



Living Histories

Large Scale Installation by
Nikesha Breeze

Sydney Biennial 2026
RE:MEMORY

Curated by Hoor Al-Qasimi

Sydney Biennial 2026

RE:MEMORY

March 14th 2026-June 14th 2026

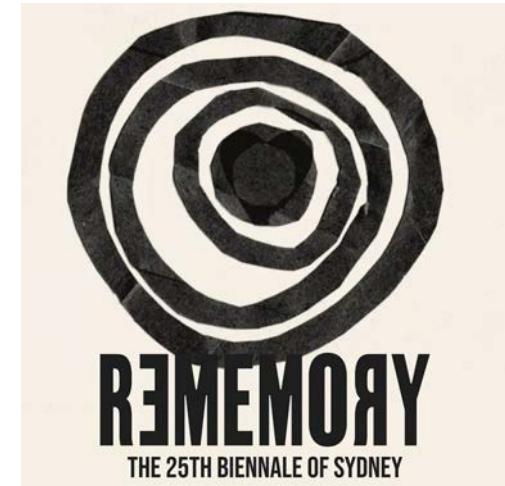
A means of revisiting, re-co-structing, and reclaiming histories that have been erased or repressed, Rememory signifies the intersection of memory and history, where recollection becomes an act of reassembling fragments of the past—whether personal, familial, or collective. The 25th edition of the Biennale connects the delicate space between remembering and forgetting. By engaging with Rememory, artists from across the world and within Australia will highlight marginalised narratives, share untold stories, and inspire audiences to rethink how memory shapes identity, and belonging, and strengthens the understanding and recognition of the histories and connections that form the contexts and pillars of community.

Unlike traditional ideas of memory as simply “remembering,” rememory delves into the fragmented and forgotten parts of history. In Toni Morrison’s work quoted above, this concept challenges the dominant narratives of American history by bringing attention to African American experiences and stories often left untold.

The 25th edition reimagines Morrison’s idea of rememory through the presentation of contemporary art, music, storytelling, and cultural engagement within the context of Sydney, Greater Sydney, and the diasporic communities calling this unceded land home. Through the defiant act of sharing, seeing, and understanding, artists and cultural practitioners participating in this edition explore the hidden effects of history and how it continues to shape the present in an evolving and consuming conversation. Rather than focusing on linear storytelling, the edition will highlight how we can become active participants in retelling our collective histories by revisiting and reinterpreting past events.

History versus memory, and memory versus memorylessness. Rememory as in recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past.

— *Toni Morrison, Mouth Full of Blood: Essays, Speeches, Meditations by Toni Morrison, 2019. London: Penguin Random House, p. 323.*





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Rememory celebrates the diverse contexts, understandings, and experience of humanity by inviting artists to reflect on their own roots while engaging with Sydney and its surrounding communities and histories. The edition will feature works that explore migration, exile, and belonging, giving voice to stories from Aboriginal communities and the divergent diasporas that shape Australia today. A dedicated program for children and young audiences will provide space and exploration for these stories to be passed on to the next generations.

Rememory will platform creative, non-hierarchical methods of storytelling, including micro-broadcasting and sharing circles. Through self-authorship and embodied practices, the exhibition seeks to amplify marginalised voices and create new ways of engaging with history. It encourages audiences to rethink what they know about the past and embrace a world where memory is shared and made collectively.

As observed by documenta 11 curator Okwui Enwezor, the postcolonial world is not distant or disconnected; it is a place of connection and shared experiences. It is where diverse cultures come together to imagine new meanings and systems for preserving memory in today's rapidly changing world.



Hoor Al-Qasimi: Artistic Director

Sydney has a multicultural community at its core, with people from different cultures from across the world choosing and calling this vibrant city as their home. I'm interested in exploring the multifaceted cultures and perspectives within this city, working with local artists and communities, as well as bringing new voices to the Biennale. It is an honour and privilege to be nominated and then selected to be Artistic Director of the 25th Biennale of Sydney, which I have been visiting for over a decade now. I have seen the developments over the years, including the amplification of Indigenous voices both local and global, which has made it an essential platform for rewriting art history."

– Hoor Al Qasimi, Artistic Director of the 25th Biennale of Sydney

Hoor Al Qasimi is the President and Director of Sharjah Art Foundation, the independent public arts organisation in the UAE founded by her in 2009 as a catalyst and advocate for the arts around the world. Al Qasimi has been the Director of Sharjah Biennial since 2002, an internationally recognised platform for contemporary artists, curators and cultural producers, and curated the critically acclaimed Sharjah Biennial 15 in 2023. She was appointed as the President of the International Biennial Association (IBA) in 2017 and serves as the President of The Africa Institute, Global Studies University, Sharjah and President and Director of the Sharjah Architecture Triennial.

