

A MATTER OF BALANCE

Visual arts in the Australian Defence Force ARRTS program

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Abstract

This paper examines visual arts practices in the context of Arts for Recovery, Resilience, Teamwork and Skills (ARRTS), a four-week intensive residential program for ill or injured serving Defence personnel, which has been hosted twice annually by the University of Canberra since 2015. Two datasets of visual material sit in the public domain and invite opportunities to undertake close reading of the visual artworks produced and processes pursued. Our work considers the intersections between participatory, expressive creative practice, and art instrumentalised for its therapeutic benefits. We attend to the tensions between stakeholders operating in an explicit hierarchy that does not reward expressive individualism, vulnerable participants emerging from this social and professional context, and researchers defined by an obligation to critically evaluate. Navigating this delicate space challenges ARRTS mentors to achieve a productive balance between artistic critique that reflects the professional legitimacy, rigour and worthiness of creative activity, both intrinsically and for its beneficial effects, and creative practice for solace and escape. Interpretations of participants' own published disclosures, combining visual artwork with descriptive statements protected from a clinical gaze, enable us to better understand how the program's participatory and expressive agenda aids recovery. This supports a tentative finding that positive health outcomes in ARRTS are enhanced by sidelining health contexts and goals.

A MATTER OF BALANCE: VISUAL ARTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE ARRTS PROGRAM

Vahri McKenzie & Caren Florance

Arts for Recovery, Resilience, Teamwork and Skills (ARRTS) is a four-week intensive residential program for ill or injured serving Defence personnel, with up to 30 members in each cohort. Participants come from the three defence services (Royal Australian Navy, Australian Army, and Royal Australian Air Force) and the emergency services. At the time of writing, ARRTS has completed twelve iterations, hosted twice annually by the University of Canberra since 2015 (with one iteration cancelled in each of 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19). The program is designed to teach and mentor participants in several creative arts streams to support them in developing new ways of being with themselves and others. After introductory sessions in three creative streams, participants choose to focus on one of Creative Writing, Visual Arts, or Music and Rhythm. ARRTS is jointly run by the University of Canberra (UC) and the Australian Defence Force (ADF), with UC taking responsibility for Creative Writing and Visual Arts streams, and ADF personnel offering Music and Rhythm. This paper is the first evaluation of the Visual Arts stream to be published and comes from the combined perspectives of a researcher newly immersed in the program (Vahri McKenzie) and a long-time mentor (Caren Florance).

Our contribution builds on recent applied creative writing research that delves into aspects of creative pedagogy in the ARRTS context (Bullock 2021a; Bullock 2021b; Bullock and Williams 2021; Magee 2021; Magee and Bullock 2021). Of particular value to the current paper is recent work describing the UC contribution as a program of ‘creative interventions’ guided by ‘four principles’ that are efficacious in aiding recovery (Webb, et al. 2021). We add to this discourse by evaluating aspects of the approach to creative practice in the context of the ARRTS Visual Arts stream. Additionally, we share the findings of visual analyses of artworks made by graduates of the ARRTS intensives, with attention to what these works reveal about their experiences of engaging with creative practice as part of their recovery from trauma.

We will frame our discussion around the four principles of creative interventions identified by Webb, Williams and Eaton, which they posit as effective in helping participants to ‘reactivate their engagement with symbolic expression ... by demonstrating their ability to learn new skills and develop an additional identity’ (Webb, et al. 2021: 41). The four principles ably capture the participatory and expressive spirit of the ARRTS program, and provide the beginnings of an evidenced-based framework to assess the achievements of the Visual Arts stream in meeting the program objectives of enhancing recovery, resilience, teamwork and skills. The ‘four principles’ framework also enables us to draw attention to areas where we identify a potential risk that mentors’ roles, or the program’s structure, may stray from a participant-centric agenda. This work is relevant for future iterations of the ARRTS program and other applied arts and health programs.



