

Art & Soul

Celebrating Mental and Emotional well being
through the Arts



Evaluation Report 2003

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INTRODUCTION

Art & Soul is a project culminating in an exhibition, which is open to all people with mental health issues and disabilities living in southwest London, in particular those living in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. It is an on-going programme, organised by a team of local arts professionals, mental health workers and service users.

AIMS

Our aim is to celebrate mental and emotional wellbeing through the arts, mainly visual, by offering to people with mental health issues the opportunity to express their skills as works of art, which are then organised and displayed by professionals in an exhibition, which is open to the public.

VENUE

The exhibition was held in The Stables Gallery, which is part of Orleans House Gallery, Twickenham. The Stables Gallery is a well-lit exhibition gallery, and has a spacious floor area which is ideal for displaying three-dimensional works. The exhibition was open for three weeks from 8 May to 1 June 2003.

PLANNING

Planning for the exhibition started in January 2003.

Funding for the project was made available by applying to several charities. We were grateful for the support of **Hampton Fuel Allotment Charity, Richmond Parish Lands Charity and Awards for All**. A project co-ordinator was appointed to administrate, who liaised closely with the co-chair of Art & Soul, Rachel Tranter and the Orleans House Gallery team.

An initial letter was sent to all mental health hospitals, day centres, and Art & Soul members in south west London, explaining our aims, and giving dates for the 2003 exhibition. We received responses from seventeen centres, and several individual artists. Participating centres included: Level Crossing, Richmond Adult & Community College, The Avenue Centre, Heathside Resource Centre, Centre 32, Solace Centre, Generate, Lakeside Mental Health Unit, British Home and Hospital, Central and Cecil Housing Trust, RB Mind. From this we were able to gauge the number of artworks we were likely to receive.

The number of submissions this year was excellent, with many artists sending in a number of works. We managed to display almost all of the art works submitted. Wall and floor space were our only restrictions. As usual, there were no selection panels, and no judgements were passed regarding the work.



Adrian Thomas 'Moonlight'

PROMOTION

An attractive image, 'Moonlight', by Adrian Thomas, was chosen to feature on the exhibition poster and private view cards. Posters were distributed throughout the borough, to libraries, health centres, hospitals, tourist information offices and local and central London art galleries. The event was promoted in the local press, 'The Richmond and Twickenham Times', as well as being listed in 'Time Out' and various local event guides.

INSTALLATION

Most of the day centres, and individual artists, were able to deliver their own work. As well as the two dimensional art works, we received a wire sculpture, some decorated ceramic tiles, two or three handmade garments, a table covered with mosaic, a sculpture made of pill boxes, a

video of events in a day centre, and a screen with panels made by a group of artists.

We stressed in our letter that we were happy to accept unframed works in order that artists would not be deterred. A professional was employed to mount and frame the large number of unframed works that we did receive. Orleans House Gallery kindly donated a number of their own frames for use during the exhibition.

The Stables Gallery was renovated prior to the hanging of the exhibition. The work force included volunteer help from Art & Soul Committee workers, some work experience students and staff members from Orleans House Gallery, who worked with a team spirit to produce a clean and attractive exhibition space.

PRIVATE VIEW

The Private View took place on Thursday 8 May 2003, from 6 to 8 pm. The event was voluntarily organised by Art & Soul committee members. It was a very successful evening. Many of the artists attended, together with families and friends. Staff from the various day centres also attended. Rachel Tranter, Richmond Borough Head of Arts, and co-chair of Art & Soul, made the opening speech. The success of the exhibition was due to the hard work and contributions from a number of people and she thanked everyone concerned. She confirmed the commitment of Art & Soul and Orleans House Gallery to the promotion of mental and emotional well being through the expression of art. A live band contributed to the enjoyable atmosphere of the evening. Music was provided and organised by Angela McHugh, and Joe Kelly recorded the event by taking photographs.



The Private View evening

THE EXHIBITION

We exhibited well over 150 pieces of artwork, which included paintings, drawings, sculptures (one of wire and one of pill boxes), a ceramic sculpture and some decorated ceramic tiles, textiles (handmade garments), a mosaic table, a video of events in a day centre, and some photography. Much of the work, both poetry and visual art, was very moving in its expression of emotion and experience.



A View of the Exhibition

We were very pleased with the number of visitors to the exhibition over the three weeks, which numbered 815. Many wrote positive and encouraging messages in the comments book.

Both artists and Art & Soul members kindly offered to invigilate the exhibition, and they were paid for their time.

