

A Pleasant View of Art

Arts Access has been running a series of programmes at Pleasant View Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation centre through 1991, through funding from the Myer Foundation.

One of the projects just completed is a mural for the drug rehabilitation unit. The work was challenging, said project coordinator Claire Humphries-Hunt, because the participants were only in the unit for two weeks at a time, and most of them were in pretty bad shape, physically and psychologically.

"They'd commit themselves for two week stretches, usually to come off one drug or another," said Claire. "When I got to see them, say, two days after they arrived, they were in a diabolical state. Their noses were running. They couldn't hold their pencils. They were terribly sick."

Claire got the participants to lie on sheets of paper while she traced around them. Then she asked them to fill in the outlines with all the things going on in their heads.

"Music had a huge effect on their moods," said Claire. At first they played things like AC/DC, and this led to buckets of blood and heavy black lines in the drawing. I decided to calm things down a bit by playing Mozart. Everyone can listen to classical music, whether they want to or not. It's not going to kill them.

"The first panel of the triptych contained all the negative self-portraits. I ran a poem called 'Miss Heroin' in gold letters across the empty outline of a woman.



Photography by Colin Bogaars

Hard at work on the Pleasant View Mural

"For the central panel, I wanted to get them interested in images of healing. The negative imagery had been so deadly. I brought in 'nice' books that had pictures of animals and the participants loved them. These positive images were incorporated into a big wheel, representing the development of their feelings and their recovery from their illness.

"I had to be careful about including references to drugs in the work," said Claire. "These people would get tremendously turned on by pictures of drugs—even by the words 'heroin' or

'marijuana'. So I referred to drugs using allegorical images. For instance, petals of poppies falling, so that they looked like tears of blood.

"The last image is of a rejuvenated human being, with its arms above its head. It's another of those trace arounds. The space inside the figure is full of gum trees and flying parrots. The rejuvenated person is full of light and colour, like the sky.

"I wanted the participants to look at themselves," said Claire. "Then I wanted them to sort out in their heads what they wanted to become."

Theatre Showing the Way

An exciting project scheduled to commence in early 1992 is the Community Re-integration Theatre Project. It has been funded by the Health Department's Drug Rehabilitation and Research Fund. It will involve clients and staff of four Victorian alcohol and drug agencies in the creation and production of a

performance piece that will explore issues relevant to the clients' re-integration into the community. There will be five public performances of the piece, in order to present the issues to the broader community and to professionals working in the drug and alcohol field. As well as benefiting people who are

getting over drug-addictions, by getting interested in drama and boosting their self-esteem, the project will also allow them to present the issues of concern to them to a wider audience. The concept was born out of discussions with Liz Cooper from CREST, an alcohol and drug agency. Arts Access developed the project and secured the funding.

Arts Access plans for 1992

December is a busy time for Arts Access with much work being put into planning the coming year's programme of activities. The availability of funding, unfortunately, is nearly always the final deciding factor on the viability of specific projects.

Many of those projects which have secured funding for 1992 are detailed in this newsletter. Others that have either secured funding or are awaiting the outcomes of applications include:

Caloola Integration Theatre Project

This exciting project will be a 15 week music and performance project with residents of the Caloola Centre in Sunbury which is currently scheduled for closure in late 1992. The project will assist residents in their relocation from Caloola into community-based care and accommodation. Arts Access has been trying to raise funds for a number of years for projects at Caloola and is looking forward to working with the residents in this final chapter for the centre.

Exposures

The various exhibitions that have been held as a result of Arts Access projects over the last two years have been so successful that a major touring exhibition is being planned for early 1992. Opening in the Malthouse Theatre's exhibition space in early March, the exhibition will then tour to the Mildura and Warrnambool regional galleries. A number of participating artists will also tour with the exhibition to conduct a number of forums/discussions in each centre about their work as artists.

