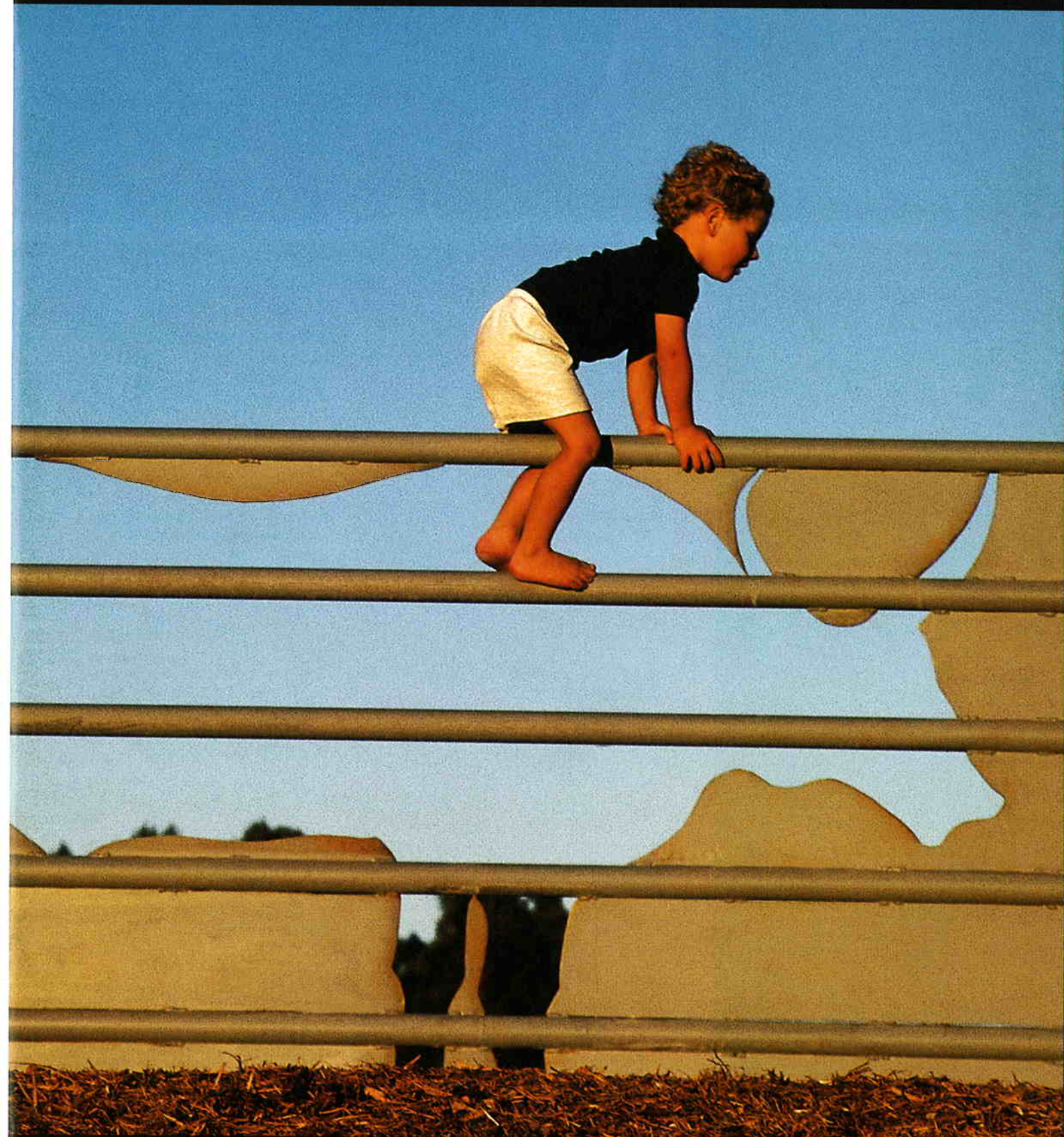


artwork

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COMMUNITY ARTS NETWORK SA INC



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The Community Arts Network of SA Inc is a non-profit, membership based organisation that promotes cultural development by supporting community arts.

- The Community Arts Network of SA Inc
- works towards a society in which cultural diversity, artistic expression and human dignity are valued and supported
 - promotes and supports excellent processes and practices in community arts
 - advocates for community cultural development and community arts
 - supports artists, artworkers and communities in work which supports these aims.

COMMUNITY ARTS

Arts practice and creative expression are at the heart of a community's vitality. People have always come together to sing, tell stories, enact rituals, to celebrate, to mourn and to mark significant events in their lives. Besides being able to see great art, people need to actively participate in these activities. This is what is meant by the term community arts, it might be a new name but it is not a new idea.

LOCAL CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

It is through the things we do together as groups and communities that we gain a sense of collective identity, a sense of place and a sense of belonging. When we value these things a positive concern for our social well being follows and we begin to take charge of our present and shape the future to meet our aspirations.

