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EXPLORING

THIS YEAR THE BENDIGO EASTER FAIR, THROUGH COUNCIL’S CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND EVENTS UNIT (CD&E), SET A PRECEDENT BY EMPLOYING LOCAL ARTISTS TO ASSIST VARIOUS GROUPS DEVISE CREATIVE ENTRIES FOR THE EASTER MONDAY PARADE.

CD&E’s goal was to forge new links with business and community groups, develop participants’ artistic skills, and enhance the quality of entries in the Easter Monday Parade. It was also seen as an opportunity to break down perceived boundaries between the arts, commercial and community sectors of Bendigo.

To achieve these objectives, the Artists-In-Industry programme ‘matched’ individual artists with two separate groups over a three months period. Artists’ contribution consisted of creative direction and technical assistance, plus the ‘matching’ of musical coordinators with visual artists and individual groups to facilitate instrument-making and musical sound comprehension workshops.

After an initially slow response from local business and industry, the project accelerated in January with a series of seminars and workshops exploring the theme and its potential. A set of criteria and possibilities were provided for the artists, together with overall direction to ensure a colourful and integrated image. The theme Many Voices of Time was sufficiently flexible to enable thirty-plus groups to visualise this theme in their artwork.

CD&E’s vision for the Parade was significantly removed from the traditional idea of ‘a float on the back of a truck’. Participants were encouraged to include themselves in the artwork, with the idea of restoring community involvement via movement and music and interaction with spectators. At first participants experienced difficulty in modifying their perceptions of what constituted a float, but after considerable discussion and exchange of ideas they developed individual approaches and produced highly imaginative artworks.

It was generally agreed that with the exception of the traditionally splendid contribution from the industrial, business, community and multicultural organisations and emphasised a cross section of age groups, while six local professional artists were engaged to collaborate with individual groups in their work environments in an Artists-In-Industry programme.
‘MANY VOICES OF TIME’
Chinese association, the quality of floats in the Parade for the past decade had lacked artistic quality. While it was recognised that entries were community based, there had been an unfortunate emphasis on advertising at the expense of community participation and this commercialism was attributed to changing work demands and the cost of producing large floats.

**THE ARTISTS’ CONTRIBUTION**

Matching artists with groups involved considering individual skills, together with the ideas groups wished to explore and the materials available. RAY PEARCE worked with Pinky’s Pizza to create giant pizza fans representing various nationalities and the importance of cultural development to Bendigo, while colourful pizza skirts enhanced the hot-pink uniforms of participants and highlighted the Italian flavour of the pizza shop entry. Ray also worked with local employment business Smith Reid North – an organisation training unemployed to assist with updating Bendigo’s historical records onto computer – creating giant puppet heads portraying significant figures from Bendigo’s past and present.

DEIDRE OUTHRED assisted the Bendigo HealthCare Group in portraying the history of Healthcare, their entry highlighting the progress from tribal medicine to today’s modern medical technology. She also helped the Department of National Resources & Environment create a representative interactive model of Bendigo’s water catchment, including waterways, forestry and farming. Deidre also worked with Bendigo Theatre Company, designing hats to compliment the company’s presentation of *The Importance of Being Earnest.*

ISOBEL KAWAI-BOURKE held weekly workshops with Bendigo Community Houses and assisted young people in the creation of colourful three-dimensional banners depicting the numerous activities provided by these organisations. She also fashioned an African tribal setting for multicultural musicians.

The Bendigo Advertiser took for its theme the explosion of the print media and was supervised by BARB GUIILLE. This entry involved the participation of fifty people and included walking newspapers with spectacular 3D banners celebrating the importance of written communication. The family-oriented group Pro Track Go-Karts provided a whimsical adaptation of motor racing uniforms, decorative rubber tyres and racing flags, all made from recycled materials.

Musical coordinators CHRISS SASS and WENDY ROWLANDS shared their skills with most groups, creating hand-made percussion instruments to enhance the sounds of individual entries. Chris and Wendy also held numerous workshops for artists and participants, investigating the structure of music and instrument development and incorporating this into the visual design process. Both assisted in the placement of entries throughout the parade, ensuring that the musical contribution was evenly spaced and complimented entries.

**OTHER ORGANISATIONS AND ARTISTS INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT INCLUDED:**

Bendigo Regional Institution of TAFE’s Visual Art Department, which adopted the project as part of their curriculum for first term students: teachers guided development and design of students’ work for their entry Time For Art.

BENDIGO ARTS ALLIANCE, with funding from City of Greater Bendigo Cultural Grants, staged banner-making workshops for women of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. MARIANNE MIDELEBURG assisted women from different cultural backgrounds to fashion beautifully coloured fabric banners.

FRANCIS GUERIN helped women from EASE make giant sun and moon goddesses, a giant bird and turtle, and colourful flags to embellish their *Reclaim The Night* entry.

Employees from Future Connections and community artist HEATHER LAIDLAW collaborated with the Bendigo Chrysanthemum Society to produce a combined entry for the annual Chrysanthemum Show.
CONCLUSIONS

The spectacular success of the 2000 Prima Gala Easter Parade’s artistic focus highlighted the significance and value of the arts within the Easter Festival, ensuring a better appreciation of the importance and practice of the arts in the community. By promoting and reflecting the identity of the City of Greater Bendigo and participating organisations, the project also developed and fostered links with business, government departments, and the arts, enabling these organisations to be involved in community arts projects with tangible outcomes. The benefits to participating bodies have improved team-building skills and fostered the pursuit of more creative approaches to future projects within the organisations. ‘Exploring Many Voices of Time’ also involved new community groups and businesses in the Easter Monday Parade for the first time.

The Artists-in-Industry programme successfully developed new skills in a diverse range of participants and encouraged participation from varied employee levels within organisations, some groups reporting an increase in staff morale and team development skills. Not only were nascent artistic skills developed in participants, there was also an increased awareness of cultural diversity and its importance to Bendigo.

The Easter Monday Parade provided a rare opportunity to showcase local artwork to more than 100000 people from Victoria and interstate. The project also fostered community involvement and celebration and dismissed preconceptions of the difficulties involved in being part of an art project. ‘Exploring Many Voices of Time’ demonstrated innovative ways of approaching multicultural, indigenous, social and historical issues and events, emphasising the harmonious and vital artistic community that has shaped Bendigo and its Easter celebration. The involvement of so many organisations and the unique nature of the art project ensured that the vision of creating a more prominent arts profile with the Easter Festival was a great success.

The thousands of people lining the streets of Bendigo for the Easter Monday Parade clearly enjoyed the creative and cultural endeavours of the many participants exploring Many Voices of Time. The colourful giant roving puppets, whimsical walkers and giant butterflies combined with exuberant samba, jazz and percussion music to create a dazzling spectacle. Through this Community Arts Project, the appearance and ambience of the Parade was dramatically changed and we look forward to a new creative era for the Bendigo Easter Fair Parade. My thanks to all participants for making our vision a reality.

LYNDA NEWTON
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