

It was a straight forward program to connect Years 10, 11 and 12 visual arts students and teachers with artists and galleries — to develop skills and kickstart a new network. What we ended up with was, for many a life changing experience ... and a new model for arts education outreach.

ARTside!—in Moree

by TRISTAN SHARPE



ARTside!-In Moree had its genesis in a two day program to engage disadvantaged metropolitan high schools with the visual arts which has been running successfully at the Art Gallery of New South Wales for over three years. The Moree program, though, was the up-sized version, modified and supercharged with all the most exciting and successful experiences the Gallery's Education Programs could offer, packaged together as one total experience.

Funded through the Arts NSW *ConnectEd* initiative, the program took place from 7 to 18 May 2007 with students from Moree Secondary College, Warialda High School, Uralla Central School, Glen Innes High School, Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School and Tamworth High School.

ARTside!-In Moree was a purposefully unstinting, intense and immersive experience that took art students and teachers on a physical and conceptual journey through the 'art world.' The strategy was to introduce these potential future artists and arts professionals to career pathways and networks, but also to decode the NSW Visual Arts syllabus, putting them inside it, witnessing it in action and transforming it into something very real, very concrete, exciting and attainable.

In Stage One, twenty two visual arts teachers from over fourteen high schools in the New England Region attended a one day symposium at the Moree Plains Gallery, with workshops to enhance professional classroom practice, with a focus on the importance of artists, galleries and original art objects in teaching and learning. Sessions incorporated syllabus applications, a talk by leading Sydney Artist Ben Quilty, life-drawing and looking and interpreting strategies. Isolated teachers connected with others they had not seen for long time. For many it was their first professional development in visual arts for years. At its core though, was an idea that a motivated, proactive teacher can motivate and create proactive students, with 20–30 students potentially benefiting from each teacher's involvement.

September – October

15 September – 21 October

👁️ **TEXTile: Reading the Cloth** Weaving and handmade textiles by Jenine Davidson, inspired by woven south-east Asian fabrics.

COWRA Regional Art Gallery
Tel 02 6340 2190

20 September – 3 October

🌷 Bowral Tulip Time Corbett Gardens has over 100,000 tulips and 25,000 annuals on spectacular display. **BOWRAL**

Tel 1300 657 559

21 – 23 September

🎵 The Idea of North An A'Capella performance with workshop on vocal techniques, nurturing new song talent and helping vocal ensemble education in the region. **NARROMINE** Tel 02 6888 9667

22 September

🎪 A medieval Spring Arts Ball A night full of fun, food and fantasy. **THE CHANNON** Hall, 7.30pm. Pre-sale tickets from Music Bizarre, Channon Store and Dunoon store. Tel 02 6688 6175

Stage Two was the heart of the program, and unashamedly student centred. Thirty-nine students worked with four artists, three local art teachers, three regional gallery staff, two Art Gallery of NSW coordinators, two NSW Department of Education Regional Arts Consultants and one Aboriginal Youth Centre coordinator in an intensive, no-holds-barred, three day art-making camp, followed by five full days immersed in the Sydney art world.

The art camp deliberately took the students out of their comfort zone. Working with professional artists and supported by local art teachers, they had to produce a complete body of work in one of three areas; printmaking, ceramic sculpture or painting. Included between studio times were workshops in artist's practice such as ideas development, research and documentation and looking and interpreting skills, continual peer critical review sessions of their work and discussions with local Kamilaroi elders and indigenous artists.

Many students were apprehensive at the enormity of the task and insecure at being separated from their friends but by the last day they were working intensively, ignoring breaks and freely discussing their



Opposite: Student at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. This page: print-making at the art camp. Photos: Robbie Burnett, Visual Arts teacher, Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School, Tamworth.

progress with students they met only 48 hours before. They all finished their body of work with time to spare, abuzz not only at the quantity of what they had achieved but also the quality.

