

Symposium:

Art & Mental Health in the Asia Pacific Region

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Melbourne

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Symposium:

Art & Mental Health in the Asia Pacific Region

Art in Mental Health :
opportunities for mental health
promotion and overcoming stigma

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Art in Mental Health:

opportunities for mental health promotion and overcoming stigma

Dr Eric Cunningham Dax (1909-2008)

one of the first to see opportunities for art in mental health

- 1946, one of the first to initiate art programs as part of mainstream psychiatric treatment, employed Edward Adamson, a professional artist, to facilitate art programs at Netherne Hospital, England, where he was the superintendent.
- Adamson later founded the British Association of Art Therapists (the first professional association of art
- therapists)



Dr Eric Cunningham Dax, 1996

Art in Mental Health:

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Dr Eric Cunningham Dax (1909-2008)

one of the first to see opportunities for art in mental health

- 1950, research into the effectiveness of art in providing insight into the experience mental illness and other therapeutic values, convinced the British National Health Service to employ artists to facilitate art programs in hospitals (this development has been recognised as the beginning of art therapy as a profession).



Art in Mental Health:

opportunities for mental health promotion and overcoming stigma

Dr Eric Cunningham Dax (1909-2008)

one of the first to see opportunities for art in mental health

- From 1946, collected artworks of his patients to educate staff of psychiatric hospitals about experiences of mental illness and later used these artworks to demystify mental illness for the general public.
- Dax believed that the stigma of mental illness is mainly a result of ignorance.



Art in Mental Health:

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Dr Eric Cunningham Dax (1909-2008)

a pioneer in community mental health

- In late 1930s, while superintendent of Netherne Hospital, England, he convinced a group of social workers to care for people with mental illness in the community.
- From 1952 -1969, as Chairman of Mental Hygiene, Authority in Victoria, he initiated many reforms and developed community mental health. Documented in his book, *From Asylum to Community*.
- 1960's & 70's - Consultant to the World Health Organisation on community mental health.



Art in Mental Health:

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Dr Eric Cunningham Dax (1909-2008)

a pioneer in community mental health

- Dax believed that development of community mental health will not succeed if the problem of stigma of mental illness is not addressed.
- He found that the art of people with experience of mental illness offers an interesting and accessible way for the general community to be educated about mental illness.



Art in Mental Health:

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A brief overview of the Dax Centre

- Developed out of The Cunningham Dax Collection, which is now a program within the Dax Centre.
- The Dax Centre is a multi-faceted non-profit organisation with a mission to promote mental health and well being through an understanding of the mind, mental illness and psychological trauma through art and creativity.



Art in Mental Health:

opportunities for mental health promotion and overcoming stigma

The Dax Centre

The Cunningham Dax Centre
Exhibitions Program (Dax Gallery and Touring)
Public Program
Professional Development Program
Education Program
Art for Emotional Literacy
Art Therapy
Cinepsyche



Art in Mental Health:

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The Cunningham Dax Collection

- With 15000 artworks dating back to 1946, it is one of the largest collection of its kind in the world, probably the most comprehensive in the range of experiences of mental illness and psychological trauma it represents.
- Heritage listed for its historical, social and cultural significance.



Selected works from The Cunningham Dax Collection



Selected works from The Cunningham Dax Collection



Selected works from The Cunningham Dax Collection



Water colour on paper
H38cm xW46cm
Artist name withheld



Selected works from The Cunningham Dax Collection



Water colour on paper
H38cm xW46cm
Artist: Renee Sutton



Selected works from The Cunningham Dax Collection



Water colour on paper
H38cm xW46cm
Artist: Renee Sutton



Selected works from The Cunningham Dax Collection



Figurine, mixed media
L28cm x W20cmxH26cm
Artist name withheld



Selected works from The Cunningham Dax Collection



Selected works from The Cunningham Dax Collection



Selected works from The Cunningham Dax Collection



Art in Mental Health:

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Exhibitions

- **On site gallery**
 - Permanent exhibition* of selected works from The Cunningham Dax Collection (changed every 3 years)
 - Temporary exhibitions* – 3 exhibitions a year, exploring mental health themes and highlight creativity of individual artists
- **Touring exhibitions** – travel to 3 rural towns each year as well as conferences and other venues (eg. federal parliament)



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Public Program

- Open to the general public
- Relates to the exhibitions
- Aim to explore mental health issues as well as artistic, ethical, philosophical, social, cultural and political issues



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Education Program

- **Secondary school programs**

Psychology, Health & Human Development
English, History, Philosophy, Art

- **Tertiary university programs**

Health students (Medical, nursing, psychology, social work), and arts, curatorial, sociology, philosophy students



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Professional Development Program

- Use of artworks to gain insight into the experience of the individual with mental illness and trauma.
- Attended by health care professionals (doctors, psychologists, nurses, art therapists, school counsellors)
- An invaluable resource for workforce training.



