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Cultural Commission. Phase I Consultation Process.

Response from Cove and Kilcreggan Peninsula Art Group – D.G.Womack : Committee member . 22.09.04

Owing to the short notice of this consultation process I have been unable to consult with my fellow members. This response is thus largely my own opinion and cannot be taken as the views of the group. However in regard to the general content of this response I think I speak for the whole of our membership.

Aim : To restore to the local community a focus for cultural, artistic and musical activity. To foster talent and to develop a repository for indigenous expertise and experience for future generations to draw upon.

'There's an idea that the only thing in the Arts is masterpieces. Very little of it is ... the fabric of a culture is to do with lots of people making lots of things and that is the culture, the richness of that fabric.' Michael Craig-Martin, Art into Ashes, Guardian G2, 23.09.04.

Education : The visual education and instruction of Primary School children is the most important point at which to start to help sustain the future of the Arts and Culture in the community. The stimulus of an appreciation of the Arts in schools should not be down to the present system of young contemporary artists in residence, as it now is in some schools. Most good Scottish art has been produced within the strong tradition in representational, figurative and landscape art. At the primary school stage a thorough knowledge and foundation in basic techniques, of looking and interpretation should be taught. At this stage the Visual Arts ought to be based on the objective/naturalistic/figurative disciplines. This should emphasise the multi-skilled nature required of an art work. The discipline of 'hand and eye co-ordination' should be implicit in this activity, groundwork for this level of education. The aim should be much in line with the basic principles of Maths and English taught at this stage. Every child, beside being articulate and numerate, should also be able to convey a simple imaginative and informed visual idea on a two-dimensional surface by the time they leave to go to Secondary Education.

This could be achieved by employing academically trained visual artists at weekend schools in the area. Specially laid out studios(to be built - not Art Rooms), or studios in a mobile format, in the mode of the 'Dream Machine' mobile cinema as a stop-gap. Eventually a regular, purpose-built premises, incorporated into the fabric of the school or community centre. Part of the remit of these studios would be to encourage the plano-reproductive image making process (non-electronic). This insight into the making of art, would in my opinion, enable children in later years to develop a sound understanding of the visual culture that they have inherited.

It should be seen as the aim of any forward planning of future cultural activity should be a lot more 'ordinary people' orientated, than it has in the past. To many informed people, too much funding from such bodies as the S.A.C. and the Lottery etc. have been put toward the promotion of esoteric and exclusive art festivals, music festivals and opera.

for the sake of tourism. To my mind it should be the other way round. Very few of the benefits of this funding trickles down to areas like ours, on the Peninsula, on the periphery of the larger urban areas. Many of these areas within the conurbation of a large city suffer from isolation, in a cultural and artistic vacuum. Lacking direct, on-hand, cultural stimulus local inhabitants are driven to seek entertainment and cultural events outside this area, at great personal expense both in time and money. Its effect is to stifle home grown talent, and in doing so is to dilute cultural identity within the area. There is insufficient infrastructure to carry out the most token of cultural endeavours. Except under extreme duress by a dedicated band of followers in a particular branch of activity there is no regular system of cultural output.

In an age of continuing deteriorating standards, in all forms of the Arts and Crafts, those of the older generation with the knowledge and skills to contribute, are powerless. Eventually as they pass on they take with them their invaluable knowledge and skills and experience. There is a need to reverse this trend and feed back into the community this knowledge and these skills. One of the aims of the Cultural Commission should be to arrange for a working party to investigate this black hole in the local cultural scene, and fund the project with the appropriate action to stimulate local artists and craftsmen to show their work.

A series of travelling exhibitions, in the style of the old Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, of the 40s and 50s (the forerunner of the Arts Council) should be set in place. These exhibitions brought hope and enlightenment in a very dark period of post-war Britain. We are now, figuratively speaking, in a similar position today. Large parts of the surrounding area of Glasgow are devoid of Arts and cultural events for a long time. This would only be a stop-gap solution. For the long term a mobile exhibition workshop with equipment and expertise, able to put up temporary exhibitions for the local community in Church halls, community centres etc.. These exhibitions would be geared to emphasise the uniqueness of the area, with painting, sculpture and crafts, inspired and manufactured in that area. There would also be an ongoing campaign to find funding locally to build purpose built accommodation for these events. These buildings would ultimately be used freely for pursuing their particular art form, craft industry, musical and theatrical interest.

J. J. Womack

