An Illustrated Progressive Novel

One of the major challenges facing regional arts is the perceived intellectual and geographical divide between regional writers and visual artists. This project—a novel written in a progressive fashion by 15 writers and illustrated by 15 regional visual arts practitioners—is an innovative way, never attempted before in Australia, to gather the creative talents of the region’s writers and visual artists in one place. The end product will be an entertainment for the entire community of the Albury-Wodonga Region.

THE CONCEPT

The concept is for an illustrated novel to be written one chapter each in succession by fifteen writers (a ‘progressive’ novel) and then illustrated by fifteen artists from the border regions of NE Victoria and Southern NSW (Albury-Wodonga and environs). The cover design, created by visual artists, will incorporate the faces of all participants into its design.

AIMS

The border regions of NE Victoria and Southern NSW have a rich cultural fabric and vibrant artistic community. Unfortunately, the community is dispersed and fragmented, brought about by factors of geographic happenstance as in the case of the state boundaries, dispersed and generally medium- to small-sized population centres, limited markets as well as intellectual and conceptual differences between writers and visual artists. Yet, as a collective, all have much to offer to each other.

Given these conditions, there is a need to strengthen the community of writers and the community of visual artists, by creating links amongst each other and connections between the two.

The aim of the project is to combine the artistic potential of writers and visual artists in an innovative project that will result in long lasting inter-disciplinary links and a tangible publication. Collaboration on such a scale, across the art forms shall develop a sense of ‘artistic community’ in the region.

The strategy envisaged to achieve these aims is a collaborative effort of an illustrated novel, on such a scale and range of art forms never before attempted in Australia. Whilst innovative and ambitious in scope, the breadth of available talent ensures that it is achievable both in terms of the personal professional development of the contributing artists and in terms of a tangible outcome to the benefit of the general public.
THE PROCESS

Expressions of Interest to take part in the project will be called for in the local media. Indigenous, NESB and young writers and artists will be actively encouraged to be involved.

The main characters and a background will be work-shopped with the editor and the participating writers, then the writing will commence. Each writer will have one week. In that period they will write a chapter in their own voice. Having a deadline will add to the energy needed to sustain an interesting and inspiring plot-line. This chapter will be passed on to the next writer; each writer in sequence will read all the preceeding chapters before embarking on their own. The region, including the cities of Albury and Wodonga will be part of the scene, indeed one of the characters in the novel, showcasing the region for all readers.

Once the novel is completed (an expected 15 chapters and about 45,000 words), visual artists from the region will set about the next stage of the project. Each visual artist will receive a chapter to illustrate in their own style.

All contributors to the project will be reimbursed $50 for costs (paper, ink cartridges, art supplies etc).

Subject to funding the book will be published by Letao Publishing, a regional commercial publisher committed to supporting regional writing. If published, each contributor will receive at least one copy of the published work.

The process of plot development, writing and illustration will be captured in a still photo documentary.

OUTCOMES

The public outcome will be three-fold: (i) a published illustrated novel (subject to funding for the printing), (ii) an exhibition of the original artwork and (iii) a travelling exhibit on process and product.

The published illustrated novel will be the visually appealing and tangible end product of the project.

It is envisaged that the originals of the artwork together with a still photo documentary of the process will be displayed for the public in an exhibition to coincide with the launch. A selection of the artwork together with a selection of images from the still photo documentary will be combined into five A1-sized posters (laminated) to form the basis of an travelling exhibit. This permits the project to reach cultural and community institutions (museums/galleries, libraries, schools, community centres) even in smaller and dispersed communities of the region. It is anticipated that this travelling exhibit will tour the region for 18 to 24 months. Thereafter it will be donated to the National Library to add to the national collection.

A less tangible, but more significant outcome of the project and the processes involved will be the strengthening of the community of writers, the community of visual artists, and the links and connections between the two, which can only be of benefit to the future.

On an individual level it is expected that the participation in the project will expose the contributing writers and artists to a range of ideas and influences that can only further their own professional development and hopefully will ultimately advance their own careers and art forms. For some, it may be the first publication of their work and thus represent the first public step in their careers.
ARTISTS

Literary Editor.—Jane Downing has over 140 short stories and poems published in journals around the world. Her short story collection Searching for the Volcano was published in 1999. Her first novel, The Trickster, is due for release by Pandanus Books (ANU) in May 2003. She received a grant from the Literature Board of the Australia Council to finish a second novel. She was one of the editors of ReCollecting Albury Writing and New Albury Writing.

Technical Editor.—Dirk Spennemann has published creative writing (poetry and prose) plus a wide range of non-fiction and academic works. He has extensive editing experience in the academic arena. He was also an editor of ReCollecting Albury Writing and New Albury Writing.

Grants Manager.—Chris Pidd is the regional arts development officer of Murray Arts. He has extensive experience in arts development and administration.

Contributing writers.—The writers contributing to the project will be selected based on a call for expressions of interest. Selection criteria are the quality of their work, preparedness and ability for collaborative writing; and future development potential. In the selection of the final contributors the editors aim at ensuring that writers from indigenous and NESB backgrounds as well as young writers are represented.

Contributing artists.—The fifteen contributing artists will be selected based on a call for expressions of interest. In the selection of the final contributors the editors aim at ensuring that artists from indigenous and NESB backgrounds as well as young artists are represented. The cover will be designed by Karen Donelly, creator of the photographic portrait The Face of Albury as well as several photographic exhibitions.

THE PUBLISHER

Founded in 1999, Letao Publishing focuses on Literature, Literary History and the History of the Book in Australia and the Pacific. As a regional press Letao is committed to providing regional writers with an opportunity to publish their works. Recent examples of its publications are:

ReCollecting Albury Writing. Poetry and Prose from Albury & District 1859 to 2000 . ISBN 1 876940 00 X

Accounting for Terror. The Recollections of a Retrenched Bank Manager in Rural Australia by Graham Jackson ISBN 1 876940 05 0

An Iliad of Albury and Other Poems By John Farrell ISBN 1 876940 06 9

**TIMEFRAME**

The project has the following anticipated time line:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commencement of Project</td>
<td>11 May 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Call for expressions of interest</td>
<td>17 May 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Call for expressions close</td>
<td>30 May 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selection of Contributors</td>
<td>2 June 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writers workshop</td>
<td>7 June 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commencement of Writing</td>
<td>9 June 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completion of Writing</td>
<td>20 September 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop for illustrations</td>
<td>20 September 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commencement of Illustrations:</td>
<td>21 September 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completion of Illustrations</td>
<td>4 October 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camera-ready copy</td>
<td>6 October 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Launch/Publication</td>
<td>14 November 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commencement of travelling exhibit</td>
<td>1 January 2004</td>
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**FUNDING**

The funding for the project derives from several sources: The City of Wodonga, the NSW Ministry of the Arts Country Arts Support Programme, and Charles Sturt University. The editors will contribute a substantial portion of the required funds in kind.