

Stories We Tell

Engaging young minds at children's opening

By Searlina Bodden

Their stories may be shorter and their experiences as small in size as they are but the children that attended the children's opening of *Stories We Tell* at the National Gallery showed no shortage of stimulating interpretations.

After assembling at the Gallery at lunchtime on Saturday – many of them grumbling and being tugged by pleading parents – the troupe gathered around assistant gallery director Nancy Barnard for an introduction to the exhibition. At first, it seemed as if Ms Barnard's fetching dialogue was lost on the young gallery-goers. Soon, however, the wariness was gone from every eye and the group drew in tightly to answer questions and make observations.

Ms Barnard led a short tour around the photographic and literary exhibition, which opened last week. *Stories We Tell*, organized by Gallery director Leslie Bigelman asked local photographers to "tell a story" with five photographs. These were then given to writers who were asked to write prose or poetry to compliment them. The result is a collection of images and narrative that are expected, yet still open to

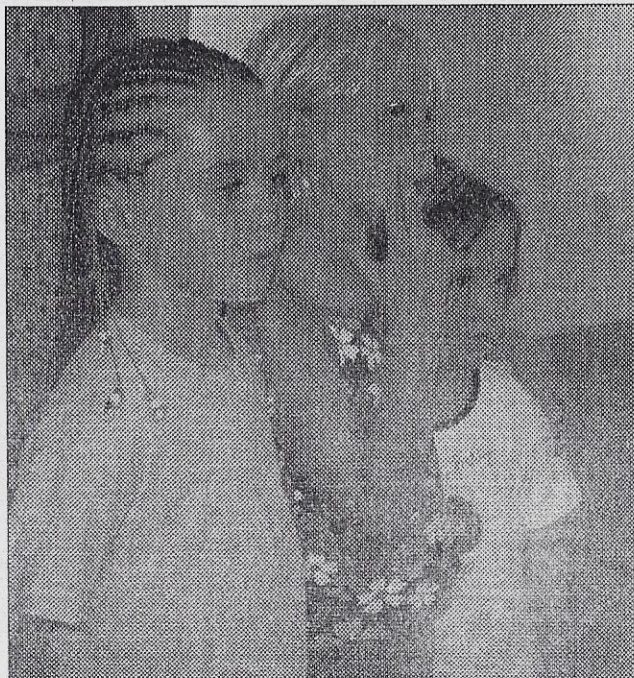
interpretation.

It is that openness that makes such an exhibition accessible to a younger audience. Such activities lay the groundwork for children comprehending creative interpretation and "constructive criticism", a topic that Ms Barnard addressed. Albeit on an elemental level, the children studied, deconstructed and made their own convictions of the works.

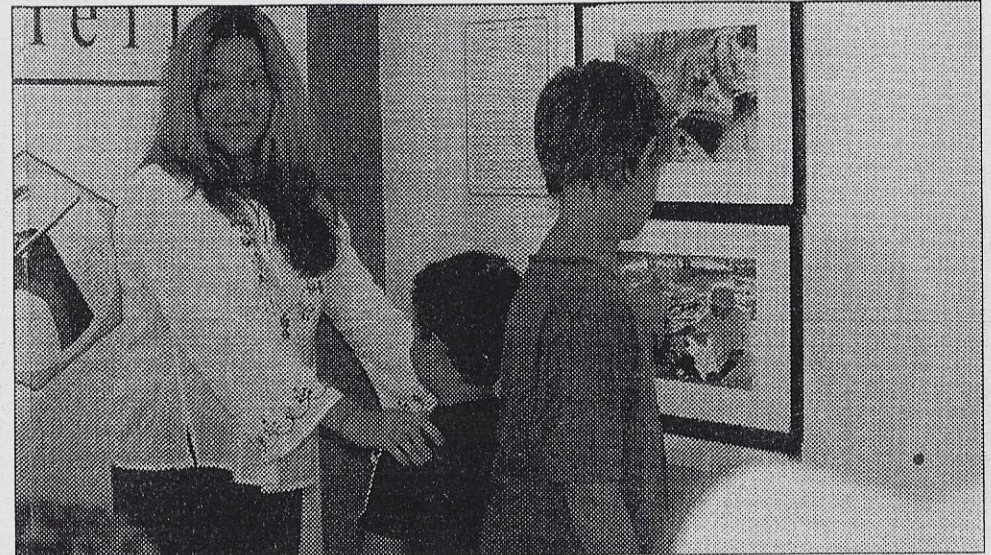
Courtesy of local law firm Walkers, tables outside of the gallery were laid out with an assortment of watercolour paints and paper. Juices

and refreshments sat neatly to the side of the painting area. In short, any primary school artist's dream.

Upon spotting the spread, the little artisans rolled up their sleeves and dug in. It was some time later that they left, with paint-splattered faces and clothes, juice-stained mouths and smiles as big as their pictures. If the gallery was looking to secure future patrons and artists, they seem to have hit the jackpot. Kids are a hard market to crack, but with a combination of finger painting and Juicy Juice, they're defenceless!



Contemplating the first collection of photographs



Demonstrating the idea behind *Stories We Tell* is assistant gallery director Ms Nancy Barnard. Photos: Searlina Bodden



George Lewis ponders his abstract interpretation.