Webb, Williams and Eaton’s principles give priority to participants’ experiences over those of other stakeholders (and other exogenous factors), and prioritise creative expression over external measures of accomplishment. The principles were developed as the result of collective experience over seven years of presenting the Creative Writing stream and hosting ARRTS at UC. Building on earlier research by members of this writing team (Williams, et al. 2019), a significant impact of the program’s creative interventions is theorised as participants’ demonstration

of their ability to learn new skills and develop an additional identity (Webb, et al. 2021: 41). The principles are not those of biomedical ethics identified in Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress' *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (currently in its 8th edition, first published in 1979), but there is an interesting echo in light of the complexities and competing agendas operating in applied creative arts research that we illuminate. The significance of biomedical ethics to the emergence of medical humanities, forerunner to the broader health humanities where we position our work, is seen, for example, in Stanford University's Biomedical Ethics and Medical Humanities Scholarly Concentration program (2021).

Beauchamp and Childress' four principles are: respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice. Nonmaleficence may be understood through the familiar and condensed formula of the Hippocratic Oath: first do no harm. The principle of beneficence is the corollary: to do as much good as possible. Respect for autonomy extends what may be considered a basic human freedom to medical ethics, prioritising individual choice and responsibility. In Beauchamp and Childress' work, the principle of justice draws attention to the impacts of the distribution of limited resources, without proscribing how such decisions ought to be made (Beauchamp and Childress 2019). Webb, Williams and Eaton's four principles (the 'four principles' referred to throughout the remainder of this paper) value participation, participant-centrism, expressiveness, and resisting tradition. They take nonmaleficence and beneficence as given; respect for autonomy is reflected in the significance given in the four principles to prioritising participants' experiences over those of other stakeholders.

Working in this space is not without complexity. In this paper, we do not adopt a traditional dyad between 'researchers' and 'participants'; our method seeks to extend some decision-making capacity to all stakeholders, including the artist-participants who have given us permission to name them and reproduce their artworks, and mentors whose practice expertise informs our conclusions. As applied arts research, our own perspectives combine the roles of artist-educator and researcher through critical reflection on practice. Our methods reflect efforts in the growing field of health humanities that 'draws on the methodologies of the humanities, fine arts and social sciences to provide insight, understanding, and meaning' (Klugman 2019: 3). This is a transdisciplinary space that explicitly brings together perspectives and approaches from different epistemological paradigms. While health humanities is often described as interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, in his introduction to *Research methods in health humanities* Craig Klugman identifies transdisciplinarity as a distinguishing theme: a way of attending to the activist spirit of this work that combines traditional single-target research methods with newer methods that seek to empower all stakeholders (Klugman 2019: 6).

UC's work in the ARRTS program occupies a productive three-way intersection between stakeholders operating in an explicit hierarchy that does not reward expressive individualism, vulnerable participants emerging from this social and professional context, and researchers defined by an obligation to critically evaluate. In his Introduction to *The Routledge companion to health humanities*, Paul Crawford calls for 'the development of a stronger evidence base for the application of both the arts and humanities to improve health and well-being' (Crawford 2020: 3). Through the development of an evaluation framework for creative work that demonstrates therapeutic benefits, Webb, Williams and Eaton's (2021) four principles make an important contribution. The principles are also significant in confronting a broader tension in health humanities that instrumentalises creative arts for their therapeutic benefits while struggling to evaluate their impacts with existing social science methods. The principles provide an explicitly

creative framework developed from collective creative practice knowledge and scholarship that advocates a participatory and expressive approach to creative practice.

In the spirit of experiential learning championed by the program, and leveraging the suitability of the principles' creative framework for evaluating applied arts programs, we extend our enquiries in a new, visual, direction. Whilst two comprehensive research enquiries are embedded within the ARRTS program and analyse its impacts and outcomes for individuals (PhD projects employing quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches to data; see Grey 2021a and Watt 2021 respectively), privacy considerations preclude case study approaches that examine individual circumstances of participants alongside their creative process and outcomes. However, two datasets of visual material sit in the public domain and provide opportunities to analyse the visual artworks produced to understand common concerns as they are reflected in subject matter and creative processes pursued. Our two approaches to visual analysis, ethnographic and thematic, do not rely on personal details and include no personal information that has not already been published.