Al Qasimi was appointed as the Artistic Director of the sixth Aichi Triennale (2025), becoming the first person to be chosen for the role from outside of Japan. In 2024, Al Qasimi claimed the number one spot on ArtReview's Power 100 list, which highlights the most influential figures in the art world.

Al Qasimi's curatorial approach centres on the histories of each place and multidisciplinary programming, with a collaborative approach and emphasis on supporting experimentation and innovation in the arts. Over the past 20+ years, she has worked extensively with various mediums including film, music, dance, talks, publications and more, to bring together all forms of art in conversation.

For the 25th Biennale of Sydney (2026), Al Qasimi will collaborate with local communities, artists and academics, whilst drawing on her own international network, to develop and realise the concept for the 2026 edition.

Nikesha Breeze

Nikesha Breeze is an internationally acclaimed interdisciplinary artist working across sculpture, installation, painting, performance, dance, and film. Rooted in African diasporic and Afro-Futurist practice, Breeze creates immersive, multi-sensory environments that honour ancestral memory and reclaim erased histories. Through layered materiality and process, their work bridges archival research, storytelling, and embodied ritual, engaging themes of grief, power, remembrance, sanctuary, and Black futurity. Breeze's practice is both research-driven and experiential, constructing spaces for reflection, dialogue, and transformation. They live and work in the high desert of Taos, New Mexico, United States, on the unceded land of the Taos Pueblo People. Born in Portland, Oregon, United States, Breeze is an African American descendant of the Mende People of Sierra Leone and Assyrian American immigrants from Iran.

www.nikeshabreeze.com





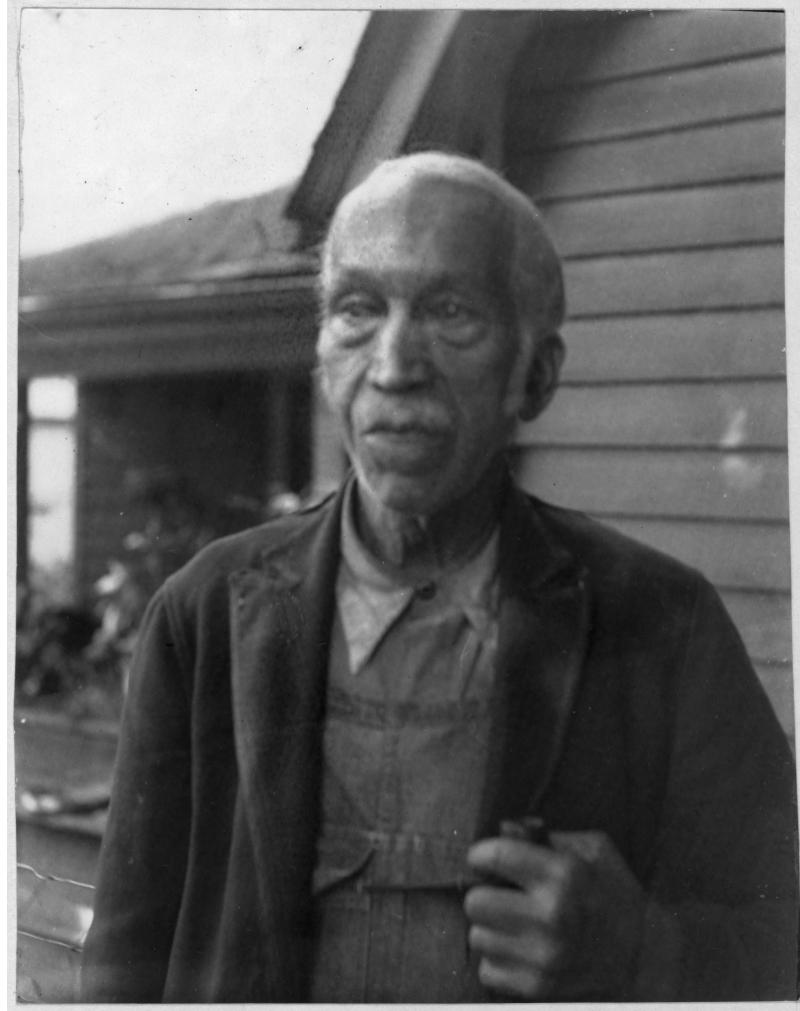
Project Overview

This immersive sculptural and performance installation reanimates the narratives of African Americans interviewed in the 1930s United States Federal Writers Project *“Born into Slavery.”* A vast oral history archive of over 2500 first hand accounts of African American elders who experienced enslavement as children. Breeze excavates these stories to create a living memory of embodied ritual, ancestral witness, and monumental sculptural presence. Set inside three towering Baobab-inspired textile columns-woven from cotton the work blends performance, storytelling, sound, and archival materials into an evocative multi-sensory experience. Viewers encounter the performance either intimately from within the structures or distantly from outside their semi-permeable walls, mirroring the layered and partial access we have to histories obscured by time and power. This project will premiere as a major installation at the 2026 Sydney Biennale.

