

Matchmaker's delight

On Valentine's Day this year, Arts Northern Rivers held its second 'Speed Dating' event in Broken Head. Thirty six local artists were given a precious 4 minutes to 'sell themselves' to twelve commercial and regional gallery directors from outside the region. The results are impressive.

by MELITTA FIRTH

A number of new relationships are blossoming between artists and art galleries and four artists have secured themselves gallery representation as a direct result of the 'match-making' event, which was an initiative of the Visual Arts Network (VAN) project. It's an excellent outcome for both the artists and the gallery directors.

The Northern Rivers has the highest regional concentration of artists per head of population. The downside of living and working in such a mecca of creativity, however, is the difficulty artists face trying to find gallery representation. 'Speed Dating' is an attempt to address this market saturation by providing connections with galleries and buyers in metropolitan centres.

Crucial to the success of the event is the willingness of local and interstate gallery directors to donate their time, travel to the event and throw themselves into the ring. For many, it's their first taste of the talent and activity of Northern Rivers artists. Iain Dawson from one of Sydney's most prestigious and successful commercial galleries, Tim Olsen Gallery (and now Art Fair Director for Single Market Events which runs Art Sydney), said, "It was a fantastic way to meet dedicated artists who you might not meet in a major city. I met several artists I thought would be commercially strong in

*Right: Robyn Sweaney, with her painting House Beautiful #7 one of a series based on houses in her home town of Mullumbimby which will be exhibited in a solo show this November at Tim Olsen Gallery in Sydney.
Photo: Des Sheridan*



the Sydney market. I also met several artists whose work was on par with the most successful practicing contemporary artists internationally."

Zom Osbourne was one of the lucky artists to be drawn in the speed dating lottery (over 150 artists apply for just 36 places in the event). "I had the very good fortune to meet Charles Hewitt and be given the opportunity to show at his beautiful Sydney gallery," she said. "Grafton Regional Gallery was also keen to show my watercolours."

Perhaps the most positive outcome of the 'Speed Dating' is the variety of strategic relationships that can develop from the first point of contact from mentoring to representation and sales. Charles Hewitt has taken on two artists — Zom Osbourne and Sean O'Shea — and is in discussions with


several others. As well as sharing his expertise on the day, Hewitt says he is committed to working with some of these artists as mentor as well as gallerist.

Painter Robyn Sweaney is over the moon after connecting with Tim Olsen Gallery. "I certainly wasn't expecting such a quick response, being offered a show in Sydney this year. The time we had with each Director may have been fast but it did the trick!"

Liz Buchmann, Director of Newtown Fine Art Trader, who already has strong connections to the Northern Rivers, said it was great to be reminded of the amazing talents in the region. "As a busy person I never would have made the time to meet that many artists so it was great. I also really enjoyed seeing some of the major Sydney galleries realise there are opportunities up here to discover

August – September

17 – 18 August

 **Puppet Theatre** The show that has delighted thousands from all over the world + workshops by Krinkl. Presented by NORPA at Star Theatre **LISMORE**
Tel 13 000 66772 www.norpa.org.au

17 – 18 August

 Sydney Dance Co presents Stephen Petronio's *Underland* — "Fast, furious and fabulous" (NY Times) at **BATHURST** Memorial Entertainment Centre
\$17.30-\$41.20 Tel 02 6333 6161

17 – 19 August

 Bellingham Jazz Festival 18th annual jazz and blues festival with a fantastic line-up. **BELLINGHAM** Tel 02 6655 9345 Website www.bellinghamjazzfestival.com.au

17 August – 23 September

 **The 2007 Archibald Prize.** One of Australia's largest portraiture exhibitions, an AGNSW tour in partnership with MGNSW at GRAFTON Regional Gallery + 3 other shows www.graftongallery.nsw.gov.au
Tel 02 66423177

emerging talents. And I felt the artists got a lot out of it — particularly learning how to present themselves to galleries.”

Sculptor Ruth Park obviously knew how to present herself. Out of the six galleries she saw, four were extremely encouraging and wanted follow up encounters to discuss possible exhibitions or to sell work. Over 20 other artists are also in negotiations with galleries and agents following the event.

The Visual Arts Network is justifiably proud of the results of our industry linkage and business development program for Northern Rivers artists, including Speed Dating. Set up to create national awareness of the region as an emerging centre for quality contemporary art, the program is quickly developing as a benchmark in best practice and creativity in promoting regional visual arts. ■

**Zom Osbourne and Sean O'Shea at Charles Hewitt Gallery www.charleshewitt.com.au.
Tania Goldsmith at www.lorrainepilgrim.com.**

Melitta Virth is the Coordinator of the VAN Project Tel 02 66288120 Website (including gallery) www.visualartsnetwork.net.au



L-R: Heather Ranclaud, Northern Inland Regional Development Board; Jack Ritchie, Arts North West and Don Tydd, Northern Inland Regional Development Board welcome Kerry Herman.



Doorway to dating. Photo: Jeff Dawson

The North West Film Strategy

Kerry Herman, a film and television producer and project manager with over twenty years experience, has been appointed as project consultant to the New England North West Film Strategy.

The project, which aims to encourage and cultivate the development of the film and television industry in the region, is a collaboration between the Regional Arts Board for the North West — Arts North West — and the Northern Inland Regional Development Board, with the support of the New England Institute of TAFE and local government authorities in the North West.

“The New England North West offers vibrant communities, great people and numerous diverse locations for film, television and multimedia makers,” said Jack Ritchie, RADO at Arts North West.

“Ms Herman will develop a set of information resources that will promote

the region as a filming destination, including a database of locations, images, services and accommodation references to promote filming opportunities and infrastructure in the New England North West.”

Ms Herman has worked with the Australian Film Institute and the NSW Film & Television Office for whom she developed and produced a package of locations marketing materials. She now leads her own production company, Stanebridge Productions.

The New England North West Film Strategy has received funding from the NSW Department of State and Regional Development, the Australia Government’s Regional Partnerships program as well as from the region’s local government authorities. ■

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August — September

17 August — 30 September

👁️ *The Polaroid Circus* Photos of The Flying Fruit Fly Circus by Petrina Hicks and Anne Zahalka. An Albury Regional Gallery exhibition at **BATHURST** Regional Art Gallery Tel 02 6333 6555

18 August

🎵 John Rutter: *Mass of the Children* Armidale Choral Society. Lazenby Hall University of New England, **ARMIDALE** Tel 02) 6772 6351

18 August

🎵 The Song Company - *The Seasons* Old and new music by Byrd, Jannequin, Lejeune, Nuyts, Marenzio, Schein, Poulenc, Chan. Songs from around the globe in the new Song Company arrangements **BATHURST** Tel 02 9251 1600

18 August — 9 September

👁️ *Cowra Art Group Show* Popular Bi-annual exhibition and competition for artists within a 100km radius. **COWRA** Regional Art Gallery Tel 02 6340 2190