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SOPHIE O'BRIEN

Sophie O'Brien comes from an artistic family. "My mum and sister are artists, and my dad is a theatre director and academic," she says. "If you put all these things together, you'd probably get a curator."

Growing up in a small community of artists outside Perth, O'Brien joined her family as they travelled together to see art exhibitions, theatre shows and live music. "Those early experiences really informed what my own practice became," she says. Starting her career at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, O'Brien went on to work as a curator throughout Australia, Europe and the UK, taking up positions with the Perth Festival, the Biennale of Sydney, the Australia Council Venice Biennale Pavilion, Tate Britain and London's Serpentine Gallery. During that time, O'Brien worked with an enviable list of artists including **Susan Norrie**, **Mark Leckey** and **Marina Abramović** while among her curatorial colleagues she lists **Isabel Carlos** and **Hans Ulrich Obrist** as instrumental figures.

"In the 1990s, the role of a curator was

fairly dynamic," O'Brien explains. "The nature of the job meant you moved from project to project, you didn't necessarily stay in one institution for a long period of time." Making her way back to Australia via New York and Brazil, O'Brien spent two years at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in New Zealand, landing back in Melbourne in 2018. Most recently O'Brien has found herself in regional New South Wales, where she is currently installed as head of curatorial and learning at Bundanon Trust. And once again, she is working within a dynamic environment poised for change.

Bundanon is currently building a brand-new subterranean art museum and 140-metre bridge, inspired by rural Australia's historic trestle bridges. The \$33 million build, designed by award-winning Kerstin Thompson Architects, will house Bundanon's \$43 million art collection and an exciting roster of contemporary and international exhibitions. Slated to open late 2021, the new space will place Bundanon firmly within the canon of important national

institutions.

O'Brien points out Bundanon is expanding its contemporary program but still retaining its core values. "Landscape is the protagonist here. The museum and artist-in-residency program will be a space of experimentation yet still linked to our ongoing conversation about the landscape. It's quite a responsibility to think through these things. Our relationships with First Nations People are primary. To think about the land you are on, whose land it is and how we interact with and learn from it."

Looking ahead, O'Brien sees a future with plenty of space to listen, experiment and collaborate. "Bundanon is a bit like me, it's a hybrid," she says. "My plan is to be as collaborative as possible. We'd like to invite lots of people to be here – not just audiences but artists, thinkers, researchers and writers. Bundanon is a gift of having space and time to think new thoughts, have new experiences and be transformed. That's the gift of **Arthur** and **Yvonne Boyd**."

Briony Downes