

MAY 2011 SEMINAR SUMMARY

ACCESS: THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT

A conversation about past and future engagement for disability and the Arts.

6.00-8.00pm, Monday 30 May, 2011

Australia Council, 372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills

FACILITATOR :

NAOMI McCARTHY: PENRITH ART GALLERY Manager - Education and Visitor Programs

Naomi was appointed into her current position in 2007 after five years as Education Officer at Penrith Regional Gallery & The Lewers Bequest. Naomi is the Director of Sizzle – An Inclusive Arts Festival, held annually at the Gallery to coincide with International Day for People with Disability. The Sizzle Festival showcases an exhibition of works on paper and video works and a performance program from people living with disability. The Sizzle Festival also includes a series of accessible workshops and tours and a number of professional development opportunities including an art mentorship. Her education brief includes providing opportunities and programs across all age groups both within and outside of formal educational settings. She has a particular interest in inclusive programming and has been running accessible tours and workshop at the Gallery since 2002. Naomi believes an essential part of inclusive programming is participating in conversation and consultation with all relevant stakeholders, her practice is informed by the dictum, "Nothing about us without us." Naomi has written several education kits including For Matthew and Others: Journeys with Schizophrenia.

PANEL:

AMANDA TINK: ACCESSIBLE ARTS Training Coordinator.

Amanda coordinates all aspects of Accessible Arts Education and Training. This includes training on Disability Awareness and Access (with the option of TAFE-accreditation), Disability Action Planning, Arts Awareness; educational seminars and forums; and the Arts Activated Conference. Amanda is passionate about disability rights as human rights, facilitating for positive change, universally accessible art, and coffee. Amanda has been in the role since October 2010. Previously she worked as the Training Officer at People with Disability Australia (PWD), and, before that, as the CEO of Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN). Her other work has included: producing and presenting Access All Areas (a national radio program on disability-related topics); guest lecturing at Australian Catholic University; movie reviewing for commercial radio; and presenting as a keynote speaker at the Disability Advocacy Resource Units 2nd Strengthening Disability Advocacy Conference.

JENNY SPINAK: SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE Program Manager Accessibility.

Jenny Spinak has been Program Manager, Accessibility at Sydney Opera House since 2006. Her role as a designated accessibility resource is unique to performing arts venues in Australia and was created as part of Sydney Opera House's commitment to improving access for people with

MAY 2011 SEMINAR SUMMARY

disabilities. Since 2006 Jenny has been involved in overseeing accessibility for the House's performances and customer experiences, site renovations, patron services and facilities, procedures and policies, staff training as well as providing accessibility advice to all business units. Jenny will discuss some of the successes and challenges involved in making this World Heritage Listed iconic building more accessible to patrons and visitors with disabilities.

JAN BARHAM: MEMBER OF NSW LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Byron Shire Mayor and NSW Legislative Council Greens member.

Jan Barham has been recently elected to the NSW Parliament Upper House for The Greens NSW and is pleased to have portfolio responsibility for Disability and the Arts. She has been an elected councillor in Byron Shire since 1999 and in 2004 became Australia's first popularly elected Green Mayor and was re-elected in 2008. In council, Jan Barham was a member of the Access Committee and involved in the development of the Council's Disability Plan in 2001 and the updated 2008 document. As a committee member she undertook experiential access training and learnt about the difficulties in negotiating streets, business and community buildings. Jan Barham was involved in the development of the Council's Social, Cultural and Arts policies and strategies and maintained access as a priority consideration for development assessment including approvals for events. Now Jan Barham will be promoting arts and disability rights in the NSW Parliament and building on the strong advocacy work undertaken by Ian Cohen and his advisor Scott Hickie in the last term of Parliament.

SEMINAR

Facilitator Naomi McCarthy, Penrith Regional Art Gallery, began by introducing herself and the members of the panel. She commented that after nine busy years at Penrith Regional Gallery, the SAMAG seminar evening was a good opportunity to be plucked out of the work environment to connect more broadly, with colleagues and arts practitioners. She also said that there is a generosity about this type of evening. By their presence, she noted that the audience had shown commitment and thanked everyone for coming. Naomi McCarthy outlined that it was her personal ambition that everyone attending would take one action from the evening, not just the feel good factor. She encouraged people to undertake one action per day to enhance arts access for people with disabilities. Naomi McCarthy then introduced Amanda Tink who coordinates all aspects of training at Accessible Arts which she has done since 2010.