Disadvantaged Youth

Disadvantaged youth will be a high priority for Arts Access in 1992. A major programme is being developed with youth in the Werribee region that will result in both a performance piece and visual art. In addition, Arts Access is currently developing a range of activities for youth in the St Kilda region.

Trainee Koori Project Officer

Following the success of the Koori Arts Project in 1991, Arts Access has identified a huge need for Kooris trained in project management skills. During 1992, Arts Access hopes to employ a Koori trainee project officer who will work on a wide variety of Arts Access projects, developing a wide range of skills.

In addition to these projects, work will continue with residents of Special Accommodation Houses and people attending psychiatric day centres. This work continues to be made possible through the Office of Psychiatric Services.

Successful projects conducted throughout 1991 will continue in 1992 including the Community Linking Project, the CSV Inner Urban Project, and EASE and the Resource Project.

If you would like more information on any of Arts Access projects or if you have any particular interests in making the arts more accessible, contact Arts Access on 699 8299.

A Christmas Message— Working together in the year that was

"New Partnerships" could well have been Arts Access' catchphrase for 1991, with many projects reaching new audiences and involving new communities.

During the year, important links were made with the National Gallery of Victoria through the "10+10" exhibition which featured works produced by both professional artists and artists with disabilities working in partnership.

Relationships were forged with the Koori community with a major project being run with Kooris recovering from alcohol and drug problems. Further links were also developed with people in prison, those who are homeless and people with severe disabilities.

Links were made with arts and disability/disadvantage organisations in other states with the formation of a national representative body that will highlight the need for increased recognition and better resourcing of people with disabilities in the arts.

1991 also saw the first year of the CSV Inner Urban project, a major on-going project with clients of the Inner urban region's Intellectual Disability Services involved in a wide range of arts activities.

An on-going relationship was also forged with all programme participants through the regular participants meetings which this year focused on the creative achievements of everyone involved.

Much of Arts Access' work throughout the year has been in developing links with the broader community, focusing people's attentions on the enormous creative potential that lies within all of us.

At a time when many people are experiencing economic hardship, the support and encouragement we have received from many sectors of the community reaffirms our belief that involvement in the arts can change people's lives for the better and augers well for an exciting and productive 1992.

On behalf of everyone at Arts Access, we wish you a happy and safe Christmas and look forward to working together in the new year.

Regards,



Judith Isherwood
Act/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Unveiling at Mount Royal



Photography by Collin Bogaars

Proud patients and staff display their work

A large textile mural was recently unveiled at the Mount Royal Hospital as the culmination of a visual arts project run in the hospital's Rehabilitation Unit.

Artist Kim Tarpy worked with patients and staff of the unit in creating the nine piece mural, which will hang in the entrance foyer to the unit

The mural depicts scenes relating to people's lives with panels representing a

wedding, the Melbourne Cup, the Grand Final, ballroom dancing and more.

Dr Graham Pennington, the unit's head and major initiator of the project, is hopeful that the project will be the first of many in the hospital.

Whilst this particular project was funded by the Myer Foundation, there is great support from within the hospital for such activities to take place.

Senior Citizens' Week 1992

Next year, the Senior Citizens' Week Committee from the Older Person's Planning Unit, is funding an Arts Access project called Senior Citizens' Treasures.

Senior Citizens' Treasures will be a celebration of art work produced by older people. It will start with a series of satellite exhibitions in different localities in the Melbourne metropolitan region.

"There's already been one such exhibition in Port Melbourne, which was a pilot project," said Ray Richards. "And at the Eltham Festival a few years ago I was involved in a similar project. The idea is for senior cits to bring out their memorabilia and arts and craft works and share them with the rest of the community"

After a series of satellite exhibitions, work will be selected from all of the shows and curated into a show at the Access Gallery at the National Gallery of Victoria. The National Gallery show, which will run from Friday April 3 to April 19, will consist wholly of work produced by senior citizens themselves. The opening of the exhibition, in the Great Hall

of the National Gallery, will also mark the beginning of Senior Citizens' Week 1992.

