

# **Art In The Woods Evaluation Report, May 05**

## **Venue**

The venue was National Trust woodland at Newtimber Holt. This was easy for everyone to get to, with parking and toilets in the nearby garage.

The woodland was about 10,000 years old and very beautiful with carpets of bluebells. There were plenty of natural resources to make sculptures with. Some participants found it hard working on a slope so flat land activities were developed

The ground did get very muddy, new shoes were bought for those participants who only had one pair of shoes that they didn't want to ruin. The woodland was perfect for participants to learn about the flora and how to use and respect it.

Originally the venue was woodland near Devils Dyke, this was changed as the walk to the wood would have been too slippery and strenuous from the car park. Toilet facilities were also too far for participants to reach.

## **Staffing**

In addition to the two tutors in the project plan the National Trust ranger (Graham Welfare) and two National Trust volunteer workers were on site throughout the project. This additional help contributed to the safety of the participants and the success of their sculptures and the project as a whole. We would recommend that this level of staffing and volunteering continue if the project were to run again.

## **Health and safety**

A risk assessment was carried out prior to the project. A first aider and a first aid box were at hand throughout. There were no injuries; however some participants found the work and environment physically tiring.

## **Transport**

Two mini busses and drivers were provided by Community Transport, one for the Moulsecoomb women artworkers and one for the university students. This ran smoothly despite the last minute changes in location. The university students arrived half an hour before the Moulsecoomb artworkers and left half an hour after for the briefing and debriefing sessions. There was a

complaint from community transport about the muddy boots so students were careful to clean this off before getting in.

### **Catering**

In the early planning stages there was recognition that the Moulsecoomb women artworkers would be unlikely to bring their own lunches. Given the demands of fresh air and exercise, it was decided to provide packed lunches for all participants. This was arranged economically and efficiently via the Bridge, in Moulsecoomb, in order for the lunches to be collected en route each morning. The caterers suggested that participants may like to request their own sandwich fillings. This was much appreciated.

### **Childcare**

Childcare was arranged to take place at the Bridge, employing highly qualified sessional workers. Whilst this was also appreciated by the M. women artworkers, during the project it became clear that two of the university students had childcare issues. With hindsight it would have been appropriate to make enquiries amongst the student group at the time of booking childcare.

### **Training Sessions**

Two training sessions were organised before the on-site project began, one at Hillview Family Centre, Moulsecoomb, and one at Brighton University.

#### **1. Moulsecoomb Artworkers Training Session**

Introductions. Looking at the Project aims.

Thinking about the students, who are they, what might their needs be?

Slide show of outdoor sculpture at Grizedale forest, Andy Goldsworthy, etc.

Images of our proposed site.

A talk about the tools we may be using, with support from the students.

Reassurance that there will be a "Comfort Zone" on site, viz.shelter, chairs and fire.

"Hopes and Fears" discussion.

Giving out maps and lists. Transport arrangements.

#### **2. Brighton University Students Training Session**

Introductions. Looking at the Project aims.

As a professional artist, public commissions/community involvement, expectations of commissioning bodies.

The Moulsecomb women artworkers, the culture they live in, their life experiences, insecurities, needs. Discussion around "The Statutory Framework" a document outlining the levels of emotional impoverishment and abuse endemic on the estate.

Slide show: Grizedale Forest, Andy Goldsworthy, our site.

Brief focussed workshop on safe use of basic tools, hammer / saw / woodcarving chisels, and supporting partner's use of these.

"Hopes and Fears" discussion.

How to use their visual journals throughout the project.

Giving out maps and lists, transport arrangements.

These training sessions went well and were invaluable in setting a positive tone of mutual understanding, at the same time as dealing with practical issues.

### **The Practical Sessions on Site**

It was decided that Day 1 should be highly structured to encourage a good level of integration between the two groups, that the progress of this would be evaluated at the end of Day 1 by the leaders.

#### **Day 1**

Introductions all round, including National Trust Ranger, NT volunteers, and documentary film makers.

Housekeeping etc.

Remembering the aims of the project.

Ground rules: keeping in touch, respect, timekeeping, tools.

National Trust Ranger's talk about the history and ecology of the woodland, which trees we can use, and which to conserve.

