

Artstart in cyberspace

Since 1991 the ArtStart NSW Youth Arts and Skills Program has held its bi-annual festival in a number of regional and urban centres across the State. This year, thanks to an innovative online initiative, it will be virtually everywhere.

by JENNY MACKLIN

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Seven and a half thousand young people took part in the last ArtStart program in 2005 and the festival, encompassing exhibitions, concerts, film festivals and radio broadcasts, reached an estimated audience of 66,000. Traditionally the festival has been launched with an event at a Sydney landmark venue such as the Opera House or the Museum of Sydney.

While the festival has always provided exciting showcasing events across the state, the opportunities to share experiences or view work from other regions has been limited by distance and cost. And, while many young people looked forward to their trip to the big-smoke for the Sydney launch, there were plenty of others who missed out. This year ArtStart aims to expand the opportunities for participation. The ArtStart festival will be moving online so that all ArtStarters can be involved, regardless of where they live.

ArtStart is a NSW Government initiative for young people aged 12 to 24, managed by TAFE NSW Access and General Education Curriculum Centre. ArtStart funds opportunities for young people to develop skills by participating in arts and cultural projects and performing and exhibiting their work at the festival. The program's foundation is its partnerships with the community, cultural and youth sectors, schools, training and tertiary sectors. The network of Regional Arts Boards are critical partners in the development and delivery of the ArtStart program.

ArtStart groups are spread across NSW, including rural and regional areas. The move to an online presence and festival means that ArtStart will have a 'home' that is accessible to everyone 24/7, no matter where they happen to be. The ArtStart online hub will be a place where managers, organisers, teachers and young people can find information, take part in mentoring, showcase their work and share ideas.



Opposite page: I heart rats by Zoe Steers, from the Underwater Love ArtStart 2005 project in the Eastern Riverina.

September – October

26 September – 28 October

Godwin Bradbeer: *The Metaphysical body 1970–2005*. A 35 year survey of one of Australia's most celebrated draftsmen

GRAFTON Regional Gallery Tel 02 6642 3177
www.graftongallery.nsw.gov.au

27 September – 1 October

Parkes Country Music Spectacular.
Singing, dancing, busking and bush poetry.

PARKES Tel 02 6863 8860

27 September – 1 October

This Is Not Art (TINA) Showcasing the work and ideas of niche communities not included in other major festivals; emerging trends; national networking opportunities

NEWCASTLE Tel 02 4927 0675

28 September – 8 October

Mildura Country Music Festival 100 artists and groups will entertain over 10 days.
MILDURA Tel 1800 039 043

Whether they live in Murrurundi, Mosman or Bourke, young artists will be able to share their work and ideas with a wide range of peers and mentors. The ArtStart online presence will be a creative laboratory, an information exchange, a gallery and networking space. Young people, coordinators and managers will be able to upload their own content, such as photos, digital art, writing, music and video. They'll be able to see what other ArtStart groups and artists are up to, offer feedback and engage in discussion.

The online presence will give ArtStarters a much larger potential audience, not only because they will be connected to other ArtStart groups, but because it will allow them to plug into the global arts community. Access to practicing artists who specialise in the young person's preferred medium is one potential bonus. In the future, for example, if some young people, spread across the state have an interest in stencil art, these participants could be connected with each other and with a mentor (who may be anywhere in the world) via the online presence.

Access & General Education Curriculum Centre is working with RipeOnline, a web strategy and design consultancy with experience in developing arts and community projects. Tess Dryza, RipeOnline's Director, believes the online presence will capture the authentic voice and experience of the Festival and further collaboration and support across regions. "Our desired outcomes for the project are three fold: to create an online presence that extends the experiential nature of ArtStart, to showcase the power of process plus the performance outcomes and finally to develop a centralised project HQ for the TAFE NSW team."

ArtStart Coordinators have expressed excitement about the prospect of being able to connect and collaborate with groups in other regions. Others believe the online environment will be a great fit for the young people that they work with, many of whom are already making good use of the opportunities the internet offers for networking with peers. Tess Dryza agrees. "Enabling user generated content is a powerful way to build ongoing engagement with the



target audience of 12 – 24 year olds. 'Bottom-up' publishing acknowledges young people as cultural producers rather than simply consumers."

While the online presence will be a permanent and ongoing resource, there will be a dedicated festival period from 15 – 30 November 2007. The online festival will be launched with a bang on 16 November when the ArtStart community comes together in 'real' time for a state-wide celebration. Groups will be able to see and talk to each other and let everyone know what's going on in their neck of the woods. It should be quite a party, with musical entertainment supplied by a surprise special guest! ■

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The ArtStart festival and online presence goes live on 15th November 2007 at www.artstart.com.au. Hope you can drop by and check it out!

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ArtStart is managed in regional NSW by the Regional Arts Boards.



Digital images by young Eastern Riverina artist, Zoe Steers, from the 'Underwater Love' series, part of the '80% Water' ArtStart project managed by Regional Arts Board, Eastern Riverina Arts Program (ERAP) in 2005. Zoe worked with four young artists mentored by ERAP towards public and online exhibition / performance outcomes.
Clockwise from left: Love Jagger, Flying Too Fast and Deer Dirt.

September – October

28 September – 6 October

 **COFFS HARBOUR International Buskers and Comedy Festival Spectacular** street theatre featuring busking performers from Australia and around the world
Tel 02 6652 8266
www.coffsharbourbuskers.com

28 – 29 September

 Deni Ute Muster Country music, competitions, ute spectacular, bull rides, staged entertainment, food, frivolity and good old family fun. **DENILIQUIN**
Tel 03 5881 3388

28 – 30 September

 Bellingen Global Carnival: World music, art, theatre and dance. Staging 5 performance areas. **BELLINGEN**
Tel 02 6655 3024
www.globalcarnival.com

28 September – 1 October

 Albury Wodonga Region Wine and Food Festival A celebration of the spring harvest and a chance to sample the local produce fresh from the source. **ALBURY**
Tel 02 6058 2996