Artistic Vision

Living Histories emerges at a critical cultural moment, as the United States continues to cycle through political unrest and ideological polarization. In times like these, the risk of historical omission, distortion, and erasure grows more acute; especially for the foundational histories of African Americans. This project asserts that African American history is American history. It draws from the archive of formerly enslaved elders; some between the ages of 70 and 125; who carried vivid memories of their enslavement, family life, labor, and liberation.

These stories are unsparing, deeply human, and richly detailed. They speak of family separations, auction blocks, violence, and survival; but also of cultural practices, resistance, community organizing, prayer, and joy. They contain genealogical data crucial to African American family lineage and memory continuity. This archive, long buried or obscured, is a national treasure; and this project positions it not only as historical record, but as a living spiritual inheritance.



Recd of Judge S Williams six hundred
Dollars in full payment for lame a
negro woman 18 years old and having her
child about one year old together with her
future increase if any which negroes
I warrant to be sound in body and mind and
slaves for life witness my hand and seal
this 25th Day of Decr 1849

The conditions of the above instrument are
such that if the undersigned shall pay or cause
to be paid to Judge S Williams by the 1st Jan
1851 the sum of six hundred Dollars good and
lawful money the property as above described
to revert to the undersigned and the undersigned
must to be now, otherwise to remain in full
possession and virtue this Day and Date above written
Test J.M. Lampby John Williams

The aforesd Negro sold under execution,
sundry against the aforesd John Williams
and his wife by the aforesd S S Williams at
summe ~~one~~ ^{one} hundred Dollars

