Welcome to Westminster City Council Arts Service’s quarterly e-newsletter about the wealth of projects we support across the city. Every year we commission and support a series of arts and cultural programmes and one-off events and since April 2007 they have reached over 50,000 people who live, work and volunteer in Westminster. This is your opportunity to find out more about these projects, and some of the other exciting cultural goings-on across Westminster.

David Ruse, Director of Libraries, Westminster City Council

## Arts in the City

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Westminster City Council Arts Service is commissioning the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) to run several arts programmes for Westminster’s diverse community. In one, Westminster charity Pursuing Independent Paths (PIP) is collaborating with the ICA on a project for young adults with a learning disability. Eight young adults will work with emerging UK artists for 12 months to create a series of performances for the ICA.

This three-stage project will begin with the participants getting their feet wet in London’s dynamic contemporary art scene: they will visit London galleries, view films and experience performance-based work. In the second stage, the participants will begin to act as artists themselves, engaging in workshops with artists to develop a new piece. Finally, as they enter into the exciting final production stages of their piece, the participants will get a behind-the-scenes view of life inside the ICA. This is a unique opportunity to learn more about one of the UK’s leading arts organisations.

Dan Kisumbi, Head of Services at PIP, stated “Our service users greatly benefit from opportunities to engage in theatrical and artistic work. Sadly such opportunities are rare.” This project provides PIP’s young service users with a much needed chance to explore their creative side. The project is designed to run for at least three years, each year bringing in new participants while strengthening bonds with former participants through ongoing arts activities, thus opening up contemporary art to a wider audience.
In August 2006, independent charity Westminster Arts secured a development grant from Futurebuilders England, The Barchester Foundation and Westminster Amalgamated Fund to run an Arts and Health project. Susan Aldworth is the artist and project manager currently managing this project named ‘Arts and Minds’, in which four artists are working in three care homes for people who are older or suffer from dementia. Susan visited each of the homes and met their residents before selecting artists for the project. “You need to work with good artists to create wonderful art projects. The artists need to be catalysts to make sure the results exceed expectations.”

In the Pullen Day Care Centre in Pimlico, Deborah Padfield is working with the clients to create a series of photographs, which will be used as a permanent installation in the House. Susan explained that “Deborah wants the clients to understand photography and she wants to unveil the process to them.” They have therefore drawn on acetate, a clear film from which photographs are developed, and these drawing were then developed into unique pieces of art. Deborah also spoke to the clients about where they live and then took photographs of the areas they talked about. “There was a great chance to get involved with the participants, hear about their lives and make art from their experience” said Susan.

The residents at Westmead Elderly Resource Centre have been working with composer Fraser Trainer and saxophonist Pete Whyman to compose their own pieces of music. Susan told us that the residents not only learnt to sing together, which culminated in a performance in November, but also really got involved in the creation of new musical pieces. “Residents composed music themselves by saying whether they wanted the next note to be higher or lower, and they also made shapes and movements with their hands to which Pete improvised music.”

The residents at 60 Penfold Street Extra Care Service suffer from dementia. “In the past we’ve tried group art activities for residents with very serious dementia but this wasn’t working” explained Susan. So she invited video artist Helen Marshall in to work with the residents individually. Helen took videos of them and showed them back to the group. “Watching the videos together was a great social thing” explained Susan. “The residents were able to see what an artist does and react to it. They were thrilled and amused to watch themselves on video.” The residents were also given cameras and shown how to make their own films. Helen is using the work to produce a documentary, and also a series of digital photographs to be installed in the care home.

Susan also commented that the workers in the care homes were as essential to the projects as the artists. With really positive feedback from the residents, like Nancy who commented “today was like Christmas and my Birthday together”, the project is a continual success.
Artspot: Ben Uri Gallery

Artspot: Hidden gems in Westminster's goldmine of galleries

In each newsletter we visit a different small gallery in Westminster to help you discover the wealth of visual art across the city.

Ben Uri Gallery: The London Jewish Museum of Art
www.benuri.org.uk

Ben Uri is a Jewish Art Society that once had four galleries across London. One remains, and is on a mission to act as a bridge between different communities and bring Jewish art to the capital. Even Prince Charles has noted that it holds the largest body of work by European Jewish artists in the world.

Ben Uri’s most recent exhibition included works stolen from Dr Max Stern in 1937, when he was forced to close his gallery and sell off its paintings at ‘Auktion 392’. This became the title of the exhibition, which has been rated in the Financial Times and Jewish Chronicle, amongst other papers. The exhibition closes at Ben Uri on December 24th 2007 and will then commence a world tour.

