

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by - Andrea McKey - Churchill Fellow 2009

Communication through art: researching new 'painting with light' techniques to tell stories and connect communities.

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Signed

Dated

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INTRODUCTION

I would like to thank the Winston Churchill Trust for entrusting me with a Churchill Fellowship and the funds to travel, explore, learn, be challenged and awed, be embraced by individuals and communities and ultimately return to Australia a person richer in knowledge, experience and willingness to make a difference, through art, in the life of my fellow Australians. The Fellowship has also given me the opportunity to promote the Trust thereby allowed me to already make a difference in the lives of some fellow Australians I met whilst on my trip.

I would like to also thank all the generous and warm individuals who I met, talked to, worked with and who gave of their knowledge, time and experience and helped broaden my horizon and learn about glass, art, youth and the importance of community for a healthy, worthwhile life.

My project explored:

- Learning how to apply the 'Painting with light' technique in glass art
- Using glass art in youth at risk programs to help reconnect them to community
- The feasibility of a mobile studio in delivering such programs

In my community of Darwin we have a rich and thriving art and craft culture with many artists and groups supporting artists. Despite this I have lacked the experience, knowledge and how to due to the nature of living in an isolated part of Australia. The learning just through books can be rather limiting and lonely and is nowhere as enriching as being part of a class and learning from an artist and other members of the class. The opportunity to partake in relevant and practical courses and talk to people involved in glass art and youth at risk programs has given me greater insight, knowledge and passion in this field.

Whilst on my fellowship I also undertook some other related and 'accidental' learning opportunities in the field of art and glass art. The knowledge I have gained from these has value added to my planned itinerary. This will be discussed further in the main body of this report.

- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
- University of Alaska Museum, Fairbanks, Alaska
- Seattle Airport Public glass art
- Annette Baron Hot Glass Studio, Detroit, Michigan
- Commercial Galleries in Europe, America and Alaska

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Andrea McKey, Artist
043986707

Communication through art, researching new 'painting with light' techniques to tell stories and connect communities.

Highlights

My Winston Memorial Trust Fellowship began on June 26, 2010 and ended on September 5, 2010. Highlights? Wow everything was a highlight. From classes in Miriam's studio which went well into the night to the joy of working with Nathan at Bullseye glass and being able to choose from a wonderful rainbow selection of glass colours to watching and learning from artists at work and being part of the glass art community. I would especially like to thank the following people who provided me with learning, networking and ongoing support opportunities:

- Miriam di Fiore, Glass artist, Mornico Losana, Italy
- Peter Lonigan, Glass artist and teacher, Glass Art Centre of the Arctic, Fairbanks, Alaska
- Nathan Sandberg, Glass artist and teacher, Bullseye Glass, Portland Oregon, USA
- Kristina Logan, artist and teacher, University of Michigan, Detroit, Michigan, USA

Visits to museums and art galleries gave me a wonderful insight into the history of glass in all corners of the world and how it fits into the contemporary glass production and the current glass movement. I saw glass pieces produced for decoration and/or function dating back 1500 years, Tiffany windows of such beauty and intricacy and contemporary glass art in commercial galleries.

Major lessons and conclusions

- One of the most wonderful facts brought home to me was something I was always aware of but it really struck me anew. It was the incredible importance of community and its influence in our lives no matter whether the community be a family, a class group, a conference group, the general artist community, a neighbourhood, a city of the world. When we are part of a healthy, supportive and nurturing community we can live healthy, productive and focussed lives. This is especially important for our troubled youth. Art creates such communities. Seen first hand that the problems faced by youth in NT communities are very similar to those faced in Fairbanks, Anchorage, New York and San Francisco and that art and community is playing an important part in helping these youth as well as the general population.
- This trip has shattered the rose coloured glasses I had on when I first thought about my project and how I would be able to go and change the world, at least for youth at risk here in NT communities. I had to refocus on how this would be possible, viable, and achievable within my capabilities and restraints as a mother, employee and mortgage payer. I learnt that my years of being part of the teaching and school community gives me a lead to do tackle this issue a bit differently.
- I gained a greater understanding of the specific 'Painting with light' technique developed by Miriam di Fiore and the confidence to explore this further in light of using parts of this technique in programmes in the NT.
- I have become more confident in my capabilities as a glass artist and the knowledge that the networks made will help me grow and develop as an artist and teacher of glass art

