Welcome everybody.

It is an honour for me to be invited to talk about this wonderful new book by Kate Veitch entitled "Trust"... in fact to talk a bit about "Trust" the book and "trust", the notion.

This book, and the way Kate writes, is always in close contact with a remarkable sense of familiarity; what it means to be part of a family, a relationship, a group, a tribe. She hears the internal voices that we all have. She tenderly supports the misgivings, the wants and needs of her characters. She recognises their foibles and flaws but she praises them too. She is not judgemental, but chooses to see a logical sense in whichever way her protagonists behave. The introduction to her characters is intimate. For example, here is a quote from chapter 1:

"Privately, Susanna was tired of hearing about the American election, but she wasn't about to say that. It would just make her sound provincial. Glancing down, she noticed her T-shirt was clinging unflatteringly to her puddingy tum; she pulled it surreptitiously away, hoping that the others, all taller and leaner than her, hadn't noticed. She often found herself feeling like a little teapot, short and stout, but how much could she do about that? It was just her build, like all of the Greenfield women; that, and middle age. Yet Gerry, eight years her senior at fifty-three, seemed barely to have aged since she met him."

The lives of these fictitious people can then unfold for the reader in such an honest and courageous way that one can not help but to notice that it is the same with one's own real life; the way it unfolds simultaneously on many levels, private and public, equipped to manage some circumstances well, others not so well, but never without this basic human faith in fate that propels us forward with hope. This is trust.

It is also the occasional lack of trust or sense of betrayal, which then has such an important role to play. We are all given an angel and a devil and a path to negotiate between them, but only in the light of one can the other be truly discerned.

The choices of conscience, whether right or wrong, reach back to a basic survival instinct which governs our behaviour. It is these universal truths, I feel, which drive the most relevant stories and which give rise to the most meaningful creative endeavour. It is such a privilege to belong to a species with instinct, which is a marvellous resource. It means as a mother, I can instantly feel what all mothers of all time have felt, the joys and the challenges. As a woman, I can respond to the fundamental nature of being female, and as a painter, which is my profession, I can engage with the decisions of painters past and present, in order to confer my own understanding of human nature through my work. I feel that Kate and I share a pursuit to capture that instinct into stories, Kate's in the written word, mine on canvas and in this way our work has brought us together.

Kate has an innate affinity for the artist. In her first novel called "Listen", the internal world of a visual artist was explored in such a way that on reading it, I was amazed how closely she understood the painter's internal dialogue. Susanna, a character in this book, is also a painter, who feels so touched and has such empathy for the people in stories she hears about, particularly when they are confronting and sometimes tragic stories, that she, like myself, has the need to draw and paint about it.

There is a beautiful line here from Susanna when talking about the subjects of her drawings with a fellow artist, and I quote

"Susanna went quite still. 'How strange you should say that. That's exactly what's been going through my head every time I do these drawings. Like there's a thousand little voices and they're all saying I was here, this is what happened. Remember me".

It is this overlapping of Susanna's story with my own that has brought me into Kate Veitch's world and here today.

Some years ago, I painted about one of the very same stories that Susanna does, quite coincidently, in this book. In this case, it was the actual experience of the poor souls who perished on the SIEV X as you may remember, the boat which sank off the coast of Indonesia in 2001 drowning 353 people, mostly mothers and children. At the time, and as a mother, I was in such grief about the incident, although I didn't know any of the individuals personally, that I felt compelled to work through it.

My brother in law, the clarinettist and composer Paul Dean, came to my studio back then, saw these paintings and similarly dared to feel something of their pain as well. They also moved him to write a piece of music entitled "Abyss", which was then premiered and reviewed in a Sydney paper.

Kate happened to read this review while completing this book, and was astonished to find that the music had been inspired by a painter who was living and working in Melbourne, and in fact painting the very same paintings as her protagonist, Susanna.

Kate contacted me, somewhat concerned that I may think she had pilfered an idea but as I wrote to her in subsequent emails, it is right and no surprise that these atrocities are engaged with simultaneously in literature and other artforms and I suggested that maybe there is also a universal consciousness where such stories are shared because they demand it.

Well, for us it has meant a new and unexpected friendship, and a cross-fertilisation of the arts, through literature, visual arts and music. But they are all platforms doing the same thing, that being, the translation of empathy into another form in order to address and better understand another person's world in a profoundly familiar way and then perhaps to better understand one's own. I think that the purpose of arts is to repackage innate knowledge and to deliver it back to us far more succinctly because of the fact that it has been slightly shifted in form, away from the here and now.

So the great privilege for those working in the arts is to be able to reconnect an audience with their own instinct, to deliver reassurance to the humble human condition and to nourish the public with the knowledge that their sense of trust, however challenged, is right. In Kate's novels, we see how empathy is positioned amongst her characters. Kate then has her gift of empathy for each of them in turn, and harnesses our imagination and empathy in such a way that we can actually feel and experience the world of another.

It is with great pleasure that I launch "Trust" by Kate Veitch.