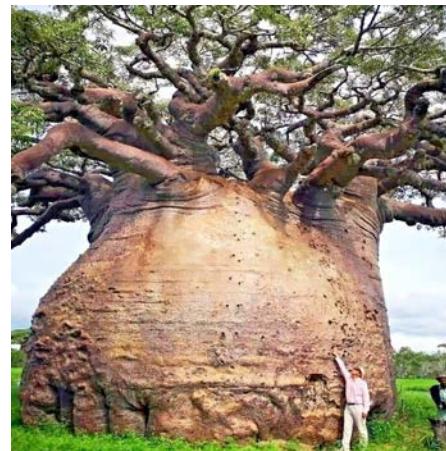


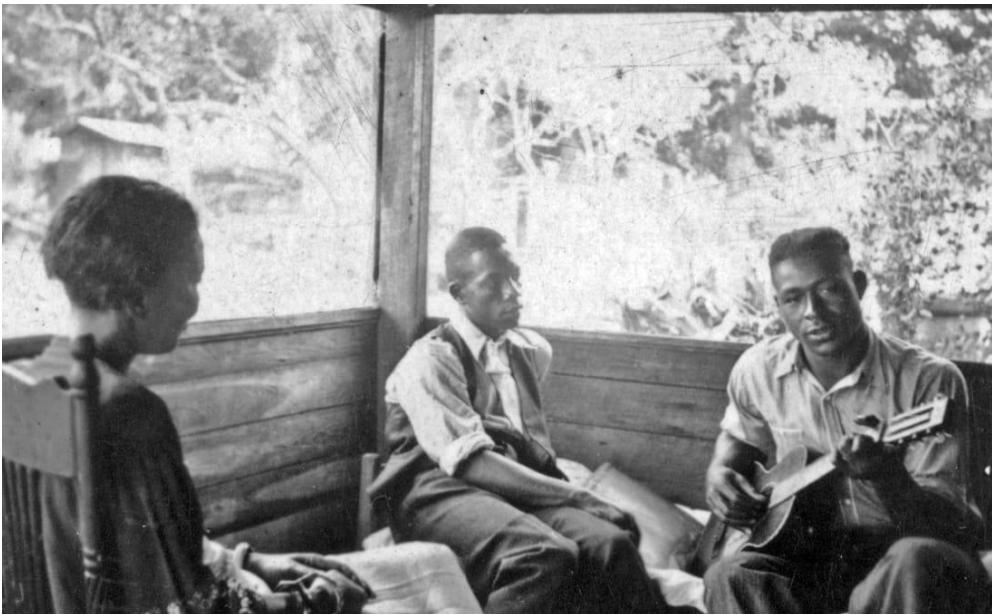
Installation

The vision of Living Histories is to create an immersive world where these narratives become embodied, visible, and sacred. Visitors step into a slowly disintegrating space, old cabins and cotton fields breaking up into pieces, interrupted by massive towering, semi-permeable Baobab-inspired trees; each acting as a guardian of ancestral memory. Throughout the space audiences encounter spatial installations filled with soundscapes, artifacts, video, textiles, and performance. Live performers serve as lightning rods and interpreters of the spirits activating the space through movement, song, and stillness. The result is not a static memorial but a breathing, durational ritual of reclamation.



original concept render *ai and photoshop image





Throughout the space there is a sonic landscape composed by Lazarus Nance-Letcher, an African American musician and composer who works at the intersection of archive and memory in Black folk music and gina breedlove a sound healer, vocalist, composer, grief doula, author, famous for her role of "Sarabi" in the original Broadway production of *The Lion King*.

Inspired by Zora Neale Hurston's 1930 ethnographical archive work, this haunting viola and voice composition is layered by the low sung hymns of Black elders from the Archives, and quiet storytelling in small embedded speakers.

This installation does not require participation or instruction. Instead, it invites presence. The work meets each viewer where they are, offering space for quiet reflection, emotional resonance, and sensory engagement. Its power lies in the intimate choreography of sound, light, image, and story; and in the presence of performers who hold and activate the space.

