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Image left: Devika Bilimoria - A Utah Time Signature, video still

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Rapid Eye Movement

20 Jan - 13 Mar 2022

Curated by Timmah Ball and Raina Peterson

Artists: Manisha Anjali, Devika Bilimoria, Karen Casey,

Forest Vicky Kapo, Dani Reynolds, Ruth Nyaruot Rauch, Naretha Williams

In an unexpected time of closure, separated from bodies, place and community, sleep has new meaning and materiality.

Catch these ideas in your waking hours at Wyndham Art Gallery in an exhibition guest curated by Timmah Ball and Raina Peterson, presenting the work of a range of artists exploring these possibilities.

Wyndham City acknowledges the peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which Wyndham Art Gallery stands and on which the City of Wyndham is being built.

We pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

Wyndham Art Gallery

Great Art. Deep West.

Cover Image: Ruth Nyaruot Rauch - 2cryp1

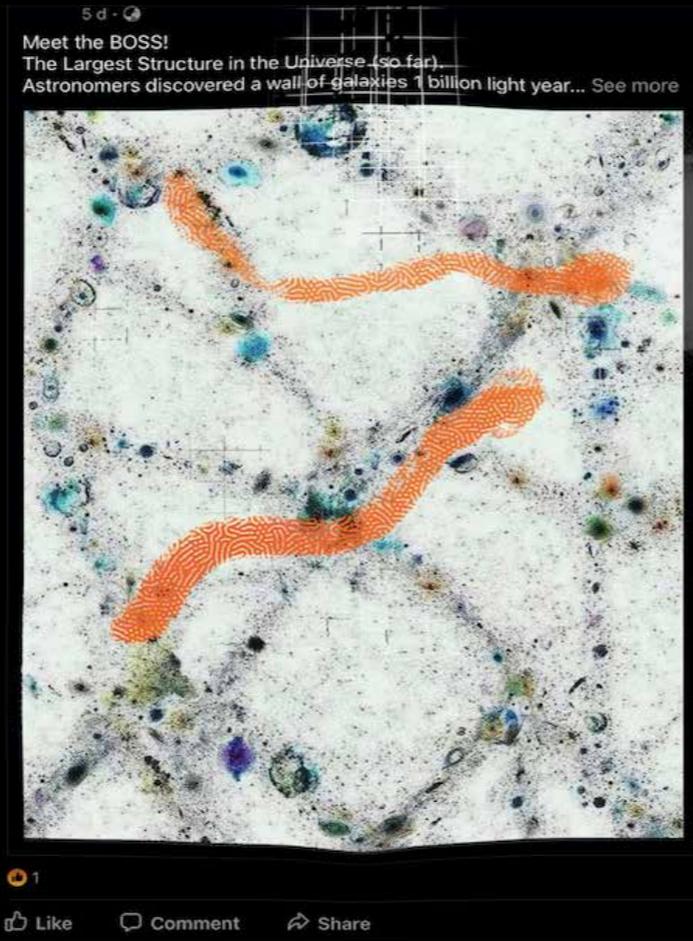
Rapid Eye Movement

Curating in the expanded field of dreams and email

This is not a conventional catalogue essay tethered to the type of writing or artistic expression that is or (was?) expected. This is a conversation in liminal space, the latter doesn't feel right anymore. We conceptualized Rapid Eye Movement via email, phone calls and text. I was nervous but it worked. I dreamt a lot, which reminded me that I still had a body, that I liked things, and I used to go to events and performances in galleries and other venues. And this contributed to the framing or theme to bring artists together in an IRL exhibition, not something on zoom or content for the internet, but physical work in a gallery.

When I was first approached to curate an exhibition for Wyndham Art Gallery/ Midsumma Festival I immediately questioned whether art still existed or if I felt the same way about it. Did I still identify as someone practicing or connected to this cities arts ecologies anymore. My dreams were filled with evocative images, which brought joy in the temporary

Image: Forest Vicky Kapo - do animals dream



absence of socialization. I still wrote about art in exhibition reviews that I couldn't actually physically go to due to lockdowns. Instead curators sent me images of the work and gallery space. As if describing the photographs of sculpture, installation and multi screen video art was sufficient. And it was because it had to be. For months the city shut and we had nothing else but our dreams.