Implementation of gained knowledge

I will share my knowledge and experience gained by giving presentations to my colleagues at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory and Territory Craft as well as taking the opportunity to teach workshops. I will make contact with art teachers in NT schools and Art Centres in regard to using this knowledge to help in art programs for youth at risk.

PROGRAMME

Germany - 30/6 to 1/7 and 17/7 to 27/7/2010

- Derix Glass Studios, Taunusstein

- Crystal Road, Bohemia
 - Frauenau Glass Museum
 - Weinfurter, Arnberg
 - Joska Crystal, Bodenmais

Italy - 2/7 to 17/7/2010

- Mornico Losana
 - Landscapes in fused glass (Painting with Light) with Miriam di Fiore
 - Art sites tour
 - Commercial galleries

USA – 28/7 to 30/8/2010

- Rochester
 - The Gathering Conference – International Society of Glassbead Makers (ISGB)
 - Studio tour
 - Commercial galleries

- Bullseye Glass, Portland
 - The big picture: Survey of kiln-glass with Nathan Sandberg
 - Bullseye factory tour
 - Commercial galleries

- Alaska
 - Fairbanks
 - Glass Art Centre of the Arctic with Peter Lonigan
 - University of Alaska Museum
 - Cultural Centre and craft demonstrations
 - Anchorage
 - Commercial galleries

- Detroit
 - Beadmaking: Taking the next step by Kristina Logan
 - Annette Baron Studios

- New York, San Francisco and Seattle (Airport)
 - The Metropolitan Museum of Art
 - Commercial galleries
 - Public art

MAIN BODY

Germany - 30/6 to 1/7 and 17/7 to 27/7/2010 Derix Glass Studios, Taunusstein

Derix has been a working glass studio since the late 1800's. Glass artists from all over the world use these wonderful facilities to work on, especially large, projects. The buildings house a large variety of kilns, numerous workshops and other large working spaces as well as storage for a wonderful array of glass and tools. It was like being in a lolly shop, I just wanted to stop and get to work. I watched artists at work, checked out the wonderful gallery with its display of architectural glass work and had a great conversation with glass artist John Clarke who was working on a window, based on an ancient stone carving design which is a commission for a Scottish distillery. John explained the process and just recently emailed me an update of the project. The design process gave me much food for thought.



Front entrance to Derix, Taunusstein



John Clarke working at Derix

Crystal Road, Bohemia

- **Frauenau Glass Museum**
- **Weinfurtner, Arnberg**
- **Joska Crystal, Bodenmais**

The Crystal Road in Bohemia has 500+ years of glass production history and many small communities still live and work around the industry in the present day. The Frauenau Museum of Glass was established in 1975 as a small community based museum supporting the glass industry of the Bavarian Forest area. In danger of bursting at the seams a new museum was built to support the growing demands of a wonderful collection of glass, a new library and a variety of programmes. Huge glass windows allow the light to reflect on glass from ancient to contemporary times. It was wonderful to recognise names of glass artists I admire. I walked an ancient glass walk over a see through floor with glass artefacts under my feet. A furnace made from glass shows its inner workings, video screens feature all areas of the glass industry and history and the place was packed. The library houses about 1500 books on everything from all areas of the glass industry and is a treasure trove of information. It is open to the public by appointment, would you believe through the tourist bureau. How the community values this museum was evident by the fact that a wedding was in the process of taking place just as I was leaving.