Whole group moves into the shape of a sleeping giant amongst the trees, each participant marking an ankle, shoulder etc, whole group discussion re: proportion. Giant approx 50' from head to foot.

Divide into 4 equal sized well integrated groups. Each group's task to collect small branches, climbers, etc, to outline the shape of a limb.

Lunch and evaluate the "stick giant".

With support from the National Trust team, chainsawing and collecting larger heavier logs to make the limbs more solid. Wrapping, hammering, and

tying these with the lighter weight climbers and smaller branches. Starting work on the torso.

At the end of the day, everyone saying a big "Thankyou".

Day 1 started with fine rain, and the tracks quickly became very slippery with so many of us using them. The Comfort Zone was at the top of a slope, which made it difficult to get to and hard to leave! Despite these drawbacks all participants entered into the activity with real enthusiasm and a commitment to getting to know each other. Any self conscious lack of confidence had gone by lunchtime when we were all equally muddy, tired and exhilarated. As leaders we discussed any problematical dynamics on site as they arose, and ensuing discussions facilitated matters. The structural progress of the giant sculpture was impressive at this early stage, so that we were able to keep to our original plan of giving participants the chance to choose to work on their own individual pieces from Day 2 if desired.

It was also decided on Day 2 to move the Comfort Zone to flat land, and to limit the additional sculptures to flat areas to diminish the risk of accidents on the muddy slopes. Two of the women in particular found the physical circumstances very difficult.

Day 2, Day 3, and Day 4 represented a remarkable surge of creative, thoughtful energy. The "sleeping giant" sculpture became "The Newtimber Giant", with all participants sharing a good sense of ownership. The head was a large ring of ash, collected with enormous physical effort by the N.T. Ranger, a volunteer, a sculpture student and a Moulsecoomb woman. The ash was in a distant field, and had to be dragged, rolled, pushed and coaxed up onto site. Once there, many participants took turns to woodcarve the facial features. The aesthetic skills of the art students was evident on many occasions as they grappled hazel branches and clematis rope into convincingly human forms. The Moulsecoomb women and the students explored the natural environment fully, mixing white paste out of chalk and water, using natural climbers to tie and bond, becoming confident with all the tools available. There was full integration between the two groups, from Day 2 it would have been difficult to tell that the participants came from very different environments. The students offered much support and encouragement, and the women offered their ideas and a practical problem solving approach.

The Ending. Everything was cleared away early on Day 4, the site tidied up. The whole group toured the new sculpture trail in buoyant mood. A private view of very public community art.

### **Achievements Learning Outcomes University Students**

All the students passed the course, five grade A's, two B's and two C's. The high level of these grades reflects the achievements of the students in meeting the extension study learning outcomes copied below.

### **Site specific sculptures**

Brighton students will acquire the artistic skills to:

1. Design and construct a site specific sculpture
2. Work appropriately in an established woodland
3. Work collaboratively in a group with other artists
4. Manipulate new materials, cutting, carving, joining, and bonding
5. Learn to safely use new tools
6. Produce an image based journal of ideas and experiences
7. Document the artwork and artistic process, photos, sketches.

### **Community arts facilitation skills**

Whilst working alongside the women from Moulsecoomb in small groups the Brighton students will acquire the facilitation skills to:

8. Assist their partner in making informed choices and decisions.
9. Develop ways of working that builds the confidence and self-esteem of their partner.
10. Encourage their partner to express their artistic ideas and opinions.
11. Develop communication, negotiation and listening skills for themselves and their partners

### **Additional Learning.**

The following additional skills were developed on the course

### **Referring to Learning Outcome numbers above**

1. The expansive woodland gave the students the opportunity to make work on a large scale that would not be possible in their studios which they embraced and explored fully

2. An extremely inspired response to the woodland and its materials resulted in a highly refined level of visual interpretation.

Woodland training from the National Trust ranger taught the students to recognise the different types of trees and understand their different properties and environmental value.

The National Trust ranger also put the site into its historical context, for example showing the students a thousand year old tree and referring to the centuries old tradition of coppicing.

3. The challenge of the rainy weather and muddy woodland environment gave the participants the opportunity to integrate and support each other on a more meaningful level than would normally occur in an indoor studio situation.