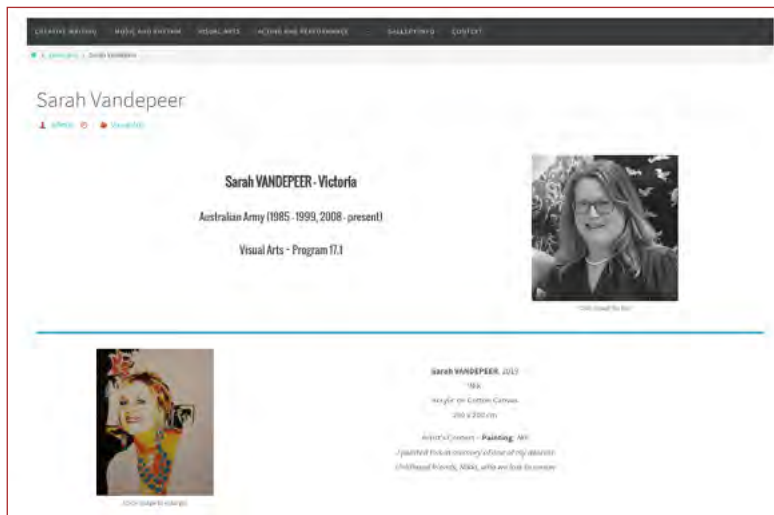
A collection of ten showcase catalogues (1) provides a richly illustrated and permanent record of each cohort's work, accompanied by short pieces of interpretive writing (ADF ARRTS Program Showcases, 2016–2021). The catalogues were designed by Visual Arts mentor John Reid for the participants, their families, and others affiliated with ARRTS. The printed catalogues are prepared during each program, and each participant is represented by at least one page of work. With Reid's guidance, informed by his understanding of aesthetic and ethnographic values, participants select images of work to include. Because print deadlines require catalogues to be completed by the end of the intensive's third week, the work shown in the catalogue is not usually a participant's major work showcased in exhibition, but it is usually representative of their creative focus. Reid also documents the day-to-day operations of the program, selecting images that are content-rich in showing an account of people and their activities. Other participants and staff are also encouraged to take and contribute photographs.

An online gallery (2) is hosted by the program's Artistic Director and researcher Geoff Grey as part of 'his ongoing exploration of the impacts, benefits, challenges and outputs of creative engagement opportunities undertaken by wounded, injured and ill uniformed personnel through the ADF ARRTS program' (Grey 2021b). A total of 41 participants from the 2015 to 2019 cohorts submitted examples of their work, along with brief, contextualising artists' statements. The online gallery is a living database, to which some participants continue adding work after their program's completion, including work made before they attended ARRTS, and work made in a different genre to that of their chosen program stream. The printed dataset and the dynamic online dataset display significant differences: the period of time each artist has to reflect and select examples of their work; the relative freedom from mediation of artists' choices; the space allotted to each artist. We consider these differences in our analysis.

It is important to note that it is not our intention to undertake formal art analyses of the artworks; all work made in the program is shared with the expectation that it will not be exposed to explicit artistic judgement. The substantial collection of material creates an opportunity, however, to interpret the ARRTS program's benefits and challenges through a thematic and material analysis. This in turn helps us to understand the ways in which making images, marks and artefacts aids the recovery of ARRTS participants.