To curate an exhibition in lockdown needed to feel like dancing, imagining that our bodies would meet again in spectacular ways. I couldn't do this on my own so I asked Raina Peterson if they would join me, nervously awaiting their reply to my text. At the start of 2021 before everything closed I saw them dance an excerpt of their work Maya at Sangam. Their body mesmerised the audience in subtle and beguiling ways. Following their hands gently move reflected how we were all tentatively re-emerging and re-engaging with bodies. I knew they could conceive something special understanding the gentle re-entry into physical space. They replied to my text quickly agreeing to work with me. And with relief and excitement I wrote them an email:

I'm really obsessing over dream stuff and sleep and also just wanting to see really beautiful amazing colourful things, which at the moment just occur in my dreams. LOL So I was thinking that maybe the exhibition could just be called Dreams or Dreaming or in Dreams or something related to dreams but then when I was goggling dream stuff and apparently it's only when you're in the Rapid Eye Movement of sleep that you have dreams. So then I thought maybe we could call it Rapid Eye Movement because it just sounds weird and it's when you dream and it also has movement in it, which I like. And eye which is cool to have a body part in it. Because bodies are awesome and I feel so disconnected from them, even from my own. But yeah if you have any other ideas and thoughts that would be awesome! 🤪

I'm also obsessed with the album and video clip Naretha Williams put out last year called BLACK MASS. The video clip has Carly Sheppard in it https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGCLPPW_NwY and was thinking it would be really cool to screen it cos it's got this weird dreamy trance like feel

and there is a moon in it!! In terms of artists I immediately thought of Manisha Anjali's Covid-19 Dream Journal project <https://communitydream.org/COVID-19-COLLECTIVE-DREAM-JOURNAL> I would love to invite Manisha or the project as a whole to be involved somehow.

To which they replied:

I love all these ideas, Manisha's dream work is freaking amazing and I love Naretha!

And i love Dreams etc or Rapid Eye Movement as title. The latter kind of ties in dreams and bodies and movement all together!

I've been thinking a lot of about bodies, embodiment and the experience of disembodiment during lockdown. And how unreal and disconnected things feel in lockdown (bloody zoom), and dreams sometimes have that feeling too, of being unreal and disjointed, but (and I reckon Manisha would have a great perspective on this) maybe there's something in dreams which is attempting to communicate to us, something which can help us reconnect with the world around us and ourselves and each other.

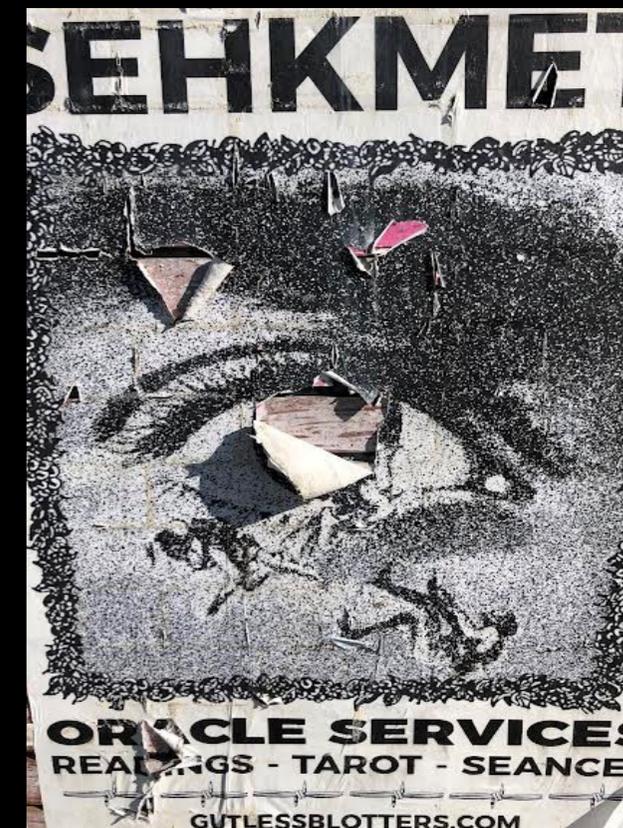
As we emailed back and forth I continued having strange dreams that felt so real that I imagined that they were helping me to reconnect to the world when it opened. Confined to the 10km radius I tried to think of an image to match our theme and the artists we wanted to work with. I was lost until I stumbled across an old poster advertising tarot readings in one of my "daily exercise" reasons to leave the house.