Amanda Tink thanked everyone for coming and suggested that although there is a lot of good material on the subject of accessibility, people in this field are often working in isolation, so at an evening such as this it is good to get together in one room.

Invoking a quote by Edmund and Jules Goncourt "Surely there is nothing that has to listen to so many stupid remarks as a painting" Amanda Tink reminded us that art is something to be enjoyed by all in all sorts of ways and for all sorts of reasons. She also quoted William Morris " I do not

MAY 2011 SEMINAR SUMMARY

want art for a few or education for a few.” *William Morris (24 March 1834 – 3 October 1896) was an English textile designer, artist, writer, and socialist associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the English Arts and Crafts Movement.* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Morris

It is this philosophy of equity which is reflected in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability. *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human rights instrument of the United Nations intended to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Parties to the Convention are required to promote, protect, and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities and ensure that they enjoy full equality under the law. The text was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 December 2006 and opened for signature on 30 March 2007. Following ratification by the 20th party, it came into force on 3 May 2008.[1] As of June 2011, it has 149 signatories and 101 parties, and the European Union 'concluded' the treaty (in effect, ratified it to the extent responsibilities of the member states were transferred to the European Union) on 23 December 2010.[2] The Convention is monitored by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_on_the_Rights_of_Persons_with_Disabilities

Amanda Tink then reflected on a significant childhood experience. As a first grader in school 25 years ago, she had the opportunity to attend a sculpture exhibition for blind students, wearing gloves to facilitate the tactile experience of sculpture in a gallery setting. Amanda Tink remarked that things have progressed in the last 5 years. Access has improved, but at a slow pace. She believes that in the next 5 years the available technology should improve access even more. Accessible Arts has a unique vision of a society in which people with a disability can participate fully and contribute. They believe in art as a human right. Therefore Amanda Tink urges arts organizations to commit to promoting accessibility. She urged arts managers to commit to accessibility, to consult with people with disabilities and their allies and to imagine and create new opportunities for this to occur.

Naomi McCarthy then explained that she had benefited from disability awareness training which she undertook at Accessible Arts in 2010. In her view, metropolitan organisations are keen to learn about accessibility but slow to act. Regional arts organisations on the other hand are quicker to act. She believes that people with disabilities are not greeted warmly in metropolitan organisations. Naomi McCarthy then introduced Jenny Spinak Program Manager Accessibility, Sydney Opera House where she is a designated disability resource, a unique role for an arts organization. Naomi McCarthy also commented that there are challenges in implementing accessibility visions. One may have good ideas and good intentions, but these can seem difficult to implement.

MAY 2011 SEMINAR SUMMARY

As the accessibility Program Manager at the Sydney Opera House, it has been Jenny Spinak's responsibility to increase accessibility for patrons and also to develop audiences of people with disabilities. Changes within the building include the installation of a fifty person lift, new escalators. Lifts have also been installed within the venue. Accessible seating has increased and there is now permanent captioning for some performances. The Sydney Opera House provides courtesy wheelchairs and courtesy buses and also offers Sign Language tours.

The accessibility program has targeted younger audiences with vision or hearing impairment and those with autism. To develop accessibility Jenny Spinak has worked with mainstream productions such as "The man who planted trees" in 2010. The Opera House consulted with students and teachers to determine how best to meet their needs. Students were given a tactile tour of the set and the puppets. They also arrived early for the performance to be given a physical outline of the theatre. The children were demonstrably excited about all aspects of their experience. In April 2011 Jenny Spinak targeted "Me and My Shadow" for students at the Royal Deaf and Blind School. The Sydney Opera House organized a Sign Language interpreter and Patch Theatre Company were happy to support this initiative. They also supplied a DVD so that children with dual sensory impairment could watch it and be prepared for the whole experience of theatre performance.

