

DRIVE BY ART

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WHAT IS DRIVE BY ART?

Imagine a public art project that – in its first year – invites thousands of teachers and students to be more creative, involves dozens of individuals and organisations in art making, and installs almost 100 new works of original art in the urban environment. Now consider that this new initiative requires only basic art supplies, is operated on a budget smaller than one average civic sculpture and has almost unlimited potential to involve thousands more creative people. Imagine a virtual art gallery on the streets of Wellington. This is *Drive By Art*, and this is what's happening and causing an outburst of public creativity in Wellington.

Drive By Art was established in 2003 as a unique way to combine community and public art. Fitting nicely into the Wellington City Council's new vision for creativity and innovation, the programme has become a prolific way to establish connections with educators and schools, creative people, organisations and institutions. It has become a way to share their art with the thousands of residents and visitors who drive by, walk by and populate the city streets.

The past year has seen 38 school banners installed along Oriental Parade (January-June 2004) to help brighten up the neighbourhood's new beach, playground and most popular stretch of footpath. More recently 55 new banners, designed and created by Wellington artists, were installed along the main streets of the CBD (July-December 2004). Another 32 Drive by Art school banners, based on a theme of environmental conservation in New Zealand, will be installed by August 2004. A hundred other new and original works of art for the capital city will follow in 2005. Since its launch, the programme has gone from strength to strength, and with each simple addition to the cityscape Wellington's urban and commuter experience is made more interesting and dynamic.

Drive by Art was developed from a few basic notions:

- New Zealand's capital is home to a wealth of creative people and ideas
- Wellington's streets have over 150 c-bracket banner sites (on street lights and utility poles), many of which are vacant and unused
- The region's schools and practising artists might like an opportunity to express themselves by painting new works of art for public display



School banner flying high along Oriental Parade

- The Wellington City Council could offer the materials and paints, oversee installation and promotion, and provide leadership and management for this new initiative.

Once refined and announced, *Drive by Art* discovered ready partnerships in the community. Primary and secondary school teachers signed on and young artists from The Learning Connexion, Massey University, Art Compass, Pablo's Art Studio, and local collectives joined in as initial participants. Dozens of practising artists, emerging and established, heard about *Drive by Art* and began making street banners. Two key sponsors from Wellington's business community, Flagmakers and Resene's, pledged significant support for the growing *Drive by Art* programme.

Under Recreation Wellington's guidance, and the full support of other Council departments and staff, *Drive by Art* was nurtured from an idea to a fully-formed community art programme. Utility poles, and indeed the urban landscape in Wellington, will never look the same.

How does Drive by Art further the council's vision and strategic direction?



Lord of the Rings Oscar banners by Miramar North School

Drive By Art came into existence at the same time as Wellington City Council's Creative Wellington – Innovation Capital vision. The underlying strategy aims to promote Wellington as New Zealand's premier centre of creativity and innovation and to attract and retain smart, creative and innovative people. *Drive By Art* provides a unique means to express, support and encourage our creative community through the use of the street banners and original art and it offers a unique way to build partnerships with hundreds of individuals and organisations. It is one of many efforts to manifest the Council's vision.

Drive By Art also came about as the Council's new Public Art Policy was being drafted. This policy was approved in 2003 and provides the framework for large monumental art, as well as temporary and community-based public art. Wellington aims to be a driving force in public art programming for all of New Zealand.

Drive By Art delivers on a number of Wellington City Council's strategic outcomes for arts. As stated in the Annual Plan, these include:

- **Arts and Cultural Capital**
 - Wellington is New Zealand's arts and cultural capital where the art infrastructure is strong and supportive of the performance, exhibition and development of the arts.
- **Art in public spaces**
 - Art enriches the built and natural environment of Wellington's central city and suburbs.

- **Diversity of arts**
 - The city values and celebrates the arts of a wide diversity of cultures.
- **Quality of life**
 - The city provides lifelong opportunities for access to the arts – thereby enhancing the quality of life of residents.

Drive By Art carries a few specific objectives:

- 1) encourage educators and young minds to think creatively
- 2) recognise Wellington's diverse creative forces and people
- 3) make the urban experience more interesting for people on the street
- 4) provide a public art forum for students, teachers and school curriculum
- 5) offer a new means of public expression for artists, organisations and community
- 6) promote artists that live and work in Wellington

This project, in its first year, has forged cultural connections, generated conversation and dialogue, and invited people to interact with new art in the environment. This process can provide a city and its citizens with a better sense of place, which is what *Drive By Art* is ultimately about.