1 Four of the ten showcase catalogue covers featuring participant artworks. From top to bottom: David Cooper, *Windswept Willow*, 2017. Driftwood, steel, wire. 30 x 43 x 20cm. Jaala` Hayes, *Lost Identity*, detail, 2017. Digital print, acrylic paint, rose petals. 144 x 58cm. Murray Pearson, *Blooms*, work in progress detail, 2019. Acrylic on canvas board. 25 x 20cm. Byron Lomas, *Free Mind*, detail, 2021. Acrylic on plywood. 90 x 60cm. Photographs and design: John Reid (ADF ARRTS Program Showcases)



2 A representative screenshot from the ARRTS online gallery, hosted by Geoff Grey, and featuring 16.1 Visual Arts stream participant Sarah Vandeeper (Grey 2021b)

We reviewed all visual work produced in the ARRTS programs archived in the printed catalogues and online gallery. In keeping with a social-constructivist approach, our interpretations emerge from a combination of closely viewing visual imagery, reflecting on existing practice knowledge, and closely reading the existing ARRTS literature. We also considered the interpretations of mentors and ADF leaders published in catalogues alongside images, including suggestions that common themes in the work include portraying aspects of ‘families’, engaging with ‘pain’, or seeking ‘escape’ (ADF ARRTS Program Showcase 2016: ix, 8). Taken together, these processes informed our thematic categories, and instances of visual themes were then methodically counted to offer indications of relative significance. This process was supplemented with critical reflection and dialogue between the authors, as well as consultation with current and former mentors (acknowledged at the end of this paper).



Webb, Williams and Eaton’s first principle is to ‘de-emphasise any focus on “traditional” academic or scholarly markers of achievement’ and, rather, to focus on participation (Webb, et al. 2021: 41). A hierarchy of genres has traditionally ranked painting and sculpture above other visual arts media, with decorative arts and crafts at the bottom. Feminist art scholars have challenged such arbitrary distinctions by showing how a fine-art/craft dichotomy maps onto public/private spaces and masculine/feminine genders (Korsmeyer and Brand Weiser 2021). As well as being critically unsound, genre (and other) hierarchies limit the potential impact of the beneficial creative practices on which we focus. Reviewing the range of practices offered in the ARRTS Visual Arts stream is one way to distinguish between traditional approaches to visual arts education and the more participatory approaches championed in ARRTS.

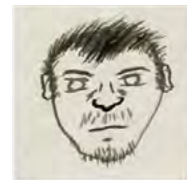
The Visual Arts stream offers a diverse range of practices for participants to engage with, as Image 3 illustrates. This diversity is enabled by the current team of Visual Arts mentors’ breadth of practice knowledge. John Reid has graphic design training and a creative practice that incorporates photography, performance art and environmental art. He is also the photographer credited in many of the images we use in this paper. Mariana del Castillo has a wide repertoire of traditional fine art skills including painting and drawing, craft-based skills including eco-dyeing, digital skills such as animation, and an exhibiting practice that incorporates all of this but is centred upon textile-based sculptural work that recycles a broad range of found objects. Co-



3 The Visual Arts stream space (here in 2016) illustrates the diversity of practice forms available. Photograph: John Reid (ADF ARRTS Program Showcase 2016.1: 13–14).

author Caren Florance, also a designer, has a typo-bibliographic practice centred upon text-based printmaking and a broad range of publishing outcomes, including artist books, zines, fine press work and digital publications, many of which utilise collaboration with visual artists.

The three mentors were all associated with the Canberra School of Art during a period influenced by a ‘Bauhaus School’ approach to creative engagement, characterised by interdisciplinary cross-pollination between different workshops, regardless of their perceived status within a traditional art/craft dichotomy. All three future mentors encountered the Graphic Investigation Workshop (1978–1998) and its philosophy of material exploration in a group context: the idea comes first, with a potential means of expression in any medium (Florance, 2019). This common factor influences the team’s approach to mentoring: an open, exploratory attitude towards visual arts without siloing fields of practice, combined with a dedication to engaging and professional presentation without pressure to finish a complete body of work.