It felt like a dream. Who were these services for, what people were having séances? Or had I missed the obvious and this was the logical conclusion of lockdowns, connecting with other realms.

The answer existed in my dreams because nothing I goggled led to anything conclusive. The website was an empty domain page and no amount of creative searches offered any answers. But the peculiar eye alluded to the surreal dream space we occupied that often felt better than our IRL realities. It became a portal to bring a range of artists together.

And the image that symbolized the exhibition.

Rapid Eye Movement is a dream of your own making both IRL and elsewhere. Through multiple perspectives and mediums the gallery is once again transformed by an astounding group of artists who traverse video, music, photography, text and performance.



Enter the dreams of:

Naretha Williams

Forest Vicky Kapo

Manisha Anjali

Karen Casey

Ruth Nyaruot Ruach

Devika Bilimoria

They offer a series of dreamlike conversations that are real and imaginary depending on your perspective.

The world is opening up again and art exists beyond our dreams but there is no need to rush, just sit and take it slow.

Image Right: Forest Vicky Kapo - *animal dreamtime*

Image opposite page: Ruth Nyaruot Rauch - pearl earring





Image: Ruth Nyaruot Rauch - Alien



Image: Karen Casey - Wadda Loada Dreaming, video still

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Response to Timmah Ball and Raina Peterson's provocation by
Olivia Poloni and megan evans

*'Curating in the expanded field of dreams and email' – Timmah
Ball*

megan - initial thoughts

I wonder do we curate our dreams?

REM sleep is mostly when we dream and apparently 'may benefit learning, memory and mood.'¹ During these covid influenced times I have been having particularly vivid dreams which is a function of REM sleep. Sometimes when I woke it took me a while to sort the dreams from my memories of what had been happening during my waking hours. Does this mean I am learning to cope with the changed circumstances we are all dealing with right now? Are my dreams useful???

*Olivia - responding to both megan's thoughts and personal
experience*

Dreams have been incredibly useful for me over the past two years. I too had the most vivid and powerful dreams during lockdowns. They would take me to physical, emotional and historical states that during