Another organization Jenny Spinak has worked with is the Autism Spectrum Organisation. Children with autism needed a non-judgmental space where they could come and go and make noise. The Sydney Opera House intends that this will be an ongoing program, not just a one off. Jenny Spinak is looking at how to make mainstream programs more accessible. In the 1950's access wasn't a consideration. Moving forward, Jenny Spinak says that access will continue to be more embedded in the Sydney Opera House's planning and activities. Funding for building modifications came from a special allocation by the NSW State Government.

Naomi McCarthy then discussed the human face of accessibility. It is not just the building that enhances accessibility, people can help others to get around. During Disability Awareness Week, Penrith Art Gallery hosts the Sizzle Arts Festival which includes an art show and sensory story telling. It is a dynamic, joyful and irreverent experience which includes a disco in the art show. It is through involvement in these sorts of events that the capacity for people to work together to navigate access issues and to assist each other comes alive.

Naomi McCarthy then introduced The Honourable Jan Barham, Member of the Legislative Council, The Greens New South Wales. Jan Barham pointed out that old buildings can be costly to upgrade for accessibility. She posits that government has an obligation to provide access to employment, transport, arts and culture for all. When modifying buildings cost is a major factor. Ramps, for example, are very expensive, it can cost \$120,000 for one ramp. At Bangalow, in the Northern Rivers district it cost a quarter of a million dollars to undertake a back of house upgrade. Therefore, she suggests that involving State Governments is essential because of the cost. Most of the halls and buildings artists use are maintained by councils, so it essential to get funding from



samag
Seminars for Arts Professionals

MAY 2011 SEMINAR SUMMARY

state governments. Jan Barham emphasized that the community gets a lot out of artists with a disability. Recently young film makers in Byron Bay worked with young people with disabilities to make a film which was a mutually rewarding experience. People with disabilities have the right to be engaged in all opportunities. Venues should consider providing Hearing loops and interpreters. There are also equity issues to be addressed in ensuring access to the arts for people with disabilities, as both audience and practitioners. Some of these are highlighted in the National Disability Strategy which was formally endorsed by COAG on 13 February 2011.

The Strategy is a ten year plan that sets out six priority areas for action to improve the lives of people with disabilities, their families and carers. For example:

Inclusive and accessible communities—the physical environment including public transport; parks, buildings and housing; digital information and communications technologies; civic life including social, sporting, recreational and cultural life.

People with disabilities can tell their stories in ways that are accessible for all and Jan Barham points out that arts and popular culture inform society which then informs politics. She therefore demands access and inclusion for our whole society. In the Northern Rivers district Real Art Works and R.E.D. provide opportunities for participation as she suggests.

http://www.lismoregallery.org/cmst/lrg003/view_doc.asp?id=152&cat=11
<http://www.realartworks.org/>

Jan Barham also recommended a documentary screened on Compass ABC TV Dancing to Disney which illustrates the mutual rewards of working with creative artists with disabilities. She was particularly moved by this film and urged the audience to view it.
<http://www.abc.net.au/compass/s3202751.htm>

Naomi McCarthy then talked about the notion of art for everybody and spoke about creativity as a part of daily life. She said that each of us carries our own history and each person with disability has their own history. Communication is integral to gain trust in working with people with disabilities. Cultural change she observed comes slowly, it takes time. Naomi McCarthy then reiterated her request that each person undertake a daily action and a daily interaction in the spirit of the topic for the evening. As the next panel member Daniel Kojta could not attend in person, he had forwarded his presentation notes to be read on his behalf.

Daniel Kojta's words speak eloquently for his position as an artist who has a disability: "The glacial distance between the terms 'disabled artist' and simply 'artist' is a profound leap in identity. 'Disabled' still carries a hefty weight within the community and often remains confined to minimal expectations. This is my conundrum. Why the need for identifying a physical condition, or my relationship with gravity." He then goes on to say "In the gallery environment it is the work which

Sydney Arts Management Advisory Group **E** info@samag.org **T** (02) 8250 5722 **W** www.samag.org **P** PO Box 18, Leichhardt NSW 2040



Communities
arts nsw



SAMAG is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW
and by the Australian Government through the Arts Council, its arts funding advisory body



The SAMAG Seminar Series is supported by the City of Sydney



samag
Seminars for Arts Professionals

MAY 2011 SEMINAR SUMMARY

represents me....In this space, where the work must speak up for it-self, my ability to stand is irrelevant” In his video project Hitch, Daniel Kojta leaves the audience with questions about what a disability is. In his words, “Your inability to perceive ability is your disability.