"The aim of the project is to focus on the skills and knowledge that older people are contributing to our society," said Ray Richards.

Asked to give an example of the sorts of things the exhibitions have attracted, Ray mentioned a violin made of newspaper.

"The violin belongs to an 82-year old gentleman, who received it from his grandfather. It's made from paper maché and plays very nicely. That's the sort of thing we want to put into the exhibition - interesting naive or folk art, rather than the focus being on traditional fine art, though there will be a place for fine art in the exhibition."

This project is another result of the on-going relationship between Arts Access and the Senior Citizens' Week Committee. Last year the collaboration resulted in the production of the 'Arts Alive' booklet - a guide showing how the arts can work for older people.

Portraits of Artists

A particularly innovative project currently running is the Portraits of the Artists Project and its showing enormous potential.

The project started with an idea from a past project participant. The idea was to use projects already underway as the inspiration for visual artists. Five artists with psychiatric disabilities have been commissioned to visit various Arts Access projects and create artworks based on their experiences there.

The project is now halfway through. Its co-ordinator is Heather Graham.

"There's been a wide variety of projects covered," she said. "One guy has been going to the Salvation Army's Gill Memorial Hostel where a mural is being painted. He's been drawing pictures of the mural being painted.

"One woman's been sketching at Kew Cottages. There's another guy who's been doing oil portraits of the participants in a dance programme for people with intellectual disabilities. And there's someone at the Pleasant View drug rehabilitation project doing drawings of a drama project. The artists are covering many varied projects.

"They go along as observers, sitting to one side, sketching or taking photos that they'll work from later. They're all pretty autonomous.

"I think it's interesting for the artists to mix with people with a disability different to their own, and it gives them a broader understanding of what Arts Access does."

The artists are proud to have been commissioned to produce work for Arts Access, which boosts their motivation. The project also benefits those being drawn, because it shows that people are interested in their work. Some of the communities where projects are being drawn are even interested in buying the pictures that are recording their work.

Heather hopes to have a small, informal exhibition of the work in January. "We'll be asking the artists to bring along their rough drawings," she said, "so that the project is seen as a developmental process. We want to see the artists working their rough ideas through, not just aiming at producing a finished product."

Collingwood in photographs

This project grew out of an approach by Community Services Victoria, who wanted to start a project involving young women in the Collingwood area. Arts Access and CSV decided on a photography course that empower the women, give them new skills and result in them creating images that reflected the concerns of young women living in Collingwood.

The project ran over 14 weeks and was based in the Good Shepherd community centre in Collingwood. The women, mostly teenagers who lived in nearby commission flats, were instructed in basic SLR photography techniques, developing the negatives and printing. "The girls took a lot of photos of each other," said Viva Gibb, the project's co-ordinator. "Their works was a bit self-obsessed, but I'd say that's a true reflection of the concerns of teenagers. "They were a positive group - very much into their own interests, which were

mainly things like music and fashion. Though most of the girls had been through some bad experiences, they tended to emphasise the positive aspects of their lives.

"The group was quick to pick up on technical aspects of photography, but only through example. They wouldn't sit and listen to instructions. They didn't like anything that seemed like school work. It was impossible to lecture to them about things like depth of field. They'd pick up on those things, but only through practical experience. They learnt things practically rather than theoretically."

Some of the results of the project will be published or displayed by CSV to coincide with the publication of a booklet about resources for young women.

"The course has been a very positive experience," said Viva. "All of the group can now take, develop and print their own photos, and two or three show definite promise as photographers."

National Networking

Arts Access initiated a meeting in Melbourne late last year that brought together practitioners in the area of arts and disability from all over Australia. The groups met for two days and exchanged information. One of the results of the forum was the decision to establish a national body to represent the arts and disability movement - both practitioners and consumers. The forum elected an interim committee with representatives from each state.