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c o n t e n t s

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high beam

NICK HUGHES

Adelaide has never seen anything quite like the inaugural High Beam Festival. For 10 days in May this year many thousands of people celebrated disability culture in the arts by participating in a range of the 60 events that made up the High Beam Festival program. It was an extraordinary, explosive expression of disability culture and it had an enormous impact on people with and without a disability who attended and participated.

The festival provided a wide range of out of the ordinary events which displayed people's abilities, and which delighted, entertained and provoked audiences. It also provided a sense of liveliness and pride within the various cultures of disability that were represented and important opportunities for social meetings and greetings between those cultures. The High Beam Festival burst upon the scene with a fresh and unpretentious energy, full of wit and surprises: bold and unexpected. It was an outstanding success.

Liz Navratil at the opening cabaret party. Photo: Sophia Borick

arts & disability festival



Catherine Chappell and dancers, High Beam Festival

None of us is perfect and we are all essentially flawed in some way. Seeing disability in this way dissolves the dividing line between 'us and them' that so often characterises attitudes to disability.

The festival was the brainchild of Arts In Action, an Adelaide-based organisation dedicated to promoting and facilitating participation in the arts for people with a disability. Tony Doyle, the Director of Arts In Action says that the initial impetus to organise the festival grew out of a highly successful three day disability cultural event which Arts In Action organised for the 1994 Adelaide Fringe. This event served to whet the community's appetite, giving an indication of how effective a larger festival might be. Tony Doyle began to talk to people; to everyone he met, about the idea of a festival and soon realised that he had tapped into an enormous wellspring of enthusiasm among people with a disability. Tony says that: 'The notion of quite a sizeable festival inspired and excited people constantly and consistently. I don't remember any negative responses [from people with a disability] to the idea at all.'

People who worked for the arts funding bodies however, were not so enthusiastic. After all, a proposal to establish a new arts festival at a time when arts dollars were in increasingly short supply was not going to be immediately welcomed; especially if the festival had the capacity to become an ongoing event. It quickly became apparent that no significant arts funding could be accessed to mount an initial festival. If High Beam was going to happen, the funds would have to come from elsewhere.

Staff at the SPARC Disabilities Foundation had also been thinking that perhaps the time was ripe to develop a festival of disability and the arts. SPARC Disability Foundation had done some market research in 1997 which identified that there was a need to improve access to the arts for people with a disability. A large arts event was seen as being able to provide a structure through which many outcomes could be achieved. The research identified the following as possible outcomes:

- Showcasing outstanding artistic achievements of people with a disability, at a local, national and international level
- Providing opportunities at a community level for people with a disability to participate in creating and showcasing new work
- Creating a forum for seminars and professional development activity to increase understanding and appreciation of disability issues in the arts
- Attracting media exposure to educate the public and improve integration in the arts for people with a disability, at a professional and recreational level.¹

Discussions were soon underway between Arts In Action and SPARC as to how to access the necessary funds.

The first major breakthrough in attracting sponsors to the festival was when Australian Hotels Association (SA) Hotel Care Community Projects agreed to

become a major sponsor. They saw High Beam as an initiative 'outside the square' and one which achieved their aim of developing their profile as a responsible corporate citizen. Besides the Australian Hotels Association, High Beam also attracted sponsorship from the City of Adelaide, the Disability Services Office, the Advertiser Newspapers Ltd., the Sunday Mail, the Advertiser and Sunday Mail Foundation, Adelaide City Marketing, the Adelaide Entertainment Centre, Trans Adelaide, and SPARC Disability Foundation. High Beam eventually attracted non-arts sponsorship of approximately \$398 000.

Overall, the High Beam 98 Festival attracted a total investment of \$488 255 in sponsorship, government grants and box office income. In a tight financial climate, the festival generated 82 percent of its support from non-arts sources. The 18 percent arts funding contribution was to support costs associated with the development of two new works, *The Flight* (Restless Dance Company) and *Touched* (No Strings Attached).² This was an extraordinary result for an inaugural festival in an untried and unknown market.

The Disability in the Arts and Disadvantage in the Arts in Australia network (DADAA) was instrumental in promoting the festival nationwide through their own network of Disability and the Arts organisations in each State and Territory. The majority of the

interstate performers and exhibitors received information about High Beam through DADAA, which also assisted in coordinating their participation in the festival. DADAA also held their annual national meeting in Adelaide to coincide with the festival.

Over 2000 people participated in the festival's opening parade, Adelaide Lighting the Way, and there were 7 other official High Beam events. Overall there were 17 exhibitions, 1 film, 9 seminars and workshops, 12 performance works, 6 dance works, 5 music works and a multi-media event.

