

# **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE ARTS IN REGIONAL WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

### **SESSION 2**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE TAKEN  
AT PERTH  
WEDNESDAY, 31 MARCH 2004**

#### **Members**

**Mr D.A. Templeman (Chairman)  
Mr L. Graham (Deputy Chairman)  
Mr J.N. Hyde  
Mr A.P. O’Gorman  
Ms S.E. Walker**

[10.30 am]

**VAN DER MERWE, MS JUDE**

**Acting General Manager, Artists Foundation of WA, ArtSource,  
Level 1, 357 Murray Street,  
Perth, examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** This committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the House itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Unless otherwise directed by the committee, a witness's evidence is public and may be published, including on the parliamentary web site, and will be available immediately after correction. Have you read the notes provided regarding appearing before a parliamentary committee?

**Ms van der Merwe:** Yes, I have.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Have you read the witness information sheet?

**Ms van der Merwe:** Yes, I have.

**The CHAIRMAN:** As you are aware, this committee is conducting an inquiry into arts in regional Western Australia, so we have a specific regional focus. We have five key areas to which we are paying particular attention. I understand that you have seen the terms of reference that we operate under.

**Ms van der Merwe:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I thank you for the recent detailed submission that you have provided. Can you give us a brief overview of ArtSource, and then we will spend 20 or so minutes asking questions that relate to our terms of reference?

**Ms van der Merwe:** That is fine. I dug out the submission that we did in March last year, and it is now out of date because we have done a lot more work since then. ArtSource is a program area of the Artists Foundation of Western Australia, which is the peak membership body for visual artists in Western Australia. We are funded through ArtsWA and we get additional funding on a project basis as we need it and as we source it. Our main task is to represent visual artists in Western Australia. To help people earn more from their creativity would be the main aspect of ArtSource, which has been set up as an employment and referral agency for artists. Effectively, ArtSource is the business arm of the Artists Foundation.

Until last year - I will cut straight to the chase in a way - we were unable to work effectively in regional Western Australia because we had an overall travel budget of \$2 000 for the whole organisation, and I do not need to say any more about where \$2 000 will get you. Towards the end of 2002 we were able to get project funding from cocktail funding for a regional and indigenous artists professional development program. We decided that we needed to do that because we had done some research with Art on the Move and Craftwest a few years previous to that to look at what artists in some of the regional areas said that they needed. Without doubt they all said that they needed professional development and assistance to learn how to prepare CVs, portfolios and documentation, and how to present themselves better to the world as practising artists. That broadly came from regional artists; it did not touch on particularly indigenous artists. I was specifically interested in indigenous artists when I began work with ArtSource because I had some experience working in indigenous communities. By the end of 2002 we had gained enough funding to put together a program - which is this thing that I will leave with you - and is basically how the

workshops eventuate. We employed a Nyoongah man, Barry McGuire, who is the coordinator for the program. He could not be here today because his wife had a baby yesterday.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It is a good excuse!

**Ms van der Merwe:** In 2003 we started looking at three regions - the mid west, goldfields-Esperance and the great southern. The Australia Council for the Arts had also done some research and it had said that the mid west and goldfields-Esperance were regions that it was particularly interested to see some work happen in. The great southern begged us to come, so we added it to the list of what we could do. Halfway through the year the program had such an enormous response that we decided that we needed to put some support in for Barry as the coordinator position, although I was doing a lot of that work with him. We employed Carol Innes as a mentor to the program, and at the beginning of this year she has come on as the program manager on a four-day-a-week basis. Carol sends her apologies; she is in Geraldton. We are out in the world, and that is where we are supposed to be.