4 Full cohort session (2016): portrait drawing with the extra challenge of using ink with a long piece of dried reed. Two examples are included above. Photograph: John Reid (ADF ARRTS Program Showcase 2016.2: 18)

Whilst participants opt to focus on a single practice stream with daily intensives supported by qualified mentors, they also continue to participate in short, full-group creative workshops. Image 4 illustrates an activity in which participants paint portraits with a long reed brush, perched above the paper. These constraints encourage expressive approaches to mark-making that work against the control that participants expect from more traditional techniques, releasing them from the pressure to compete. The image also reveals participants as simultaneously being both the representing artist and their partner artist's subject.

Professionally presented outcomes open to the validation or criticism of others are another aspect of art practice that may be considered a traditional marker of achievement. Each iteration of the ARRTS program ends with a 'Showcase' exhibition and performance that presents a body of work for participants' families, as well as dignitaries from ADF and UC. The professional standards of this event are impressive: a large room is transformed into a performance space, with stage, curtains and lighting rig installed. Mentors from the Music and Rhythm stream, who are serving ADF personnel and musicians who play in a variety of ensembles for ADF functions, perform alongside participants. Another room transforms into a gallery space, with framed and professionally labelled works presented as worthy of serious consideration. The significance of the Showcase challenges participants and mentors alike to maintain an entirely participant-centred workshop. Whilst an impressive Showcase event can consolidate achievements, and it is part of professional practice to complete the creative cycle to public display, a focus on this event alone will not sustain a long-term creative practice.

This first principle recommends a sense of caution in relation to 'traditional' markers of achievement and emphasises the significance of the 'participant-centered nature of the program' (Webb, et al. 2021: 41). Striking the right balance between professional outcomes and generative processes relies on mentors' expertise to ensure participants' safety in revealing themselves in these new ways, through appropriate guidance in selecting, arranging and presenting their work.



The second principle embraces 'a broad based, multi-form approach' to visual art, within which 'participants can identify and pursue their own areas of interest, regardless of our own preconceptions of the "traditional" creative modes of practice' (Webb, et al. 2021: 41). In moving beyond traditional approaches, this second principle can be seen as continuous with the first. A variety of approaches to creative practice are modelled, with low-stakes, playful exploration an important part of this ecology. For mentors, process is as important as outcome, and the workshop atmosphere encourages participants to focus on creative practice as daily practice, for its own sake.

Image 5 shows mentor Mariana del Castillo leading participants in making expressive sculptural figures from wire, foil and tape. The Visual Arts mentors' approach challenges high art historical precedents that disparaged handcrafts and 'poor' materials. Contemporary trends that 'upcycle' and reuse found materials, once a radical Dadaist act, have often influenced participants before they arrive, and the mentors encourage this practice by organising trips to local 'tip-shops' for such materials, brainstorming conceptual ideas and relating them to relevant examples of contemporary practice. It is an example of the impact of the Graphic Investigation Workshop's philosophy that an idea can be served by the materials, rather than privileging training in that material or process (Florance, 2019).



5 Full cohort session (2019): sculpture workshop using wire, foil and masking tape. Photograph: John Reid (ADF ARRTS Program Showcase 2019. 2: 46)

Employing ‘poor’ materials that are cheap and accessible, and techniques that do not require sophisticated tools, supports participants in developing a long-term creative practice that fits with their everyday life. Such approaches can be considered through the philosophical lens of everyday aesthetics, which recognises the continuity between artistic encounters and everyday life. It draws on John Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics in *Art as Experience* (1958) and expands attention from isolated aesthetic objects to ‘a mode of aesthetic experience that is complex, immersive, and multisensory, and thus readily applicable to everyday life’ (Irvin 2009: 138).