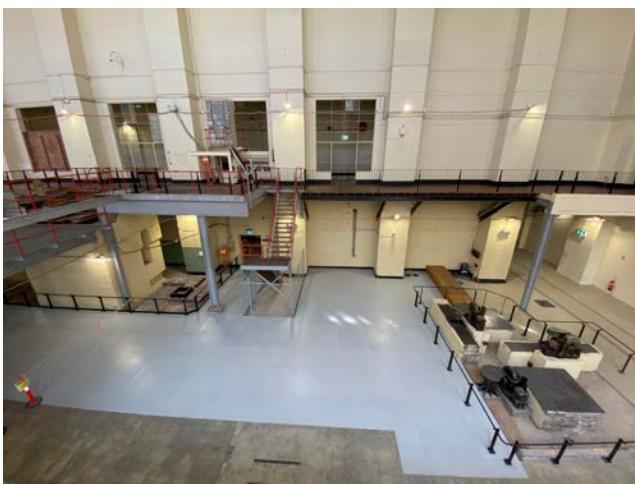
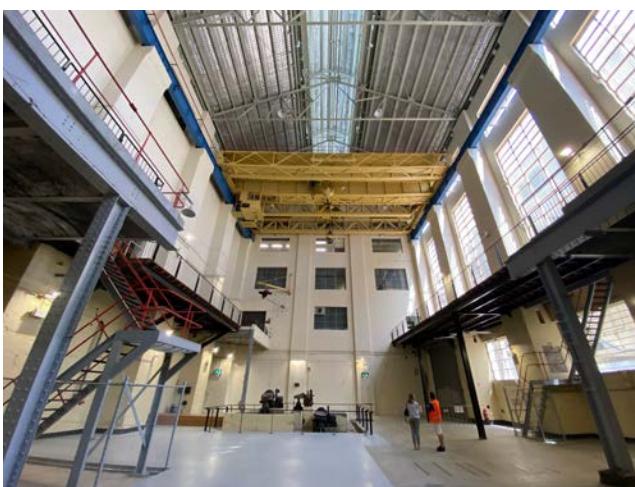
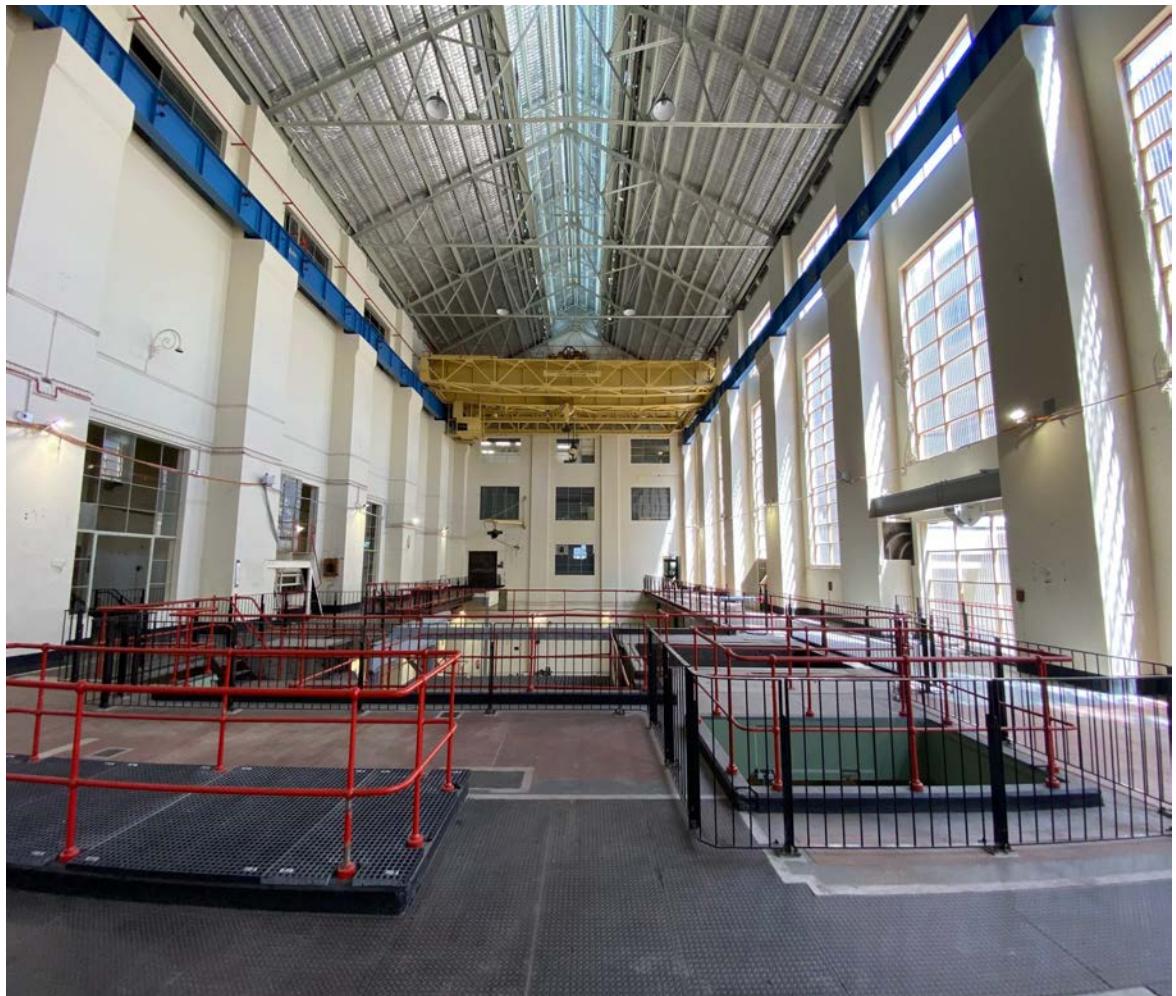
Rather than presenting history as a fixed record, Living Histories unfolds like a memory field; dreamlike and haunting.

Site: White Bay Power Station

The White Bay Power Station is a monumental industrial landmark on Sydney's inner harbor, recently restored as the central site for the 2026 Biennale of Sydney. Once a coal-fired generator that powered much of the city, the Power Station now serves as a vast architectural vessel for contemporary art, performance, and critical inquiry. Its layered histories of labor, energy, and transformation offer a potent context for large-scale works that address questions of memory, power, and collective inheritance.

Presenting *Living Histories* within this site situates the project at the intersection of industrial and ancestral architectures, where the remnants of mechanized production meet acts of embodied remembrance. The installation will occupy one of the Power Station's largest turbine halls, as the largest commissioned work of the 2026 Biennale, *Living Histories* carries the most extensive institutional support from the Biennale's curatorial and production teams, underscoring its central role in the exhibition's thematic and spatial composition.





Technical and Material Strategy

The construction and installation of *Living Histories* involve a carefully coordinated integration of textile engineering, architectural rigging, and responsive lighting and sound design. The three monumental Baobab-inspired textile columns are fabricated from layered cotton, cheesecloth, and natural fiber composites, suspended from existing structural trusses within the Power Station's turbine hall. The design emphasizes permeability and breathability, allowing for air, light, and sound to move fluidly through the environment while maintaining a sense of monumental presence.