4. The woodland materials were at first seen as a limitation "what am I going to do with a load of sticks?" Rising to the challenge and being creative with the materials the students soon turned this limitation into a great learning opportunity, e.g. white paint was made by grinding chalk and adding it to water then applying it with a brush made from clematis and a stick.

### **Transferable skills.**

The daily de-briefing sessions were a very successful way for the students to feedback the skills they were learning. In particular creative thinking, problem solving and a non-judgemental approach to diverse groups were being developed.

Self and group management skills required more support

Negotiation and team work were areas that involved much interesting discussion.

### **Benefits to Moulsecoomb Art Workers**

Women from the Hillview Families Centre Project benefited in the following ways in line with the project aims:

- Had the opportunity to get involved in a supported sculpture project using materials from the environment in their art.
- Build their self-esteem and confidence in their sculpture designs as well as general confidence and got involved in something that they would not traditionally take part in.

- Learnt from the university student's knowledge and experience of art and reflected on this in their own work.
- Experienced a different environment and situation where they had the freedom to express themselves artistically.
- The project allowed the women to think about their art and provided them with the confidence to explore how they can further get involved in local art projects and carry on carving and making artwork.

### **Materials and Equipment**

Some materials were needed such as nails, twine and sketch books, however the sculpture materials were predominantly found in the woods.

The National Trust provided most of the equipment such as saws, hammers, loppers, rope, tarpaulins. Two National trust workers were qualified to use chain saws which were crucial to working in the woodland and making large sculptures.

### **Attendance**

19 University students from across the Arts and Architecture faculty applied to do the course.

9 of these were given places and completed the course. Attendance was very high with only two students missing a session.

The course leaders felt that if the project were to be repeated it could accommodate 15 - 20 university students providing the transport, catering and equipment budgets were raised accordingly

9 Moulsecoomb artworkers volunteered to attend. The child of one fractured his wrist on the evening of the first day and she was subsequently unable to attend. Two of the women found the physical conditions more strenuous than they had expected, and did not return after Day 1. Other women at the Family Centre expressed interest in taking their places but it was felt that, having missed the first structured day would make later joining difficult. The remaining 6 Moulsecoomb artworkers had 100% attendance.

### **Final Training/ Student Evaluation at Brighton University**

At the final training session Students gave in their visual journals for assimilation into their extension study grade.

The group watched a slide show of still shots taken throughout the practical

sessions on site, revisited the "Hopes and Fears" chart, and discussed their wide-ranging experiences during the project, including identifying the skills they had learnt and developed.

They then completed written evaluation sheets comprising 6 questions. All 9 students attended, but 1 had to leave before completing her evaluation. A summary of their answers is as follows:

**1. "Did you learn anything that you may take forward in your own artistic practice?"**

4 learnt from the challenge of working outside

6 learnt basic woodcarving/constructing skills

3 learnt from working with artists from different backgrounds

5 learnt from the challenge of working with limited natural materials

**2. "Do you feel you've benefited from working alongside the Moulsecoomb women, and if so, can you identify how?"**

7 responded that they developed a great respect for the women's capacity to grow in confidence in a relatively short time, and commented on their resourcefulness.

5 feel a new awareness that they are in a privileged position on their courses

"I met wonderful characters"

"Some great partnerships were formed"

"I felt truly humbled"

**3. "Did you learn or experience anything that may impact on other areas of your life?"**

4 found working collaboratively useful

4 enjoyed a new mutual respect for people from completely different areas of life. "Incredibly strong women"

1 is now applying for a Carousel voluntary artworker post in the summer

1 is more confident with woodwork, esp. Carving

"I learnt that if a common goal is set, communication will happen"

"I learnt how to make a chicken curry" (from one of the women)

**4. "Did you learn anything that you feel may prove useful in your career in arts/architecture? "**

7 learnt the benefit that art can have in the local community



2 learnt from the direct experience of Land Art

1 would like eventually to go into art therapy, so found the whole experience "incredibly useful"

1 re iterated the usefulness of group work/negotiation experience

**5. "Is there anything you would like to change about this extension study, for future students?"**

4 felt it should be longer, e.g. 6 mornings over 3 weeks.

2 commented that the timing was difficult as it coincided with end of year assessments, though they appreciated it would be too cold earlier in the year.