The way we approached working with those groups was initially to have meetings with key players in all the regions; that would be ATSI; the development commissions; the ACCs; DIA; the Aboriginal corporations; the art galleries, if there were any; and, specifically and most importantly, elders. Part of our funding application insisted that we work 80 per cent with indigenous artists and 20 per cent with regional artists overall. That was just because that is how the funding cocktail worked and where we felt the greatest need was. We began a series of what we hoped were going to be effective workshops. First of all, I should say that we put together a program that dealt with the issues that we thought people wanted to see and hear about. This is just workshop-sheet stuff, which is designed to be given to people in conjunction with a workshop. It is not particularly stand alone, just very simple things like what is a portfolio, why you need one and how you put one together; and what is a CV - CV is a word anyway and it is incomprehensible to an awful lot of people - why you need a CV, how you maintain it and how you put it together. Then we run a practical workshop on making a CV. We do another workshop about documentation and what is the best kind of documentation for your artwork. We go through from the happy-snap camera to a good-quality slide film and to digital work, and then we have a practical demonstration of that and invite people to bring their artwork. You also get this nice combination of seeing people's work, talking about their work and people being able to talk to each other about their work. We have a session on how to market your work and what are the dos and don'ts; a session on selling your work and getting a relationship with the gallery; a session on public art, which has been the growth area; and a session on copyright. The copyright one tends to cover a bit of intellectual property rights as well.

**The CHAIRMAN:** How long has that been in the field now?

**Ms van der Merwe:** In the field, for a year. We aim to run 12 workshops and last year we ran 16. We contacted 127 artists who came to those workshops and we worked with 102 artists on a one-to-one basis.

[10.40 am]

**The CHAIRMAN:** Where were those 16 workshops mainly held?

**Ms van der Merwe:** They were in Kalgoorlie - we always have two in Kalgoorlie because there is a kind of divide there, so politically it is better for us and we get a better result if we have two - Katanning, Albany, Laverton, Leonora and Geraldton. In Geraldton we have two workshops, one at Wila Gutharra and one at Bundiyarra. They have just gone up to have one at the regional art gallery at Wila Gutharra. They have been held in Mullewa, Esperance, Wiluna, Northampton, Yalgoo and Wandalgu. There is a big list.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** We were at Regional Parliament last week -

**Ms van der Merwe:** In Albany.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** Yes. The group involved there is with the Great Southern Development Commission and you mentioned those in your submission. While I was there, I was very fortunate to buy some art from some great southern indigenous young people who had been in Perth, who had been dislocated and then attracted back to their home towns of Mt Barker and so on, and who are using art not only as a vehicle to engage themselves in their own community, but also to earn a living. There are examples of success stories. We are after empirical evidence in our inquiry. Do you have any research in terms of the economic value?

**Ms van der Merwe:** Specifically, a number of stories have come out of the workshops that we have done. We just did one in Mt Barker a few weeks ago and I think I have heard about the young people you are talking about. Katanning, for example, has a nice little art gallery but it had never ever held an indigenous art exhibition until the end of last year. That came about through our workshops because we like to bring people together such as the local community development officer who runs the gallery and the people who have independent galleries and shops around. We like to bring all of those people together to introduce them to each other for a start. There had never been an indigenous exhibition in Katanning until the end of last year, and there are three booked for this year.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** Wow!

**Ms van der Merwe:** That is an enormous change just in that little space. Last year, Barry McGuire and Carol Innes were able to take the Arts and Cultural Development Council of Geraldton Inc to meet people in Wandalgu. They had never had any contact there before and the people from ACDC were not entirely sure that it would work if they went on their own. But because they had that link with two Nyoongah people whose artwork was taking them out there, they were able to make that link well. I think about four weeks ago they had an exhibition of Wandalgu work in the ACDC's gallery in Geraldton.

In terms of other real economic benefits, ArtSource works to connect people with clients who want to commission artists. Last year, we were able to work through a Main Roads project, which was \$40 000 commission for artists, with three indigenous artists to mentor them through the process of putting in a public art application. We had never been able to do that before and Main Roads is very keen to see artwork by Aboriginal artists as part of its Percent for Art approach to public art. None of the art coordinators has found a really good way of helping people to put in applications. It is quite onerous putting in submissions for public art. We were able to help three Nyoongah artists last year. Main Roads said that it could have selected any one of them, which is really unusual. All three people - only one got the commission - are now much better equipped to go for their next project. Two of them have done that and have put in applications.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** You touched on the Percent for Art scheme in your submission. I think it has been one of the big successes of the arts in WA. The committee is dealing with people who are committed to the value of the arts. We are trying to produce a report that tells everybody in the economic rationalist world that we unfortunately live in 'why' in an economic sense. Is there evidence of what Percent for Art funding has meant to the employment of artists in WA?

