

## Evergreen

(An environmental Art & Storytelling project involving, SEASONS mental health and well being service, Redhall Walled Garden and Jupiter Artland.)

In Autumn 2013 as coordinator of SEASONS mental health and wellbeing service I was invited to be involved in a focus group at Jupiter Artland to help develop new learning resources, specifically, ones which could enhance the visitor experience of an adult audience who may have little formal art education and additional support needs.

An exhibit we focused on was Nathan Coley's "In Memory" a sculpture resembling a small, private cemetery, enclosed by tall concrete walls and overhung by a striking looking dead tree. The image of death, the clinical nature of the enclosure and tidy stones prompted me to think about the way we neatly bury our loved ones and mark their passing. I looked at the living woodland round about, a vibrant habitat and thought about the various myths of the tree of life whilst considering how we honour a life and the significance of what we remember...

At this moment, although I didn't know yet, the Evergreen project was conceived.

In May 2014 a member of SEASONS passed away leaving the service a legacy & it was decided to fund an Art project in his memory which would involve storytelling, visual art and nature. As part of the experience an enduring digital memory would be created to share with a wider audience.

After much consideration a template was created for the community project which would allow for a variety of contributions and ensure a meaningful participative experience for everyone involved.

The following proposal was submitted to Jupiter Artland:

In honour of Tom Miller a member of SEASONS who passed away leaving the project a legacy we've been inspired to celebrate his memory and the memory of people who may no longer be physically present in our lives, but have shaped us and contribute to who we are.

As a starting point: Nathan Coley's "In memory" considers how we honour a life, the dead tree overhanging the confined concrete space suggests what may be within, reminiscent of a family plot, a space for private reflection. It presents us with a contained reduction of what was once vital, marked by tributes in stone.

### Remembering:

Memory holds a living trace of someone or something lost, but is subject to the alchemy of consciousness, changing in time and place, a fragile, organic, transitory reflection.

### Recovering:

Experience of loss is messy, visceral and stirs our deepest emotions. We may need to compartmentalise thoughts and feelings in order to carry on, but loss cannot always be contained and upwelling emotions can affect us in surprising and unpredictable ways, leaving us feeling broken.

Recovery is a term often used in relation to mental health and wellbeing. The idea of recovering a part of the self which has been damaged or lost and the ability to live well.

### Honouring and celebrating:

The living woodland around Jupiter is a beautiful natural space and where we would like to create our celebration of life and those who have touched our lives.

The tree of life, Ygdrasil, has roots deep in the earth and branches which stretch towards the stars.

Each growing tree symbolises life and we would like to dress them in age old tradition, this process will be filmed to create a digital memory with the intention of sharing this as part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival in 2016. With a screening under the stars at Jupiter.

We'd like to plant a sapling for every mature tree we dress, to contribute to the cycle of life and renewal of the woodland.

We will visit seasonally and each season there will be two visits. The first to allow the group to be in the space explore, observe, feel and find the tree we will be working with, before returning to create art works/ symbols, with which we will decorate our chosen tree. The process will begin in July 2015 (continue in September, November January, February and finish in March 2016.)

After producing the original proposal SEASONS teamed up with SAMH's, Redhall Walled Garden project.

Initial workshops with the Redhall service focused on storytelling and making art. Participants from the two well being services shared stories and explored creatively together making space for new friendships. Both services have since enjoyed visiting and exploring Jupiter Artland together.



### **Art and Games at Redhall Walled Garden May & June 2015**

September 2015 it was agreed that the saplings to be planted would be conifers to create a Pinetum. Nicky Wilson, the owner of Jupiter Artland, had a number of antique tree stake labels from a Pinetum and wished to re-create this in the grounds of Bonnington House. Planting conifers fitted well with the project as most people, in current times, understand celebratory tree dressing in the context of Christmas tradition.



## **Tree Planting February 2016**

In January 2016 the name Evergreen was chosen as, like Patrick Geddes' Evergreen publication, where only four copies were produced each corresponding to a Season, our project beginning in Summer and ending in Spring has inspired creativity and environmental renewal.

Friendships have been made, trees planted, Art created, knowledge shared and there are more stories to come.



**Tree dressing in the woodland at Jupiter Artland December 2015**

Jane Mather