Lighting is designed to operate as both sculptural and temporal, shifting subtly throughout the day to evoke transitions between dawn, dusk, and ancestral time. Custom sound equipment is embedded within the installation to create localized sonic environments that respond to the architecture's natural acoustics. Rigging and support systems are developed in collaboration with the Biennale's production team to ensure full compliance with engineering and safety standards, while preserving the aesthetic integrity of the materials. The technical strategy prioritizes modular construction, ease of assembly, and minimal environmental impact, aligning with the Biennale's sustainability framework and the adaptive reuse principles guiding the White Bay Power Station site.





The design of *Living Histories* presents a highly articulated multi-sensory environment that transforms the industrial architecture of the Power Station into a dynamic site of archival reanimation. At its center, a monumental textile structure in the form of a tree contains a secondary tree within its hollow trunk, representing systems of lineage, recursion, and regeneration. The tree is constructed of broken barnwood and evokes a sense of reconstitution in the face of active disintegration. Surrounding this central form, the installation incorporates a partially deconstructed cabin structure that appears to fragment and rise into the vertical volume of the hall, evoking processes of material and historical dissolution.



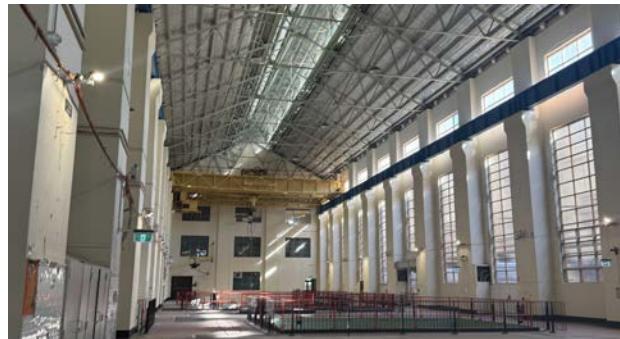




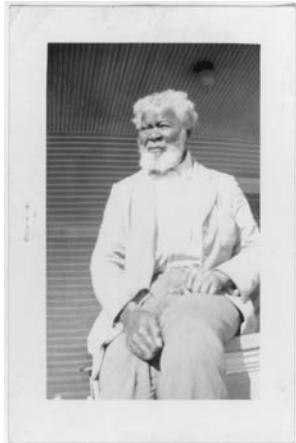
The spatial composition integrates large-scale video projection with original black and white animation by the artist, and a series of hand-printed cyanotypes, suspended with raw cotton, light, and sound.

Within these zones, curated artifacts, archival materials, and textual fragments are embedded as points of reference and reflection. Shown here through a series of detailed 3D renderings, the design establishes a coherent spatial logic that enables audiences to move through gradations of density, luminosity, and sound.

The result is an environment that positions the viewer within an active field of historical resonance, where visual, tactile, and auditory elements converge to construct a living continuum between material evidence and collective memory.



The significance of presenting this work in such a scale lies not only in its physical dimension but in its capacity to transform a site of industrial power into a site of ancestral and cultural reckoning. The Power Station's architecture becomes both witness and participant in this reanimation of history, amplifying the work's dialogue between past and present, memory and monumentality.



Artist Statement:

I am first and foremost inspired by the people, by the voices inside these narratives. My work in archives is born from a deep desire to hear more of the story, beyond the sanitized, limited, and manipulated history we are taught. I want the rest of the story, the ways of living, loving, resisting, and imagining that were taken from us.

These particular stories are the memories of children, spoken decades later by elders. There is a dream-like quality to them, the way certain details lodge in the heart for a lifetime. These are the things that stayed: moments of play, terror, love, and survival, remembered through the eyes of a child who lived through enslavement. The perspective of a child on that reality is rare, and it carries a truth that is both monumental and intimate.

The archive is alive with complexity: healing remedies, textile knowledge, music, prayers, the rhythms of dialect. It could not be contained in one medium. This work had to become an entire world of sculpture, performance, sound, image, and ritual, a space the audience can inhabit fully, where the stories can be felt with the body as much as the mind.

The materials themselves are intentional, carrying their own histories. Gauze originated in Gaza, a place known for its extraordinary textile weaving. Gaza, now the most wounded place in the world, gave us a fabric that has become one of the most essential materials for wound care globally. Creating these trees in gauze is an act of acknowledgment, a way of naming the shared wound we are all carrying.

Cotton's history is inseparable from the forced labor that shaped Africa, the Caribbean, and the global South. It binds together the narratives of so many oppressed peoples. In this work, I use it to build sixty-foot-tall life-size baobab trees, massive in scale yet light enough to overtake and transform an industrial space. Baobabs are sacred gathering places across the world, revered for prayer, offerings, and communion. In many places, their hollowed interiors have even served as churches. They stand here as living wounds, as ancestors, as sanctuaries of memory.