In Digital Flaneur, 2007 Daniel Kojta plays on the contemporary enchantment with technology. “Digital Flaneur presents a unique drama in which the phenomena of technology digitizes an alternate route from the limitations of reality, repair has been made. Here I have used stop motion to animate movement and gesture in my paralysed legs. Footage is shot in the prone position, rotated ninety degrees, and I am healed by the contemporary God of technology. But the question remains, when will I require the update?” Other works by the artist were also shown and are discussed by him in the presentation notes posted with this article. Daniel Kojta also works as a curator and most recently was invited to present a talk and series of workshop in new media in Adelaide. He also put together a collaborative work with twelve other artists from Adelaide for Delve community arts in 2011. <http://www.anat.org.au/2011/04/delve-workshop-adelaide/>

General discussion and audience questions and comments then continued as follows.

The Bundanon Trust has recently established a residency for artist with a disability. When Daniel Kojta arrived to take up an artist’s residency at Bundanon, the building was not accessible. There were other adaptations to be made, as the terrain can be quite rugged in the bush with few cleared paths, Daniel Kojta brought his motorbike to maximize his experience of the natural surroundings. Therefore creating accessibility was a two way exchange and a shared learning experience.

Naomi McCarthy talked about a group from Northcott Disability Services which included 11 people in wheelchairs to do a performance at the Penrith Regional Gallery. Executing this called on cooperation, and goodwill to ensure that all guests to the gallery were assisted.

A question was then put to Jan Barham: Are there lessons we can learn from the Aboriginal experience in terms of acceptance and cultural awareness?

She replied that the principles of cultural awareness could be applied to the disability sector. Her personal experience of navigating her home town in a wheelchair and also of navigating it blindfold have informed Jan Barham’s awareness of access issues.

Amanda Tink then outlined the Disability Awareness Training offered at Accessible Arts which is 4 hours of Disability Awareness Training, there is also Disability Action Planning Training and Arts Awareness Training.

The conversation then turned to the use of the term ‘disability’. Some expressed frustration with the terminology, the weight and connotations can be negative. An additional comment was that the language can be changed but really it is the attitude not the language that matters.

Sydney Arts Management Advisory Group **E** info@samag.org **T** (02) 8250 5722 **W** www.samag.org **P** PO Box 18, Leichhardt NSW 2040



Communities
arts nsw



SAMAG is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW
and by the Australian Government through the Arts Council, its arts funding advisory body



The SAMAG Seminar Series is supported by the City of Sydney



samag
Seminars for Arts Professionals

MAY 2011 SEMINAR SUMMARY

Jenny Spinak answered a question about the Sydney Opera House upgrade and explained that funding had come from a special grant from the New South Wales government. Jan Barham raised the importance of Access and Mobility plans which must take into account all aspects of accessibility, not just from an arts perspective, but the whole of a person's life.

The seminar then concluded with thanks to the participants and to the audience. This was a timely discussion as access is likely to become an increasingly salient consideration for arts organizations to fulfil their obligations under the National Disability Action Strategy. According to the Australia Council, "Some 19 per cent per cent of the Australian population lives with a disability and close to one million Australians with a disability develop, create and experience the arts."

Seminar Summary: Aviva Finberg

USEFUL WEBSITES

<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

(Links to National Disability Strategy)

<http://www.janbarham.org.au/>

<http://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/>

<http://www.aarts.net.au/>

<http://www.penrithregionalgallery.org/>

http://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/visit/access_newsletter_Sept_09.aspx

<http://www.patchtheatre.org.au/>

http://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/About/11EventMediaRelease_MeandMyShadow.aspx

<http://www.penrithregionalgallery.org/sizzle%202010.php>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Morris

Sydney Arts Management Advisory Group E info@samag.org T (02) 8250 5722 W www.samag.org P PO Box 18, Leichhardt NSW 2040



Communities
arts nsw



SAMAG is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW
and by the Australian Government through the Arts Council, its arts funding advisory body



The SAMAG Seminar Series is supported by the City of Sydney