



## **MICHAEL WILLIAMS APPOINTED ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF 2021 SYDNEY WRITERS' FESTIVAL**

**Media Release, Tuesday August 18, 2020**

The Sydney Writers' Festival Board of Directors is pleased to announce that Michael Williams has been appointed Artistic Director of the 2021 Festival.

On the appointment, Festival Chair Mark Scott said, "The wealth of literary programming that Williams brings to this role is unsurpassed, and in this difficult financial and curatorial time for Arts organisations the board is heartened to have someone as impeccably qualified as Michael working on the May 2021 program. His lengthy service at Melbourne's Wheeler Centre renders him one of the best-connected people in the Australian literary world."

Williams will work on the 2021 festival, scheduled for 26 April–2 May, while a global search for the ongoing position will take place in early 2021.

The appointment reunites Williams with Sydney Writers' Festival CEO, Chrissy Sharp with whom he previously worked at Melbourne's Wheeler Centre for Books Writing and Ideas. In 2009, Sharp was the inaugural Director and Williams, the Head of Programming. When Sharp left in 2011, Williams was promoted to Director where he worked until March this year.

"Michael is well-known to Sydney Writers' Festival audiences, and much admired by them for his frequent contributions as event moderator and for memorable interviews with Festival guests like George Saunders, Max Porter and Helen Garner. In Melbourne he is much loved as a champion of Australian writing and publishing and for his engaging and inclusive programming at the Wheeler Centre. I'm really looking forward to working with him on the 2021 Sydney Writers' Festival," said Sharp.

Over the period of Williams' Wheeler Centre leadership, the centre hosted more than 200 events a year and attracted a global audience through podcasts, broadcasts and digital media. Williams also hosted ABC RN's *Blueprint for Living* (2015–2016) and *Talkfest* (2017–2019). He remains a regular guest on ABC Radio and TV.

Excited by the task ahead, Williams said, "I've been a fan of Sydney Writers' Festival for many years—as a reader, as someone who worked in publishing, as a colleague at Melbourne's Wheeler Centre and as an interviewer and participant on their stages—and there is nothing like it. There's a reason it's one of the world's best writers' festivals, beloved by audiences and authors alike. At any time I'd be thrilled by the prospect of getting to work with this astonishing team. Right now, amidst the instability and hardship, Sydney Writers' Festival has an opportunity to reimagine how we think about what a writers' festival is and does; who it's for and why it matters. As the relationship between the local and the global changes in seismic ways, the ways we share stories and build communities around conversation is powerful and vital. I can't think of anywhere better to explore that than the Sydney Writers' Festival."

Williams replaces Michaela McGuire who has taken up the role of Melbourne Writers' Festival Artistic Director.