Image: Ruth Nyaruot Rauch - Red

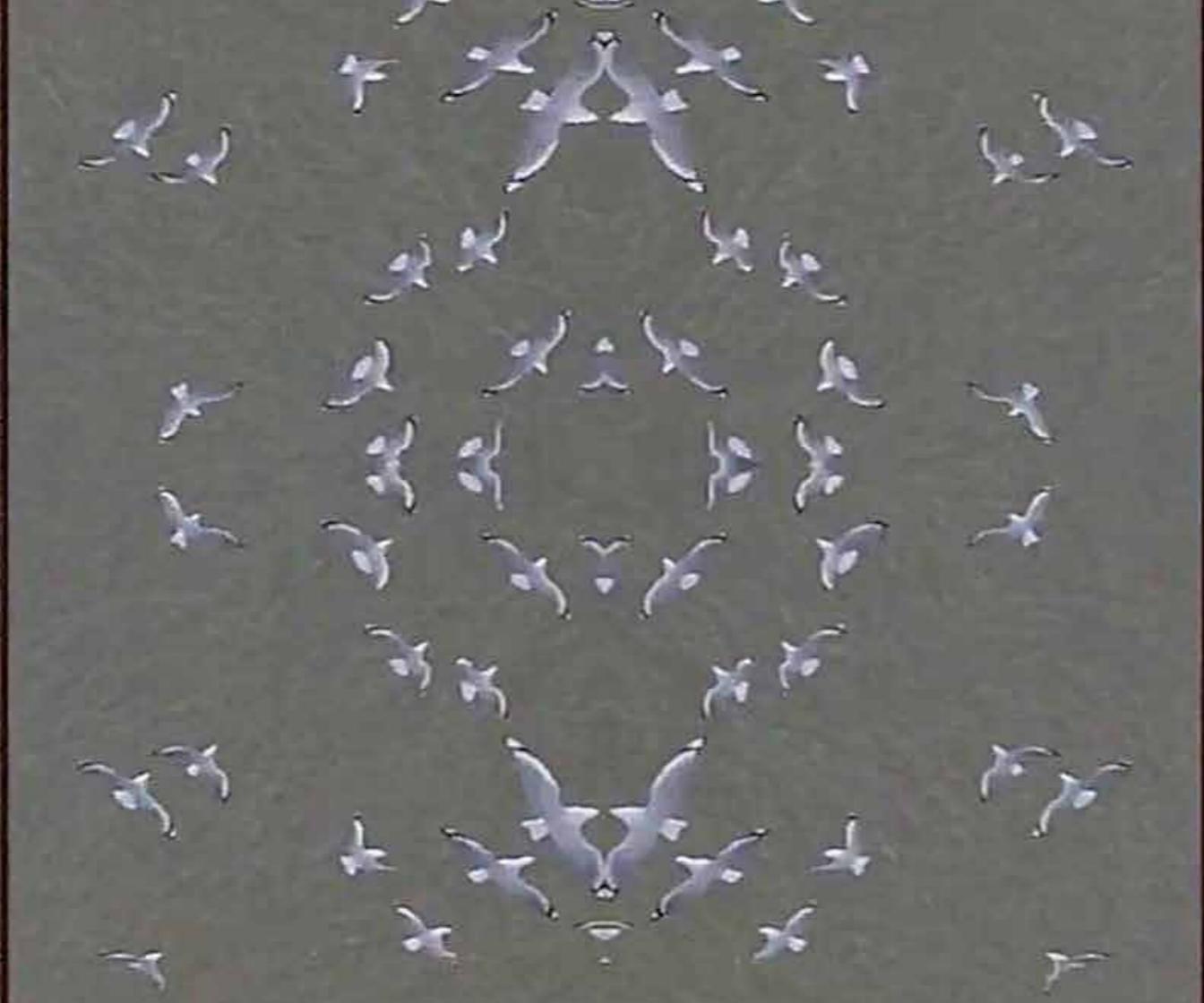
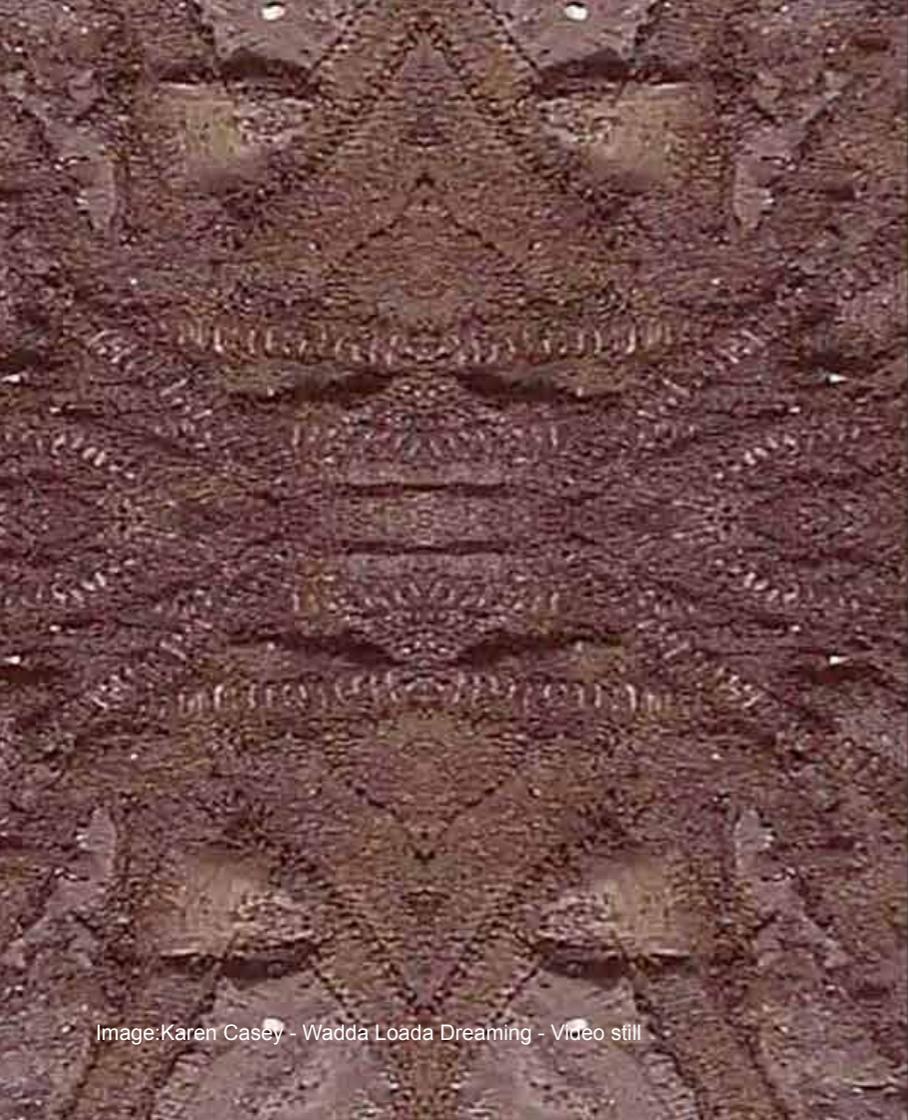


