FALL 2014
HELLO IN THERE, HELLO OUT THERE
Hello In There/Hello Out There
A project organized and facilitated by Common Weal Community Arts
Curated by Wendy Peart, Curator of Education and Community Outreach

SEPTEMBER 2 TO 7, 2014
Reception: Sunday, September 7, 1:00-3:00 pm

A Conversation with Chrystene Ells
by Wendy Peart, Curator of Education and Community Outreach

Can you tell me about how the Hello In There/Hello Out There project came to be?

Chrystene Ells: I had spent several years caring for my dad until he passed away and had learned what life is like in some residential homes for the elderly and terminally ill. Like most people, I had not been aware of this world until my own parent entered it. I saw widespread isolation, depression, boredom and disengagement among the residents – the facility’s resources being stretched so thin as to only be able to provide physical care. When my dad died, I missed visiting the home and hoped to work in a creative capacity with seniors.

In 2012, Gerry Ruecker, from Common Weal Community Arts, proposed a year-long residency. At our first meeting, we shared our experiences of the final stages of our parents’ lives and brainstormed for an arts program to engage seniors. We talked at length about the passive nature of activities in homes – that the residents
are communicated to instead of with and how important the sense of connection is that comes from being truly heard. So we began with the idea of engaging residents and inviting the sharing of stories by saying, “Hello In There” (inspired by the John Prine song).

Integral to the project was providing the participants the opportunity to tell their own story, in their own voice, sharing their stories with the outside world and allowing them to say, “Hello Out There” back.

It has been said that art has a remarkable ability to trigger memory response. Did you find this to be true, and if so, can you elaborate on an instance when this was the case?

This is absolutely our experience, without exception. For example, one woman in her mid-nineties saw pictures of a one-room schoolhouse among the images we supplied. She began to recount her experience of attending a prairie schoolhouse. She ended up building a Memory Box about a specific moment: as she was sitting in school looking out the window at the wheat field outside school grounds, she saw a little boy coming across the field. She realized it was her four year old brother, who had walked the five miles from the farm to the school. As she worked on the box, she began to talk about her little brother, how he was always cold and had fallen ill later that year. His flu turned to pneumonia, and he died. She remembered his body being laid out on the living room table. She was one of 14 children. It was a very sad time for her family but her mother barely had time to grieve the loss of her son. This was something the artist had not thought about for many years.
Welcome to our Concert

I wasn’t a good student in school—all that took place. But the most exciting time of the year was Christmas concert time.

It began with dances in the hall to raise money for Santa presents, the whole family came to the dance. The walls were lined with dishes when the young kids got tired they went to sleep on the tops of the desks with coats as padding.

We were taught to dance this way.

Then we figured our father to put the stage in the middle so we could practice the stage. Someone told us to put the dolls to hold the stage. The stage was built in the barn. So some time in the middle of December we would get the stage. So’s would blow our minds.

The teacher must have gone through half this time of year.

Every Monday had something to do with singing songs. One of the most important was the piano for us and we learned every practice. Mary Boyle was a wonderful pianist and pianist.

One teacher, Mrs. Neeve, had the ability to control the chalkboard, making a huge blackboard. We could sing songs while she turned the pages. Vera is now a well-known painter.

Another teacher, John Walker, helped us sing our carols in a box. It was so

Appealing to have him on our side. One of the best teachers ever.

Santa came to all our concerts, one of the most popular of the district. One little boy said:

Santa asked, “What did you see?”

He replied, “All the kids, those are his boots.”

May God bless one home schools and all those who attended them.
Hello In There/Hello Out There is being exhibited at Dunlop Art Gallery. What does this mean to the participants?

From day one, the participants understood that there would be a public exhibition at a Regina gallery of the Memory Boxes and Life Books. They were also told that this was optional, and that they did not have to display the work. I had expected some participants to be shy about showing their Memory Boxes, but as it turned out, every single artist was eager to share their work. If there is one thing that the participants agreed on, it is that the way of life they knew as children is incomprehensible to those who have come after, and that they largely feel forgotten, misunderstood, or disregarded by young people. Like anyone, the Hello In There artists want to be remembered, acknowledged, and understood. They want to reach out and touch others, they want to share and connect. This exhibition at Dunlop Art Gallery allows them to give us the gift of their wisdom, to project their voices, experiences and emotions from their own recovered memories, from behind the locked doors of the residential facilities where many of them now live away from the world, from the depths of their full hearts.

Special thanks goes to Rowan Pantel and Berny Hi who also worked on this project.

**Artist Biography**

Chrystene Ells is a filmmaker, puppetmaker, performer, and interdisciplinary artist who lives in Regina.
FUNDERS

PARTNERS
Al Ritchie Health Action Centre, Regina
Regina Senior Citizen’s Centre, Regina
Golden Prairie Home, Indian Head
Echo Lodge, Fort Qu’Appelle

CREDITS
CHRYSTENE ELLS and Hello In There/Hello Out There participant Hilda Swallow with her memory box. Photo: Gerry Ruecker
CHRYSTENE ELLS and Hello In There/Hello Out There participant Hilda Swallow with her memory box. Photo: Gerry Ruecker
PAT SHAW, Violetta School Christmas Concert, 2014, memory box
Photo: Courtesy of Common Weal Community Arts
Central Gallery & Mediatheque  
2311 - 12th Avenue

**Hours**
Monday through Thursday  
9:30 am - 9:00 pm  
Friday 9:30 am - 6:00 pm  
Saturday 9:30 am - 5:00 pm  
Sunday 12:00 pm - 5:00 pm  
*Closed Statutory Holidays*

Sherwood Gallery  
6121 Rochdale Boulevard

**Hours**
Monday 9:30 am to 6:00 pm  
Tuesday 9:30am to 9:00 pm  
Wednesday 9:30am to 9:00 pm  
Thursday 9:30 am to 6:00 pm  
Friday 9:30 am to 6:00 pm  
Saturday 9:30 am to 5:00 pm  
Sunday 12:00 pm to 5:00 pm  
*Closed Statutory Holidays*

Office  
2311-12th Avenue

**Hours**
Monday through Friday

Dunlop Art Gallery researches and presents a diverse range of contemporary artworks, and promotes visual literacy through activities that include exhibitions, programs, publishing and collecting. For more information, please visit our website, www.dunlopartgallery.org.

**FREE ADMISSION**
The Dunlop Art Gallery is wheelchair accessible.

Want to know more about Dunlop exhibitions and events? Subscribe to our E-blast service and receive information on upcoming programming 4-5 times annually.

Email dunlop@reginalibrary.ca to be added to our E-blast list.