Next, it was straight on the bus to Sydney, bonded together and empowered by their experiences, eager and ready to take on what ever came next. The emphasis shifted from art making to the 'art world', where art works exist and artists operate. An investigation of the Art Gallery of NSW included both 'front of house' and 'behind the scenes', including collection storage, the Conservation Department and talks with curators and other key staff. The group visited artist Ben Quilty's studio, The National Art School; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Gallery Barry Keldoulis and, last but not least, Sotheby's Auction House. Everyone who spoke to the group discussed their professional practice but also their personal

story of how they came to the art world, providing tangible, positive role models. The students were continually mistaken as being from a University; such was the quality of questions that always followed. They never got tired of hearing that.

A night program made the most of time in Sydney with some cultural 'must dos': a tour of Sydney Opera House with a performance by the Australian Ballet, a drawing workshop in Centrepoint Tower, a trip to Darling Harbour including a film at the IMAX Cinema (*Spiderman 3* — culture has many levels) and a major exhibition opening with 1,500 other 'invitation only' guests at the Art Gallery of NSW.

Stage Three is yet to come, but it will bring the students full circle in their journey, with an exhibition of their work at the Moree Plains Gallery in November.

There is no doubt that for the teachers, artists and Gallery staff, *ARTside!-In Moree* was a valuable experience that will advance their professional practice. For the students though, it will have a much more lasting effect. They have grown personally. To observe them develop a confidence in their own art making; an interest in interpreting the world and a pride in their opinion of it; a love and pleasure of art in general with a passion to pursue it further and, significantly, a recognition that they are now leaders in the arts in their local community was a pleasure and privilege.

Perhaps the spirit of these outcomes was captured at the Art Gallery opening on their last night in Sydney. Dressed to the nines, effortlessly mixing with the crowd, comfortably chatting with anyone who would talk to them, one of the students remarked, "Not many people here know much about the art. I was telling them what it all meant and I knew more than them!" What more can you say? Mission accomplished!

One year in the planning, two weeks in the delivery. *ARTside!-In Moree* was a big, scary, challenging undertaking, filled with many variables and unknowns for the Art Gallery, Arts NSW and all of us who came along for the journey, but this is the best kind of program, isn't it? It has also been extremely rewarding. We have all learnt more about the important outcomes that can be achieved in a sustained, immersive, quality Visual Arts education program that pushes students to achieve in ways they didn't think possible, no matter where they live.

ARTside!-In Moree affirms the Art Gallery of New South Wales' and Arts NSW's ongoing commitment to regional education audiences. More importantly though, this innovative pilot program has given us the opportunity to experiment, develop and test an 'ideal' form of outreach that focuses on the particular needs of regional students and teachers and one which we hope to use as model in the future for other NSW regional centres. ■

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ARTside!-In Moree was an Art Gallery of New South Wales Education Outreach Program delivered in association with the NSW Department of Education and Training with the support of Arts NSW through the ConnectEd Program. A half hour documentary about *ARTside!-In Moree* is currently in production.

September – October

22 – 23 September

📍 Ulmarra River Festival Cultural and historical festival celebrating life in the riverside town. **ULMURRA**
Tel 02 6644 5756

25 – 30 September

📍 *The Story of the Miracles at Cookie's Table*, an extraordinary new play by Wesley Enoch commissioned by HotHouse Theatre **ALBURY** Tel 02 6021 7433
www.hothousetheatre.com.au

26 – 27 September

📍 Accessible Arts' *Arts Activated* Conference, **SYDNEY** For all those passionate about people with disabilities and their active inclusion and participation in the arts
Tel 02 9251 6499
www.thespasticcentre.com.au/artsactivated

26 – 29 September

📍 *Sakura Matsuri Cherry Blossom Festival* Origami, calligraphy, sushi making and kite flying workshops. Karate and sword demonstrations, sumo wrestling **COWRA**
Tel 02 6341 2233