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Portable Zine Maker Kit, created by Tessa Rapaport and Karl Logge of Makeshift (www.makeshift.org)



One of Rapaport and Logge's portable office objects.



Nic Low, co-director 2007 NYWF.



The Voiceworks editorial committee work on Nanoworks.

National Young Writers' Festival :: Fresh Air, Business Cards & The Odd Hicky

By **Madeleine Hinchy**
NSW | 02.10.2007

Writers tend to be solitary creatures. The stereotypical writer sits at a desk staring hopelessly at a typewriter, consuming poisonous quantities of coffee and cigarettes. Suddenly, they stop banging their head against their desk and find inspiration. Alternatively, they head off to a pub and find it in a lonely bottle of vodka.

This is an exaggeration but writers do spend a lot of time inside, alone, staring at a computer screen often in a pair of dog eared pyjamas. The **National Young Writers' Festival (NYWF)** gets writers out of bedrooms and out into the world.

The **NYWF** is held in Newcastle as part of the annual **This Is Not Art** festival. Over four days, writers, publishers, performers and other interested parties talk about the nitty gritty of being a writer. There are workshops, panels, spoken word performances and the **Zine and Independent Press Fair**.

It's an exciting time to be in town as **TINA** features other major events including **Electrofringe** and **Sound Summit**. The city is packed to capacity, overrun with eager intellectuals and creative creatures.

Once you attend **TINA** you are likely to find yourself hooked. It's not just the intellectual events that gets people going but also the wild night program at venues such as the **Festival Club**.

The 2007 co-director of the **NYWF**, **Nic Low**, is one of many that became committed to the festival ethos. "I came in 2004 and it completely blew my mind. I had never had that much stimulus in my life!"

Low is involved in a wide range of arts practices from writing to installation art. He claims that a multidisciplinary focus is one of the interesting things about **TINA**. "We don't quarantine the festival. In the programme we don't specify which events fall under what category, you have writers turning up to **Electrofringe** events and sound artists turning up to writing."

TINA is also about allowing aspiring artists and writers to get a sense of their potential career. One innovative method the directors devised to facilitate this was the **Open Office**. For three days, the editorial team of Melbourne-based publication **Voiceworks** set up in Newcastle's Civic Park. Armed with one laptop and a set of ingeniously modified objects created by the artists **Tessa Rapaport** and **Karl Logge**, the team worked to put together **Nanoworks**, an anthology of the 2007 **NYWF**.

Rapaport and **Logge**, had taken antique suitcases, typewriters and other pieces and adapted them to create travelling workspaces. Suitcases became portable zinemakers kits or work cubicles and a picnic table and a BBQ became desks.

The editorial team had only those three days to put together the publication from submissions they received before and during the festival. Their office had no walls and no shelter, and provided complete and transparent access to their processes of editing, writing and compiling. Despite concerns that the editorial crew would find the environment disruptive, everything went like clockwork. The editors were intensely productive and managed to clock off at five everyday. Writers came and went borrowing mobile materials such as the **Zine Makers Kit** or a typewriter on a trolley before going and sitting in a quiet corner of the park to put together something for submission.

The publication was done in time for release at the Sunday **Zine Fair** with the editors achieving in days what they would normally do in months, proving that while writers might like to consider themselves as solitary creatures, they are able to interact with the outside world and still get work done!

This sense of adapting your notions of productivity and sustainability was central to **Open Office's** concept. The idea originated several years ago when **Logge** and **Rapaport** were living in a small apartment in inner city Sydney. They were struggling to work and live in the same space so began taking their work to a nearby park. Being in the open made them reconsider what it was they really needed to work.

The ability to meet and engage with people like **Rapaport** and **Logge** is all part of the experience. Part of the attraction of the event is also the potential for networking, but this was one of the contentious topics of the festival.



Open Office's 'Reading Room,' made by Tessa Rapaport and Karl Logge.

There was a lot of debate as to whether it was a necessary evil or an evil at all. **Nic Low** says that he thinks that the process of meeting and greeting people at **NYWF** shouldn't be ascribed a label as 'networking.'

"We want people to come with embryos of ideas, to be able to share and connect with other people who are doing similar stuff or who will challenge them. Hopefully, people go away with 50 new names of people they love and admire, a whole bunch of phone numbers and emails and maybe the odd hicky!"

Whether you came back sporting a hicky, some sunburn or a suitcase of zines, the **NYWF** was a fantastic excuse to get out of the house and into some sunshine.

For more info on the **National Young Writers Festival**, visit: www.youngwritersfestival.org or for **TINA**: www.thisisnotart.org.



Tessa Rapaport and Karl Logge from Makeshift [Image: Madeleine Hinchy]

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CREATIVE ORGANISATION PROFILE: National Young Writers Festival (NYWF)



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