Image: Karen Casey - Wadda Looda Dreaming - Video still

the waking hours were inaccessible. It's not so much the particulars of what I was dreaming that interested me but the possibilities of where that dream journey took me when I woke. Lockdown is so boring. By the end of 2021 lockdown I felt flat and void of stimulus in the everyday. I remember the word 'languish' being thrown around. Beyond Blue describes it as 'a feeling that you are stuck and empty'.² How do you find muse in that constant state? For me dreaming allowed me to feel. To grasp at intense emotions, ups and downs, those lost sensations that the mundanity of lockdowns stole. They were motivating and invigorating. This all translated into my curating. I gained more momentum than ever before and worked on some fantastic projects.

'Whether art existed or if I felt the same way about it' – Timmah Ball

Olivia - initial thoughts

I craved creative connection during lockdown. Having been so abruptly cut off from creative communities, art spaces and art IRL forced me to quickly create meaningful virtual connections to sustain creative thinking and practicing. Fortunately, I was part of a creative collective, the Image Collective, and in 2020 we received funding to support the making of a publication and website. We met regularly on zoom, spending hours discussing questions such as the one posed by Timmah above. Had our relationship with the image and image making changed due to the pandemic? In the introductory text to the Image Collective publication, I asked 'what does the image mean when it's all we have, when we can't go outside to see the real thing?'³ I still don't know the answer to this. But I do know that I personally feel a stronger connection to it than in pre-covid times. That being forced into an impossible situation of curating during a crisis clarified my relationship with it and made it undivided. Pre-covid I constantly questioned my future within the arts, now I can't ever see myself doing anything else.

megan - responding to both Olivia's thoughts and personal experience

I turned inward during lockdown. I was very thankful for my own art practice as it gave me a much-needed time filler and a very direct way to be creative over the long periods spent in isolation. In regard to how it affected my experience of curating I felt very differently. I really missed seeing other people's work in real life. On one occasion I had to curate/hang a very large exhibition entirely virtually. The Wyndham Art Prize which included over 80 works had to be created in a mock-up of our exhibition space using photographs of the walls so that it could be translated into a virtual gallery based on the Wyndham Art Gallery. This was very weird, and I found myself waking in the night trying to walk myself around the two floors of the gallery and remember whether I had missed anything. My half-awake state blended into my dreams on many occasions, curating in my sleep.

Did the exhibition exist, did the art exist or did it only exist in my dreams. What was real? It was hard to distinguish, made more difficult given I had a real-life memory of an actual space that we had recreated in a world made of zeros and ones. I am left wondering what IS In Real Life anyway????

'...conversations in liminal space' – Timmah Ball

megan - initial thoughts

I have been missing lingering in hallways, or chatting by the photocopier, the liminal spaces of my workplace. Instead, my sleeping hours seem more and more like the virtual hallways of the faux meetings done on Teams or Zoom. Am I talking to colleagues, curators, artists online or am I dreaming about talking to them. If we take the non-space of the internet as a liminal space we are constantly beaming to and fro, from one strange and sometimes blurry vision to another. The weird background effects, that allow your conversationalist to be anywhere from the Gold Coast to New York and then slide in and out of view, mingled with their cat or a plant on their desk, is dreamlike.

