

Sustaining a vital art link



Some of the crew that sustains the magic of Artlink: Daneel Robinson, Jenny Altmann, Amanda Lines, Deon Cameron and Gayle Clark.

By Carol Altmann

There is something very special in the Warrnambool art scene that puts the city on par with a movement happening in places like New York, London, Paris and Switzerland, yet most of us don't know it.

Artlink Studio, based in the 124-year-old Ellerslie College building in Koroit St, is a hub of creativity for people who have a range of disabilities, be they physical, mental or emotional, and who find expression and healing through art. Artlink provides an open-plan studio space in one of the most beautiful, sun-drenched spaces in town, together with art materials and the opportunity to learn from others.

Significantly, there is also a substantial gallery space with

a permanent exhibition of works that are for sale.

In any other major city, this space would be a drawcard as part of what is known as the ["outsider"](#) art movement: art that is created by people outside of the formalities of art training.

But while "outsider", "raw", "naïve" or "brut" art is gathering pace elsewhere, very few people venture up the 12 steps and into the Artlink gallery space outside of special events, such as the Warrnibald portrait prize that has been held (very successfully) for the past two years.



Where the magic of Artlink happens: the 124-year-old Ellerslie College in Koroit St, Warrnambool.

What they are missing is the chance to walk the molasses-coloured floorboards of this glorious venue and see art created from the heart, perhaps by somebody who is working only metres away in the studio space.

Visual artist Jenny Altmann, who has been with Artlink from its inception as Art Options in 2008, believes art allows people with difficulties or disabilities to find a way through.

"Art is so healing. I have used art as therapy myself, so I

know how it can work,” she said.

“If you are happy at doing something, then the rest of your body is in good shape.”

“There is a magic that happens here,” adds textile artist Gayle Clark, who is one of four working artists at Artlink.

“It is not just about exhibiting and selling art, but about people being in the moment, making the connections, and finding their art spirit.”



Creative spirits: Gayle Clark, Jenny Altmann and Alex Rees, who held his most recent exhibition at Artlink in August.

Unlike the [Creative Growth Art Center](#) in Oakland, California, Artlink is not about art therapy, in terms of having specialist art therapists running the program (although one staff member does have that qualification). Instead, it is about working artists being employed to guide the creative process. That process includes not only visual art, but dance, drama, music and writing.

About 30 people at any one time regularly access Artlink,

which comes under the Western District Employment Access umbrella, and Jenny has seen remarkable transformations.

“I remember one young woman who was a survivor of domestic abuse and she was so lacking in confidence when she first came here, she was almost immobilised. Now, she is doing a TAFE course. It can make that sort of difference,” she said.



A work by Rhiannon Newman featuring her own pet dog.

[Artlink won a Highly Commended award at the recent Warrnambool Business Awards. The gallery space is open 10am-4pm, M-Thurs, 241 Koroit St, Warrnambool.]



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