



Long Bay inmates are painting their way to better mental health

Monday 30 September 2019

A new exhibition of inmate art will explore how painting and art practice can improve offenders' mental health and help them cope with long hours of imprisonment.

The collection of 30 artworks will go on show from 9-20 October at Long Bay Correctional Complex's Boom Gate Gallery, as part of The Big Anxiety Festival being held across NSW.

Corrective Services NSW Assistant Commissioner Luke Grant said the '*...in Trouble*' exhibition included a range of painting styles based on the theme of mental health.

"For some, the experience of incarceration can aggravate mental health problems and the artistic process provides a safe and positive way of dealing with problematic feelings and emotions, such as depression and anger," Mr Grant said.

"Since 1992 the Boom Gate Gallery has exhibited the works of inmate-artists, supporting their rehabilitation and allowing them to acquire skills to hopefully gain work on the outside.

"Creative projects can also contribute to improving an inmate's mental health and act as a gateway to other learning experiences for individuals who have often had very poor and disrupted experiences of education."

Boom Gate Gallery curator Elizabeth Day said very few of the artists being exhibited in the new show had ever produced art prior to coming to prison.

"They have stumbled upon this means of creative expression because they have seen someone else painting, or possibly because they have a memory of enjoying art in high school or some other chancy reason," Dr Day said.

"There is no doubt that art functions-effectively in the lives of those who spend many hours per day either alone or with another cell mate. In the case of many of our Aboriginal artists, it is a crucial social connector. Art in prison can frequently be a lifesaver and becomes a new way to 'live in one's skin'."

Shane was incarcerated in 2015 for robbery offences and is one of 21 artists featured in the exhibition. The 31-year-old is in the Violent Offenders Treatment Program at Long Bay, which aims to address his offending behaviour.

"I suffer bad depression and find it hard to trust people. Since being here I've started to paint. I find it helps me relax . . . it keeps me calm and helps me sleep at night," he said.

"My family says my mental health has improved ... The more I paint, the better I get."

...in Trouble

Thursday to Sunday, 9am – 3pm, 9-20 October, 2019

The Boom Gate Gallery, 1300 Anzac Parade, Matraville NSW

thebiganxiety.org