



“What, these old stripes? I painted them myself”

Moving beyond moving beyond violence

In our last newsletter we published a recent speech by Arts Council Chair, Peter Biggs, in which he reflected on the far-reaching effects of art in society and particularly in prisons. Arguing that the arts ‘can bring wholeness, harmony and radiance to an individual, to a community and to a society,’ Biggs cited prisons and local communities where the arts ‘are being used as a tool to move communities and individuals beyond violence’. In this issue we print various responses to this viewpoint.

Warren Feeney, Centre Of Contemporary Art Director, writes in the April 18 issue of *The Press* of ‘an increasingly pervasive sense that art is less about creativity, excellence and profundity, and more about providing a cure-all for society’s problems.’ He adds ‘I believe serious art is undervalued when it is required to focus on accessibility or to meet the aspirations of a social welfare agenda. Art operates on a more subtle and complex platform. It may reveal aspects of society’s troubles but it is not a universal remedy for them.’

Mike Riddell - *writer*

I found myself both moved and disturbed by Peter Biggs’ affirmation of the transformative role of art. Moved because of the acknowledgement he gives to the organic connection between spirituality and creative art. And disturbed, more vaguely, by placing too high and utopian a construction on the place of arts within society. His trinity of components of art - wholeness, harmony and radiance - have a Greek and aesthetic ring to them. While they may certainly be part of artistic endeavour, and even evoke similar resonances within the human spirit, we perhaps should not be too eager to promote the universally positive effects of art. Is it not also true that much art is born out of fracture, conflict and darkness; and that it may both feed upon and encourage the despair of a culture?

I do not want to be a gainsayer, nor to pour water on the newly kindled and bright flames of passion which Biggs brings to his job. Personally I am delighted to find someone in Creative New Zealand paying tribute to the essential spirituality of art. The creative process is, and must always be a product of the soul if it is to be anything more than distracting trivia. And the relationship between religion (in the broad sense of

the word) and art has been an enduring if tempestuous relationship. But we need to be careful not to claim too much. I worked for a short time in Paremoremo Prison where Peter Biggs found inspiration for his theme. Some very fine works of art were created in the classes he cites. But I know for a fact that some of the inmates used their time there to make weapons for themselves, which were later used in assaults on other inmates. Sometimes the artistic and violent impulses lived side by side in the same person.

James K. Baxter claimed the genesis for his own craft came from ‘my shadow, my enemy, my monster’. He also suggested that ‘Art, the mainstay of culture, is not bred by culture but by its opposite: that level of hardship or awareness of moral chaos where the soul is too destitute to be able to lie to itself’. If we seek to correct such moral chaos through the tutelage of art, we may be destroying the very wellspring of artistic creativity.

It is the moralistic or evangelistic impulse which does more than anything to mar art, by simplifying the human spirit through the use of slogans and formulae. We do well, then, to be suspicious of any ‘agenda’ whatsoever for art, even if it is the noble one of redemption of society. While I readily concur that the violence in our community points to spiritual dis-ease, I am not at all convinced that creative art will do much more than make that apparent to us.

I think art can dredge the depths of the human spirit, and serve to reveal the horror and potential contained therein. But I doubt that art, in and of itself, can wholly transform that which it uncovers - any more than the mirror in front of the dentist’s chair can remove toothache. Salvation might be best left to the religious partner in the relationship, leaving art free to be nothing other than what it is. A McCahon or Hotere may awaken my religious impulses, but I don’t expect them to save me. Much as I respect and appreciate Mr Biggs’ high view of creative endeavour - and in particular his highlighting of spirituality - I find myself worried that he may be announcing what Baxter used to term ‘Communist art’. That is, the employment of artistic media as vehicles for other ends. Let us hope that is not the case.

More responses overleaf



seven plus



chrysalis seed trust

Who are Seven Plus?

We are a network of visual artists in Canterbury who meet to encourage each other in our art and faith. Most of us are established working artists, local to Canterbury. We represent various aspects of the art world: some are professional contemporary artists who exhibit locally, nationally and internationally; others work in commercial art and design, or teach. Others are currently studying art at local tertiary institutions. Included in our ranks are a network of art lovers who have a commitment to the vision of Seven Plus.

