

# Angelica Mesiti *Relay League*

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## Education Resource

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Art & Design



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## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

*Relay League* by Angelica Mesiti presents a newly commissioned three-channel video installation. The work takes as its departure point a Morse code message transmitted by the French navy on 31 January 1997 to signal the imminent demise of this communication method: 'Calling all. This is our last cry before our eternal silence'. Morse code, which entailed a system of dot and dash radio signals and was often utilized as a language of distress at sea, was phased out after 130 years in favour of new digital communications. Inspired by this final poetic phrase, here Mesiti interprets its original dots and dashes through music, choreography and non-verbal communication.

The first video features the musician-composer Uriel Barthélémi translating the Morse code message into a percussive score that permeates throughout the entire installation. The second shows a unique form of dialogue and exchange between two dancers, Sindri Runudde, who is partially sighted and Emilia Wibron Vesterlund. Together the pair has developed an intimate and corporeal language of communicating movement as Emilia helps Sindri to 'watch' dance through the touch and feel of their movements together to interpret and understand the choreography through the touch and feel of her body against his. The third depicts the dancer Filipe Lourenço interpreting Barthélémi's percussive sounds in a new choreography that directly references silence and vision through gestures loosely drawn from the vernacular of folk dance. This final video reveals that a dialogue is playing out between each of the performers, and the dots and dashes transmitted throughout the galleries produce a subtle dissonance so that the work continually slips back and forth between cohesion and dissolution. *Relay League* leaves a sensory impression of a language that has been transformed into code, which in turn iterates as a score, a performance, a haptic exchange and an instrument, enabling multiple acts of translation across time and space.

*Relay League* draws on the artist's ongoing interest in non-verbal communication, crosscultural exchange and adapted methods of expression. A defining feature of Mesiti's practice that will be integral to these new works is her investment in collaboration with a variety of performers - both professionally trained and self taught, hailing from metropolitan centres to small, remote communities. The works are conceptually linked by their exploration of perception, translation, communication, loss, silence and reinvention via the language of performance. They consider notions of limitation not with pity but with respect for its difference, resilience and innovation, highlighting how transformation emerges from loss and decay.

Mesiti's practice has consistently demonstrated an interest in how the body is used in expression and communication. This has been explored via music and dance as a form of cultural remembrance in widely seen works including *Citizens Band* (2012), *In the Ear of the Tyrant* (2014) and *Nakh Removed* (2015). She has investigated adapted methods of communication in the face of adversity in *The Calling* (2013-14), which depicts the intricacies of whistling languages in three remote communities, and in *The Colour of Saying* (2015) for which she worked with a sign language choir and elderly ballet dancers to consider the paradox of 'ability'. The work was filmed during Mesiti's residency at the Centre National de la Danse in Paris.

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Angelica Mesiti was born in Sydney in 1976 and is currently based in Paris. She holds a Master of Fine Arts from the College of Fine Arts (now UNSW Art & Design) at the University of New South Wales. Mesiti works primarily with video and installation, incorporating performance, dance and music to explore ideas of community, cultural tradition and spirituality. She is interested in performed cultural traditions in a state of transformation or at risk of extinction due to complex social, economic or cultural shifts.

Mesiti has received numerous awards, grants and commissions to create her work and has exhibited widely in biennales and institutions both nationally and internationally.

Mesiti is also a member of the collaborative group The Kingpins (with Técha Noble, Emma Price and Katie Price). They have exhibited and performed in museums nationally and overseas.

Angelica Mesiti, *Relay League* (video still), 2017, commissioned by Artspace. Image courtesy the artist, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne and Galerie Allen, Paris



## KEY CONCEPTS

translation  
language  
communication  
science  
transformation  
transmission  
choreography  
expression  
performance  
representaton  
adaptation  
interpretation

## PRIMARY STUDENTS

This primary program encourages cross curriculum connections and experimental art making. Activities have been designed to involve students in creative thinking, appreciation of visual art concepts and artists, as well as art making.

## RESPONDING

Describe what you see:

Choose one video. Can you describe what the performers are doing? Do you think they are telling a story? If so, what kind of story is it?

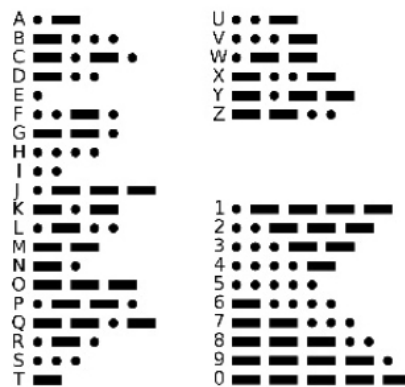
List all of the ways you communicate with your friends. This can include speaking or waving, playing, laughing, dancing, crying.

A mood is a feeling that can be created by an artwork. Close your eyes and listen to the beating sound in the gallery. How does this sound make you feel?

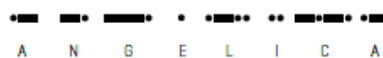
Play a game of Telephone using the Morse code phrase from the exhibition: 'Calling all, this is our final cry before our eternal silence'. As a class discuss how this game might relate to the exhibition.

## CREATING

International morse code:



Write your name using the international Morse code. For example, Angelica spelt in morse code is:



Now that you can spell your name in Morse code can you play it? Using any instrument, clapping or humming perform your name to the class.

You can decide how you want to interpret the sound of Morse code but traditionally the dot is a short, staccato sound and the dash is an elongated sound.

Angelica Mesiti, *Relay League* (installation view), 2017.  
comissioned by Artspace. Image courtesy Artspace  
Photography: Zen Wimberley



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## SECONDARY STUDENTS

The secondary activities are designed to develop and broaden students' understanding and ability to critically interpret art concepts, the artist and their practices, as well as design and make artworks using different techniques.

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### RESPONDING

As you move through the video works in the exhibition space, consider the lighting and sound in the installation. Are you more or less aware of your body and movements in the gallery space? Expand on the importance of the body in the exhibition.

What impact does the rhythmic beat have in the gallery space? Describe how important sound and vibration is to this exhibition. How different would this exhibition feel if you were watching the videos in silence?

Consider the design of the installation and the exhibition title. How does the placement of works and design of the space relate this to a relay league.

Spoken languages are the primary source of communication in our society. Consider two forms of non-verbal communication. What do these adapted methods of interaction reveal about human experience?

How has Mesiti used filmic techniques in these works? What effect does this create?

How the artist expressed ideas of transmission and translation in her practice.

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## CREATING

In small groups, assign yourselves roles as either writers or performers.

Create a performance that responds to a current event. Together consider how to create movements that will physically represent the event. Consider facial expression, posture, gestures, gaze and use of space.

Writers are to take notes documenting the performance and reporting on the event. Performers and writers then collectively present their work to the class.

Reflect on your process with the group. How did you translate the event into a choreography and discuss any difficulties you had trying to communicate using your body.

Angelica Mesiti, *Relay League* (video still), 2017, commissioned by Artspace. Image courtesy the artist, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne and Galerie Allen, Paris

Education resource content developed by Artspace Sydney.

*Relay League* was curated and developed by Artspace and is touring nationally with Museums & Galleries of NSW. This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. The development and presentation of *Relay League* is supported by Commissioning Partner the Keir Foundation. *Relay League* was produced with the support of C ND National de la Danse, Paris and University of New South Wales Art & Design. *Relay League* will be accompanied by a book published by Schwartz City and designed by Formist.