Inside, the scale collapses into intimacy. You enter the wound to listen. Small embedded speakers carry the elders' voices, their childhood dreams, their memories of freedom, the textures of their lives. These interiors become spaces of communion where a shared history can be held in care.

Every choice in this work is deliberate. For me, intentionality is a form of honoring, an act of care for spirits who endured erasure and violence. It is how I keep faith with the living and the dead, ensuring what we carry forward is true, layered, and alive.

~Nikesha Breeze



US/AUS Creative Team



Nikesha Breeze



Lazarus Nance Letcher



gina breedlove



amara tabor smith



brontë velez



Yohana Zecharis



Kelly Dezart-Smith

- [**Nikesha Breeze**](#) – Artist, Director, Lead Visionary

Interdisciplinary artist working across performance, sculpture, and installation. Breeze's practice centers ancestral memory, African diasporic narratives, and embodied ritual.

- [**Lazarus Nance Letcher**](#) – Musical Composer

Composer, multi-instrumentalist, and scholar, creating original soundscapes and musical compositions rooted in Black sonic traditions.

- [**gina breedlove**](#) – Vocalist & Sound Healer

Vocalist, composer, and grief doula whose work bridges ancestral song, Black sonic traditions, and ritual healing. Creator of *The Vibration of Grace™*, Gina brings decades of performance and sound healing practice to this project, weaving voice as a sacred and embodied archive.

- [**amara tabor smith**](#) – Choreographic Support & Ritual Consultant

Acclaimed choreographer and ritual performance artist contributing guidance on movement and spatial embodiment.

- [**brontë velez**](#) – Choreographic Support & Ritual Consultant

Artist and cultural strategist supporting the embodied and spiritual dimensions of the performance environment.

- [**Yohana Zecharis**](#) – Studio Project Manager

Experienced project coordinator and creative producer, facilitating logistics, scheduling, and communication across international and local teams.

- [**Kelly Dezart-Smith**](#) – Performance Production (Australia) Local production support lead, facilitating performer logistics, rehearsals, project management and physical integration on-site in Sydney.

AUS Performance Artists



Ran Fields—Born in Atlanta, Georgia, Ran Fields is an internationally published, genre-defying artist whose work exists at the intersection of sound, visual art, and storytelling. As a creative director, musician, and photographer, Ran has built a reputation for pushing boundaries both sonically and culturally. Their work explores identity, race, and lived experience, with the latest single *Inner West Goofies* blending smooth, drive-ready production with lyricism that challenges systemic oppression and performative activism.



Andrew Bukenya—Andrew studied music (voice & conducting) at the University of East Anglia and was twice awarded the Norwich and Peterborough Scholarship, enabling him to continue vocal studies with John Aplin (MA). He was subsequently awarded a prestigious Japanese Government (Monbusho) Scholarship, which allowed him to pursue postgraduate solo vocal studies at the Tokyo National University of Music and Fine Arts.



Basjia Almaan—Basjia is a queer black artist residing on Gadigal Land. She is a multidisciplinary artist whose main focus is on movement. Her movement is rooted in expressing and sharing strength, power, joy and deep sensuality as a form of reclamation and liberation. Her art celebrates and elevates the black femme body, unashamed, and reclaims its beauty in a colonised world. She has a strong focus on eroticism and self pleasure to remind you that pleasure is sacred, she reclaims her sensual energy to perform movement that is both grounded and free.



Nyaluak Leth—A poet hailing from South Sudan, channels her experiences into captivating verses that transcend boundaries. Her words, like a symphony of emotions, challenge societal norms and explores the complexities of identity and human connection. Through her works she creates immersive experiences, blending poetry with movement, music and visual art.

AUS/ US Production Team

- **Justin Dudley** US– Builder & Fabrication Assistant

Builder and sculptor with experience in large-scale installation and architectural fabrication, supporting structural and spatial buildout of the trees and sets.

- **Lucas Reishi** US- Builder Welder and Rigger Lucas will support the technical rigging and welding of the main tree elements and overall structural support

- **Michael Kennedy** – Performance Production (Australia) Local production support, facilitating event coordination, location and budget logistics, and technical integration on-site in Sydney.

- **Ed Horne** – Exhibition and Fabrication Lead Fabrication artist and installation expert, leading technical build and material realization in collaboration with Sydney-based partners.

- **Fredericka Mackenzie** – Sydney Project Manager On-the-ground coordination lead in Sydney, bridging communications between the artist, Biennale, and production/fabrication teams.