Arts Access took on the role of organising both a subsequent telephone conference and a further national meeting which took place in July 1991. The outcome of that meeting was the establishment of a national body called DADAA - Disability and Disadvantage in the Arts Australia (not bad as acronyms go).

The meeting established a philosophy for the body, which states that:

- Everyone has an innate creative ability.
- It is a human right to have access to and respect for people's creativity through artistic expression.
- The arts can be an effective means of positive social change.
- People with disabilities and disadvantages have a right to self-determination of the form and means of their creative expression.
- People with disabilities and disadvantages have creative potential which can contribute to and enrich society.
- People with disabilities and disadvantages have the right to participate in the cultural life of the society.

DADAA intends to hold a national conference in mid-1992.

"It's a difficult thing to get funding for," said Ray Richards. "At the moment, representatives on the committee are trying to raise the funds for the next national conference. If you are going to have a national body it's important for you all to get together physically once a year."

"It's productive as an information exchange and as a lobby group to represent our interests to both state and federal governments. And it gives more power to each state organisation if you can speak with one, collective, national voice."

Gill Memorial Mural

Last year, Arts Access was involved in painting a mural in the canteen of the Gill Memorial Day Centre, a centre for homeless men run by the Salvation Army.

Arts Access was approached again earlier this year to develop a second mural project.

The artist, Megan Evans, used a consultative process to decide what the mural was going to be about.

"I spent the first three three-hour sessions talking to almost everybody in the centre. I didn't ask them what they wanted the mural to be about, I just found out what was important in their lives. Little scenes emerged"

Megan drew the scenes from the men's lives into a surrealistic design. The completed mural shows a set of shadowy interiors, all with different perspectives. A red ribbon runs through the rooms and passageways, out into a lush, sunny garden.

"It's a dreamscape that you can wander off into," said Megan. The most dramatic image in the painting is of a cat, falling through the air.

"The cat to me represents suspense. Most of the people here live in a state of constant suspense – they live on the streets, they encounter violence. The cat is just a way of subtly representing that.

"A blatant message doesn't respect the viewer," said Megan. "It doesn't acknowledge that viewers can bring their own interpretations to a painting"

Megan ran the group as a team – she didn't just give people their own piece of wall to paint on.

"The participants worked all over the painting. Because they weren't precious about any one part, nobody minded if I neaten up something they'd painted.

"I think there's a bit of myth that says you can't paint over someone else's work. I don't completely change what people have done, but I think people are happier if you end up with a good piece of work that they know they've contributed to, rather than have something that looks clumsy that they'll get embarrassed about. People know if their drawing isn't quite right, and as long as your alterations are an improvement they'll be happy for you to re-do their work.

"It all depends on the approach you take. Obviously, you can't just paint over what someone's done, because that invalidates them. You've got to establish at the beginning that this is something we all work on as a team."

Megan assigned to the men different roles in the painting, depending on their level of skills.

"As you go along you find out what people's level of ability is. At the start of the project hardly any of the men had painted before. I gave them a brush and told them to have a go. One of them, who'd never painted before and didn't think he could, ended up painting most of the ribbon that runs through the mural. By the end, he was very confident."

ESPRIT branches out

Esprit, the clothing manufacturer, distributor and retailer, has recently set up the Esprit Cares Trust to provide funds for community activities with disadvantaged youth.

Arts Access was involved with one of Esprit's first projects which aimed to help disadvantaged young people and to foster links between Esprit's Richmond store and the local community.

Following initial contact by Judith Isherwood, Esprit approached Arts Access with the idea of setting up a project with homeless and disadvantaged young people in the Richmond area. A visual arts project was developed, producing hangings for the windows of Esprit's Richmond, which was being renovated at the time.

"Esprit was eager to get this project off the ground," said the artist, Linden Bobbit. "The result was that I didn't have as much time as I'd have liked to get the participants together. Another difficulty was that it was just before school holidays.