The second principle can assist mentors to reflectively guide participants beyond fixed and preconceived areas of interest, towards new, broader ideas and approaches. It also flags the fact of distinctions between mentors’ and participants’ interests. Whilst entrusting creative interventions to visual arts educators with practice and pedagogical expertise accords with the culture of respect for authority that is inculcated by the defence services, mentors come to the program as ‘whole people’ and may have past traumas of their own. Trying a variety of processes invites participants to identify their interests, develop new interests, and be inspired by mentors’ interests. At the same time, the second principle guides mentors to challenge their own preconceptions.

A ‘Soldier’s Five’ is an informal military phrase referring to a quick instructional demonstration or lesson. Once Visual Arts mentors learned the phrase from a participant, they introduced regular breakouts to give quick demonstrations of technical processes or skills, as in Image 6 showing Caren Florance conducting a short introduction to the concept of books as art. In the same way, participants are encouraged to present for the whole group a technique that is known to them, and as they are familiar with the Soldier’s Five format, they often do so. It is one of the more visible ways in which participants educate and support each other with ways of getting through their days.

Two points follow from this meeting of cultures. The ADF operates in an explicit hierarchy that does not reward expressive individualism and has a results-oriented approach to training. Skill acquisition is an explicit goal of the program (signalled in the S of the ARRTS acronym), and participants favour activities that require palpable labour and manual dexterity, as seen in print workshops with letterpress artist and co-author Caren Florance (Image 7). The achievement of



6 Visual Arts stream 'Soldier's Five' led by Caren Florance (2020), introducing the group to the concept of artist books. Photograph: John Reid (ADF ARTS Program Showcase 2020.1: 37)



7 Caren Florance leads a handset letterpress workshop at the Printmedia & Drawing Workshop, ANU School of Art & Design, 2017. Photograph: Caren Florance and uncredited participant (ADF ARTS Program Showcase 2017.1: 19–20)



8 Program participants performing a song for their peers during an evening Review showing off works-in-progress at HMAS Harman. *Photograph: uncredited participant (ADF ARRTS Program Showcase 2021.1: 58)*

a reasonably quick result with a machined finish that looks like professional print publication is consistent with the manual tinkering and an outcomes-orientation that are common parts of military culture. This may sit awkwardly against the approaches championed by the first two principles, and it is part of the Visual Arts mentors' skill to balance experiences of creative process, with its ambiguities and possible failures, with the value of producing artefacts to share.

The second point to be made about outcomes-oriented military culture relates to the history of parading and showcasing achievement through ceremonial occasions and theatrical reviews. Image 8 was shared by participants as self-representation of a spontaneous evening review of works-in-progress at HMAS Harman Royal Australian Navy Base, where most participants reside for the program's duration, free of uniforms and the usual recognition of rank. Such participant-initiated showcasing produces a powerful sense of their shared military culture, creating opportunities for cultural exchange between mentors and participants to balance programmed incursions and excursions.

Each of these examples is consistent with Webb, Williams and Eaton's third principle, which recommends that mentors 'encompass multi-disciplinary approaches to creativity, and allow participants to branch into multiple streams if that is where their interests lie. The point is to facilitate creative expression, rather than to make excellent art or develop a specialization in an art form' (Webb, et al. 2021: 41). Our analysis reveals that visual work is produced from across the practice streams, illustrating cross-pollination between them, and the broad use of marking and other ways of making for self-expression.



Systematic reviews of the benefits of creative arts in achieving therapeutic goals overwhelmingly demonstrate positive outcomes for participants (Maujean, et al. 2014; Regev and Cohen-Yatsiv 2018; Schouten, et al. 2015; Van Lith 2016). However, such studies also reflect broader challenges with work in this transdisciplinary space, such as the difficulty of measuring specific benefits of creative practice. For example, Van Lith's systematic review focused on practice knowledge but found it impossible to compare and contrast various arts practice approaches without further understanding their philosophical foundations (2016: 20–21). Further, art therapy approaches in this literature usually reflect a specific clinical cohort or health condition (Regev and Cohen-Yatsiv consider seven clinical categories; Van Lith examines four specific mental health issues; Schouten et al. consider trauma). The ARRTS program is different in this

regard. Whilst all participants have been identified as ill or injured by ADF clinical staff, and their safety is supported through the availability of clinically trained ADF health staff throughout the duration of the four-week intensive, mentors are not briefed on and have no initial knowledge of participants' diverse clinical backgrounds.

