



Pictured: Tan Hua, collaborative performance with Megan Keating (Asialink Visual Arts resident) & Mei Li, Taiwan, 2007

Strong cultural ties

Melbourne University strengthens its ties with Asia with the continued success of the Asialink Arts Residency Program, as DAREN POPE discovers.

Traditionally Australia's cultural interests have been in the UK and Europe and nowhere has that been more evident than in the arts. For some years now, that's been changing.

Since it was established in 1991 the Asialink Arts Residency Program has been sending Australia artists to Asian countries, fostering stronger relationships through the 'universal language of artistic expression'.

The Asialink success story is directly related to the support shown by Melbourne University. Not only is the organization housed at Sydney Myer Asia centre on campus but Asialink receives half of its annual funding from Melbourne University coffers. That strong bond in turn has been reciprocated through a number of education and language programs.

Georgia Sedgwick coordinates the Asia visual arts residency program at Asialink. She says the organization was founded in the visual arts, but these days has a pretty broad base.

"We do a whole heap of other activities. There's a corporate public program section, an education section and there's the arts."

Asialink's Education Foundation provides schools and teachers with a range of services designed to engage young Australians with Asia through their studies.

In many ways the growth and strength of Asialink represents a shift in cultural focus for Australia.

Sedgwick says there are very practical reasons for this cultural realignment.

"It's taking advantage of the fact that half the world's population lives in Asia, it's right on our


doorstep," she says. "Yet in Australia we don't necessarily have a very sophisticated understanding of the many cultures there."

That's where the Asialink Arts residency programs step in.

For the majority of grant recipients, the residency is their first extended visit to the host country and a radical departure from their own culture.

Sedgwick says it's a two way street.

"It gives them connection to networks in Asia that can be ongoing. Quite often people end up going back several times in their lives and form an ongoing relationship," she says. "They tell their friends about it so the networks expand and expand."

Applications for the 2008 Asialink Arts residencies are now open.  www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au

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