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Art for Emotional Literacy

- Emotional literacy increasingly now recognised as vital for emotional regulation and resilience against trauma in children.
- A project to train teachers to encourage primary school children to explore their emotional experience through art.
- Developed by a work party of child psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, art therapist and teachers.



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Cinepsyche

- Use of film to explore a wide range of psychoanalytic, mental health and broader socio-cultural issues.
- Groups watch films together followed by discussion lead by experts
- Useful for schools and professional groups



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Art Therapy

- Professional development for Art therapist
- Pilot program for asylum seekers in collaboration with Asylum Seekers Resource Centre
- Research into evidence for its effectiveness



Art in Mental Health:

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Many ways...

The Dax Centre's programs demonstrate the many ways in which art can **promote mental health**

and to **promote social inclusion and counter stigma** of mental illness.



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Other Organisations & Programs

Splash Art , Stables, Second Story, Artful Dodgers –

- encourage people with experience of mental illness to make art, and develop career as artists.
- help them gain a sense of competence, reminding themselves and others of their creativity / abilities
- give them a sense of purpose and identity.



Art in Mental Health:

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Theoretically, and from the experience of the Dax Centre over the past 30 years...

These exhibitions create a **non-stigmatising opportunity** for communities to come together to discuss mental health issues.

Art exhibitions offer a **safe, non threatening,** and also **interesting and engaging** way for people to explore and learn...



Art in Mental Health:

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**Opportunity for
community partnerships and development**

Touring exhibitions of the Dax Centre...a platform for mental health services, local government, NGOs, schools and community groups to come together to launch public mental health education programs.



Art in Mental Health:

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Art in Mental Health:

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Art in Mental Health:

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Can the exhibitions of art by people with experience of mental illness and psychological trauma ...

promote a greater understanding of such experiences (mental health literacy) in the general community...

and a more positive and sympathetic attitude towards people with these experiences ?



Art in Mental Health:

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Independent evaluation of touring program

Centre for Program Evaluation, University of Melbourne, 2009

High level of interest, acceptance and participation: 10-20% of local population. Strong media coverage.

Community groups and agencies continue to meet years after the touring exhibition left, using the same model to promote greater awareness of mental health issues in their local communities.



Art in Mental Health:

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What about empirical evidence that these exhibitions actually increase understanding and change attitudes?

The Dax Centre has evaluated the response of 10000 visitors to its exhibitions (2005 to 2008).

Visitors are asked to fill in a 3 items questionnaire after their visit.



Art in Mental Health:

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Evaluation of 10000 visitors to the exhibitions of the Cunningham Dax Collection

Item 1:

A total of **92.34%** agreed or strongly agreed (54.79% and 37.55% respectively) with the statement:

“The works of the Collection have helped me gain a better understanding of the nature of mental illness.”



Art in Mental Health:

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Evaluation of 10000 visitors to the exhibitions of the Cunningham Dax Collection

Item 2:

A total of **91.39%** agreed or strongly agreed
(45.24% and 46.13% respectively) with the statement:

“The works of the Collection have helped me gain a
more sympathetic understanding of the suffering
of people with mental illness.”



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Evaluation of 10000 visitors to the exhibitions of the Cunningham Dax Collection

Item 3:

A total of **92.27%** agreed or strongly agreed
(41.11% and 50.16% respectively) with the statement:

“The works of the Collection have helped me
appreciate the ability and creativity of people
with mental illness.”



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However...

Not all exhibitions of art by people with experience with mental illness promote greater understanding and more positive attitude towards them.

Eg. Hitler displayed the artwork of people with mental illness along with 'modern art' to denigrate them as Degenerate Art (Entartete Kunst) .'



Art in Mental Health:

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**Research at the Dax Centre
found that for exhibitions to be effective they should:**

- display the artworks ethically and respectfully, with consideration for the artists wishes for confidentiality and attribution.
- tell the story about the artist, but information must be factual and interpretation and opinion kept to a minimum.
- not specially highlight the diagnosis of mental illness but include it as part of an overall story about the artist/creator, which include their personal history, their own view of their art etc.



Art in Mental Health:

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The Dax Centre found that for an exhibition to be effective in mental health promotion and overcoming stigma it should:

simultaneously...

provide information about mental illnesses and personal experiences of them (to increase mental health literacy)

and

highlight the **ability/creativity** of people with mental illness (to overcome stigma)



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“Art provides a space in which thinking and emotional experience can be liberated from the limits of reality. It allows a contact to worlds different from ours, within an artificial, and therefore, safe space. Art can help in reducing the stigma attached to mental illness”

Hans Thomashoff and Norman Sartorius, 2004

Art Against Stigma,
International touring exhibition
World Health Organisation

