

## Interview: Anna-Kate Loughnan Azucena gallery, Dunedin.

Anna-Kate Loughnan, a 24-year-old student completing a PhD in neuro-anatomy medicine at Otago (the anatomical effects of alcohol on the foetus) is pioneering Azucena, a gallery, café and trust in Dunedin. The trust provides mentoring for Christian artists, support and opportunities to feed back into the community.

Azucena is the Spanish name for the 'Madonna Lily' which is commonly held to signify eternal life, love and majesty and grew from Anna-Kate's photographic and artistic focus on the Arum lily in her own art.

### What is the vision for the Azucena Trust?

It began when I was working in what we might call 'creative ministries' at Dunedin Apostolic church. We were using the arts as a tool to encourage the talents and skills of Christians. For me, I view the arts as a way of communicating ourselves as well as allowing other people to make their own judgements on what we are saying, who we are. The benefit of that is the community can access our creativity outside the church walls, not feel threatened or enclosed within a church background.

I really started to think about this issue of being free to explore ideas within one's faith when I noticed the impact that the church had on one of my brothers. As an artist his views and interpretations on faith and life were often misunderstood by those within the church. As a result he felt that in order to belong he would need to conform or at least not question. That being an essential part of who he is, the only alternative was to either give up his exploration within the arts or give up his faith.

3 years ago I started to look into taking what I was wanting to achieve, the encouragement of Christian artists, outside of the church and into the community. I wanted to provide a space which supported them in an open, non-threatening environment where anybody from any background would feel comfortable.

It only solidified at the beginning of 2003, as a way to encourage Christian artists in their faith and spiritual walk, to really express who they are through their art medium. So it's about encouragement and support as well as an opportunity to input back into the community by providing community workshops and mentoring.

### How do you see Azucena fits in with the wider visual arts community?

The arts are such a powerful tool in all aspects of life, which includes a spiritual aspect. Azucena is not about isolating the Christian artists from the wider arts community, rather acting as perhaps a "springboard" to encourage Christian artists in their faith and their involvement within the arts community.

There is a role for strongly narrative pieces. Some can explore their own beliefs and faith through that mechanism. It also enables others to

watch the artist's exploration of that and reflect back on it and interpret it.

Whether or not the art "speaks a message" I don't think is as important as encouraging and supporting the artists themselves.

### Do you have any particular Christian-artistic influences?

I don't have a particular favourite but I am inspired by the Catholic expression of the arts, particularly their tradition of stained glass windows.

### What sort of artists do you like to show?

Personally I would really love to have a whole hoard of textile artists! Azucena is currently showing visual artists, however there are some upcoming slots for music, and we would love to incorporate poetry.

### How do you see the connection with the vision of Chrysalis Seed?

An interesting question. I can definitely see the two visions being complementary and working in well together, both working for the artists and the arts community. Before starting Azucena we had little, or no, idea of Chrysalis Seed and it has been encouraging for us to discover more about CST. While there are many aspects that are similar between CS and Azucena there remain some aspects which make each distinct and not in competition, i.e. CS supports all artists (visual artists/poets) while Azucena aims to support Christian artists and their faith within the arts community.

**Past exhibitions** at the new gallery have included: Josh McMillan, a printmaker who identifies himself as a "New Zealand Polynesian"; Shelly Johnson (see interview), collage; Mike Cook, acrylics, and Kate Walkinshaw, photography (both third year arts students); Dana Pierce and Katie Gray, acrylics; and Pete Thompson, photographer and skate and snow board artist.

**Exhibitions planned for the near future at Azucena, include:** Dave Teata, third year art student, acrylic painter and printmaker; a group exhibition of Polytechnic students organised through the Polytechnic alongside an acoustic music event in the gallery featuring local bands. Future plans include a sculpture exhibition in a dedicated outdoor space behind the exhibition room which will extend Azucena as an indoor/outdoor experience.

The gallery is situated at 233 Stuart Street, Dunedin.

**John Stringer**



Anna-Kate Loughnan, Azucena, Dunedin.