Principle four is to 'be entirely participant-centric in terms of outcomes and outputs', including the freedom 'to work either in an "art therapy" mode or simply in creative play and practice' (Webb, et al. 2021: 41). Images used above to illustrate the first three principles can be considered ethnographic, in as much as they were produced by mentors and participants immersed in the program, designed to offer a rich sense of day-to-day activities as well as issues and questions arising. All of these images come from the ARRTS catalogues. For our second, thematic, mode of analysis, we have selected images from the online gallery because the inclusion of participants' written statements alongside these images adds richness to their self-expression. We reviewed all visual work produced in the ARRTS programs archived in the printed catalogues and online gallery. What follows is not a formal art analysis but rather a description of prevalent themes and an indication of their relative significance, suggested by the number of times each theme can be identified. Our visual analysis reveals three major themes: escape, health, and the military. The first two accommodate the fourth principle's characterisation of modes of practice (art therapy or creative play), which we describe through thematic categories 'health' and 'escape'.

The greatest in number is 'escape', which includes work depicting familiar or exotic places, animals, or hobbies like car culture. Graeme Copeland's *Kiama Coast* effectively illustrates this approach (9). He writes, 'This painting depicts a part of the South Coast of NSW between Gerringong and Kiama. My wife and I try and get out as much as possible, preferably surrounded by nature and away from the crowds' (Grey 2021b). Of *Country Carport* (10) Copeland writes: 'This painting is of my Mum and Step-Dad's house near Castlemaine, Victoria. The blue 1959 J Series Bedford in the foreground has been in the family for 40 years now and I hope to restore it to its former glory' (Grey 2021b).

Work about 'health', broader than 'pain' (the term signalled in Creative Writing mentors' texts, ADF ARRTS Program Showcase 2016: 8), includes references to illness or injury, and references



9 Graeme Copeland, *Kiama Coast*, 2020. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 80cm (Grey 2021b)



10 Graeme Copeland, *Country Carport*, 2020. Acrylic on board, 60 x 80cm (Grey 2021b)

11 Saif Shamki, *Pusser Post Resolute*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas, 50 x 40cm (Grey 2021b)



12 Dez Flakelar, *Untitled*, no date. Pen on paper. 14.8 x 21cm (Grey 2021b)

to actions that are found to improve health. Saif Shamkhi shared *Pusser Post Resolute* along with this statement: ‘I created this artwork to tell the story of the drowning feeling that some pussers [slang for sailor] come back with after a rotation on Operation Resolute (Australia’s border protection operation 2006–2013). I wanted to highlight the injured veteran community’s experience of feeling both lost and spiralling down when rehabilitation and other support is not provided in a timely manner’ (Image 11, Grey 2021b). An example of work that explicitly references health-promoting activities is seen in Dez Flakelar’s pointillist drawings (12). He writes, ‘When I first tried pointillism, I found that it calmed my over-active mind. It grounded me in the art and completely seized my attention’ (Grey 2021b).

As researchers, we find it remarkable that work about ‘health’ is the second most significant thematic concern. Because the ARRTS program differs from art therapy in separating clinical and creative approaches, it is surprising to find that many participants choose to make work about their health. The sheer volume of work addressing this theme encourages us to posit that positive health outcomes are enhanced by sidelining health contexts and goals. The significant difference between art therapy and ARRTS creative practice is the relative freedom from a clinical gaze: expressions of traumatic experiences and feelings within the usual framework of ADF healthcare have professional implications for serving Defence personnel, which does not encourage disclosures that may support recovery. On the other hand, visual evidence suggests that participants are relatively unguarded in creatively expressing perspectives about their service, including its potentially damaging aspects.