While in the Crystal Road area I also took the opportunity and visited a variety of small galleries, run by local glass artists and their families and a number of studios. Every place I

went to was packed with tourists. This whole area is alive and well and supports a large number of small communities the same as it has done for hundreds of years.



Weinfurtner, Arnberg



Frauenau Glass Museum

Italy - 2/7 to 17/7/2010

Mornico Losana - Landscapes in fused glass Painting with light) course with Miriam di Fiore

This course run by Miriam was one of the most amazing things I have ever experienced. Miriam taught in Spanish, Italian and English and had passion and energy to burn. Living on site immersed me not just in the glass course but also her family and the small community of Mornico Losana. Miriam bought an ancient farmhouse some years back (a winery) and has won the hearts of the community by restoring it and bringing life back into the community by putting Mornico on the map through her world class classes and her 'Painting with light' technique.

In the class were six students from all over the world. The steps of the technique are simple but the whole process is quite complex and we needed a lot of energy to keep up often working late into the night. I had always admired Miriam's work but to see her work the magic was another thing. Even though her work looks painterly everything is made from glass powder, frit, handmade stringers and sheet glass. Miriam was open and honest about how everything is achieved, no hidden processes or coyness or secrets. We cut, sifted, pulled stringers, sprinkled frit and pushed it around in order to achieve the landscape perspective which Miriam has perfected. It took 7 firings and multiple layers of glass so each day we would dash into the kiln room to peek at our progress and hopefully would not have to cry at the results.

Miriam taught me about the importance of passion, enthusiasm, vision, dedication and confidence in your life and work in order to create beauty and allow your students to do the same. I learnt so much, not just about the process but about Miriam and her road to where she is now as a world renowned, self supporting artist and much loved member of the community she lives in. Her energy and passion for her work and for people and her love of teaching was palatable and infectious and taught me so much about being an artist and a teacher. I just wanted to stay there forever. It did however also cause me a little bit of angst as I realised that the particular process I so wanted to learn and use for my Fellowship project may be too complex and not achievable in the full format. I spoke to Miriam about it and she gave me some great ideas on how to adapt the process for beginners.

Miriam not only taught us her technique but showed us how to run an efficient workspace and studio safely and tidily and how to do great work with minimal tools. I made a wonderful new friend who lives in Canada and also works with young people so we are currently sharing ideas. I will go back and do another class with Miriam in a few years time.

On our day off Miriam took us into the surrounding countryside to look at wonderful artwork on buildings and churches, painting, mosaic and architectural masterpieces.



Our pieces in the kiln, ready for firing



My tidy workspace



Miriam helping me with the vitrigraph



Miriam teaching in her studio



One of Miriam's pieces

USA – 28/7 to 30/8/2010 Rochester

I attended the Gathering Conference for The International Society of Glassbead Makers (ISGB). What an amazing opportunity to speak to glass artists from all over the world including Australia. I listened to speakers and watched demonstrations on bead making, flame working, how to grow as a glass artist amongst others. One such demonstration brought home to me how easy we have it in the western world in regard to tools, materials and support. The demonstration was about the Krobo beads from Africa where glass bottles are sorted by colour, ground by hand and made into beads using moulds and kilns run by wood fires. It took about 15 minutes to make one bead and the skill and patience involved had everybody stunned. This industry supports communities and community programmes.



Krobo beads



Flameworked necklace at the Gathering Exhibition

At the conference I met a number of Australians and was able to talk to them at length, over loads of coffee, about the Churchill Fellowship programme. I was amazed that these artists had not heard about the Trust and the support it gives to Australians.

Unfortunately my plane was late getting into Rochester and I missed the bus to go to the Corning Museum of Glass. On the upside two of the librarians came and gave a presentation of lunch one day. What an amazingly supportive organisation Corning and the Rackow Library is. The library houses the largest collecting of information about glass and they are willing and able to provide research and reference support to glass artists all over the world.

