



# Red Tape by Terra Art

**MERILYN COX**  
founder, Terra Art



Terra Art is a safe place for young people and an art and design skills studio. The idea came in response to the suicide crisis in the south-east of the state. I was working in Country Arts SA at the time and they let me do the project alongside principal artist Maria Filippow over nine months as a professional development opportunity. We chose the town of Millicent because it has a lot of inter-generational poverty.

It's got a large housing trust area and a high drug-using population. It's 50 kilometres to Mt Gambier and to get there you need a car and a licence and petrol which means there's this large group of young people feeling quite isolated.

The young people we see are really disenfranchised. Half of them should still be at school but the schools just can't cope with their issues so they're left to float. Trying to get help for young people is almost impossible. We had difficulty getting a health worker in the beginning but then when they came and saw us they said, 'Oh my God! These are the young people we've been trying to access for years and we just haven't ever been able to get them.'

We started off doing lino prints, very basic. And then for a photographic project we gave them disposable cameras for a week and what they came back with... well, you know,

funny stuff really. Pictures of bongos and things like that. So then we knew we should take them through the whole thing. Teach them about visual language and what makes a good image and take them on excursions. And the studio developed from there. For a lot of young people it's been the first thing they could call their own. It's very much their space and they're proud of it. The whole idea of teaching these skills is to give the young people a language so they can articulate the way they feel. They can produce images that reflect their lives and they feel heard. Everyone's a part of the studio process. It's very collaborative and they've been using very complex software programs. I was blown away by the public response to the *Red Tape* show but the best thing was at the end when one of the girls who'd been a part of it came up to me and said, 'Great. I've got rid of it now. Let's make something more positive next!'

**CAROLINE HAMMATT**  
project coordinator



When Marilyn first started the studio, I was doing a multimedia course at the TAFE in Mount Gambier and she asked my lecturer if anyone in the class was interested in helping out at Terra Art with computer skills. So I came in and I ended up being mentored by Ian Corcoran, a projection artist from Melbourne. He helped me with editing programs like Final Cut Studio. That's when I started working on the *Red Tape* project.

It was basically a slide show that was a combination of text, drawings and photos. Some had been manipulated. And the young people did the soundtrack. The plan was to project the images on this huge water tower in town. And there was going to be another show projected onto an old historic building in Robe which is a small town about 80 kilometres away.

We got this thumping great big projector and a scissor lift to take it up so we could project right on the top of the tower. It was quite an amazing site actually. None of us knew how it was going to go which was pretty scary. It had been a fairly fluid concept to start with but it went off really well. Millicent is renowned for being cold and wet so we'd organised for the local Lioness Club to have free soup on hand. Quite a big crowd turned up, probably 300 people and because we had some mind boggling technical hitches, people had time to mingle and drink the soup and it created a very nice and unusual feeling here.

These kids are normally on the outer in this community. They don't fit in but a lot of people were really moved by their work. They came up after the show and said how sad it was. Which is interesting because we'd already tried to put quite a positive spin on the work before it went up! People didn't realise that these kids face the sort of things they do. There were offers of help. So yes, it was a very good response. And the kids, most of them got a real sense of achievement out of it and were proud because their families did come out and support it. One of the young people actually said that it was the first time she had nearly all her family together. I think there was only one auntie who didn't show up.

At the moment we're working on *A-Lure* which ties in with Visionary Images in Melbourne. *A-Lure* is very much about mobile phone content and trying to engage the public. We've got a big question in our window that says, 'What's your favourite thing to do with other people?' There's a text number and an email address and as we get the answers we're putting them on post-it notes and sticking them in the window in a big collage. It's looking good and people stop and look in the window and occasionally we'll go out and we'll ask them the question and put their answer in the window.

Most people in the town would know about us now and that wasn't always the case. Hopefully it will all come together.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

Terra Art participants, *Red Tape* projection on the old customs house, Robe, May 2006

*Imitation* created by Terra Art

*Red Tape* projections on the Millicent water tower