A community festival

High Beam was both an arts festival and an integrated and culturally inclusive community festival. The community of people with a disability comprises approximately 10 percent of the general population. So people with a disability, along with their families and friends form a sizeable community within society. However, it tends to be a disparate community and one which has few opportunities to gather together. High Beam offered a rare and hugely appreciated opportunity for people with a disability to experience a true sense of community:

High Beam provided an outlet for a lot of people who have previously had little opportunity for social interaction or artistic expression. The festival's groundswell generated high levels of participation for people with a disability, as performers, exhibitors and as audience members. Community based programs such as the lantern making workshops, or the Holdfast Bay Community Choir, provided the essential community foundation on which High Beam could be developed and sustained throughout its 10 day duration.

The Lantern Making project, which culminated with the Adelaide Lighting the Way opening event, involved 1162 people in lantern making

workshops in the five months or so lead up to the Festival, and in turn, attracted more than 2000 people to participate in the parade. Friends and family of the 100 members of the combined choir, the casts of No Strings Attached and Restless Dance, and the numerous exhibitors from the 15 local exhibitions, for example, added to the audience base to create the necessary 'sense of event'. High Beam's community based projects provided the opportunity to interact, to learn, to become motivated and engage in creativity involving all sorts of people - participants with a disability, carers, people from the wider community and artists, who as role models, shared skills with others.³

Lisa Capon who coordinated the Lantern Making project, stressed how effective it was as a community event and the enthusiasm with which people participated in both the preparatory workshops and in the parade itself. In order to make a lantern, participants have to work together: one person to hold the pieces of springy cane in place while the other binds them together. The very nature of the activity requires cooperation and engenders a sense of community.

'High Beam presented a host of arts events offering opportunities to socialise with and make new friends. For many audience members, their families and/or carers, participating in the arts was a new or rare experience.¹⁴ It is only during the last decade that the policies of integrating people with a disability into the wider community have started to have some effect but in many cases, people with a disability are still struggling to find their place within the community. Lisa Capon described the enormous hunger for a chance to come together and participate that she encountered through the lantern making workshops. Many people with a disability have restricted opportunities to socialise and so the festival events were lent a further dimension by the joy and eagerness that many people felt to find themselves part of

Because this community usually has so few opportunities to meet together, the sense of community was all the stronger when they did.



Members of Restless Dance Company, D faces (Whyalla) and Company Chaos (NSW) sharing a workshop during the High Beam Festival. Photo: Andy Rasheed.



Troll Music band members, High Beam Festival

'Disability is natural to the human race and everyone has disabilities; it's simply a matter of degree.'

gatherings where people with a disability were the norm. Because this community usually has so few opportunities to meet together, the sense of community was all the stronger when they did.

An arts festival

High Beam was also a festival that celebrated the artistic achievements of people with a disability. Many of the companies which were part of the program regularly produce work of an exceptional standard and the festival attracted international companies that work with people with a disability: Mooms Theatre from Stockholm and Touch Compass from New Zealand. The work of the Adelaide-based companies: Restless Dance Company and No Strings Attached, showed that South Australia possesses precious artistic resources in this area which are of world class. This is shown by the following comment in a letter by Kjell Stjernholm, Artistic Director of Mooms Theatre to Restless Dance Company about their production *The Flight*:

This is simply one of the best performances I've ever seen in the field of stage performances including disabled artists. And believe me, I've seen lots ñ and made lots. Both nationally and internationally. And since I think the disability dimension offers extended qualities to the stage, it's not only within our field you excel. Your show is simply great, no matter what the comparison.

The excellent work of these companies gave the festival a serious artistic edge which established it as a genuine arts festival in its own right. Tony Doyle commented: 'A lot of people think that anything to do with disability is a bit Mickey Mouse and this Festival certainly wasn't. There was a spectrum of quality art products.' Several staff from the Australia Council realised the importance of what was happening and made the trip to Adelaide to observe the festival for themselves. The Director of No Strings Attached commented, 'It was extraordinary to have the national avant guard arts journal in Australia covering the festival, because that validates the work we're doing at an artistic level as well as at a community level.'

The fact that the festival was both a community event and an arts festival caused some confusion and discussion amongst some participants and Tony Doyle acknowledges that there is a need to: '...look at how we present and describe what the program of the next High Beam Festival will be in terms of whether it's professional product or whether it's more community celebration type of stuff.' What is clear is that both elements will continue to be essential components of the festival.

Professional development was a third element of the festival. A two day seminar: *Art, Self Expression and Identity*, explored the blocks and challenges faced by a range of professional artists with a disability. The seminar also dealt with various issues that arise out of the concept of disability cultures.

Why a festival?

The idea of a large High Beam Festival seemed to mesh naturally and easily with the changes and developments in people's thinking. Once the idea of a large festival began to be canvassed, it started to gather a momentum of its own as more and more people realised that it would be able to make a significant impact on public opinion, and on perceptions about people with a disability and their involvement in the arts.