I was lucky however and made it on the Glass Studio bus tour which gave me a chance to network with my fellow glass artists as well as see some wonderful studios and meet the artists. The work displayed in the galleries was world class and they are probably still wiping my nose prints off the glass cases.

Bullseye Glass, Portland - The big picture: Survey of kiln-glass with Nathan Sandberg

The Bullseye Glass factory is a Willie Wonka Chocolate Factory kind of place. Sheets of glass in every available colour, jars of powders and frits and stacks of moulds everywhere you look. Artwork adorns the walls in the resource centre, everything to inspire and support the glass artist.

The class with Nathan was not what I had originally wanted to do but in the end I was glad I got to be part of this class. Nathan was a warm, funny, enthusiastic and incredibly knowledgeable teacher and I learn a lot from him and also my fellow students. We worked on thick glass projects, learnt the use of cold working tools, made casting moulds and learnt about finishing off work in order to give it an edge. I gained a lot of confidence in this class and learnt new processes which I had seen in books but had never attempted before. The simple way of making a casting mould with clay and a special plaster mix really impressed me with its possibilities for teaching. It was fun, easy and relatively inexpensive with a lot of scope, especially for new students.

Nathan also had an exhibition opening during the week of the class and was kind enough to take me into the city for opening night which was held at the Bullseye Gallery in the centre of Portland.

Nathan organised a factory tour of Bullseye for the students. This was totally enlightening. We watched glass being poured onto tables, pushed through rollers (a bit like sheets of toffee) and cut to size before being sent on its way to the annealing kiln.



Some of the work produced in Nathan's class



The workspace and kilns in the studio

Fairbanks, Alaska Glass Art Centre of the Arctic with Peter Lonigan

Before I left for my trip Peter advised me that due to financial issues he had taken on a job and might be unavailable during my time in Fairbanks. Unfortunately I was unable to make contact on my arrival and therefore I missed out on the opportunity to watch him at work in his studio and further pick his brain about his work with youth at risk.

Pete runs a hot shop which is an expensive undertaking. Some years back he helped the teenager of a friend who was having problems fitting in and this was causing social and behavioural problems. That started Pete off on a track to help youth like that become worthwhile members of the community again, using glass art as a medium.

Pete and I had spoken in length about his work with glass and youth at risk. His philosophy incorporates a lot of what Miriam said. He is passionate about his work and that transfers to his students. He teaches the importance of confidence, enthusiasm and the need for doing something worthwhile for yourself and the community.

Students come regularly to his studio and work on projects. Each student is able to sell his work at local markets with some of the profit going to the student and the rest back into the class to benefit the whole class.

His dream is to fit out a truck with a mobile hot shop and drive that through the US helping other youth along the way to be integrated back into their community. Unfortunately grant opportunities which support the arts and artists are few and far between in Alaska, not like here in Australia, so this project is a long way off being achieved. I will keep in touch with Pete and his spirit and enthusiasm will help me work towards my goal even at a smaller scale and with a kiln not a hot shop.

While I was in Fairbanks I visited the University Museum which was a wonderful new building standing on a prime spot overlooking the campus. Although there was no glass art I enjoyed seeing the wonderful works of art and craft in the galleries and the interpretative displays about Alaskan history. I also took the opportunity to visit a cultural centre. This was a large, new space with galleries, museum type displays and daily demonstrations by native Alaskan people, young and old, working on traditional crafts. I was able to jewellery making, embroidery and leatherwork, chat to the artists and also purchase items. It was a great way to showcase indigenous art and craft.

Anchorage

The Glass Art Gallery I wanted to see especially had unfortunately closed a few weeks earlier but I was able to visit a number of other commercial galleries while there. Glass art seemed a

bit limited, although beautiful. Indigenous art and carving featured very heavily in all the galleries and were exceptional and I spent a lot of time just looking at the intricate work.

