

What is the new Sidney Myer Education Centre at Heide Museum of Modern Art?

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As the Education Officer at Heide Museum of Modern Art, I am frequently asked about the new Sidney Myer Education Centre and how it works. This article gives an overview of how the Centre works within the Education Program and answers some of the more frequently asked questions.

Education Program

Heide Museum of Modern Art is a unique public art gallery providing educational access to modernist and contemporary art and design via its unique buildings, gardens, galleries and Sculpture Park. Heide is a living curriculum resource, providing innovative programs designed to engage students with Australian art history and contemporary art practice while fulfilling several of the VELS objectives using the Community of Inquiry model as its platform. With the opening of the Sidney Myer Education Centre in July 2006, Heide has raised the bar in interactive education, affording school groups (from pre-school through to VCE), the opportunity to create individual or team-based artworks in direct response to stimulus experienced in the galleries or Sculpture Park.

The Sidney Myer Education Centre was conceived as part of Heide Museum of Modern Art's 2005-06 Redevelopment Program and enabled Heide to expand its Education and Public Programs beyond the confines of an exhibition environment. This new facility provides a dedicated workshop, where students can build on ideas generated during **Think Tank** sessions in a collaborative and team orientated process.

Between 2003 and 2005, the Community of Inquiry process (also known as Think Tank) was developed in consultation with Dr Sue Wilks (University of Melbourne), Heide and 14 public and private schools. In Think Tank students question and debate ideas generated as a response to one chosen artwork. This process encourages students to question, clarify, develop opinions, debate and justify their thinking about what they perceive in an artwork. In this setting the teacher's role shifts to one of clarifying facts and summarising thinking, encouraging students to take ownership of their learning as they develop higher order thinking skills in their interactions. With the development of this strategy, Heide finds itself at the cutting edge of student centred learning and in complete alignment with VELS guidelines for interdisciplinary, personal and social learning.

Using the Education Centre, Heide can now accompany our theory and thinking components with a practical session responding to specific art work/s or themes, in which students make a collaborative artwork using a **team-based structure**. In short, students are presented with a sculptural problem or brief, from which they develop individual designs, a negotiated collaborative design and a maquette for a sculpture which could be commissioned by Heide, within a timeframe of approximately 50 minutes.

The team-based sculpture has proven a popular choice with school groups in terms of the practical workshop because it incorporates several aspects of VELS in a truly interdisciplinary structure.

The team-based learning has proven extremely successful in terms of outcomes and can be readily adaptable for most year levels as a response session to exhibitions or tours of the Sculpture Park. For example, I recently had a group of year 10 students studying the work of Albert Tucker and surrealism. The group had never been to an art gallery previously so the introduction of theory followed by a practical response promoted a deep engagement with Surrealist theory and practice.

As part of their concept development students were asked to create imagery using the surrealist technique of automatic writing from which strong images were developed into

concept sketches and subsequently a maquette that was taken back to school for further exploration and development.

Feedback included comments about how the Heide program encouraged students to think outside the square and how the program challenged students to form new opinions based on deeper thinking. Heide's philosophy of promoting new thinking is embodied in programs designed for use in the Sidney Myer Education Centre, which provides a stimulating interactive setting for students to explore art both theoretically and practically.

Professional Development Program

With the demonstrated success of the Community of Inquiry process as a thinking tool for students, came increased demand from teachers wanting to learn about the process in order to incorporate the technique in their classrooms. Hearing this request Heide responded through the development of Professional Development programs where teachers could observe and experience the technique in action. During 2006 Heide conducted six Professional Development sessions receiving positive feedback from participants on how the technique had been of success in stimulating discussion and higher order thinking in their classrooms.

Now into 2007, Heide has expanded these sessions to include a practical component (conducted in the Education Centre) which provides teachers with opportunities to learn art-making skills transferable to any classroom. For example the next session will be 4 May 2007, where Innovations & Excellence Cluster Educator, Cathy Price will conduct a Community of Inquiry around a photographic work from *Perfect for every occasion: photography today*, followed by a cyanotype workshop with artist Sue Pedley. (Cyanotype is a simple, non toxic, photographic technique using light sensitised paper, objects and the sun to create an image, on the paper, when washed in cold water).

This new theory/skills format will also be available in the other five workshops planned for this year with each workshop providing teachers with different skills adaptable to a variety of teaching settings

School Holiday Program

The Sidney Myer Education Centre is also the site for school holiday programs in which artists facilitate practical workshops engaging a target audience of 8 – 12 year olds with the working processes and techniques they use. These two-hour sessions connect children with contemporary art-making practices and practitioners in a hands-on workshop providing participants with skills usable in most home settings. Workshops have been as diverse as flip book animation, alternative bookmaking, photography, ceramics and aboriginal architecture. Wherever possible Heide attempts to connect artists who are currently exhibiting with a younger audience; thereby demystifying contemporary art-making processes, and inspiring young artists to expand their engagement with contemporary art practice and exhibitions.

In conjunction with the exhibition *Perfect for every occasion: photography today*, upcoming workshops in the Easter school holidays focus on alternative photographic techniques, allowing children to explore cyanotype, salt printing and image manipulation/creation using scanners.

Summary

The Sidney Myer Education Centre provides a stimulating setting (with glorious views of Heide's Sculpture Park) to explore art and art-making processes in a variety of contexts. Whether experiencing the Community of Inquiry process as a student or teacher, developing team-based sculpture, or learning about art-making from contemporary artists, Heide Education Programs provide a stimulating and challenging experience for art students of all ages.

For enquiries regarding Heide's Education Programs please contact Clayton Tremlett, Education Officer via email: education@heide.com.au

This article first appeared in *ARTicle* Volume 9, Number 1, Autumn 2007, pp 31-32.