Tony Doyle was also convinced that only a large festival would have the capacity to make a difference: 'You can accomplish a mass of stuff with a festival like that that you can't accomplish with a similarly resourced range of smaller projects.'

Firstly, a festival reaches far more people than a range of smaller projects can. One of the problems of projects involving people with a disability in the arts is that they can be invisible, especially to the media, and if no one else knows they are happening then they can easily be ignored. A large festival is harder to ignore.

Secondly, a festival has a much greater capacity to simulate thought in the cultural sector about access and involvement of people with a disability. These issues are often viewed as add ons in the arts sector generally; seen as extras which need to be thought about occasionally but then are often forgotten again. When disability is a common thread that runs through all the activity, then artworkers and others who

participate in a festival are encouraged to see access and participation issues as essential rather than peripheral.

Thirdly, a festival has the capacity to educate the public. This is perhaps the most important effect that High Beam had. Many people without a disability see disability as other, as alien, as something to be avoided and they fail to comprehend that people with a disability are just that, people, who happen to have a disability. The positive and supportive framework of High Beam helped ordinary members of the public to make contact with people with a disability and with their artwork and to connect on a human level. The real challenge is to change the public attitude that sees arts activities for and by people with a disability only in terms of therapy. *The High Beam Arts and Disability Festival Evaluation Report* by Deidre Williams clearly shows that the festival was effective in educating people in this way: '...60% of people surveyed felt that they also gained an increased appreciation of the creative abilities of people with a disability.'⁹ But much still remains to be done here and the next festival (High Beam 2000) will continue to address these attitudes.

Concepts of disability

Tony Doyle sees disability as a continuum that affects everybody:

I don't know any human being who doesn't have some kind of disability. That is, some aspect of themselves that for one reason or another stops them doing things more effectively. Disability is natural to the human race and everyone has disabilities; it's simply a matter of degree.

None of us is perfect and we are all essentially flawed in some way. Seeing disability in this way dissolves the dividing line between 'us and them' that so often characterises attitudes to disability. This is a view of disability that accepts that it is a natural part of everyone's make up. It allows us to see that there is a spectrum of disability that affects us all and to identify with the flawed humanity that we all share. The work of Oliver Sacks proceeds from exactly this point of view. As a Doctor, Sacks is interested in the life experiences of people with neurological difficulties precisely because they offer 'an

unexpected perspective on the human condition'. The experience of people with a disability speaks volumes about what it is to be human. And artists with a disability have, throughout history, been significant contributors to all the human cultures: Beethoven, Toulouse-Lautrec, Van Gogh; the list is large and impressive. Without disabilities the cultural inheritance of the human race would be very much poorer.

This view of disability as a natural part of life also has some profound implications for attitudes towards access to the arts for people with a disability. As Tony puts it:

There's a lot of people with a disability who do very good art even though they might be disadvantaged or face extra barriers - we need to be making sure that those people get represented and resourced and have opportunities... Resourced in a way that allows them to overcome the barriers of disability and get their artwork out and well presented and in a professional context.

Society needs to be able to recognise these needs for we are all diminished if they are ignored, just as we are all augmented when they are acknowledged.

High Beam provided a successful vehicle for the wider recognition of those needs. This was observed by Margo McGregor, speaking for the festival's major sponsor Hotel Care Community Projects. She commented:

I think one of the really important things for us to strive for as a community is integration, to be able to accept everybody who lives in the community, and give them the best possible opportunities for having the same access in life - and to have a good life. High Beam is one of those mechanisms that actually achieves that goal ■

FOOTNOTES

1. 1998 High Beam Arts and Disability Festival Evaluation Report, Deidre Williams p1
2. Ibid, p12
3. Ibid, p5
4. Ibid, p 14
5. Ibid, p7

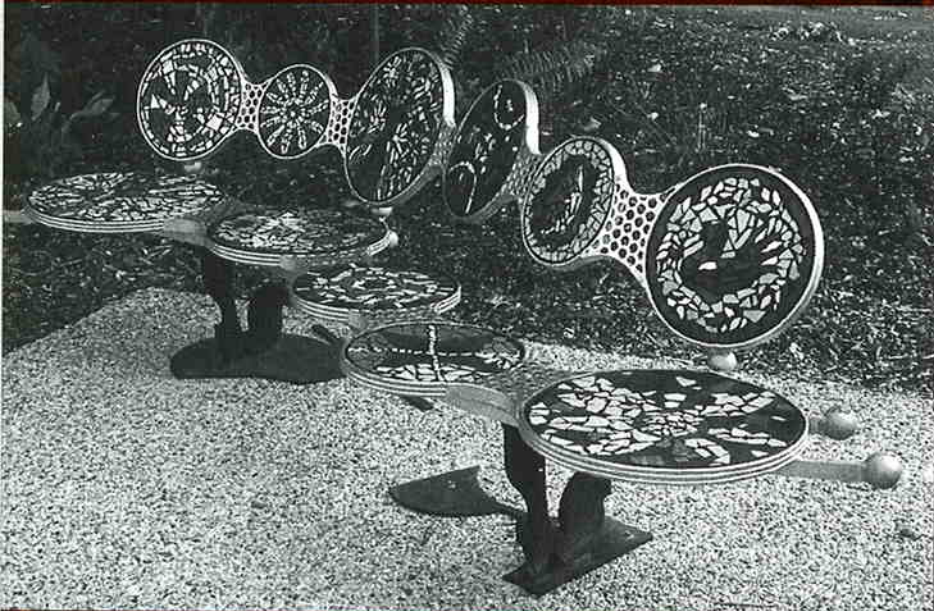
Nick Hughes is a freelance writer, director, actor and dramaturg based in Adelaide. He also works for the Australian Writers Guild and Restless Dance Company.