This leads into the third most significant theme, which is the military itself. Entry into a new community of practice aids the formation of new identities for participants that can exist alongside their military identities, assisting them to ‘re-story their pasts ... into a more wide-ranging narrative’ (Webb, et al. 2021: 42). Standing as an artist’s statement for Eduardo de Araujo’s *Line of Sight* (13) is a link to the Australian War Memorial’s online exhibition of the Napier Waller Art Prize, for which *Line of Sight* was Highly Commended in 2019. De Araujo’s statement makes it clear that, like Shamkhi’s *Pusser Post Resolute*, this work responds to his experience



13 Eduardo de Araujo, *Line of Sight*, 2019. Textile embroidery on digital photo, 26.5 x 47cm. Highly commended in the 2019 Napier Waller Art Prize (Grey 2021b)

of Operation Resolute. He writes: 'HMAS *Warramunga* prepares to board a Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel in the northern Australian waters. I captured this image to display the everyday life for three months during the election period. We deployed at short notice from our homeport with minimal personnel on board to a high-tempo area where we encountered young families voyaging across the ocean on vessels that are not seaworthy, for a new start in life' (Australian War Memorial 2021: n.p.).

Military-themed work that does not adopt a critical view tends to be double-coded in other thematic areas, such as escapes and reflections on the self through self-portraiture. It is perhaps significant that there are more examples of military-themed works in the online gallery than in the catalogues, where participants have had time to add to their portfolios, sometimes after they have left service. It is also the case that the freedom to explore and reflect on feelings through creative activity, including expressing criticism of the ADF, is explicitly communicated to participants during the program. At the Showcase that concludes each program, ADF dignitaries witness frank and open creative critiques of service and give supportive feedback to participants afterwards. These complex attitudes are reflected in a final example, from Nath Breakwell. His series of 'Vet Toons' display a 'specific military dark humour' in their reflections of military culture (Grey 2021b; 14).



The four principles of effective creative interventions offer a framework for visual analysis of the Visual Arts stream of ARRTS by illustrating some of the creative processes pursued, as well as the cultural exchange that occurs between mentors and participants which feeds back into and further enriches the program. Principles one and two embrace broad approaches to artmaking, including those that sit close to everyday practices including crafts and skilled handwork. Mentors' own identities act as models here, where their passions inspire and invite emulation, and their serious consideration of participants' work invites them into a community of practice that is not overly judgemental, recognising many approaches to creative participation.



14 Nath Breakwell, from *Vet Toons*, (ongoing series, n.d.). Coloured pencils on paper (Grey 2021b)

The freedom to engage in autonomous ‘art therapy’ or what might appear to be simple ‘creative play and practice’ (Webb, et al. 2021: 41) requires mentors to be alert to the needs and priorities of individual participants, which fluctuate over the course of the four-week intensive. Navigating this delicate space challenges mentors to achieve a productive balance between artistic critique that reflects the professional legitimacy, rigour and worthiness of creative activity – both intrinsically and for its beneficial effects – and creative practice for solace and escape. Some participants are open to discovering a new community of practice, others seek comfort and solace through their individual practice itself.

Building trust with participants – encouraged by artistic environments that are fun, safe and inclusive – is essential. Work in this ADF context requires a new kind of vigilance, to soften and slow down defensive responses in order to maintain ‘a nonconfrontational and non-competitive atmosphere conducive to the development of creative practice’ (Webb, et al. 2021: 41). Interpretations of participants’ own managed disclosures, combining visual artwork with descriptive statements protected from a clinical gaze, enable us to better understand how the program’s participatory and expressive agenda aids recovery. Arts for recovery from trauma, and, further, creative practice as a way to maintain and promote good health and wellbeing, is a long-term process requiring productive creative habits. The evidence demonstrates that many ARRTS participants discover creative and therapeutic ways of expressing and reflecting on their experience of trauma which are sustained well beyond the intensive workshop.

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