

Addicts and idealists

NICK HACKWORTH |, EVENING STANDARD | Wednesday 17 November 2004 01:00 |



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The Evening Standard





Once scene in the crack den installation depicts a drug addict slumped on a filthy mattress ()

An art project set up by the charity Kids Company and Tate Modern, this highlights the plight of children who suffer from homes broken by drug addiction, and it presents their work in a block of Portakabins in the garden at the back of Tate Modern.

Alongside the art, by youths ranging in age from four to 20, is an installation of sorts, a convincing recreation of a crack den with mannequins sitting menacingly in the corners. These provide a visceral context to the more conventional pieces grouped thematically in the cabins, along the lines of crime, emotional impact, sexual abuse, ideals and dreams.

Children's art is almost always both poignant and fascinating, communicating a mix of innocence, wisdom and honesty uninhibited by the self-censorship that comes with age. Add to this the particular experiences borne by some of these children and the small shards of creative expression become overwhelming.

In the room for dreams and hopes, some very young children have, in messy watercolours, illustrated desires such as "I wish everyone was rich", "I wish my uncle didn't die in the war", and "My hopes are to go to heaven, play football and have magic".

In the crime room, we see the tendency of some children to rationalise their experiences into almost filmic narratives, producing quasi-storyboards of traumatic incidents, including physical and sexual abuse.

Next to some of these is a semi-abstract sculptural self-portrait by Lizzie, a 17-year-old girl from Peckham, of herself as a street warrior, with glass lungs, full of cigarettes.

But these are just a few examples. Though the display is makeshift and haphazard, it contains many more just as powerful and moving and eloquently expressive of the damage suffered by some young lives.

From tomorrow, until 17 February. Information: 020 7887 8008. ■