**Ms van der Merwe:** The Percent for Art review would certainly touch on that because it refers to, I think, roughly \$11 million over the past 10 years that has gone to artists and art projects. I think 400 art projects have been commissioned in that time - I will get those figures wrong, so it is better to get them straight from the Percent for Art review publication. I agree that the Percent for Art scheme is an enormous thing, but what it has also done is drag local government along in its wake. Because there has been so much more commissioning of public art and it is getting visibility, local government has started to say that it needs art on various projects, civic structures, administration buildings and the like. The Town of Vincent, the City of South Perth and the City of Albany all have Percent for Art policies and they all deal with a per cent for developers as well as just their own. I have just been doing some work with the City of Geraldton on its own. Last year - these are

only the projects that come through ArtSource - we dealt with 122 projects, the total value of which was \$2.6 million. Thirty-two of those projects were local government, 35 were Percent for Art and 34 were private clients. There is another bit of a breakdown there. The public art model is a real growth area and the State is pulling other people along in its wake.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** Let us embellish that. I declare my conflict as the writer of the original Percent for Art policy at the Town of Vincent. I think we were the first one to hit developers there. One thing that concerns me is the \$130 million Perth Convention and Exhibition Centre, which, in effect, is a government building. However, because it was let out as a contract it somehow escaped the Percent for Art requirement, which is an absolute disgrace. The fact that the Government and the community is now receiving criticism because they are chucking in extra money for a magnificent piece of art is perhaps a disgrace in itself. As a parliamentary committee, we are looking at tightening the legislation so that good things do not escape the net. We have evidence that public art is a good thing and we have all the dry figures of so much money being spent on art to allow us to look at the recommendation that all government contracts, regardless of whether they are in-house or contracted out, adhere to the Percent for Art scheme. Can you give us expert advice on whether that would be a good thing?

**Ms van der Merwe:** You are talking to the wrong person because I always think that art is a good thing because it allows human beings to interact in a deeper way with their environment than they would otherwise -

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** You are the right person to talk to.

**Ms van der Merwe:** I find it hard to describe these things. Human beings have more of a requirement for their environment and for the way they live than just being a hard-edged concrete building without decoration or embellishment. I think that is hard-wired into us frankly. You can say that when you live in your cave and after killing your -

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** Spouse?

**Ms van der Merwe:** Yes - or sabre-toothed tiger for the day! Probably the next thing you are going to do is a drawing on the cave wall. It is so much a part of how we live that we want to make something that talks about our spirit. That is humans. Anything that we can do to improve our environment and to allow us to interact more with another part of ourselves is a better thing.

[10.50 am]

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** Let us go further on that. To me it is inconceivable that a Government could spend \$100 million on a building or a lump of contract and not address those issues of stirring the soul, reflecting our sense of space and all those other things. As a parliamentary committee, we want to get rid of loopholes so that that can happen, I guess, and we need support for those very things that you have just said are valuable and really important for a society.

**Ms van der Merwe:** Yes. You have caught me on the hop a bit; I always have to think about that quite carefully.

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** With the Northbridge tunnel and all those other massive works that Main Roads do, there is a per cent for art policy and there is the wonderful, indigenous, Wagyl-like art coming into the Northbridge tunnel.

**Ms van der Merwe:** Yes, that is the painted work. Certainly Main Roads has developed a public art approach. I do not think anyone would dare go near saying it is a per cent for art approach. For instance, the tenderers were required to include a public art model in Tonkin Highway stage 6, which was put at \$300 000. I think the project was in excess of \$70 million, so we were not getting anywhere near close to per cent for art. The sad thing about that was that the public art part disappeared from it. So, although aspects of Main Roads have an approach towards public art, it depends whom the project manager is; it is not across the board with Main Roads. However, Main

Roads has got a lot better and more committed, I think, to including public art. Because there has been traditionally a per cent approach in all the schools, prison, TAFEs, justice centres and hospitals, those big three groups have all had such a positive response to it. They are the groups that deal most directly with the community too.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I go back to what you said about the regional indigenous artist development program, which is your package.