On 7th January 2008 their new exhibition opens, with portraits of author and journalist Chaim Bermant. This exhibition gives intimate insight into Bermant's life, since most of the images are by his artist wife Judy.

If you want to see what all the fuss is about, and learn more about Jewish culture by seeing some of their amazing pieces first hand, then take a look at the latest exhibitions below.

Until 24th December 2007
“Auktion 392: Reclaiming the Galerie Stern Dusseldorf.” A dramatic physical reconstruction of the Galerie Stern and of the auction environment of the forced sale of Max Stern's extensive stock.

7th - 28th January 2008
“Portraits of a “Licensed Heretic”: Chaim Bermant by Judy Bermant” - Group show. An exhibition of portraits of the author and journalist Chaim Bermant by his widow Judy will be held to mark the 10th anniversary of his death.
Westminster artistic talent shared stories of success at TheSeer open evening

Westminster City Council Arts Service would like to thank all who attended TheSeer open evening held at London Print Studio on 9th October 2007. 75 artists and arts organisations as well as council officers from archives, libraries, parks and leisure gathered, networked and chatted away under the light-rhythmic Calypso music at London Print Studio on Harrow Road. Councillor Daniel Astaire, Cabinet Member for Customer and Community Services, opened the event by highlighting the contribution that TheSeer has made to the creative sector in London - increasing employment opportunities for artists and opportunities for everyone in the city to participate in arts activities.

One of the aims for the evening was to ask local artists and arts organisations what they wanted to see on TheSeer. We wanted to know how we can develop the site for you, so that everyone gets as much out of it as they can.

A number of interesting points were raised and I wanted to tell you what we’ve done to improve TheSeer as a result.

TheSeer linked to London Schools Arts Service (LONSAS) but their web pages did not link to TheSeer. This has now been rectified, and the LONSAS page linking to TheSeer can be found here in the ‘Information and Advice’ section:
http://www.lonsas.org.uk/aef.asp

We decided it would be a good idea to promote TheSeer to all departments in Westminster Council with a dedicated email. Every member of staff (over 4,000) across all our departments received an email with a brief description of how they can use TheSeer and links to the site.

We are currently looking into ways to generate an alert for artists who are featured on TheSeer frontpage.

While individual artists publicise their work on the site, arts organisations and Local Authorities use the site to find suitable artists when they seek to commission for a variety of projects. Many of the queries the Arts Council and General London Authority receive from the public, artists or colleagues are referred to TheSeer. As you can see, we are also working hard to raise the profile of TheSeer and many of the partner boroughs are also putting time and effort into publicising it. TheSeer is a busy hub, receiving about 120,000 hits per month.
The Local Authority Arts Officers are always trying to develop TheSeer to make sure users get the most out of the site. They have to approve all entries before they go live. They are kept up to date about new artists, events and projects, so that they can share information more effectively and reach the artists and performers more easily.

We found the feedback from the evening really useful, and as you can see we’ve made some changes to improve TheSeer for everyone using it. If you have any comments or suggestions we’re always ready to listen to what you have to say. You can contact Valentina Wong, Arts Information Officer, on vwong@westminster.gov.uk or 020 7641 2409, or Tim Jukes, TheSeer Co-ordinator, on info@theseer.info.

www.thesear.info is a partnership between Arts Council England, London and sixteen of London’s Local Authorities including Westminster City Council.

A full list of partners can be found at www.thesear.info/PartnersSponsors.html
Your feedback on your ambitions for the Arts in Westminster

Westminster City Council is refreshing its strategy for culture which expired in 2006. The new one will have a stronger focus on arts but will still make links with other cultural services in the council. In February 2007 we held a large scale consultation event with the creative sector to determine what issues are important to the arts and cultural organisations in the city.

In June 2007 we discussed the main principles for the strategy at the Health and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting to gather the views of the members of council who sit on that committee.

Arts consultants David Powell Associates (DPA) are helping to develop the strategy. They have interviewed a number of key officers in the council who either deliver cultural services or whose work is related to cultural services. They have also interviewed a number of councillors from both political parties.

On 10th January 2008 we will be discussing an early draft version of the strategy with the four Regional Cultural Agencies: Arts Council England, Museums Libraries and Archives Council, Sport England and English Heritage.

There will be an opportunity to read the draft version and send us your comments during January 2008. You will be able to download it from the Westminster City Council website http://www.westminster.gov.uk/leisureandculture/artsandentertainment/strategy.cfm

We’d love to hear your feedback on the second issue of Arts in the City. If you have any comments or suggestions about the newsletter, or would like to recommend something to be included in the next issue, please email Valentina Wong, Arts Information Officer, vwong@westminster.gov.uk