Olivia responding to both megan's thoughts and personal experience

Working within liminal spaces during the lockdowns and in general through the pandemic has been one of



Image: Naretha Williams - Chaos Country, Video still

the most challenging issues. How do we program when we are stuck in between lockdowns with an end date never close or certain? How do we program with relevance during a pandemic when nothing is the same as before and we don't know what it will be like post?

'I dreamt a lot, which reminded me that I still had a body' 'My dreams were filled with evocative images, which brought joy in the temporary absence of socialisation'. – Timmah Ball

Olivia - initial thoughts

I wish I'd kept a dream journal. In my dreams I caught up with so many people from my past and met new ones. I travelled to existing and imagined places. I dealt with issues. Now I don't remember any of this in detail. I do remember the feeling though. I can't forget that. The sensation when you initially woke from those vivid dreams. It sits deep in your stomach and slowly slips away down your legs and through your toes throughout the day, as if you slowly walk them away. I wish I could catch those dreams and access them on demand. That feeling is so familiar and I crave it.

megan - responding to both Olivia's thoughts and personal experience

I know what you mean, that sense of something really important that is just out of your grasp. I can only remember my dreams when I am in-between sleep and wakefulness. As I become more conscious, they slip away and only the really strong dreams stay and only if I really concentrate on remembering them.

I had one last night that I tried to remember so I could write about it here. It was as though I was watching it on a television set, but an old-fashioned screen. I was swimming in a backyard pool and then I was looking at a scene on a screen of a man with tin legs dropping into the sea to swim with a shark. The view was from under the water, and he was talking to the audience about how he was safe from the shark because of these tin legs. The when the shark came and tried to eat him his legs were unpalatable and just as it was about to eat his upper body a huge groper with enormous teeth ate the shark. I have such a strong image in my head, almost like an after image, of the man dropping through the ocean with his tin legs. He was very small. I'm no analyst but there is something about that small man with tin legs in a big ocean seen on a screen, that resonates with my waking feeling of dealing with covid.

'They offer dreamlike conversations that are real and imaginary depending on your perspective.' – Timmah Ball

megan - initial thoughts

IRL, in real life has taken on a new meaning. Once that was waking time, walking around time, doing anything in your own physical dimension that has you interact with other physical objects. The virtual world has changed our expectations of that. We can walk around in a virtual world using a VR headset and it 'seems' as though we are experiencing the real world. Maybe this has just made me more conscious of the disjuncture between what I experience and know is real for me, and what you experience and know is real for you? We never really know what Orange is for anyone else because we only have the clumsiness of language to share our experience of it, both colour, touch and taste. Seen from this perspective all our conversations are dreamlike. We swim in a 3D collage of indistinct experiences as though we are bumping up against one another in our dreams, REM sleeping through a workday, shopping while asleep, sleep walking through our lives?????

Olivia - responding to both megan's thoughts and personal experience

Have you heard of the Immersive Presence Project produced by St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne? They have collaborated with filmmaker Lynette Wallworth to create VR experiences for COVID-19 patients; allowing VR access to their loved ones and missed comforts from home when it's not possible IRL. The family 'curate' the VR experience for their family member in hospital including events such as a normal family dinner, gardening or the dog playing to comfort the isolated patient.

<https://www.svhm.org.au/newsroom/news/virtual-reality-brings-patients-closer-to-home-during-covid-19>

megan's response to Olivia

I wish I could experience that. Maybe we will be curating that way in the future??

Olivia's response to megan

Maybe somewhere people already do?



Artist in Conversation

Rapid Eye Movement

Saturday 12 Feb

4 - 6pm

Hear from curators, artists and audiences ponder their dreams, discuss the consequences of isolation during Covid and speculate about the future of art in our uncertain world.

Then wander up the road to Park Lounge at Kelly Park where Wyndham City celebrates all things queer with music, performance, food, drink and fun.

Access this discussion as well as past Artist in Conversation event recordings through through Wyndham Art Gallery's podcast channel *Go Deeper* at:

<https://wyndhamartgallery.podbean.com/>



Image: Dani Reynolds - Latent



#deepwest
wyndham.vic.gov.au/arts

