



VARUNA, THE WRITERS' HOUSE

Australia's national residential writers' centre in the Blue Mountains

VARUNA is Australia's national residential writers' house in the former home of writers Eleanor and Dr. Eric Dark in Katoomba in the Blue Mountains. In 1989 their son Mick Dark gifted their home to the Australian public through The Eleanor Dark Foundation. Since then Varuna, The

Writer's House, through its residential program, has inspired the creation of new Australian writing and provided support for a thriving writing community and growing alumni by providing a dedicated writing environment in which to create and develop new work.

The 2014 Varuna Residential Program will run continuously throughout the year with up to five writers, each with an identified project, invited to be in residence at Varuna at any one time.

The five streams of the Varuna Residential Program are:

- Varuna Residential Fellowships for Writers and Illustrators: This is a selective program that in 2014 will offer 30 outstanding Australian writers and illustrators residential weeks at Varuna to develop a new work (15 weeks in total).
- Varuna Residential Partnerships: In partnership with writing organisations and individual philanthropists Varuna supports a range of residential opportunities for writers that encourage equity, access and diversity in Australian writing. Varuna will support 10 residential partnerships in 2014 (7 weeks in total).
- Varuna Publisher Introduction Program: Varuna's Publisher Fellowships provide writers with an opportunity for their work to come to the attention of an industry decision maker whilst it is still in development, and offer industry decision makers the opportunity to make a connection with new writers and works of potential. Varuna will offer 15 Publisher Fellowship residencies in 2014 (7 weeks in total).
- Varuna Guided Programs: Professional development residency programs offered by Varuna in the 2014-2016 triennium will include: Varuna Professional Development Residencies, offering one-on-one consultations with one of Varuna's Creative Consultants whilst in residence; and Varuna Focus Weeks offering writers the opportunity to live in residence with a creative mentor whilst working on a particular project. In developing themes for Varuna Focus weeks Varuna will continue to consider and create platforms for discussion and the creation of new work in emerging forms of practice and the development of collaborative works. Varuna will offer 37 Guided Program residencies in 2014 (7 weeks in total).
- Varuna Invited Residency Program: Limited places are also available for writers with an identified project to request a paying residency at Varuna.

The Varuna with Sydney Writers' Festival is a well-established three-day event held since 2006 primarily at the wonderfully atmospheric and historic Carrington Hotel in Katoomba. The Festival serves as a platform for the promotion of new Australian writing, including the promotion of local and regional writers, and an opportunity for writers and the community to engage with international writers in an intelligent and intimate environment. The Festival continues to be an important opportunity for audience development, particularly to those readers living in western Sydney, the Blue Mountains and central west NSW.

In 2014 the Festival will feature signature events centred on the Art Deco Carrington Hotel. The main

program, featuring international and national authors, will be held on Monday 19 and Tuesday 20 May.

The line-up this year includes a Booker-nominated international novelist; high-profile politicians mulling over chaotic careers; comedians, poets side-by-side with debut fiction from emerging writers who were helped by Varuna. The Festival ends with a book about escaping the rat race through cycling, followed by a cycle tour of the Blue Mountains!

Opening the Festival at the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre on Friday 16 May will be an exhibition of poetry and illustrations inspired by Mountains stories and legends from the Black and Blue group; along with an exhibition of indigenous stories and artworks—'Stories from the Mountains' and 'Stories from the Sea'.

If last year's program is anything to go by, this year will be another exciting and memorable event. Last year, reports Paul Cosgrave, Dermot Healy, described as Ireland's finest living writer, 'entertained effortlessly with stories from his native west of Ireland and read from his novel 'Long Time, No See'. Healy cited Joyce and Beckett among his major inspirations. Cheryl Strayed ('Wild') soaked the audience in American wit and charm, describing her spiritual strengthening on an 1100 mile Pacific Coast Trail hike. Geordie Williamson ('The Burning Library') pondered the reasons behind fading awareness of earlier Australian literature; and Helen Trinca ('Madeleine') offered new insights into Madeleine St. John's anxious life. Mark O'Flynn ('The Forgotten World') described the extraordinary community of 'South Katoomba', once sited near the Ruined Castle. Anne Summers presented a characteristically stark but logically compelling exposé of Australian misogyny. 'Why can't we move on from this—it's been on the agenda for forty years, now?' she asked. Broadcaster Ramona Koval ('By The Book'), called words 'the archaeology of your soul', and social researcher and writer Hugh Mackay presented the annual Dr. Eric Dark Memorial Lecture.'

It was indeed a feast for all literature lovers. For details of this year's program, see www.varuna.com.au

Below: A panel from the 2013 Varuna-Sydney Writers' Festival events at the Carrington Hotel featuring Carol Major, Jesse Blackadder, Mark O'Flynn and Julienne van Loon (photo Paul Cosgrave)