- **Lily Fenwick** – Sydney Production Assistant On-the-ground coordination in Sydney, bridging communications between the artist, Biennale, and production/fabrication teams.



Justin Dudley



Lucas Reishi



Ed Horne



Fredericka Mackenzie



Lily Fenwick



Michael Kennedy

Project Timeline

June – August 2025: Pre-Production & Research Finalization

Initial concept refinement, archival selections, and script development begin. Early design sketches and fabrication planning are drafted in consultation with Sydney Biennale production teams.

August 21–29, 2025: Site Visit to Sydney

Nikesha Breeze travels to Sydney to conduct an in-person site visit at the White Bay Power Station. The visit includes spatial assessment, tech consultations, and in-depth collaboration with Biennale staff, Sydney-based fabricators, and production leads.

September – December 2025: Remote Fabrication & Score Development

Performance and sound development continues in the U.S. Key collaborators begin fabrication of sculptural elements, set design mock-ups, and interactive materials in preparation for the on-site build. Original musical score and voiceover content are composed and recorded.

January 25 – March 1, 2026: On-Site Installation in Sydney

Nikesha and lead collaborators travel to Sydney to oversee and execute the full fabrication and installation process at White Bay Power Station. This includes assembling the Baobab structures, integrating sound and media systems, lighting, and set detailing.

March 2–8, 2026: Technical Rehearsals & Performance Integration

Rehearsals and staging of live performances within the completed space. Sound, lighting, and performance timing are finalized. Venue walkthroughs and press preparation begin.

March 9–13, 2026: VIP and Press Preview

The project is presented during the Biennale's official press week for early engagement by media, curators, and cultural leaders.

March 14 – June 14, 2026: Biennale Public Exhibition

Living Histories: The Trees Remember opens to the public as part of the Biennale's main program. The installation includes durational performances, immersive audio-visual components, and sustained audience engagement throughout the three-month run.

June 15–30, 2026: Deinstallation & Archival Documentation

Project is deinstalled with care for preservation. Archival documentation—including video, photography, and narrative reflection—is completed and prepared for potential touring, publication, or acquisition.

Budget

The total projected cost for *Living Histories*:

\$200,000 USD, covering research, pre-production, fabrication, performance development, on-site installation, and travel. This budget ensures that a large-scale, durational performance installation of this scope and complexity can be realized with integrity, safety, and care for all collaborators involved.

Funding Summary:

- Confirmed Support: **\$150,000 AUD**

(~approx **\$96,000 USD**)

- Additional Support Needed: **\$125,000 USD**

The additional funding will directly support pre-production costs, and production costs, music composition, script and performance development, and equitable labor for artists and fabrication team.

Current Funding Partners:

Richard Levy Gallery is publishing two limited edition rewards; "Artist Proof" bronze Death Mask from the EJI Freedom Monument and Archival Prints for supporters of *Living Histories*.

New Mexico Black Leadership Council is a 501 (c)(3) and the official fiscal sponsor of *Living Histories*.

Summary Budget Breakdown

1. Artist and Creative Labor (\$68,500 USD)

This includes artist direction, script and score development, choreographic consulting, and payment to collaborators including composer, vocalist, performers, and project management support. The project prioritizes equitable compensation for Black artists, ritual workers, and technical experts.

2. Materials, Fabrication and Installation (\$58,000 USD)

Covers the fabrication of three monumental textile columns, internal scenic environments, truss structures, lighting, sound equipment, and set pieces. Materials include hand-treated cotton gauze, steel armature, and historically evocative elements like wheat, corn, and sugar. Work will be fabricated on-site in Sydney in collaboration with local teams.

3. Travel and Lodging (\$18,500 USD)

Includes international flights, visas, lodging, and per diem for the artist and key collaborators traveling from the U.S. to Sydney for installation and the exhibition run.

4. Audio and Visual Production (\$18,000 USD)

Supports composition, studio recording, mixing, and integration of archival oral histories, narration, and ambient soundscapes. This also includes projection and media integration within the installation.

5. Administrative and Operational Costs (\$17,000 USD)

Includes project management, communication, and coordination across teams in the U.S. and Australia, ensuring timely delivery, artist safety, and production clarity.

6. Documentation, Promotion and Marketing (\$15,000 USD)

Allocated to address unexpected production expenses, material increases, or urgent labor needs.

7. Contingency and Support (\$27,000 USD)

Allocated for fiscal sponsor fees, and to address unexpected production expenses, material increases, or urgent labor needs.