

# SPORT + ART + EDUCATION

by Purnima Ruanglertbutr

Pic: Adrian Vittorio



ABOVE: Purnima teaching students during the Basil Sellers Art Prize 2012

Today, art museums and university art museums in particular, nationally and internationally, are demonstrating increased commitment to public access and learning, using visitor experiences to drive many of the museum's decisions and activities. Museum learning situations are distinct from that of formal educational institutions, as learning is spontaneous and personal, and encourages exploration of ideas. Museum education programs enable a museum to reach out and serve the public and globalised society of which they are part, to enhance accessibility and to execute a museum's mission. The premise underpinning education programming across museums is excellence and equity, combining "intellectual rigour with the inclusion of a broader spectrum of our diverse society" (American Alliance of Museums, 2005, p. 2).

The majority of museums have a designated education department or education officers to develop programs that demonstrate strong connections between art and other subject disciplines, and the development of cognitive skills used to master subjects such as reading and writing. Successful education programs in museums are usually facilitated by decisions to incorporate and support education from a top-down approach. Often quality of teaching and learning, and a focus on education is achieved through standards outlined by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. These encourage cultural institutions to selectively partner with them to implement programs that assist school curriculum objectives and state education priorities, such as the development of student visual literacy skills to increase students' abilities to produce pleasurable responses

to works of art and to write about visual images with lucidity and fluency.

Education officers are trained teachers who plan and organise regular lessons and activities within the museum or off-site. These lessons cater to student and teacher needs to enhance the study of disciplines using the museum's changing exhibitions and collection. Education officers are most often responsible for developing education resources, selecting which works of art to include in school visits and guiding art interpretation, analysis and higher order thinking. They maintain close connections with school teachers, exercising cooperative strategies to prepare for visits. In this regard, a close partnership exists between museums and schools.

Undeniably, the museum educator's role has expanded from a narrow focus on teaching children, to a wide range of activities that address social, civic and personal development matters. Their activities extend beyond developing programs for students in schools to those involving children, adults, families and community groups, as well as servicing teachers through professional development programs and learning resources, including promoting and evaluating their programs. They participate in conferences and contribute to scholarly discourse surrounding their profession on a local and international scale, and visit centres of excellence in museum education to broaden their ideas.

Supported by benefactor Basil Sellers AM, the Basil Sellers Art Prize (BSAP) is an exhibition demonstrating how an education program can form a bridge of communication between the museum and users by producing interactive, accessible and comprehensible museum experiences.



The objective of the BSAP 2012 education program was to provide innovative, challenging and relevant educational sessions for students and teachers at the Potter. These programs were unique in their flexibility and adaptability to diverse class, curriculum and learning needs, whereby teachers were encouraged to provide input into lesson content and delivery, the nature of which typifies tailor-made education programs.

The overall aim of the education program was based on the premise of the art museum as a true centre for learning—one that delivers programs that reach out to many young people and education groups, including the underrepresented. Interdisciplinary-based learning formed a core

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part of the BSAP 2012 education programs, demonstrating strong connections between art, other subject disciplines and the development of cognitive skills used to master subjects such as reading and writing. Fuelled by the increasing number of school teachers who are recognising the advantages of “aesthetic education”—of bringing students into a gallery to look at authentic artworks replete with scale, colour, texture and detail—as a crucial part of their curriculum activities, a range of English, English as a second language (ESL) and sport programs were developed to form part of the programs. Within secondary school English programs for example, students learnt about literary devices, produced a variety of creative writing works in response to artworks and were encouraged to debate concepts of Australian identity, belonging, place and culture essential to their study of English texts. Research shows that writing in response to visual art facilitates students’ literacy and aesthetic development, metacognitive understandings and an increased awareness of the self and world.

The Basil Sellers Art Prize 2012 education programs were a great success with over 900 students from diverse geographical areas in Victoria participating in the program. Worth highlighting is the targeting of underrepresented audiences, who were to form the majority of the 2012 Prize’s education audience, which comprised ESL students, particularly international and adult multicultural students who have newly arrived in Australia or are refugees. Adult ESL education groups are often marginalised in many museums’ programming, education resources and interpretive devices. Students at the Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) in Melbourne were recurrent participators of the ESL adult programs delivered as part of the Education Program at the Potter. Of these students, 60 per cent had never visited an art museum in Australia before. They had low to intermediate English language proficiency and little knowledge of the sociocultural behaviour expected in museums. Their knowledge of the purpose of art museums in society, the language surrounding art and how to engage with meanings and interpretations of artworks was also low. While the students are completing courses that have no direct relevance to art, the BSAP 2012 education programs were tailored to offer students an insight into Australian culture, art and issues of settlement, as well as teaching vocabulary about art and sport using original artworks in the exhibition. Students developed visual literacy skills by producing responses to works of art and by expressing ideas through spoken or written language.

The challenge now lies in keeping these audiences by removing barriers to participation (including attitudinal and cultural), and in altering perceptions of irrelevance, diminishing feelings of cultural exclusion and feelings of being unwelcome. University museums must promote themselves as institutions that embrace social equity and access if they are to reflect the aspirations of their parent institutions. A dedicated education program is a primary way to deliver such a message. As one participant writes,

“...I would have never come to the museum myself because I think it is not for me, that I will not understand what is inside. But, the teacher at The Ian Potter Museum of Art made me realise that art is for everybody and I can come to the museum anytime. Some of the artworks helped me to think or learn more about Australian culture and history” (student, AMES Flagstaff).

Photo: Adrian Vittoria



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