Seven Plus is one of the art networks under the umbrella of the Chrysalis Seed Trust which is a charitable trust under the auspices of Spreydon Baptist Community Services.

The mission of Chrysalis Seed Trust is to help resource the arts community from a Christian perspective.

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Kia ora!

A few weeks ago I had a lovely visit from Doris Tutill who was my art teacher at St Margaret's College. Doris studied at the Canterbury College School of Art from 1929-34 where influential figures were Florence Akins, James Cook, Cecil Kelly and James Johnstone, and she specialized in landscape, head life, pencil portraiture, embroidery and calligraphy. From 1954 to 1979 Doris taught art at St Margaret's College and had exhibitions at the CSA and the Bealey Gallery. In 1986 she was ordained in the Anglican Church and became associate priest at Merivale from 1986-89 and subsequently priest-in-charge at Avonside. CST Resource Centre has a copy of her comprehensive publication 'Religion and Art: The Inevitable Association' - which is well worth reading.

At the recent Christchurch Arts Festival I loved Hone Tuwhare's book launch. Quite elderly now, this leading New Zealand poet and kaumatua of the Maori writing world, beguiled the audience with his warm self-effacing humour and wonderful use of language. Another memorable event was an evening of top New Zealand

musicians and recording artists setting James K Baxter's poetry to song. Interestingly enough, Chrysalis Seed people are also planning various collaborations for 2002.

The Midwinter Seven Plus Soiree went really well with a stunning performance of hymns composed by Jane Simpson and Bill Ahlers and sung by singers from S. Michael's, followed by a fabulous overview of the 'Dark Plain' exhibition at CoCA by Jonathan Mane-Wheoki. We could have listened to Jonathan all night but eventually tore ourselves away to deal with delicious deserts which we didn't want to go to waste/waist!

I hope you'll come and join our next Seven Plus event when we visit the Bridgewater art collection on 29 September, and do remember there's a wonderful range of resources for you to experience and utilize at our CST Art and Faith Resource Centre at The Arts Centre.

*God bless and arohanui!
Bridget Underhill*



'Godley Head' by Stefan Roberts

Moving beyond moving beyond violence ...continued from front page

Ben Lander - painter

Biggs is right in his call for New Zealand to be a creative country. Creativity is something that is given from God because we are made in His image. I feel that art reflects good and bad aspects of human nature and either way it is positive to give expression through the arts as it articulates and expresses our failings and successes. Its wonderful that they are doing these kinds of things in prisons. Creativity should be fostered. I like the idea of arts being a tool to bring about a non-violent society but we should not be under the illusion that art is a cure-all for

all social problems. Art does not always appeal to the good in human nature.

Stefan Roberts - photographer

Violence often stems from peoples frustration at their inability to communicate with society or other individuals. I believe art helps as an alternative form of expression. Many people have not been exposed to the possibility of using art to communicate how they are feeling or to become more aware themselves of what they are feeling. I believe art in prisons is a good starting point for helping to understand where people are coming from.



Detail of 'Watercannons being used as motors in the Phillipines' by Jessica Crothall



Detail of 'The Lewis Hoard' by Anne Fountain



Detail of 'Drawing' by Kees Bruin



Detail of 'Dancing days' by Jo OHara



Detail of 'An artist rowing down the Avon, using umbrellas for oars' by Mark Lander

Sarah Amazinna - *The SPACE Gallery Director and Director of Christchurch Arts Council*

Biggs presents a healthy and encouraging opinion and its great to see this type of viewpoint coming from our Arts organisation.

Craig Dixon - *Vicar of St Matthews*

It reminds me of the book 'Art as Healing' by Edward Adamson - looking at the development of the art work of psych patients as they journey toward wellness. I have always maintained that engaging the creative self is healthy and healing. From experience during times in my life that have been traumatic or demanding, engaging in the arts has helped me source a healing tool and commence a process of absorption where the negative world recedes - art anaesthetises - providing space for rebuilding and restoration.

