



Case Study: Learning Connections – *tough(er) love*

Country Arts, South Australia (CASA)

by Tammy Hall – Coordinator Audience Development

Tammy Hall gives a brief overview of the work of the Country Arts' Learning Connections program in South Australia and shares some of the challenges they face when working in rural areas with a geographically widespread group of artists and schools.

What we do?

Country Arts SA is one of South Australia's largest arts organisations, providing arts and services across regional South Australia through a range of arts programs and initiatives, the management of performing and visual arts venues, and the provision of grant funding which supports the creative endeavours of communities and individuals. Visual Arts Touring aims to tour professional visual arts exhibitions throughout regional SA and nationally.

About *tough(er) love*:

tough(er) love was a collaborative exhibition between Country Arts SA, independent curator John Neylon, the Flinders University Art Museum and City Gallery (FUAM), and 12 selected artists from the Eyre Peninsula, culminating in the 2013 exhibition *tough(er) love art from Eyre Peninsula* at the FUAM City Gallery from 23 February – 28 April 2013. The 12 selected artists from across the region were invited to explore and

express the complexities of this ‘tougher love’ affair. The exhibition presents new work by Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists working out of larger population centres including Port Lincoln, Whyalla and Ceduna and by other artists working in smaller communities. *tough(er) love* comprises new work by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous painters and sculptors – John Baily, Cindy Durant, Amanda Franklin, Siv Grava, Joylene Haynes, Karl James, Elma Lawrie, Verna Lawrie, Beaver Lennon, Leith O’Malley, Pungkai and John Turpie.

After opening at the FUAM the exhibition commenced a two year tour of Regional SA, to be completed in April 2015. To accompany the tour, Country Arts SA developed the ***tough(er) love learning connections resource***.

Learning Connections is a hands-on arts access program developed by Country Arts SA for regional South Australian communities with a particular focus on young people and their schools. Its broad objective is to encourage and support life-long learning through schools’ access to touring art exhibitions and associated arts programs. Learning Connections also encourages life-long learning through Art Connections Practical Workshops and in-gallery DIY Discovery Trails.

It offers teachers specific resources and strategies, across many different learning areas, for using Country Arts SA exhibitions and performances as curriculum resources to encourage meaningful and engaging encounters with art from the earliest years.

The *tough(er) love learning connections resource* includes videos that explore the exhibition themes, materials, the environment, the behind-the-scenes work of transportation, curation, selection and installation, and interviews with each of the individual artists.

There is a pdf version that can be downloaded from the Country Arts SA website - <http://www.countryarts.org.au/learning-connections/tougher-love/>

BEHIND THE SCENES

VIEW THESE RESOURCES AND MORE AT COUNTRYARTS.ORG.AU

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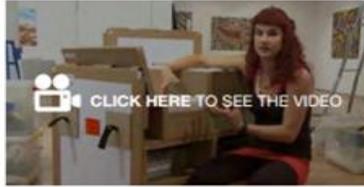
CURATION

John Neylon and others talk about the curatorial process.



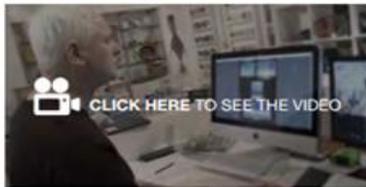
TRANSPORTATION

Anna Goodhind talks about preparing and packing the works for transportation.



SELECTION

John Neylon talks about the process of selecting and working with the artists.



INSTALLATION

Discover how the exhibition was set-up.



Objectives:

- to give students and teachers the opportunity to connect with artworks on display in a meaningful way
- to promote life-long learning through the exploration of behind-the-scenes roles in the visual arts
- to provide teachers with a resource that will enable them to connect with the artworks and help their students develop a deeper understanding of the work
- to provide the artists involved in this project a voice through which to discuss their artwork
- through the artists, to address aspects of regional life, including isolation and distance, and the ways in which they have overcome these difficulties to continue their art practice
- minimise access barriers, locating the works online extends the traditional gallery experience

The target audience:

- secondary students
- teachers
- tertiary students
- regional artists and residents interested in the arts
- people interested in a career in the arts (behind-the-scenes info)

Production of the Learning Connections – tough(er) love resource involved three key stages 1) concepts developed with the curator 2) a video schedule was developed for installation and 3) resources were developed for online delivery.

Three key outcomes:

- Audience members who engaged with the works were encouraged by gallery sitters to explore the on line resources. An increase of 19% of online traffic was recorded as a result of the online resource. The experience was new for gallery sitters and there were challenges with the use of understanding the technology.

- Increased access – the ability to view the behind the scenes development to delivery of Visual Arts tours. Audiences were able to hear direct from the artist about the work that was being viewed, artists are usually voiceless in the gallery setting.

Key points for effective practice:

The biggest sticking point for this project would be distribution. The majority of galleries showing *tough(er) love* are staffed by volunteers. This is restrictive to distributing the information to teachers with a long lead in time, as there is not dedicated person to do this, and the knowledge does not exist in the galleries.

Bringing schools in to visit the exhibitions has been a challenge, with many having to travel a fair distance to experience the show. The learning connections resource was designed to allow students to interact with the works though they may not be able to

make it to the gallery. This message is not necessarily being passed on to the schools and so they are not accessing this resource as much as they should.

Those who have accessed the resource have enjoyed the behind-the-scenes information and videos. It is this content that we can refer people to for a range of exhibitions, not just this particular show.

Technology has also been a barrier. While we would love to be able to upload all the information onto a tablet that could travel with the exhibition, and be accessed in the gallery space, we do not currently have this in our budget. We would also like the opportunity to upskill gallery staff and volunteers prior to sending out these resources. This would make sure that the staff are comfortable with the equipment and walking audiences through it.

Future plans:

The resources will accompany the exhibition for the two and half years while the exhibition tours regional South Australia. The behind the scenes footage will remain relevant for all future exhibitions that we tour. We would like to expand on and further build on the behind the scenes insights to include our theatres.

Looking ahead, we would like to provide access to digital tablets that visitors attending the exhibition will be able to use to view the content which will contribute to a deeper engagement with the work and offer a new way to connect to the artist. We are continuing to evaluate the promote the availability of the resource and would ensure that a strategic marketing campaign is developed to support similar resources in the future. In the future we would also look at the use of QR codes, improved labelling and looping videos in the space so that visitors can see what they can access for themselves.

For more information on the Learning Connections program, please contact:

Tammy.Hall@countryarts.org.au