"I got in touch with youth workers, accommodation houses and with some young women who had been involved in aerosol art exhibitions. Most of the young people I contacted were really interested but because of the short time available it was hard to get them along. We did the work on Sundays"

Linden ended up with two groups – one was aerosol artists and the other was made up of younger children. The groups preferred to work separately and each did three panels. The theme the groups agreed to was 'The Future', and it was decided that the images should have a positive feel. The windows in Esprit had a mount around them, so the works weren't designed to make a continuous whole. Each panel was a separate work.

"At first Esprit didn't want any aerosol art," said Linden. "I don't think they had a clear idea of what it would look like. They were keener on the younger ones, whose style was more naive." But Esprit accepted the aerosol style once they saw that it would be more than just graffiti.

"The only thing I imposed on the aerosol artists was that their work had to be pictorial," said Linden "They couldn't just draw lettering. I wanted to maximise personal expression. Still, the conventions of aerosol art did get in the way of the kids' originality a bit. At first I wanted them to start the pictures with ordinary paint, to build up a background, then spray-paint over the top. But that didn't fit with the conventions of the genre. But generally they did avoid clichés, and came up with a very fresh and uplifting piece of work.

"The work was received really well by Esprit, and by the public. Esprit were keen to establish links with the Richmond community and with Arts Access. I think this project succeeded in both these aims."

Exposing themselves

In March, Arts Access will open an exhibition called 'Exposures' at the Malthouse Theatre in South Melbourne. After a week at the Malthouse the show will go on tour to Mildura and Warrnambool Regional Art Galleries. In addition to the exhibition itself, Arts Access will be sending artists who will run discussion forums at each of the venues. These forums will be aimed at helping the general public learn about arts and disability.

Funded by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, with 'Life. Be in it.' as the health sponsor, the exhibition will feature 50 art works by artists with a wide variety of disabilities.

Eleven of the works in 'Exposures' will be bought and shown in the UK. SmithKline Beecham, an international pharmaceutical company, is building a new headquarters in Merseyside, Liverpool. The company has chosen to furnish its headquarters with art works by disabled or disadvantaged artists from around the world. SmithKline Beecham has nominated Arts Access to select 11 artworks from 'Exposures'. The pieces will be bought and displayed in the new Merseyside offices.

"We want to give this as much publicity as possible," said Judith Isherwood, "it may get other companies thinking along the same lines."

'Exposures' opens at the Malthouse Theatre on March 2 1992, and closes on March 8. The show then moves to Warrnambool Art Gallery, from March 11 to March 22, and then to Mildura Arts Centre, from April 6 to April 26.

Saturday Art

Class III

The response to the Saturday arts classes has been very positive, so a third set of classes (eight this time) is under way. The classes are targeted particularly at people with psychiatric disabilities. Because of the enthusiasm shown by the participants it is likely that the classes will continue through 1992. It is also hoped to start similar classes in the eastern and western suburbs sometime next year.

Vocal Dance and Painting Workshop

Aviva Sheb'a, who has been performing and teaching dance for 25 years, will be giving an introductory workshop in the Arts Access Studio. Aviva teaches 'Vocal Dance and Painting' - an exciting cross between singing, dancing and painting that she has developed herself. The workshop will also include relaxation techniques and advice about the effects of diet on behaviour and well-being. The workshop happens on Saturday March 14, 1992 at the Arts Access Studio, 109-111 Sturt Street, South Melbourne. It costs \$55 (\$40 concession). Booking by March 1: Aviva Sheb'a, 'The Haven', 3 Tweedale Street, Dunolly 3472. Phone: (054) 681 324

ARTS ACCESS

Arts Access is a non-profit organisation committed to creating opportunities in the arts with people with disabilities or who are disadvantaged.

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Memberships range from \$15 for concessional membership, \$30 for single membership to \$50 for organisational membership and is tax deductible.

Members are kept up to date with the year's activities through the quarterly newsletter 'Access'. Members receive discounts on all Arts Access publications and are invited to participate by attending those programmes that culminate in public performance or exhibition.

For more information, contact

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