

Young Starlets

Victorian schools inspire the Melbourne art world



Cassie Hardy with her work "Starlet"

Top Arts VCE 2008

Standing among great artworks from the brushes of John Black, Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton and Sydney Nolan can be a humbling experience, but for 61 talented art students it is the thrill of a lifetime.

Until mid June, over 70 works of art from Victoria's best young artists attending government, independent and Catholic schools will hang alongside Australia's great artists at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) – Australia's oldest public art museum.

Top Arts 2008 attracted thousands of entrants using a range of mediums, including painting, photography, drawing, printmaking, ceramics, animation, works on paper and an installation. The themes range from the force of nature to relationships with family and friends, technological development, exploration through self-portraiture, fantasy and folklore.

According to the gallery's Coordinating Curator, Merren Ricketson, the selection panel was delighted with the creativity, skills and ideas that emerged from art classrooms across the state.

"A photograph captures a story in an instant"

"For 15 years *Top Arts VCE* has given Victorian art students a way to explore current themes in society and a voice to convey their attitudes and ideas to the public.

"In turn, the NGV becomes a learning site for students and plays a crucial role in supporting and strengthening the links between VCE students, the arts industry and the community," Ms Ricketson said.

Princes Hill photographers

The exhibition opened on 25th March in an atmosphere of high excitement and for 18-year-old photographic artist, Cassie Hardy, opening night was incredible.

"It was pretty amazing because there were so many people there," she told *Education Today*. "It was a really bizarre experience to see so many people looking at your work."

Her artwork, entitled *Starlet*, is an outstanding gelatin silver photograph, depicting 1930s' Hollywood glamour. Her friend, Erin, was the subject and the two girls spent many hours on photographic shoots before Cassie disappeared into the dark room at Princes Hill Secondary College in Carlton North. Not really "into drawing and painting", Cassie Hardy says that she didn't realise her artistic abilities until Year 8, when she discovered photography.

"I love the realness of it," she said. "A photograph captures a story in an instant."

To add a real taste of nostalgia to her Hollywood theme, she used her Grandfather's medium format 3¼-inch film camera. "It's one of those old boxy ones you look down [on] from the top," she explained.

She also used her school's digital Nikon SLR camera and thanks Princes Hill photography teacher, Julie Davies, for her help in the dark room.

Fellow Princes Hill student and photographer, Gene Drendel's, foggy landscape is also featuring in the exhibition and Ms Davies is thrilled.

She attributes the success to tons of hard work,



Starlet and a moody piece from Gene Drendel



dedication, determination and experimentation with different effects and to Princes Hill Secondary College's extensive arts programme.

"There is a lot of dedicated studio space at Princes Hill for all mediums: printmaking, ceramics, photography, multi-media, wood and metal, so there are a broad array of techniques and skills for the students to learn from Year 7 up," she explained.

The students are also encouraged to seek help and assistance outside the school and with Princes Hill located at Carlton North, close to the national and commonwealth galleries as

well as contemporary art spaces, inspiration and support is not far away.

Ms Davies is sure that being able to visit so many galleries makes a big difference to a student's awareness of what is possible in the arts.

"A lot of the students come here with a good understating of the arts, whether that's through the ability to go to exhibitions or that some of their parents are involved in the arts as well," she said.

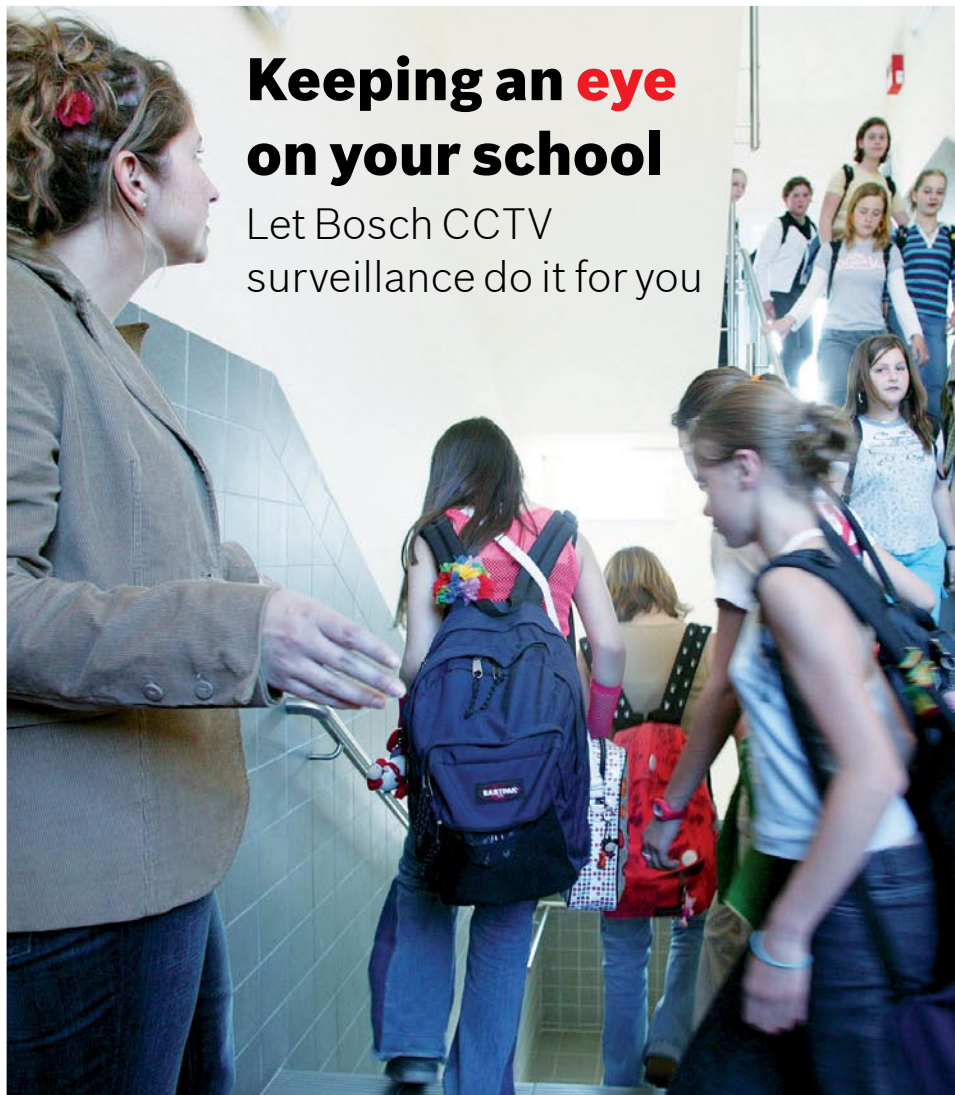
While photography will always be a big part of their lives, both Cassie Hardy and Gene Drendel have veered away from art (for now) to study science at university.

People's Choice Award

The Top Arts show is a popular public event with a grand total of 192,818 people visiting the gallery last year. Part of the appeal may be the *Goldman Sachs JBWere People's Choice Award*, which gives the public a chance to vote for their favourite artwork. As a result, the art departments of the top three schools whose exhibitors obtain the most votes receive a cash prize.

The Tops Arts exhibition is on display at the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia in Federation Square, City of Melbourne, until 14th June.

See www.ngv.vic.gov.au



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