



## **PRESS RELEASE:**

**'United in Diversity' Finding the extraordinary in the ordinary.**

**Toi Ora Live Art presents a Photography Exchange Exhibition from Salzwedel in Germany. The touring exhibition 'Portraits of a Town' was produced by GRIPS, a work and rehabilitation organisation in collaboration with the Centre for Social Psychiatry, ZSP Salzwedel.**

**Toi Ora exhibits 'Portraits of a Town' - GRIPS exhibits 'A Day in the Life'**

Universally people who experience mental health issues are still discriminated against and viewed with some hesitation. This exchange exhibition challenges and questions these perceptions whilst suggesting that by looking at and celebrating the commonalities of the human experience and not our differences than society will be better off for all.

"The exhibitions are about the fact that people are not that different in many ways. Differences are also about diversity and fullness of being, art and culture, and something to be celebrated and acknowledged, not shunned or feared." Erwin van Asbeck, General Manager of Toi Ora Live Art Trust also states that, "There are still strange perceptions about mental health in the community and people do find themselves on the fringes of society as a result."

Six artists from Toi Ora and ten from GRIPS, all of whom have varying degrees of photographic experience, are featured in this exhibition. 'A Day in The Life' artist Bridgitte Naera, 40, says her photos represent the things she no longer takes for granted in life, "Most of my photos are of the everyday, simple things in my life, but it's these things that represent the stability and consistency I now have, "This is the thing I'm most proud of in my journey so far," she says. 'A Day In The Life' is currently exhibited in ZSP Salzwedel.

Mr van Asbeck says the exhibition aims to raise awareness surrounding mental health perceptions, and is all about "finding the extraordinary in the ordinary"

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“United in diversity“ is a motto of the European Union, a title that also reflects the microcosm of the Hanseatic town of Salzwedel.

The ‘Portraits of a Town’ exhibition portrays the many characteristics of Salzwedel, not only the façade of buildings, the streets and local environment, but more importantly the people who live there and their lives and professions.

It is the result of six months work by a group of ten photographers who attend GRIPS. - Lead by Dr. Nicolas Nowack, the project encouraged participants to interview and connect with the local inhabitants and business owners, in so doing helping them to overcome personal anxiety whilst gaining confidence, interpersonal skills and project experience in support of their social integration. The therapeutic success was also evaluated and published in cooperation with a local university.

GRIPS’ project “Portraits of a Town” resulted in establishing better understanding of mental illness and tolerance from the inhabitants of Salzwedel.

The project exemplifies Dr. Nicolas Nowack’s new concept of “Creativity Based Contacts” (CBC). Published and presented at mental health conferences in Europe, “ this method includes local population in therapeutic projects, through attractive creative activities, CBC is an effective anti-stigmatising programme “, says Dr. Nowack.

#### Some information on our project:

- ZSP Salzwedel stands for “Zentrum für Soziale Psychiatrie Salzwedel” [www.zsp-salzwedel.de](http://www.zsp-salzwedel.de)
- GRIPS an organisation which carries out rehab through work, art and creative projects, worked in collaboration with ZSP, on this project and exhibition. [www.grips-reha.de](http://www.grips-reha.de)
- ten group members and two staff carried out the project.
- twenty people in the Hanseatic town of Salzwedel were interviewed and portrayed, and thousands of pictures were taken over six months.
- edited images of exhibition on show at Toi Ora Gallery in New Zealand.

We invite people to come and view the exhibition and get a better understanding of the diversity of talent and arts practice not only here at Toi Ora but from a contemporary German perspective.

### **Toi Ora Gallery: German Exhibition ‘PORTRAITS OF A TOWN’**

**1 - 23 November 2012.**

**Opening: Thursday 1st November 5.30pm.**

Erwin van Asbeck.  
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Hours: Mon to Fri 9 to 5pm.

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