It was extraordinary to have the national avant guard arts journal in Australia covering the festival, because that validates the work we're doing at an artistic level as well as at a community level.



'Adelaide Lighting the Way' lantern parade, High Beam Festival.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Garden seat, artist David Atkinson, Prince Charles Hospital

AND PUBLIC ART

Fountain detail - artist Paul Brown, Harbour Square, Cleveland Town Centre, QLD

JACKIE OHLIN

In the good old days before competition policy scared people off creative and integrated approaches, a Council Community Arts Officer cajoled Council's Recreation Department into commissioning public art installations in local parks.

This clever move had the effects of spreading her own meagre budget further, adding to their professional development, promoting safe, fun and beautiful places and, lifting Council's profile in the community. Working together across Departments and with the community, this particular Council and many other Councils across the country spearheaded 'the best practice' approach advocated by the Australia Council/Australian Local Government Association's Cultural Development Strategy.

In this article, the issue of Local Government's role in public art is examined. Are we still (to quote Michael Leunig) 'awfullising all the public places'? Or are we identifying opportunities instead? Does 'best practice' hold the capacity to inspire? And if there are bold 'leaders of the pack' out there, how do they manage to hold it all together?

The new role of a Community Cultural Development Officer/Public Art Officer is multi-dimensional. They must:

- assist the local community to define and embrace public art;
- ensure that an integrated approach is both voiced and practised;



Seat, Mackay Public Art project

- secure funding (preferably as part of the whole, integrated package of development);
- develop an effective brief embracing everything from the community' aspirations to more concrete elements such as safety and ongoing maintenance
- develop opportunities for artists who want to work with local communities
- commission and nurture projects through stakeholder fisticuffs, bureaucratic, lengthy storms and occasional triumphs.

Does this sound like an ideal career move, or an invitation to an enduring migraine?

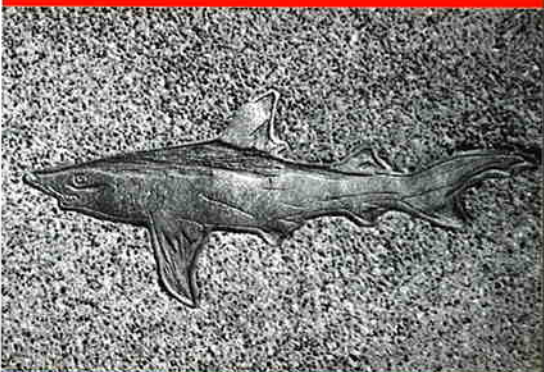
Increasingly, Local Governments at the cutting edge are recognising the need to carefully define their role in public art and more broadly, cultural development. Not for them 'Adopt-an-Artist', or whacking in one installation and smugly agreeing 'Well, we've done art, now what else in on the agenda!' The new breed are developing carefully considered strategies for integrating public art across new developments in the community. Public Art Advisory Committees comprising community stakeholders, artists, art experts and other professionals are represented. Criteria for commissioning public art are articulated - safety, maintenance and integration with the landscape, process,

and people are spelled out. They're also thinking through the pros and cons of direct artist commissions versus 'community art' - proposing that either is a legitimate methodology. Yet they are quite clear that unless there is a commitment by the Council and the artist to a community cultural development approach, public art must not be masqueraded as 'community art'.

Pat Zuber, Community Cultural Development Officer with Redland Shire Council in Queensland, is one of the new breed, with the experience and wisdom of an 'old hand'. Pat says: 'The processes that have integrity are those that have community input right from the beginning.' A case in point was a Mexican standoff where professionals in one development project insisted on planting jacaranda trees, and community members were equally insistent they did not want them! The matter was ultimately resolved, but illustrates what can happen when egos get involved with public art processes, and too many players want to install their vision, rather than listen and respond to community views.

Pat also believes that maintenance is a key issue in public art processes, and argues strongly for the involvement of a conservator at the design stage to comment on proposed materials and public safety aspects.