WORKSHOP

The Art & Soul and Poetry workshop took place on Sunday 25 May as part of Museums and Galleries Month from 2 to 5.30 pm, and was a great success. Julia Ruppert organised a printing workshop, and we were fortunate enough to have Anna Menuir and her colleague Lloyd from Survivor's Poetry present, who led some creative writing activities. The event took place in the Stables Gallery and tied in with a family's workshop in the main gallery, which encouraged a sense of collaboration and integration between the two events. In some instances Art & Soul

members helped the children complete their Cultural Landscape in the main gallery.



FEEDBACK

Messages from visitors in the Comments Book were very appreciative, about both the visual art and the poems. Visitors were moved by and identified with the deep expression of emotion. Others commented upon the high quality of presentation, and the wide variety of work on display. One visitor said: *"I believe that Art & Poetry can unlock the soul and everyone who creates something that is in their mind for others to see and experience are truly blessed."* One visitor described the exhibition as "inspirational", and another said that it was *"nice to see work that has something to say for a change"*.

We were fortunate to have Anna Menuir and Lloyd from Survivors Poetry at the Art & Soul Workshop, to lead poetry-writing activities. Anna said: *"It was a privilege to work in such a congenial environment and Lloyd and I were made to feel very welcome. The gallery and all the artwork were truly inspirational. As planned, Lloyd and I were able to use the artwork as a starting point for some poetry writing. All five of us wrote a poem or a first draft, and a couple of participants shared some of their work, which they had brought with them. It was exciting to have the opportunity to blend the visual and written and the images flowed in both pen and paint!"*

Joe Kelly, of Footsteps Art Group wrote a letter of commendation. He said: *"I think that the standard was very high and the preview went very well. I think that this exhibition has many positive effects. It raises awareness about mental health and art. It raises the self-esteem of the artists by providing prominent gallery space. I think it builds an important bridge between service users and the rest of the community."*

EVALUATION – Positive Outcomes

Once again Art & Soul 2003 gave artists the opportunity to exhibit their work professionally in a public gallery. We hope this contributed to the artists' sense of achievement and esteem, and the confidence to develop further. Artists have the opportunity to sell their work through the exhibition, giving recognition that their skills are valued and taken seriously.

Helpers and volunteers who participated in installing the exhibition in a gallery situation hopefully gained some useful experience, which might be helpful in future employment.

Response from many of the day centres has been very positive and enthusiastic, and expressed the hope that the event will be repeated, as they feel that the exhibition provides contributors with a goal.

It was also felt that an important aspect of the project is that it provides an opportunity for people to come together socially as well as creatively.

AREAS TO LEARN FROM IN THE FUTURE

Deadlines for delivery of work should be stated clearly and adhered to.

It would be helpful to draw up a form so that every piece of work could be itemised by the contributor, and then this could be used as a checklist for return of work.

It is important that each piece of work is clearly labelled with name of artist, centre, medium, price (if applicable).

Information regarding pricing and the gallery commission needs to be clearly communicated during the planning process and prices agreed accordingly.

OTHER EVENTS IN 2003 & FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Art & Soul and Orleans House Gallery will continue to promote mental well-being through the visual arts. Our next event, which took place in celebration of World Mental Health Day, was a lecture given by Dr Colin Rhodes, called 'Autism in Art', in which he explores autism in art and its relationship to 'Outsider' Art. This lecture co-incided with the Stephen Wiltshire exhibition, which also included a special event for the Big Draw on Sunday 19 October. Some members from Art & Soul attended and contributed to a large collaborative drawing inspired by Stephen's work in the Octagon Room. Art & Soul recommended a number of members to the European Year of Disabled People event at York House in December 2003.

The Art & Soul committee were also involved in the consultation for the Coach House education centre development, which will provide more opportunities for the group to meet and exhibit in the future. Plans for 2004-5 include a possible website for Art & Soul, events for World Mental Health Day and plans for the next major Art & Soul exhibition in May 2005. The Art & Soul committee which met in November 2003, provided a number of useful ideas for the future including the potential for merchandise, including books and cards.

CONCLUSION

The response to the Art & Soul Exhibition 2003 by both participants and visitors has been positive and encouraging. Comments in the Visitor Book confirm that similar exhibitions in the future would be very welcome. Orleans House Gallery, in making available gallery space on a regular basis for Art & Soul Exhibitions, provides a valued opportunity for artists with mental health issues to exhibit their work in a mainstream setting. It also raises the profile of mental health by giving the general public an opportunity to gain a greater understanding by engaging with meaningful and expressive art forms.

Appendices

News cuttings

Publicity Material

Visitor Comments