

Weekend Gold Coast Bulletin

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Art with Marina Saint Martin

■ How would you like to be jailed for a crime you did not commit, living in incarceration without hope of clearing your name? An art project, highlighting the efforts of lawyers and students who work to prove the innocence of the wrongly convicted, opens next week

Works of Conviction



It would be interesting to find out just how many great art show ideas occur during a casual chat over a cup of coffee.

That is certainly how the Coast's unique *Innocence* are project was born.

Lawyer Jason Murakami and gallery director Lorraine Pilgrim were discussing their common interest in art over cappuccinos. The conversation drifted towards the idea of painting to a specific theme and how few artists got the chance to work in themed group projects.

Then Jason started to talk about his professional passion, the Innocence Project, an organisation which fights for the rights of the wrongfully convicted. The talk then moved to how a group of artists would depict visual versions on the theme of the miscarriage of justice.

Thus, an unusual and important social issue art project, called *Innocence? Capturing the Wrongfully Convicted* was born.

The Innocence Project was founded in the US in 1992 by lawyers with the idea of helping the convicted innocent, using law students to do much of the research.

A Gold Coast group was set up Jason Murakami, Chris Nyst and Griffith University law academic Lynne Weathered.

The first local Innocence case - a bid to free a North Queensland man convicted of rape – was won with research done by Griffith University students. The university has since adopted the

Innocence Project into its curriculum. The idea of explaining and promoting this project via visual art immediately appealed to Pilgrim.

“I suggested the artists think about having a group show based around the theme of innocence, capturing in paint or in photography the issues of wrongful conviction, with each artist interpreting the theme in his or her own way.”

She included newspaper cuttings and information about the project and sent the idea to some 35 artists and the majority immediately agreed to participate. They were given six months to develop the theme, and the resulting art show will go on display at the Lorraine Pilgrim and Nyst Gallery, Southport, on Friday.



Guest artist will be photo artist, Mari Hirata, who has photographed Lynne Weathered for her artistic interpretation of the theme. Archibald finalist for 2009, Mike Chavez, has painted Jason Murakami as his freedom fighter.

Other artists taking part include Giles Alexander, Shayle Flesser, Sally Harrison, Lisa Lee, Trinity Leonard, Cal Mackinnon, Simon Mee, Kathy Mackey, Donna Malone, Deb Mostert, Hobie Porter, George Raptopoulos, Kirsten Reed, Simon Roots, Mel Simpson, Llewellyn Skye, David Smith, Rachel Smyth, Rebecca Stonehouse and Emma Theyers.

Lynne Weathered, director of the Griffith University Innocence Project, as well as co-chair of the International Committee, sees this art as having ‘the ability to help people see and feel things’ in a way in which the technicalities of the legal world may not be able to do.

“An art exhibition of this kind will allow for some of the emotion underlying a wrongful conviction to be brought to light,” she says. “It is hard to imagine the horror of being in prison for a crime you did not commit and living with the invisibility of your innocence. This art will provide a visible focus to the problem of wrongful conviction.”

Former High Court judge and chair of the Innocence Project Advisory Board, Mary Gaudron QC, will open the exhibition on Friday night.



“The task to replicate this diverse range of emotions the issue of wrongful conviction arouses, through a visual medium was a difficult one, says Jason Murakami. “But I believe the artists have excelled, and captured this very serious and important social justice issue.” Despite the potentially dark theme, many of the works are beautiful and positive. “When the artworks started to come in I found the artists had exceeded my best expectations,” says Pilgrim. “I found myself looking at the works and thinking ‘Yes! Yes! You’ve got it.’”

■ *Innocence? Capturing the Wrongfully Convicted* at Nyst Gallery, Southport, until August 25.