Not for them 'adopt-an-artist', or whacking in one installation and smugly agreeing 'Well, we've done art, now what else in on the agenda!'



Paving detail - Mackay Public Art Project



Paving detail - Mackay Public Art Project

Many Councils are now routinely writing service specifications stipulating maintenance and replacement requirements. Certainly that trend was set over ten years ago by the-then Brunswick City Council in Victoria. Council commissioned local artists to provide street furniture in order to both celebrate a unique and liveable streetscape, and to live up to its social justice agenda of providing employment for local artists. This trend was also followed by Melbourne City Council and many others.

In the tiny historic port township of Cossack, Western Australia, an artist and cultural tourism consultant, Brian Hoey, developed a public art opportunity of a very different kind - the kind he refers to as 'art in a hard place'. With a shared vision, but very little material support, the Westrek Foundation, under Brian's caretakership, set about to restore the stone buildings of Cossack as a 'living town'. Consider these odds: Brian arrived in Cossack (in iron ore country some 1600km north of Perth) in 1990. The town was deserted, with its few remaining buildings in a poor state. It

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was 45C, it had not rained for 6 months and it was not to rain again for a year. Cyclones threatened constantly. The redeeming feature of Cossack, says Brian, was its beauty. A refreshment shop, souvenir and Art Gallery, built gradually as 'entrepreneurial activity', provided some of the initial monies for restoration work - this work undertaken by

unemployed young people doing skills training. Local contributions, resource companies, donations and Western Australian Government funds also enabled the project to continue. The project saw the development of Backpacker accommodation, a social history museum, an Annual Fair attracting about 4,500 people over a weekend, art workshops and annual Art Awards, worth over \$13,500 and attracting national artist participation.

The Shire of Roebourne developed interest in the project over time, seeing Cossack as a tourist destination and the importance of arts in that process. Brian notes that the Shire (which now manages the lease for Cossack) recently commissioned a \$25,000 sculpture for the airport terminal at nearby Karratha - the artist is one who undertook some workshops at Cossack. Brian comments: 'There is no doubt that without our emphasis on arts and cultural development that income for progress would have been non-existent. It has been by experience that the Shire Councils can take a lot of convincing about the value of supporting community art practice, but this is to be expected.'



Giuseppe Raneri, mosaic seat in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy

The role of Councils is not that of risk takers; you may need to prove the value of the arts as a viable part of the community, not only as a means to social cohesion and balance, but also as a potential job creator and income earner.'

Councils' responsibility for public art and stakeholder involvement necessarily compels them to confront contemporary issues, not the least of which is reconciliation with indigenous peoples. Across Australia, in the mid-1990s, Local Reconciliation projects mushroomed in small and practical expressions of communities seeking new ways to work together. In Regent Street, Redfern, New South Wales, artists and community members have etched a powerful and contemporary record of indigenous culture in the pavement.

The project was jointly funded by the South Sydney Council and the National Office of Local Government Innovation Awards. While many such funding opportunities have now all but disappeared, it is heartening to note that the agenda has carried on among committed Local Councils.

For example, Townsville City Council, in Queensland, has recently developed a cultural trail building upon an oral history of the European and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Garbutt. The 'Mundy Creek Natureway', linking the suburb to the sea, had historical use and still holds environmental, social and cultural significance for the communities today. It being developed with extensive revegetation, hard surfacing and interpretive signs designed by local artists. A recent tree planting involved local school students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other residents.

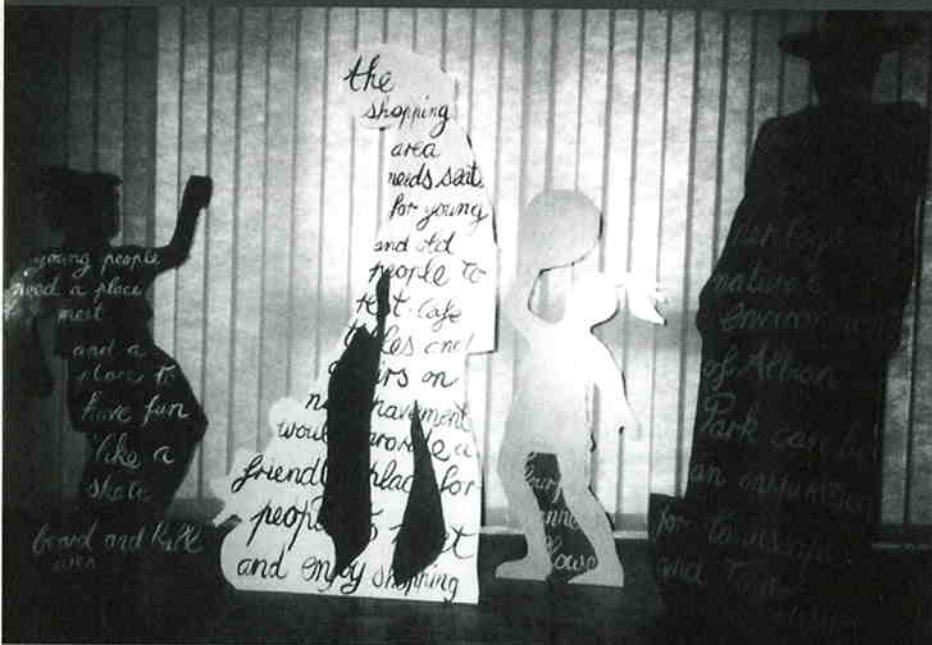
Public art and community cultural development have 'come of age' in Local Government - that is, at least, within those Councils who have realised the intrinsic and extrinsic value of the medium and process. Their stories of 'best practice' should continue to be told, in circles which enable artists, Council staff and elected representatives to consider the importance of 'looking over the side of the fence' to pick up on new techniques, or just be surprised and delighted about new opportunities.

