

anzjat

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND JOURNAL OF ARTS THERAPY

Editorial team

Editors Sheridan Linnell and Catherine Camden-Pratt
Journal Coordinator and Editorial Assistant Jill Segedin
Copy Editors Constance Ellwood and Belinda Nemeč
Proofreaders Rigel Sorzano and Belinda Nemeč
Research Sub-committee Chair Kirsten Meyer

International advisors

Andrea Gilroy, Ronald P.M.H. Lay, Jordan Potash

Peer review panel

Jan Allen, Annette Coulter, Karen Daniel, Jo Davies, Claire Edwards, Cornelia Elbrecht, Bettina Evans, Patricia Fenner, Esther Fitzpatrick, Fiona Gardner, Andrea Gilroy, Deborah Green, Jennie Halliday, Rainbow Ho, Jo Kelly, Adrian Lania, San Leenstra, Amanda Levey, Annetta Mallon, Shaun McNiff, Kirsten Meyer, Julia Meyerowitz-Katz, Nikki O'Connor, Jean Parkinson, Radhika Santhanam-Martin, Mariana Torkington, Carla van Laar, Jill Westwood, Sue Wildman, Daniel Wong.

The editorial team wishes to thank those members of the Peer Review Panel and others who generously contributed their time and expertise to the peer review of this edition of *ANZJAT*.

Published by Australian and New Zealand Arts Therapy Association
ABN 63 072 954 388
PO Box 303 Glebe, NSW 2037, Australia
www.anzata.org

© Australian and New Zealand Journal of Arts Therapy, 2016

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Opinions of contributors are not necessarily those of the publisher. The publisher makes no representation or warranty that the information contained in articles is accurate, nor accepts liability or responsibility for any action arising out of information contained in this journal.

ISSN: 1833-9948

Design and production Jill Segedin

Printing McCollams, Auckland, New Zealand and Documents On Call, Melbourne, Australia

Exhibition review

So much there is – Māpura Studios

Studio One Toi Tū, Auckland

24 August – 15 September 2016

Reviewed by Asha Munn and Wendy Lawson

Introduction

A unique collaboration between artists and staff at Auckland's Māpura Studios created a multimedia installation at Studio One Toi Tū. Through soundscape, sensory exploration of surface, fluidity of paint, and the written word, artists revealed their deep concerns, joy, hopes, and fears. They articulated what they care for and why they make art, and considered the shared human experience. This review is written by two of the Māpura Studios staff who worked on the project.

Māpura Studios

Māpura Studios is an innovative space specialising in art therapy and creative projects. Māpura offers people from diverse backgrounds, including those living with complex disabilities, the opportunity to have a voice through creative expression. It is often full to the brim with people making art, thinking about art, and finding new ways to be creative.

Māpura Studios is built on years of experience and offers a distinct fusion of fine art, creative education, and art therapy. Its policy is one of inclusion: any person of any background and life experience who is interested in developing their creativity is welcome. Māpura values and encourages individuals, and acknowledges the therapeutic qualities inherent in the use of art materials. Its work is carried out by a collaborative team of professional artists and arts therapists.

Our roles with Māpura

Asha Munn: *I am the senior art therapist at Māpura Studios. I support art therapists and art therapy at Māpura, as well as seeking out and establishing new opportunities for providing art therapy and building partnerships with organisations that share our aims. Along with three art tutors/facilitators, I am part of the Māpura creative team. Together we take a broad overview of Māpura's activities, and find ways to work with management towards achieving the organisation's aspirations.*

Wendy Lawson: *I am an arts facilitator and arts therapist at Māpura and have worked in a range of the arts programmes. I am also the student liaison coordinator, a role that has allowed me to get to know the artists and their families better, and to appreciate more fully the support people and organisations who champion the work we do.*

Our involvement in the exhibition

Initially, the *So much there is* project was led by a single internal curator, in conjunction with Studio One Toi Tū, so neither of us was on the curatorial team. But as preparations for the show progressed, staff took opportunities to collaborate and contribute behind the scenes. In this review we reflect on that process as it unfolded.

