

# The Art House: Emily's Report

Wesley Rātā Village, May 2021



## Introduction

I have been running an art studio space for village residents and other keen locals every Friday afternoon for the last five weeks (starting from April 23rd), in half of the former “Daycare” building (most recently the EasyBuild site office). The space has been open from 1pm to 3pm for anyone to pop in and have a look around, a chat, share some afternoon tea and perhaps participate in a creative activity of their own choosing.

## The initial plan:

I knew we had some artists living here at the village who were in need of a creative space, and others in our surrounding community who were also interested. Creating a shared communal space where people can connect with each other socially and have the freedom to express themselves aligns with many of our guiding touchstones for the village, such as mutual exchange, learning, and local orientation. The richness and joy that the arts can bring to people’s lives is well-documented. The intention was that the activities and structure of the sessions would be guided by the participants themselves, and that it would develop organically as more people became involved. The residents’ voices would always be central.

A pop-up trial was a fast and easy way to test out this seed of an idea, find out what worked, and make some great connections while having fun and learning along the way!



*Front entrance before Easybuild vacated*

## The Building:

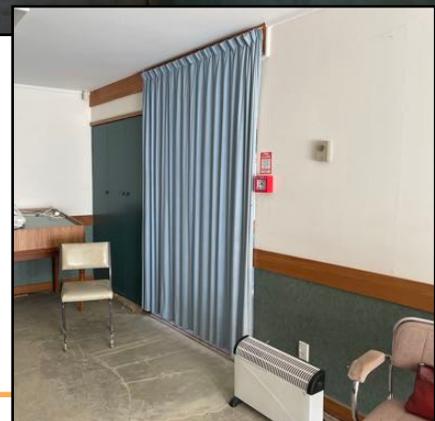
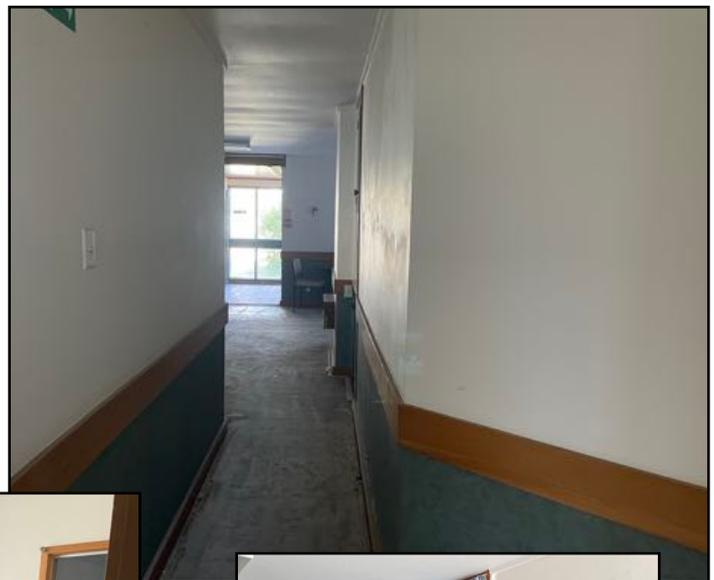
Apart from its recent use as a site office, this building has been sitting empty for a long time. Part of it is briefly accessed on Monday mornings by the Team Naenae Trust gardening group who use it to have their tea break while tending the community garden at the front of the property.

The “downhill” side of the building is currently closed off. The side we have been using for the art studio is uncarpeted, with concrete floors and in a state of some disrepair. There is currently no hot water or internet access. There are some small old fan and radiator heaters attached to the walls, and a good-sized kitchen. A few small rooms lead off from a narrow corridor, as well as three accessible toilets, some storage cupboards and a “laundry” with two tubs.

As a stand-alone structure with its own easily-accessible entrance from Rātā Street, this building has much potential to become a community resource for both onsite residents and locals alike. The current “bare bones” state of the building was a good blank canvas to start experimenting to see what we could create.



*Ross brings Garth for a sneak peek*



## Week One: Friday 23 April

**Eric, Garth** and **Johannes** came along today and introduced themselves over a cup of tea. We chatted about ideas and shared experiences of creative lives lived!

These three will have much to offer to a space like this - Johannes is a former tutor at The Learning Connexion, and Eric and Garth are both very talented lifelong artists.

We didn't do any art today, but everyone seemed excited about this new project.



*Rearranging the furniture - and adding a second-hand lightbox!*

## Week Two: Friday 30 April

**Garth** was joined by his brother **Paul** today, along with **Eric** and **Johannes** again.

We had a great chat and learned more about Eric's long and varied career in the visual arts – from designing advertising and tourism posters, to painting commissioned portraits and many years of teaching at the Wellington Arts Society and other organisations. He is a very accomplished portrait painter and teacher. Eric is still kept busy painting commissions for clients who seek him out to create portraits of their loved ones, and is happy to lend his friends a hand with learning some tips and tricks, but is not wanting to teach structured lessons at the village – it is more a chance for him to have a space to do his own work. That said, he is a wonderful mentor to his next-door neighbour, Ray, and another local Hutt friend, who are both very keen to learn. Eric has a lot of great experience and advice about running community arts spaces, and will be a fantastic person to have involved as this project develops.