One of the enduring challenges, however, remains the effective management of public art and community cultural development processes, and the last word on this goes to Pat Zuber from Redland Council who insists that guiding such processes cannot be left to chance - whether the process is public consultation or ensuring that public art is on Council's wider maintenance schedule, Council needs to commit the resources to ensure that 'someone is on hand to do it' ■

Jackie Ohlin is an arts consultant in Canberra. She has worked in and around local government for many years.

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planning culture



CEAD Project - documentation of community ideas about town re-design, Albion Park NSW, artist Toni de Mestre

community

GRAHAME KIME

Reflections on the cultural planning and development phenomena.

In *Artwork*, Issue 38 Malcolm McKinnon¹ indicated some of the dilemmas facing those undertaking cultural planning and development roles including a distinction between the planning and 'hands on' project model. To my mind, the two are inextricably linked, just as theory should be linked to practice. The fact that Malcolm laments the lack of critical debate in the field led me to offer some of my own reflections on working within this ever-changing cultural practitioners' landscape.

'Culture of the community'

When I first became involved with community arts some 15 years ago, there was, at least amongst the coterie of practitioners which I knew, a good deal of questioning about theory and practice. Much of this discussion was centred on the rationale for community arts in the first place and the consequent difficulties of developing what was intended to be a 'democratic' and politicised art form. Much of the discussion related to the historic development and social role of art, which was further contextualised within a 'capitalist' state. 'Community' was always a hotly contested term, somewhat ambiguous and often contradictory, it nevertheless provided a political point to the inclusion of cultural forms that were marginal to institutional experiences of art. The term 'culture' then became broadly encompassing referring to the 'culture of the community' which determined a framework from within which various aspects of a community's experiences could be explored.

Despite the limited project base of much of this work it nevertheless managed to represent the social and cultural experiences of difference that mainstream art or media representations never fully realised. Local histories, migrant experiences, Aboriginality and gender issues could all be given a communicating form that others in a community might gain some understanding from. These representations, although perhaps informed by aesthetic histories, didn't themselves need to rely on the strictures of formalism and artistic self-consciousness that frequently pervaded contemporary art strategies. This lack of a formal self-referential aesthetic meant that the outcomes of projects could be more confluent with a broader community understanding of representational languages and therefore be more open to and representative of their cultural influences. The constraint on the effectiveness of these projects was the limited capacity to distribute and promote the work which may have extended its reach and made it less marginal.

My personal experience of projects included mosaics, murals, comic books, social history documents, exhibitions, sculpture and community theatre. Each project was strategic in its form and content, with particular community representation serving to give voice to or highlight a condensed set of issues or concerns. Broad-brush community representations were rarely useful and generally ran counter to the concern to problematise the very construction of community as whole and complete. Projects were intended to be explorations of issues or the promotion of particular community identities. Another cause was to provide some skilling of communities in the use and application of particular media and art forms. This naturally required a strong dependence on participation of large or small community arts and non-art groups. It was often a difficult but always rewarding experience, each project reaffirming one's faith in the process.

A role for local government

Local government, from which much of this activity was developed through the arts officer programs, was always an uneasy site of resistance. Apart from its inevitable bureaucratic constraints, community arts projects tended to be located in and identified with the welfare sector, somewhat limiting their pro active intention. Another limitation was that Government always wants to represent itself as consensual, a problem identified in the Heks Report (1985)² which described the problems of working for Councils, including '...pressure to...generate cultural representations of the municipality as one big happy family.' Nevertheless local government has a significant supply of resources, which is reflected in the continuing push for partnerships between funding bodies and this arm of the public sector.