How is Drive by Art managed?

The project managers of *Drive By Art* share a sense of leadership, a pioneering spirit, and a professional approach to project and community development. From its initial outline, *Drive By Art* was thoroughly planned. All materials were researched and trialled, communications were developed and a process was refined and then put into practice. The initiative was designed to be scalable, beginning small but accommodating growth, welcoming new concepts and partnerships and allowing the possibility of special themed banner-design projects in future.

The total budget to date has been less than the cost of many single mural projects, yet the effect comprises hundreds of participants and the thousands of people who encounter their creative work on the street. In short, *Drive By Art* has become a model for community

development through the arts and a simple yet ambitious way to link our community to Wellington's built environment.

As *Drive By Art* reaches its first year of existence, programming is being fully evaluated by the project managers. This will involve sending questionnaires to all participating teachers, artists, and community groups. Other aspects are reviewed on an on-going basis, with changes continually incorporated to make improvements. These factors include installation costs, material and paint durability, communications and media relations, signage and project literature. Anecdotal feedback from participants and the general public is also an important part of the evaluation process and the future of *Drive by Art*.

How does Drive by Art invite participation?

Drive By Art was developed with bold plans in mind. It was structured with low barriers to participation, and to accommodate wide interest, dynamic design themes, and just about any form of community partnership.

The Department of Conservation was the first of these partnerships, wanting to develop a series of banners around a conservation theme. Over 30 new banners designed by students in the Wellington region are being collected as we speak for installation along Oriental Parade in time to celebrate Conservation Week in August. The benefits of *Drive By Art* in this case are two fold; fulfilling part of schools' art curriculum and educating pupils in conservation issues as they develop the design of their banner.

Another partnership with Miramar North School resulted in a series of 11 *Lord of the Rings* themed banners for the suburb that is also home to much of Wellington's film industry. These street banners were affectionately dubbed *Drive By Oscars*, because each design reflects one of the Academy Awards won by *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. They continue to fly as a tribute to Wellington's local film industry, and the creative students of Miramar.

Wellington's Fringe Festival was another early partner. Organisers invited Fringe artists to design original street banners around the annual festival theme - Revelations. These joined the urban landscape in February this year.

Future implementations are being planned to incorporate other community issues and cultural themes. High schools might paint a series based on New Zealand heroes and historical figures. Professional artists could create a banner-exhibition for local jazz or arts festivals. Refugee's and migrants communities might create banners that depict icons from their cultures. Fashion design students could create a virtual cat walk of creative outfits along the streets. The possibilities for new and interesting community partnerships are limitless.

Drive by Art also extends beyond the streetscape and into Wellington's interior spaces. We are currently investigating hanging Drive by Art banners in swimming pools, recreation centres, libraries and public lobbies after the banners come down from lampposts. This creates even more links between the creative contributors and their local community.

How is Drive by Art innovative, successful, and community-minded?



Pukerua Bay School class at the installation of their banner

The urban landscape in Wellington has long been populated by pre-printed flag banners – hundreds of them – which appear on utility poles from Newtown to Oriental Bay, Lambton Quay to Karori. These are stock designs, primarily used to tell pedestrians and motorists about an upcoming festival, a new exhibition at Te Papa, or free summer concerts. Instead of unoriginal promotional images, *Drive by Art* lets young people paint scenes from their world, invites local artists to design bold geometric banners or colourful landscapes, allows groups and organisations to tell their visual messages.

This original art, carefully planned and painted, tells us a little more about what young creative people value, think about, and hope to celebrate in art and in the world. The banner designs by adult artists offer an opportunity for people in the urban environment to experience colourful, complex or engaging new works of art. This process, and the loftier motive behind *Drive By Art*, is to let our culture reflect itself. In that respect, *Drive By Art* offers an innovative and ubiquitous opportunity to look up from our daily routines, ponder a city full of interesting visual statements and reflect on Wellingtons' sense of place and cultural well-being.

Whether it involves a primary school class or a well-known portrait painter, *Drive By Art* is based almost entirely on the creative contribution of its participants. The banners displayed along city streets are each unique and distinct. *Drive By Art* has become a cost-effective gallery without walls: open to all and celebrating the expression and visual ideas of the participants. This is its greatest success.