2 asked for a shared revisitation of the project with the women, either to the site itself, or as a get together film show.

**6. "Any other comments?"**

7 reported that it was well organized, with everyone's practical needs met at all times, and the opportunity for individual artistic development

4 stated that this extension study should happen again, as it was so successful

1 asked for the option of making art in the woods to be made available on the sculpture course, to take advantage of the unlimited space.

"I think this is a good extension study as it opens up opportunities to work with the community. To my knowledge there is not another extension study that gives this skill and I would highly recommend that it should be done again. I really enjoyed it."

**Moulsecoomb Women Artists Feedback**

While it was not possible to arrange a formalized evaluation session at the Family Centre, the women were asked if there was anything they would like to feedback to the organizers. The following are their verbatim responses.

"I had the best time."

"I liked all the students, they're just like us really."

"I got a bit good at sawing."

"It was fantastic team work."

"The students were very encouraging."

"When I sat down for a cup of tea on my own, I'd look round and one of the students was sitting down next to me and talking with me like we were

friends, it was great."

"It really increased my confidence."

"Can we do this every week?"

"Wasn't it good though, what we did?" (referring to the sculpture)

"It was all really good fun."

"I'll never look at the countryside the same again."

"It was a challenge, but it was a fun challenge."

"Since we got back, I've made some flowers out of sticks for my Mum's front garden; my son's been collecting sticks to make things too."

"I liked the woodcarving."

"There was an old branch down in our garden, and I let my boys (6 & 8) take the bark off with butter knives. They loved it. I told them they'd done it so carefully, next time I get my money I'm going to get us some chisels."

"I went out there last weekend with the kids, it still all looks great."

"Before we went, I thought I'd mind the mud and everything, but when we were out there I never noticed it, I was having such a great time."

"I'll never forget it all."

### **Concluding Statement**

The Art in the Woods Level 2 extension study clearly met the original criteria as set out in the project proposal. The sympathetic funding allowed all participants to be supported in their practical needs, viz. transport, childcare, catering, materials and equipment.

It is clear from the student evaluation forms, and their visual journals, that the community art aspect of the project has produced far-reaching benefits, and prompted a thoughtful response to the social impact of art, and the role of the artist.

Both students and the women enjoyed the natural environment, and maximized the possibilities it offered.

The Moulsecoomb women had a unique experience which has given some of them, who were previously struggling, the self confidence to parent their children in a positive, creative way.

Praise and thanks should be offered to Graham Welfare from the National Trust, and his two volunteers, who integrated sensitively with the whole group, and offered practical support throughout.

The sculptures left in the woodland at the end of this project, exceeded our expectations in that they represent high quality, permanent, public art.

## **National Trust evaluation of woodland sculpture project, May 05**

The project was a huge success on all levels.

The National Trust's criteria for the project were as follows:

1. To promote the use of National Trust countryside properties for excluded groups:
2. To gradually alter the perception of the National Trust (from one of Stately Home owner to one of Countryside manager)
3. To work in partnership with the local University and local community groups.
4. To gain a resource (the sculptures) that will attract visitors to the site and encourage them to explore further afield.

It was interesting to find that while 1 & 2 were particularly aimed at the Moulsecoomb family group, amongst the university students there was little understanding of the National Trust's role in countryside management.

I was particularly surprised to find that, out of the whole group, only 3 out of 19 had visited the downs before. The great success of the project was that nearly everyone said they would bring friends/ family to visit their work and then explore further into the countryside.

The only point I would change in future would be to have a designated hour to give a walk and talk further into the countryside (probably at the end of the project).

As a first time project everything went exceptionally smoothly – although I wasn't involved in the organising beforehand. This is quite an important point as I have little time to organise or fund such large projects. What we can provide is the resource (the woods) and time during the project.

We would like to be involved in similar projects in the future.

The art produced was of very high quality – particularly the giant. I was pleased to see a feature in the Argus and there will hopefully be a feature in the National Trust magazine (both regionally and nationally) in the Autumn.

Everyone I have met has commented how wonderful the wood looks.

I believe the art module was entitled "access to art" and this was fulfilled via use of the countryside. From our perspective you could call it "access to the countryside" via the use of art.