expenses | (93,450) | (82,798) |
| Artsworker expenses | (240,325) | (232,542) |
| Poetry commissions and appearance fees | (94,222) | (114,900) |
| Production costs | (98,928) | (83,888) |
| Contractor expenses | (46,911) | (97,616) |
| Consumables and office expenses | (10,294) | (16,895) |
| Publicity and promotion | (20,751) | (29,093) |
| Accounting and audit | (20,827) | (18,715) |
| Insurances | (17,147) | (16,205) |
| Travel costs | (46,031) | (29,658) |
| Depreciation and amortisation expenses | (5,995) | (3,989) |
| Interest expense | (106) | - |
| Other expenses | (42,018) | (19,573) |
| **Total expenses** | **(1,086,332)** | **(1,114,890)** |
| **Surplus before income tax expense** | **111,805** | **229,442** |
| Income tax expense | - | - |
| **Surplus after income tax expense** | **111,805** | **229,442** |
| **Total comprehensive income for the year** | **111,805** | **229,442** |

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

**As at 31 December 2024**

| | As at 31 December 2024 $ | As at 31 December 2023 $ |
|---|---|---|
| **Assets Current** | | |
| Cash and cash equivalents | 928,344 | 652,856 |
| Trade and other receivables | 215 | 2,288 |
| Prepayments | 20,721 | 31,053 |
| Other financial assets | 720,110 | 850,004 |
| **Total current assets** | **1,669,390** | **1,536,201** |
| **Non-Current** | | |
| Plant and equipment | 10,206 | 12,347 |
| Intangible Assets | 14,142 | - |
| **Total non-current assets** | **24,348** | **12,347** |
| **Total assets** | **1,693,738** | **1,548,548** |
| **Liabilities Current** | | |
| Trade and other payables | 80,837 | 76,870 |
| Deferred revenue | 254,725 | 238,507 |
| Provision for Employee entitlements | 35,248 | 27,463 |
| **Total current liabilities** | **370,810** | **342,840** |
| **Non-Current** | | |
| Provision for Employee entitlements | 5,415 | - |
| **Total non-current liabilities** | **5,415** | **-** |
| **Total liabilities** | **376,225** | **342,840** |
| **Net assets** | **1,317,513** | **1,205,708** |
| **Equity** | | |
| Accumulated surplus | 1,317,513 | 1,205,708 |
| **Total equity** | **1,317,513** | **1,205,708** |

Full financial report available on request, including notes which should be read in conjunction with these statements.




**Red Room Poetry**
Level 3 The Arts Exchange
10 Hickson Road
The Rocks NSW 2000

T: 1800 POETRY
contact@redroompoetry.org
redroompoetry.org

ABN 35 103 464 446
Design: Alphabet Studio