The exhibition process

The exhibition *So much there is* invited the public to enter into the richly diverse experiences and perceptions of the artists at Māpura Studios. It also asked some pertinent questions about disability and ability: Where does one start and the other begin? What is disability? What is YOUR disability and what is YOUR ability? Do we need these labels? If so, what purpose do they serve?

At Māpura, difference is truly celebrated, and this exhibition challenged its audience to see the complexity of the world through the lens of difference. The exhibition title, *So much there is*, came directly from a Māpura artist to articulate the ‘everything’ of life, and in the studio. The enrichment that the artists find in the studio, the powerful union of art and people, and the huge value of accepting and celebrating difference, were all brought into the public realm in this inclusive showcase.

Māpura curates about twelve professional exhibitions each year and aspires to a collaborative approach. *So much there is* excelled in this respect by recognising collaboration as a powerful tool for exploring, and giving voice to, the difficulties that many of the artists face. The exhibition was not only *about* collaboration but was – in and of itself – collaboration in entirety.

To consult with and represent the whole studio (some 200 artists) in one exhibition took collaboration within the studio to a level higher than Māpura had ever previously attempted. The curatorial team (led by artist and arts facilitator Sacha Kronfield) wanted to give the artists at Māpura a voice, challenge hierarchical structures in the art world, and cross thresholds in order to establish dialogues between viewers and artists. Sacha said:

We wanted to go a little deeper, ask questions around disability, of both ourselves and the audiences that we have. We aimed to involve and empower our students in the exhibition process and make their stories visible. We wanted to ask them how they wanted to be represented? I was pleased with the final

results and delighted to work as a team in this project, our collaborative creativity is what made it successful. The result on the studio floor was also fantastic. Māpura community feels more solid, more caring and more cohesive.

The resulting exhibition occupied four gallery spaces at Studio One Toi Tū, for four weeks. During this time the audience was invited to trail through an eclectic mass of paint, pencil, clay, installation, performance, and film: *So much there [truly] is*. Myriad artworks operated together, forging relationships and connections between different media and spaces: from sculpture to painting, from wall to wall, and from room to room. Viewers were drawn into the artists’ worlds through narratives that were deeply personal but that also spoke of universal themes. Perhaps some visitors found the exhibition confronting, requiring them to consider how we all connect and relate and make our own way through life en masse.

On entering the exhibition, viewers were faced with a series of statements and questions, such as:

I am NOT disabled.

Are you a bit fearful when you meet us for the first time?

These confronting subjects and complicated questions were direct responses from Māpura artists, born out of a series of open discussions between artists and staff as they came together each week while preparing for *So much there is*. Moving through the show, viewers were then invited to pause and read a selection of personal stories that sat alongside life-sized black-and-white portraits of the artists. These portraits were created in collaboration between photographer/senior art therapist Asha Munn and Māpura artists, in an effort to establish comfortable ways to represent the individual and what they wanted to say.

Throughout the four-week exhibition period, *So much there is* sought to avoid any distinction between ability and disability, by establishing a continuing and changing dialogue with the public through a series of open conversations and experimental workshops, such as working

with musical instruments and using wheels (scooters, bikes, wheelchairs) in a mass print-making public artwork. Audience members were invited to make their own marks upon the exhibition itself by drawing directly onto gallery walls, with an entire room covered, floor to ceiling, with an intermingled array of marks made by a joining together of artists and audience in relationship. The collaboration also reached out to Auckland's creative network, who came together through 'Creative conversations' – a lively, facilitated panel discussion of the real issues for both disability and the arts.

