

Imagination Inspiration Improvisation

A Visual Arts Enquiry into Understanding Suicide

"We have pushed away art, fantasy, stories, traditions and spirituality from our books and our clinical rooms, thereby giving way to formulas and rationalism. In doing so, we have deprived science of its human experience and our research participants and patients of their true soul."

Erminia Colucci

An Experiential Workshop

conducted by

***Artist Mic Eales and
Dr Erminia Colucci***

(University of Melbourne, Australia)



The multiplicity of arts-based research practices express and communicate human experience through critical interpretation and contextualism in similar ways to storytelling. In this way art has the ability to contribute to knowledge and understanding through engagement with the imagination. Using creatively expressed *original voice* narratives and engagement with embodied ways of knowing (i.e. our emotional, intuitive, cultural and spiritual selves), a fluid vibrant process can be stimulated in order to convey meaning rather than factual information. During this workshop we will discuss, create and transform materials and ideas in order for them to take on new form and new meaning. This workshop is designed to stimulate and encourage participants, and an eventual audience, into re-examining their own attitudes, experiences, ideas and cultural perspectives relating to the issue of suicide. By recognizing the power of art to transform, insight can be gained into experiences that would otherwise remain hidden.

As an artist/researcher trying to make sense of my own 'lived experience' of suicide I began researching the issue by employing autoethnographical and narrative inquiry methods to investigate ways in which I could *speak* about suicide and my experience of it. As a teenager I made two attempts on my own life and became suicidal again a few months after receiving news of my brother's suicide in 2002. After reaching a crisis point I began to use my art and art practice (sculpture and printmaking) as vehicles for communicating what words often fail to do. In articulating and expressing my thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions through my art, I was able to focus and direct the intensity of my lived experiences in a way that neither written or verbal language has yet been able to replicate.

During the workshop, Dr Colucci and I will share and discuss our experiences of how art practice can be utilized as an introspective inquiring tool to help

make sense of and create meaning out of difficult and complex questions relating to suicide. We will also discuss our current cooperative/co-researcher project as an example of an interdisciplinary approach to understanding suicide from a variety of cultural and social perspectives. The aim of this workshop is to remind us all that we are more than just a body and a mind and that our humanness/soul/spirit needs to be heard, nurtured, (re) considered and acknowledged in academic research, therapeutic settings and in daily life.

Participants will learn to...

1. have a greater appreciation and understanding of art-based research.
2. gain insights into how art-based research can impact on an individual as a process of healing.
3. understand alternate ways of approaching research either as an individual or within an interdisciplinary collaboration.
4. talk about suicide-related issues in a creative and engaging way.

Anyone interested is welcome to attend, particularly mental health professionals, researchers, academics, artists, carers, educators or for those interested in alternative approaches to understanding suicide. However, it must be stressed that this is not a therapeutic workshop. Workshop duration will be about 3 hours plus tea break.



Mic Eales has a background in the arts that goes back to 1979 when he began training himself as a potter/fibre artist. He graduated with Honours in 2008 having majored in sculpture and handmade papermaking and is currently carrying out a PhD project on arts and suicide.

Dr Erminia Colucci is Lecturer/Research Program Coordinator at the Centre for International Mental Health (University of Melbourne), Chair of the non-profit organization Multicultural Women in Arts (MWA) and Vice-Chair of AISV taskforce against Domestic Violence. She began studying cultural aspects of suicide in her undergraduate studies (Italy) and hasn't stopped since...