**Ms van der Merwe:** Which we then called “artist mob” because that was part of it.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That has obviously been very successful and is fulfilling a need, as demonstrated by the participation in regional Western Australia. You read out the list of places where these workshops were held last year. How do people in regional communities access ArtSource and information and workshops such as these?

**Ms van der Merwe:** And support groups.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes. How do they get hold of you? How do they know where you are?

**Ms van der Merwe:** First of all, we network through all the local organisations that we know of: the Aboriginal corporations, the local galleries, the regional galleries, the regional art centres, the DIA, ATISIS and developments commissions - those are the main ones - and we send out media releases to all of them. Before we do any of that, we talk to people. That is the very first thing that we do. We have a visual source database, which is online now. That has been a very good tool for people to see the work of other artists and to see their own work, if it is on the database. It has also been a good tool to get potential commissioning clients into the fold so that they can see what is going on and what is available. People can search on that database by name, profession, media, the type of project and the region, so it is a good way for people to link into it. Going back to what you asked about how people know about us, all those usual systems for getting in touch with people are available. Curiously, about 28 people attended the first workshop we held in Katanning. We did another one earlier this year, which I did not attend, but 22 people attended and they were all different; they were not the same lot of people. We always ask people whether we can keep in touch with them. All the people who have attended the workshops are on our mailing list for our quarterly newsletter. Some of those people - the artists who we think and they think are ready to take on professional opportunities - are invited to become members of ArtSource and have their work registered on our database.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is interesting. How do you determine whether they are ready? Is a decision made? How does that happen?

**Ms van der Merwe:** It is a more organic kind of thing really. We have not needed, fortunately, to get into tighter criteria. At this point anybody anywhere can join ArtSource for \$110; that is it.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is that the annual fee?

**Ms van der Merwe:** That is the annual fee, but there is self-selection there because the artists have to provide us with a digital CV and six images of their work and they have to fill in a five-page form. That helps us to match them with a client. So if those things are too hard for them, they are probably not ready for it anyway.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are the workshops you hold in those areas for anybody, no matter what their level of expertise?

**Ms van der Merwe:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIRMAN:** In our travels around the various communities, we have noted that some still operate on the old Arts Council model. Interestingly enough, in a couple of communities a few artists have said that they do not see themselves fitting within that structure and they do not become members of the Arts Council, for whatever reason. Do you have any comment about those people

who choose to sit outside the network, although they might have a long history in the community, and how they can be better engaged?

**Ms van der Merwe:** I guess we chose to approach our work by specifically employing an Aboriginal arts worker to do this work. We went to specific Aboriginal organisations to do the work and we specifically invited non-Aboriginal organisations to go to those centres. I have not been to all the workshops. However, in Katanning there are certainly members from the local arts and crafts society who had membership through Narrogin, Katanning and Kojonup, and they all came along to it and were terribly cheerful about it. After that they wanted to make connections with those indigenous groups. I am not sure of the background of the kind of people you are talking about. I have lost the thread of what I was going to say.

As long as we can engage with as many people as possible, and try to bring them together, we are doing the job that we are supposed to do. This is probably because of the nature of visual arts, but a lot of visual artists simply are not interested in being a part of that pod. Going back to per cent for art, we will always miss out on some of the amazing artists we have in Western Australia because some people will never want to go through that tendering and expression of interest process; it is just not in their nature or not in their desire. For instance, we will probably never see a work of somebody such as Brian Blanchflower in a per cent for art project, no matter what the scale is.