Artists or artworkers had a significant role to play in the project-based model as they brought to the communities with whom they worked skills that were special to their particular profession. The best of these artists also had the skill of communication and the understanding that their role was as facilitator rather than project leader. Their own personal aesthetic had to be secondary to the demands of the group process. It wasn't just anyone who could do it, and the belief in the activity had to be weighed against the desire for often more sophisticated aesthetic visions that an artist working alone may explore. The aesthetic of these individual projects had to generally be measured in other terms, as their individual success was determined more from how well they addressed particular community experiences and how the process actively involved the community in determining the outcome. To my mind the aesthetic value lay in the relationship between artist and community and how in a general sense each project added to the collective enterprise of challenging art to serve a whole new set of working criteria.

To my mind the aesthetic value lay in the relationship between artist and community and how in a general sense each project added to the collective enterprise of challenging art to serve a whole new set of working criteria.



...the knowledge gained
from communities
through the contact that
project work created was
invaluable in being able
to carry out or develop
further strategies.

Community arts projects and cultural planning

Project-based work still seems to play a significant role in the community arts/cultural development sector. In the two projects which I recently reviewed for this magazine, 'Gungahlin on Plate' and 'High Art: A CD-ROM Project', project work was still the focus of the activity even if the strategy involved other aspects of cultural or community development, including planning roles. Projects can therefore be a tool in the development of other objectives and it is a strategy through which cultural workers can stay in touch with those communities on whose behalf they are attempting to promote cultural issues. One of the obvious problems of developing dialogue with communities is the proximity with which one chooses to work with them. Projects seem to be worthwhile ways of facilitating that process and avoiding the top down approach that is a familiar experience of many communities when it comes to planning and development.

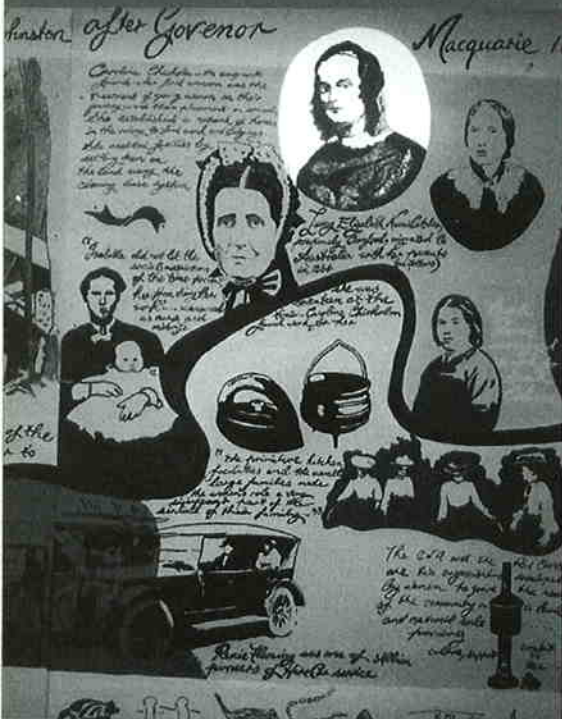
As a community arts or cultural development officer I found the knowledge gained from communities through the contact that project work created was invaluable in being able to carry out or develop further strategies. Communities need to understand and trust your objectives before they are likely to willingly endorse or participate in any further work. Naturally you won't please everyone, and there are many pitfalls associated with the community consultation/participation process. Nevertheless a significant body of knowledge can be built around this direct interaction which in turn leads to better results. In fact I have always thought that this is the primary value of the term 'community' in community art or community cultural development, that is, it identifies the client who is most significant to the process.

Importantly the value of project activity is what it has given to a community and how a community in

turn values the result. This value usually extends beyond the artwork itself and has many intangibles and difficult-to-measure attributes. You often have to be there, as the saying goes. Nevertheless there are certain identifiable components that are at least documentable and some which may be experiential or only realised over time.

Community participation is one measure although this needs to be viewed in terms of quality as well as quantity. Endorsement of the project by word of mouth is always a good indicator as is the project's longer-term outcomes. Some aspects may be measured in economic terms although this can lead to reducing all work to product rather than experience. An example of what I would call an endorsement came from a project which I organised in my local community when I was the arts officer six years ago. This was a depiction of the town's history in a mural that has since adorned the local swimming pool. The project arose from a local cultural planning group that I established to help give direction to the work I was carrying out in the area. The group was inexperienced but wanted to do something concrete instead of just discussing future directions or ideas. The local history group provided the necessary inspiration through their energy and efforts to make the adjacent history centre more appealing. Although it may no longer be the most novel and exciting idea, a mural was something which the group could grapple with in the early days of its formation, and something which would produce a tangible result in a reasonable time frame.

Fortunately a local artist, Tori de Mestre, had joined the group because she wanted to be a part of the town's development. Tori had also grown up in the area so was known to many of the older residents. With a moderate sum of money from the local council and donations from local businesses the project was planned and set in place. Tori worked tirelessly researching the town's history, from the records kept by the local history



Detail: History Mural Project for Albion Park NSW, artist Tori de Mestre