



Death and Diversity

newsletter update

This is the third in a series of newsletters to keep you informed about the project

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Museums Wellington



The **Death and Diversity** project has commenced. Leading into the start of the exhibition season on 5 December, a group of pupils from St Theresa's School in Plimmerton celebrated the Mexican **Day of the Dead** by building a colourful altar in honour of deceased loved ones. On 2 November, Claudia Arozqueta from Enjoy Gallery gave a talk about the significance of the **Day of the Dead** and how it influences Mexican contemporary art. This was followed by delicious refreshments provided by the Mexican Embassy such as margaritas, traditional hot bread and hot chocolate.

In late November, Imagine the Land Project artists Karma Barnes and Ekarasa Doblancovic install the **Mandala of Life and Death** at the Museum of Wellington City & Sea. The construction process of the mandala, which is based on the Tibetan circle of life and death will take place over four days and will be open to the public for viewing throughout this time. The Museum is one of five venues where works will be produced in New Zealand and Australia in the final months of 2011.

Finally, at the end of November, Voice Arts Trust presents six performances of **At Circle's End**.

Voice Arts update

In June, after months of community liaison, a group of participants, diverse in culture, faith, and age began a creative journey together, towards the creation of a unique performance exploring the theme of death and diversity. Weekly drama workshops delivered by Voice Arts Trust encouraged the group to play, share, learn, and create together.

Early on in our explorations, it became apparent that there was a common belief amongst members of the group that death was simply the ending of one journey and the beginning of another; hence the paradox of our title, **At Circle's End**.

The make-up of the group has changed over the past four months and while the final company comprises ten performers, many others have participated along the way contributing to the group process.

The faiths that have influenced this performance are Islam, Hinduism and Christianity, alongside cultures of Indonesia, Malaysia, Somalia, Mexico, India, Philippines, Ghana, and New Zealand. There are also many whose spiritual outlook is not defined by a particular religion.

The participants have risen brilliantly to the challenges of creating a compelling devised performance work based around a difficult subject. Drawing on storytelling techniques from their own cultural traditions, the multi-layered work is highly visual, physical, vocal and at times even humorous.

The performance reflects the experiences and beliefs of the participants involved but we hope the stories told will resonate with all who come to see the production.

At Circle's End The Drama of Death from Diverse Perspectives is directed by Madeline McNamara and is produced by Voice Arts Trust, in partnership with the Museum of Wellington City & Sea.



Participants from a workshop session of At Circle's End



Death and Diversity

Victim Support

An organisation that works closely with the New Zealand Police and whose volunteers often help provide support after a death is Victim Support. A video which outlines the work of Victim Support will be playing in the Community Resource room adjacent to the *Death and Diversity* exhibition.

Victim Support is a free 24/7 community response to someone dealing with, in some cases, the worst time in their life. A large proportion of the services we provide are working alongside people who are grieving the loss of a loved one, including people who are not necessarily immediate family members and friends. In the case of a suicide the people we support can include witnesses, neighbours, and work or study colleagues. We provide emotional and psychosocial support and information, and in the case of death where a crime has been committed we advocate for the rights of victims providing financial assistance and practical support as victims move through the criminal justice system. Our service is delivered by teams of highly-trained volunteers who are managed by Service-Coordinators; and, as a leading agency in the voluntary sector, our training standards, quality assurance and accountability are paramount.

We recognise that there was a time in New Zealand when there were only two traditions of death and dying – Māori and Pākehā. New Zealand is now more ethnically diverse and our training programmes include modules that help our volunteers gain an awareness and understanding of cultural considerations as well as

ethnic and religious responses to death. It is widely accepted that people who receive adequate support and information are more likely to remain connected in a positive way with their whānau, family and local community and are better placed to rebuild their lives.

Volunteer profile

Pam joined Wellington Victim Support in 1991 as part of the first group of volunteers to be trained. On her first night of roster duty she slept with her clothes on in case the phone went and she had to go on a call-out. Pam has quite a distinctive voice and while getting petrol from a service station the worker asked her while they were talking if she volunteered with Victim Support; on saying yes he said she had rung him twice at home after a couple of holdups, once the offender had a toy gun and the other time an umbrella under a coat. He said he was very pleased to meet her in person. Pam decided to retire from Victim Support at one stage but that didn't last long. 10 days later she called saying she was coming back. In her early years working at the Downtown Community Ministry, Pam thought it would be a good idea to have a survival guide to Wellington for those on limited means, so she went ahead and wrote one. It is now in its 11th edition.

Denise Reiri
District Administrator
Victim Support



*Pam receiving her 20 year
service pin from John Spence,
Acting District Commander,
Wellington Police.*





Death and Diversity

Film Archive

The New Zealand Film Archive is pleased to partner with the Museum of Wellington City & Sea in the public programme for the *Death and Diversity* project.

The Film Archive will host screenings curated from its collection of feature films, TV dramas, short films, actualities, newsreels, documentaries and amateur film to complement the wider *Death and Diversity* project. There will also be screenings of international content.

Death is often used as a subject, theme or plot line in film, and The Film Archive will draw from its extensive collection to present fictional and non-fictional representations of the mortality of man. Fear of death and dying, actual death and dying, and what happens to those who have died and those who are left behind will all provide engaging material.

In our modern culture that tries to deny death and keep it separate from life, art (and film in particular) reminds us of its shadow, and allows the celebration of life and memory through moving image.

More information to come when screenings begin in 2012.

Mark Sweeney
Manager – Present
New Zealand Film archive



THE FILM ARCHIVE
Haka Kaitiaki © Ngā Taonga Whakaahuā The New Zealand Film Archive

Schedule for 2011

23-27 November

installation of the Mandala of Life and Death (up until 11 December),

27 November, 1pm

Kala Dostal, the Director of Amitabha Hospice in Auckland, explains Buddhist concepts of life and death, followed by an artists' talk.

19, 20, 26, 27 November, 3pm

18, 25 November, 7pm

Voice Arts Trust presents *At Circle's End*. A group of strangers; diverse in culture, faith, age, and performance experience come together to create a unique production exploring the rituals surrounding death and dying, grief, mourning and lamentation; a celebration of people's diversity and sameness; an ultimate celebration of life. Entry by koha.

6 December

Death and Diversity exhibition opens and runs through to the end of June 2012

2012

Full 2012 schedule of *Death and Diversity* public programmes to come.

Ethnic Affairs Adviser

Mui Ngah Lee has taken over from Pitsch Leiser on the *Death and Diversity* project. Her role is to engage, connect and enable ethnic communities in the Wellington region.

Mui says 'I have worked both in the public and not-for-profit sectors; the OEA role sees me returning to government service. My work over the recent 15 years was in the international development sector, enabling communities in developing countries to develop skills and strengthen capacity to deal with the challenges of globalisation and climate change. Prior to

joining OEA, I was involved in supporting the settlement of migrants and refugees in New Zealand and sustainable community development in the Asia-Pacific region.'

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