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# Soft sculptures invite co-creation at old bank building

Turn the historic Union Bank building into your universe with ØFFERINGŚ, the creative mind behind UnitePlayPerform.

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Celina Lei



VISUAL ARTS

UnitePlayPerform, ØFFERINGŚ (Melissa Gilbert). Photo: Jason Winston.

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Earlier in the year, Melbourne's **MARS Gallery** and property developer Banco Group partnered up to offer the old Union Bank building in Prahran as a free site for creative projects until 30 December 2023.

After an open call to artists and curators across all mediums, the new initiative, Art at the Bank welcomes ØFFERINGŚ (Melissa Gilbert) to present the first exhibition in this special venue.

Known for creating otherworldly experiences, Gilbert draws inspiration from pioneers of counterculture and socially engaged art, including US choreographer Anna Halprin, conceptual artist Marina Abramović and Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto.

She is the creative mind behind **UnitePlayPerform**, an organisation with a mission to drive the cross-fertilisation of art, health, science and well-being.

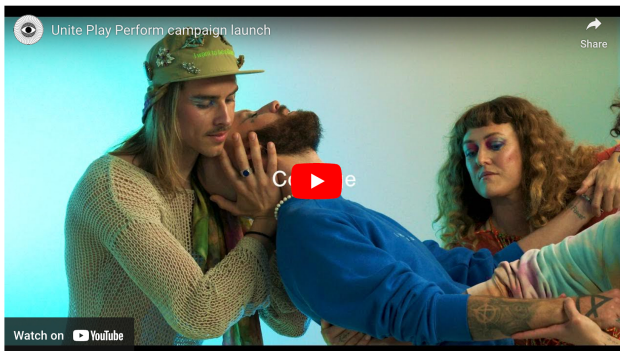
The aesthetic identity of UnitePlayPerform is 'a response to the isolation and segregation of society,' says Gilbert, telling *ArtsHub* that the idea emerged organically during the lockdowns of 2019.

For the past few years, Gilbert has been creating Playkits – custom-designed sculptural works – for different workshops that hand over agency and autonomy to the participants. From large-scale public art to intimate dining experiences, these activations have previously transformed iconic venues, including the Queen Victoria Building in Sydney and Carriageworks. An iteration of her soft sculptures was also included in Museum of Brisbane's **Play Moves** last year.

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UnitePlayPerform is underpinned by neuroscience and built upon an action-based framework – disarm, disrupt, unite, play, perform and transform.

'It creates safety, where participants are then guided to create risk and choice,' explains Gilbert. [The process] goes through this cycle twice over, and it deepens the sense of accomplishment for participants, rather than just being a voyeuristic experience.'



*Design your own universe* will fill the historic Union Bank building with soft sculptures, wearable objects, a live soundscape and tangible installations – inviting participants on a journey of community art-making and self-discovery from 23-28 May.

During this time, Gilbert will guide participants through five interactive experiences: Build and Destroy, Quintessence Experience, Ancient Future Playshop, Kinship Playshop and Utopia Playshop, where the human energy becomes part of the art itself.

She says that the goal is to use the opportunity to bring back a thriving community and activate unused spaces in meaningful ways.

UnitePlayPerform opens with a **celebratory launch on 21 May**, followed by a programmed schedule each day until 28 May; **bookings required**.

More artists participating in Art at Union Bank will be announced in the upcoming months.

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Celina Lei is an arts writer and editor at ArtsHub. She acquired her M.A in Art, Law and Business in New York with a B.A. in Art History and Philosophy from the University of Melbourne. She has previously worked across global art hubs in Beijing, Hong Kong and New York in both the commercial art sector and art criticism. Most recently she took part in drafting NAVA's revised Code of Practice - Art Fairs. Celina is based in Naarm/Melbourne. Instagram: @leizy\_

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