[11.00 am]

**Mr J.N. HYDE:** It was interesting in Geraldton to see the number of practising artists who said it was very hard to get on the treadmill for art without the people who used to fill out the forms, meet the contract dates and such things. Bureaucracies such as Main Roads would go with what they knew and what had the least impost. What excited me was your comment about ArtSource being involved in mentoring and enabling people to step up to the next level. That seems to be an intervention program that is needed in the State.

**Ms van der Merwe:** That is dead right. We have been helping people in Geraldton and Kalgoorlie, and we have another project in Laverton involving practising artists who have never gone near doing work in a public building. We have been helping to match those opportunities with other artists who were either in the regions or the metropolitan area to work together as a team. Such things can work or not work. It is an organic process that probably has much more to do with personalities than anything else. The mentoring system that we started working on with Main Roads has a good chance of being successful in the longer term. It was very time consuming for us. It involved sitting down once a week with this group of artists to help them understand every aspect of the brief and the contract and how to put together a proposal. We then came back and looked at the drawings, their budgets and time lines. It has been extremely rewarding because they are a much happier group of people now.

**The CHAIRMAN:** A number of concerns were raised in your inquiry about the Myer report. I know it was a national report. You mentioned in your submission that you are pleased that the minister is taking the lead in trying to look at accessing additional funding as recommended in the report. You mentioned that there are a couple of recommendations that, if implemented, would exclude something like the Artists Foundation of Western Australia from accessing any increase or any available funding. Have you taken that up as a concern with anyone, apart from the state minister I presume, from representative bodies or peak organisations?

**Ms van der Merwe:** I must say that I have been sitting in this position as the acting general manager for two weeks. Therefore, I might not know the detail about what might have happened before that. Rupert Myer came to our office to talk to us about what we are doing. ArtSource and the Queensland Art Workers Alliance are the only two bodies that work in this way - that is, as a matching agency or employing or referring agency. Rupert Myer was impressed, and demonstrated as such in his report. Every year we get a call from South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria or Queensland to ask, "You have one of these; how do we get it?" We tell them that it is a long

process and that a fair bit of money goes into developing something like this. They go away and try to get it up, but do not seem to succeed.

Having been a practising artist 10 years ago, I am extremely pleased that more money is going to practitioners as a result of Myer. That is a fantastic result. The Artists Foundation is extremely pleased about that. These are the people we represent. Ongoing discussions are taking place about the federal funding that goes to contemporary craft or contemporary arts bodies, but does not go to membership bodies or organisations like ours that provide this sort of service. The National Association for the Visual Arts - NAVA - has had quite a good win out of Myer. It is deserved. It does a very good job in overall lobbying for the entire country. The past concern was that no national organisation was able to effectively work or deal with artists who live in the Northern Territory or northern Queensland. It tends to be a Sydney-centric thing. NAVA's membership is treated as the local membership body. It has about 600 artist members from New South Wales, and 40 from Western Australia. That is the break up.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I have read the recommendations, and you have highlighted a couple of key recommendations. Obviously, some of these impact on the State Government's policies and practices. Did you have any other key issues that you want to raise with the committee concerning our terms of reference? I think you have covered very clearly in your submission the benefits and importance of supporting visual arts at a regional level, and ultimately at a state level. Also, you have covered the employment issue because you have given some examples of enhanced employment opportunities for visual artists in the regions in particular. Is there anything else you want to add?

**Ms van der Merwe:** The only thing is that having spent a year on the regional and indigenous projects, and having made three quick trips this year already out to the regions, I see that as being the most important thing we can do at the moment. I cannot overstate how important it is for the health of visual arts in Western Australia. I would really love to see the kind of things we have been doing become self-sustaining. We are working towards having enough links in the regions so this type of work can carry on in the regions. We were able to pull this together only through cocktail funding. It is only a two-year project. I would like to see us make this kind of model work statewide. Regional Arts Australia has picked this up as a model way of working, too. Those are the main points.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You have proved clearly in the submission and in evidence provided this morning that this program, only one year in, is delivering quite significant benefits to the artists and, indeed, the communities involved. Thank you very much for your contribution this morning.

**Committee adjourned at 11.09 am**