Detroit

Beadmaking: Taking the next step by Kristina Logan

Kristina is my bead making hero and I was not disappointed with her class. Again I had a wonderful and inspirational teacher. I was a school teacher for many years and have taught many craft classes but Kristina taught me a lot about dealing with students and how to successfully communicate. She did all this with utmost patience and such a gentle nature that the class was like being in meditation. I am a mainly self taught glass artist and bead maker and to be in such a class was a wonderful experience. I learnt so much processes and techniques and it will help me make sense of much of the reading I have done in the past.



Kristina Logan showing us a technique



My tidy (before) workstation

Annette Baron Studios

One of the students in the Kristina Logan class organised a day in the studio of Annette Baron. Annette is a hot glass artist and gave her time and experience to instruct me in the art of glass blowing. Wow another mind blowing experience and one I had never dreamt of having, certainly not on this trip. This day gave me another perspective on glass and what an amazing and varied medium it is.



New York, San Francisco and Seattle (Airport)

In New York I went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and caught up with a fellow librarian who arranged a short personal tour for me. Wow the Met was the most wonderful place and I spent many happy hours wandering through the different galleries and taking photos (yes I was surprised but one can take photos there). The most beautiful and moving pieces were the windows by Louis Tiffany. I have never seen anything so beautiful and intricate and after all these years still so perfect and colourful.



Louis Tiffany window



Old glass bottles at the Met

I also visited a number of commercial galleries and spent a lot of time just checking out the public art which is scattered all around Manhattan and in San Francisco. There were mosaics on walls in shopping centres, murals on buildings and sculptures in the parks. How the public interacted with the public art was great, each space had seating arrangements which helped incorporate the art with everyday life in the city.

Seattle Airport evolves around public art (for the public at the airport anyway). I specifically trotted down to concourse A where a large piece of glass art adorns a set of large windows. Some years ago I watched a video of those windows being made (at Derix in Germany). An artist called Cappy Thompson based the work on Native American legends. I spent so much time looking at the windows I nearly missed my plane.

Besides these windows there were columns entirely covered with images made from glass mosaics. Plinths are here and there with art work on them, mobile hang from the ceiling. The whole place is fresh and alive and lots of people wandering around looking at the art work.



Cappy Thompson windows at Seattle airport.

CONCLUSIONS

The Fellowship has given me some challenges to face. I had just never imagined how time consuming and energy zapping my ideas would be. Dreams are always a lot easier than reality. But I have plenty of energy, courage and passion. I now need to work out how to put what I have learnt into action. This will take flexibility and some changes to my original ideas. How do I bring the most benefit to a Youth at Risk programme within financial and time restraints? While I was sitting in plane seats and waiting for transport I often thought back on my experiences and how to best utilise them. Am I an artist, am I a teacher and can I combine both while holding down a full time job?

Thinking about Pete's challenge of trying to earn enough money to do what he loves and continue to manage his Youth at Risk Program and the time and energy the Painting with Light course required has given me much food for thought. To best utilise everything I have learnt and be an artist I might need to teach the art teachers. This will allow the maximum exposure of my knowledge and skills learnt to the people who are working with youth and also youth at risk.

Since starting out on my trip I have spoken to a group of dedicated glass workers who have set up and travelled with a mobile hot shop in Tasmania. We discussed the idea of doing what Pete wants to do – travel the country with a mobile studio, visiting communities along the way and teaching teachers and students. I will explore this further as It will share the load of what I had planned to do.

I can however teach the Painting with Light techniques I have learnt on a smaller scale at Territory Craft. This will ensure I share my knowledge and continue to increase my skills and grow as an artist

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assess the best path towards bringing the knowledge I have gained to NT youth
- Develop a viable plan and make contact with art teachers in Darwin and Art Centres in communities
- Develop the glass techniques I have learnt to better suit the students who will be taking the classes
- Continue to encourage healthy communities through art and incorporate art in the everyday life of children