Ruth Unger - *Chrysalis Seed Arts Adviser*

Based on my personal experiences within "the System", I would agree the arts have potential to be a powerful tool in assisting motivated prison inmates find new directions as they seek to re-order their lives. There are other equally powerful tools available as well, such as literacy and the development of work skills, to name just two. However, I would question whether the arts in themselves are wholly responsible for spiritual transformation or whether their function lies more in acting to awaken the spirit to some new, positive options. Spiritual transformation involves

a complex healing process that encompasses character and condition and it is a tall order for the arts to be solely responsible for the entire regenerative experience.

Peter Crothall - *Director of Chrysalis Seed Trust*

I am encouraged by Peter Biggs' call to using creative gifts for healing and Warren Feeney's warning that we sacrifice professionalism and creativity if we see art merely as a social tool. Chrysalis Seed seeks to affirm both art as healing and as a serious professional pursuit in our contemporary culture. We want to develop an environment, resources and community that will affirm and encourage both emerging and established artists from a Christian perspective. Part of this process will involve discovering the healing potential of the arts and in the long term I want to see the establishment of professional art therapy as part of our resources. Another critical value we protect is 'art for arts sake'. This is vital in working towards encouraging a contemporary, professional and personal development of artistic gifts in all disciplines. The church for too long has seen art merely as a tool of evangelism, worship and healing. When we reduce art to being a tool and artists as a means to an end then we lose sight of an essential aspect of the Creator. As Michael Parmenter has said, the artist should be a prophet. However, the artist, made in God's image should also be encouraged to celebrate and express her creative gifts in whatever way she chooses in following Him.

Seven Plus news

Congratulations to **Kees Bruin** and **Craig Dixon** who were finalists in the 2001 Cranleigh Barton Drawing Award.

Mark Lander will be a guest lecturer at a South Australia textile fibre forum at Geelong in September. In October and November he will tutor workshops at the University of Houston in Texas, attend the annual Dard Hunter paper making conference in Dalton, Massachusetts, and lead a workshop at Central Michigan University. Mark and Yvette are expecting their second baby any day now.

Preview and review of **Jessica Crothall's** show 'Run Lola Run' in 'Looking at faith.' Charmian Smith. *Otago Daily Times*, 23 May 2001, and 31 May 2001.

Feature article on **Mark Lander**. 'Love on paper.' Kim Knight. *Sunday Star Times*, 5 August 2001.

Preview of 'Life Cycle' show by **Jessica Crothall** and **Jo O'Hara** at the Salamander Gallery. 'Duo look at life's cycles.' Jenny Setchell. *The Press* 15 August 2001.

Shows by Seven Plus artists

Katie Thomas - Centre of Contemporary Art, 16 May - 2 June

Jessica Crothall - Aigantighe Art Museum in Timaru, and Gray's Gallery in Dunedin, May and June.

Ken Hall - School of Fine Arts Exhibition, July.

Carol Spain - 'Threadworks 01: Stitches through Time' exhibition by the Embroiderers Guild, Canterbury Museum, 21 - 29 July.

Anne Fountain - 'The Lewis Chessman', Centre of Contemporary Art, 8 - 26 August. She also had a show at the Bowen Moore Galleries in Wellington in May.

Darryn George - 'The Hippy Hop Show', Brooke Gifford Gallery 7 - 25 August

Jo O'Hara and Jessica Crothall - 'Life Cycle', Salamander Gallery, 21 August - 2 September.

Stefan Roberts - 'painter of light', Middleton Grange Main Office Foyer, 20 August - 19 Sept. He has a solo show at Dobson Bashford Gallery opening 3 October. Other recent shows: Dobson Bashford Arts Festival Exhibition and Eastside Gallery exhibition.

Alan McLean - 'Sculpture in the garden' - group outdoor exhibition for invited sculptors at Jane Swinard's home, Lombardy, Governors Bay. 9 - 11 November.

Mark Lander is exhibiting paintings at Fitzroy Gallery in September and will also be showing work next year at Napa Valley in California.

Kees Bruin will have a retrospective exhibition at the new Christchurch Art Gallery in 2004.