

2007 NZ Mental Health Media Grant recipient Jo Randerson's art exhibition opens

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This weekend marks the completion of the first NZ Mental Health Media Grant project, which is administered by the Mental Health Foundation on behalf of the Like Minds Like Mine programme*.

Jo Randerson, a recipient of the inaugural 2007 Media Grants, is curator of a new art exhibition opening at TheNewDowse in Lower Hutt, Wellington.

The exhibition, *My House Surrounded by a Thousand Suns*, runs for four months from 5 July to 26 October and celebrates the work of artists with experience of mental illness and also artists with intellectual disability.

Jo says the idea for the project was inspired by a trip to Belgium's Guislain Museum in Gent in 2006.

"The museum featured a fantastic selection of work by artists [the museum describes as being] in alternative mental states.

"I loved the energy, direct communication and complete individuality that comes through work by outsider artists – it's so honest and uncensored and no-one else creates anything like it."

On her return, Jo applied and received a Media Grant to bring this experience to a New Zealand audience.

"Working with the 16 artists represented in this exhibition has been very liberating for my own work," she says. "I hope that everyone who sees the exhibition will be similarly inspired."

Judi Clements, Mental Health Foundation Chief Executive says, "It's exciting to see that one of our 2007 recipients has completed her project and that it is accessible to the public.

"Jo's worked hard to pull together all the elements of what is an exceptionally interesting exhibition with a group of local artists who have unique insights and experiences to share.

"The Mental Health Foundation hopes this will prove to be another way of breaking down the stigma and discrimination that still surrounds people with experience of mental illness and is proud to support Jo's work as part of the Media Grants programme."

Jo believes people will be invigorated by the art in the exhibition and the floor talk and panel discussion planned over the next two months.

"I also hope audiences will think about alternative mental states as being on a continuum and not regard people as being 'either mentally ill or not'. We are a

diverse society full of many wonderful and unique characters, and our communities work well when we embrace and value our differences."

This exhibition is supported by TheNewDowse gallery and Arts Access Aotearoa.

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Background information

* The Mental Health Foundation administers aspects of the Like Minds, Like Mine programme on behalf of the Ministry of Health.

There are 16 artists featured in the exhibition:

Martin Thompson, whose geometric works have received international acclaim.

**Amy Szostak, painter, singer and serious A-ha fan

Penny Taylor, whose colourful works always refer to her home and the sun, and from which the exhibition takes its title

**Reece Tong

Wendy Randall

Colin Korivin

Wendy Best

**Vicki Dooley

Daniel Phillips

Raewyn Lee

Timothy Rodley

**Matthew Squire

**Geoffrey Gaskell

Yelena Barbalich

Victor Bright

And Ernie Peach (deceased, Dunedin)

** *Available to be interviewed*

Curator, Jo Randerson, is the founder of Barbarian Productions (an independent comic-theatre troupe) and author of *The Knot*, *The Spit Children* and *The Keys to Hell*, is a freelance performer and writer based in Wellington. Winner of the Bruce Mason Playwrighting Award in 1997, and the Robert Burns Fellowship in 2001, Jo has performed in the UK, Scandinavia, Europe and Australia, and also in Russia as a Winston Churchill Fellow (2002). She was the designer of the successful 'Posted Love' exhibition, which premiered at the National Library and her visual artwork has featured in exhibitions at the City Gallery in Wellington, and the Physics Room in Christchurch. Jo was also one of the Billy T Comedy Award finalists in 2005 - overall, she is an artist who works across many mediums and is above all interested in strong and different voices within the arts community.

Associated Events

Floor talk with Jo Randerson

Saturday 12 July, 2pm FREE

Join award winning author, playwright and curator Jo Randerson in conversation with Wendy Randall and Matthew Squire, two artists whose work is featured in the exhibition. Meet in the gallery.

Panel Discussion facilitated by curator, Jo Randerson

Sunday 3 August, 2pm FREE

With Amy Szostak (artist), Glen McDonald (Vincent's Co-ordinator), Marianne Taylor (Arts Access Aoteroa), and Stuart Shepherd (School of Fine Arts, Massey)

So what does the term 'outsider art' really mean? This informal panel discussion will look at the connection between creativity and mental illness, the important role our community organisations and spaces play in fostering creative talent and expression, and the status and increasing international interest in the work of New Zealand's outsider artists... and whether the term 'outsider' is still relevant?

Images available on request

Matthew Squire, *Map of Europe*

Reece Tong, *Luscious Latino*

Geoffrey Gaskill, *Three heads, 1*

Vicki Dooley, *Figurative*

Amy Szostak, *Wedding of June and Bjorn*

Victor Bright, *Green stripes on turquoise*