Johannes and I discussed further potential connections between The Learning Connexion and Wesley, and our shared interest in stop motion animation. After Johannes had left, Garth told me he's always been interested in this too - and is particularly fond of Wallace and Gromit films! He said his love of cartoons and puppetry ties into this. (I must get him some modelling clay!)

## Week Three: Friday 7 May

**Nic Drew-Crawshaw** and **Hannah Vollebregt** came in the morning for another discussion and look around. [\*See separate proposal from Trade School Industries]

### Attendees:

**Johannes**  
**Chris Barrant**  
**Eric**  
**Ray**  
**Tui**  
**Lesley**  
**Annette**  
**Frances**  
**Carol**  
**Ira**



(The Guiding Group also visited the art studio this day).

### Some art supplies we added:

Lightbox  
Modelling Clay  
Paint  
Pencils



Village resident **Frances** has always wanted to learn watercolour painting, so is keen to attend organised lessons on this. She also has some great ideas about how the residents could use the space in future for a variety of gatherings.

**Lesley Nicholls** also lives at the village, and after coming along to watch some of the activities, she popped back up to her villa to bring along her beautiful woven blanket to show us. This was made by sewing together a selection of samples she had made over the years, as a gift for her grandchild. Lesley was part of the **Art Weaves Studio** for many years, based in Thorndon (in what is now the PM's house), and created a stunning range of wall hangings, murals and clothing throughout her life. She collaborated with the artist Gordon Crook for many years, and has artwork in the Dowse and Te Papa collections.



Our lovely volunteer, **Carol**, brought along her own paints, brushes and paper, set herself up on a little table, and happily painted away the afternoon, ending up with a beautiful watercolour that she displayed on the wall. Carol is very crafty, and has many interesting hobbies such as growing bonsai trees, flower arranging, and scrapbooking, and already has a great rapport with many of our residents and visitors. She will have much to offer to the group. Carol and resident **Vicki** were

overjoyed to bump into each other again after not having seen each other for the last few years.

Village residents **Ira** and **Annette** had a great time creating prints with the materials that Johannes brought along. They are both keen to return, and would enjoy continuing a variety of organised activities.



**Chris Barrant** came to visit after meeting Ira at another community art activity that same morning down at Naenae Library. Ira had told him about what we were doing, and he came to

check it out! Chris would be very keen to run a weekly project that culminates in a “zine” that tells a story of the village and/or its residents (this is just one of his many ideas). Chris is an artist himself, and is skilled in running community art workshops.



*Johannes, Eric and Chris admire Eric's portrait album on his phone.*

**Johannes** is keen to teach classes at the village, and is also interested in renting studio space for himself here. He has a lot of equipment, including a large printing press, so would need two or three rooms to accommodate all of this. The printing press and some of

his other equipment would be available for others to use, with supervision. Johannes also has contacts at The Learning Connexion who would be interested, both in shared art spaces, and possible tutoring.

**Tui** attended art school in Gisborne, and later took adult drawing classes at Parkway College in Wainuiomata. He said he has done many drawings and paintings throughout his life. Tui's cousin may still have some of his artworks, although he threw out a lot over the years, and when moving house.

Tui likes to sit in the bus stop sometimes and think about painting the view – particularly the sunset over the valley. He enjoyed looking through the art book I brought along to the studio, and was considering doing a drawing to add to the collage of the village, or to share with the group. His eyes have been giving him trouble, so he says perhaps after he's been to the eye specialist he may be able to get back into drawing. But he is keen to support the project and come along, even if he does not end up doing art. He likes to take things slow and have time to build up to getting actively involved in something like this.



**Francine** came along on week three to join in the printmaking activity after hearing about the art studio at this week's coffee group. It turns out she is a talented ceramicist, and had a great discussion with Johannes all about this.

## Week Four: Friday 14 May

[Conversations on Mon 10/5/21 at the Ageing Well Coffee Group:]

**“Snow”** – has links to Foxton, Time Cinema, National Film Unit, Miramar, and Peter Jackson, wants to organise a film screening about the Wahine (heritage footage) at the village.

I would be very keen to help him organise this. Snow plans to come to the studio on a Friday sometime soon.

Snow used to make furniture inlaid with paua – intricate designs and painted layers; also told me he carved taiaha and taught others these skills. He worked at the National Publicity Studios making dioramas to publicise different parts of the country, and models for the Dominion Museum. He described to me a flickering strobe light effect for firelight - a scene cut in half to give the illusion of depth(?) Cows in foreground and background; a forest fire demo(?) using a tilted grid of candles... he is full of amazing stories and I can't wait to see him at the studio!

I also spoke with **Grant** on this day – he is happy for us to share the “middle” space with the gardening group. Grant and his wife Leila have both been unwell – but Leila may like to get involved in the craft activities when she's feeling better as she runs a weekly craft group for Team Naenae Trust at Naenae Library.

**Garth** said he's really pleased to see this happening – he has felt for a long time that the village needed something like this, as there are “all these people sitting inside by themselves” and they could be doing more – he loves the idea of people coming together and having to chance to be creative. There is so much to write about Garth I will need another whole document. Many people have noticed a marked change in him since he began engaging in village activities.



**Week Five: Friday 21st May**



*Annette with Carol, who brought along her bonsai kowhai tree to share with the group - the subject of her painting from the previous week!*



*Eric's signed watercolour mixing demonstration that he gifted to Carol along with one of his special brushes.*



*Tui with his golden antelope horn and the special lined bag that he had woven for it!*