How is Drive by Art a good and sensible thing to do?

Perhaps the best way to understand this project, and its effect on the community, is to listen to the people involved. Please see the attached appendix for a list of comments to better understand what *Drive by Art* has done in its first year.



A sample of banners painted by local artists

Appendix

Supporting comments from our participants

"It's nice to walk along Oriental Bay and discover original art by local children in the community. *Drive By Art* livens up the everyday environment, but often in subtle ways. It provides a spontaneous showcase for the visual arts in Wellington."

Sue Fuller, Yoga Instructor and Art Student

Drive By Art creates visual excitement and transforms the streetscape into a delightful, interesting experience. It proves that good art doesn't need to reside in galleries. It can be all around us. Because creativity, really, is all around us."

Stephanie Woodman, Local Painter and Art Instructor; founder, Art for Kids

"This project challenges people to work with a different approach and scale...*Drive By Art* is not the usual format for art-making or art exhibiting. New and interesting things happen as a result, and I have seen a lot of growth in the participating artists, and those who have tackled this creative challenge."

Marcel Baaijens, Community Arts Activist and founder, Art Compass

"We have plans to build on the *Drive by Art* initiative and involve other groups and creative efforts. Future banner projects will continue to enhance the Miramar area—to showcase not only the film industry, but the Miramar community past and present".

Allan Probert, Miramar Community Association.

"The artistic energy that echoes daily throughout the streets of Wellington constantly amazes me. Art in the public eye creates an atmosphere that we pride ourselves on. Public art is a vibrant way to light up our streets creatively by involving the entire community. Accessible, available, and reachable art creates a strong sense of community and reinforces our reputation as the 'Creative Capital'. *Drive by Art* is all of these things and more".

Carla Russell, New Zealand Affordable Art Show

The *Drive By Art* banners are a great use of Wellington's airspace! They make my life more colourful, and show how students and local artists can contribute to the city's character. It really does show how creative Wellington's people are."

J. B. Patel, owner and proprietor, Oriental Bay Dairy

"Since hitting the streets, the *Drive By Art* banners have generated all sorts of new ideas and discussions. It would be really cool to see a new series of jazz and music themed banners in the next year. The visual possibilities are unlimited."

Noel Meek, live music producer and publicist, Wellington International Jazz Festival

"I think the creative banners are a wonderful addition to the neighbourhood, and to any street in Wellington. It gives creative people of all ages, levels, and backgrounds, the opportunity to participate in the life of the community, and add something unique to the world around us."

Judith Newport, Oriental Bay Residents Association

"I've seen the banners all over town, and I think they are such a great idea! My students can't wait to start on their design!"

Sandy Moeke, Teacher, Discovery School (Whitby)

"These bright and artistic students found inspiration in Wellington's recent success at the Academy Awards. They responded in the classroom, and created an original banner for each Academy Award won by Wellington's Lord of the Rings film-makers. With *Drive by Art*, the students developed a unique celebration that takes their pride right onto the streets of our community."

Joyce Adam, Principal, Miramar North School

"*Drive by Art* is a great opportunity to turn the streets of Wellington into a gallery. The banners add colour, originality, and variety to the capital's streetscape, and give artists the chance and challenge to contribute to the city's creative buzz."

Mark O'Brien, Local artist and mural painter

"Resene is an avid supporter of art, design and colour in the community and is proud to be a major sponsor of *Drive by Art*. We fully support efforts to beautify our communities with works of art and public creativity. Resene see *Drive by Art*, and the use of strong bold colour, as the perfect ways to transform dull urban areas into exciting aspects of city life. Art, after all, enhances the spirit, identity and pride of our neighbourhoods and our neighbours alike."

Karen Warman, Resene Marketing Manager

"*Drive by Art* is a fantastic idea and one that provides incredible inspiration and pride for the students", she said. "There is an excitement at all levels, from the planning out of the banner, through to the creative process, and then when it hits the streets and flies high above Wellington".

Tanisha Fearon, Teacher, Pukerua Bay School

I think it's a fantastic idea and very creative. I like the lime green and the funny looking symbols we painted on our banner. I like the thought that it will be dangling right over Wellington for everyone to see.

Naomi Naveh, Pukerua Bay School Student

Our banner has great smooth soft colours, and the black lines make the pictures stand out. It's good to show things about us to the rest of Wellington. I like how the pictures represent us.

Clarrie Macklin, Pukerua Bay School Student