As part of Māpura's efforts to improve the well-being of our artists, our studio hosts Whitecliffe arts therapy students undertaking clinical placements. For recent graduate and arts facilitator Wendy Lawson, who works in a number of Māpura's programmes, the exhibition provided scope to explore the questions and complexities that public exhibition can bring. She was able to support a number of students – including some of Māpura's less prolific, experimental artists – to be part of the Māpura showcase, working alongside them to prepare for the show.

For artist Callie Hunter, the road to opening night was just as rewarding as the final product. Callie created a performance/installation piece inspired by the popular computer game *Candy Crush*. In her artist proposal she said: "What's important in the game is setting goals and achieving them. That's what is important to me". Callie's submission was not a typical two-dimensional artwork, ready to hang. Rather, it required thoughtful curatorial consideration and a fair amount of self-belief and problem-solving on Callie's part to get it ready for display.

Māpura's Kids and Teens groups were also invited to share their creative ideas, with their artworks taking over one room and commanding considerable curiosity from visitors. Nestled among paintings and sculptures, a video installation by teen artist Vita Smith combined visual art with Vita's own spoken words, to explore life's random moments as gifts of knowing. Meanwhile, on a plinth in the corner, 'shhhhhh the purple cat is

sleeping' sat quietly. This sculpture was created by a group of young people who know what it is like to 'feel purple' in a world that seems predominantly another colour altogether.

When we were building up to the show, the collaborative process that flows between artist and support person was hugely important. Working creatively in partnership with her child, a mother shared how her daughter, Brenda, loses power in so many elements of her life, but regains it at Māpura through the creative and collaborative process:

In so much of Brenda's life people do things TO her. Many things are out of her control but in art she controls everything. When it comes to art she decides. The colour, brush size, texture, placement ... everything. It may take us six times to get the right colour, but she is very particular. It is her on the canvas!! ... yes, no, yes, no, yes, no, yes, no YES. We can offer advice, but Brenda has her own mind and creative control. I assist her to hold the brush and she directs the movement.

Collaboration between mother, daughter, art tutors, arts therapists, and the studio space: such valuable relationships that are often built on non-verbal communication.

So much there is responded directly to the continuum of difference and similarity upon which we all stand – a reminder perhaps that although 'the same' and 'not the same' appear to be polarities, often only a fine line separates the differences and similarities between us all. The exhibition itself was born out of a complex union between artists, art educators, and arts therapists, who speak a similar language but may not all share the same perspective or understanding. Lively discussions and solving problems were important parts of this project, and were necessary in order to move comfortably towards a successful result that everyone in the studio could be proud of.

For those of us working as part of the team curating the show and supporting the artists to exhibition stage, our manoeuvres and decisions had to be delicate, and our responses and encouragement had to be communicated

in ways that were at once protective and empowering. Concerns about safety and visual representation all came into play. A crucial responsibility when working with a population that includes some of society's most vulnerable people was to help them discover ways to represent themselves that were not disempowering.

So much there is was as intricate in its development as it was in its final presentation, and in its numerous public interactions. The line between art and life may not always be clear: arts therapists have to navigate the 'so much there is' that our clients bring, and recognise that the delicate collaborative

relationships we form are core to the work we do in any setting.

Diversity of people, substance, and complexities saturates our world. How do we filter our experiences? What and who do we allow in? What and who do we keep at a distance? There is so much: how do we process the myriad before us? Each of us has different methods of functioning in the world. The art shown in the exhibition expressed individuality in response to a multi-faceted world. Using the thread of art, it linked artist to artist, person to person, and experience to experience. Maybe we began to notice that, actually, we are not that different?



Clockwise from top left: Figure 1. One of two walls in the hallway of black and white photographs and stories – a collaborative work between Asha Munn and the Māpura artists (photographed by Asha Munn). Figure 2. The two walls of the salon room. Figure 3. Audience interacting with artwork. Drawing directly on the cartoon room gallery walls. Figure 4. The question Māpura posed to the audience of *So much there is*. What is your (dis) ability? An invitation to interact with the work and respond to the show's themes by drawing and writing responses.