

**The farmer describing
his thoughts of suicide
is holding his toddler on his
lap as he speaks. Earlier we
see him walking desolately
past an empty dam.**
He throws a stick, an expression
of disgust, despair and
frustration. It's a fragment of film
footage from the first year of Big
hART's latest project in the far
west of New South Wales.

**SCIENTISTS, POLITICIANS AND BIG BUSINESS ARE ALL HAVING THEIR
say about the worst drought in history. Now, some of the people most
directly affected, those families living alongside the Murray and
Darling Rivers, have the opportunity for their stories to be heard.**

thenewgold

by VANESSA BATES



*Beck & Tash Hurley, mother and daughter,
part of the Gold project in Griffith.
Photo: Casey Ankers.*

*Gold is funded by The Westpac Foundation,
Arts NSW, The Australia Council & Griffith Council.*

Gold — Water is the New Gold looks at climate change and its widespread effect on communities and farming families throughout the Murray Darling Basin. It follows on from the successful model of Radio Holiday, managed by Bronwyn Purvis and Dawn Yates, in which marginalised young people explored the isolated shack communities of North West Tasmania and Northcott Narratives, produced by Christopher Saunders and set in the public housing estate in Surry Hills NSW (which was the subject of the recent ABC TV documentary, *900 Neighbours*).

Gold — Water is the New Gold is a three year arts and social change project co-managed by Christopher Saunders and local community development worker, Casey Ankers. Looking at the historical, personal, political and symbolic significance of water (the 'new gold'), this exciting project focuses on six isolated farming communities throughout this enormous region, reaching from Southern Queensland, across New South Wales and down to northern Victoria. The project has been in development for two years and preliminary workshops commenced in May 2006.

As in Radio Holiday, Gold aims to re-engage marginalised young people in education by involving them in a task focused, media/arts project. Big hART artists will be working alongside young people from Griffith to interview families and individuals within the six communities and gather stories, histories, anecdotes and arguments.

Together they will make films, take photographs, record voices and create portraits. This material will then become the basis of six site-specific celebratory performances on rural properties in each of these communities, currently set to take place between March and May 2008.

The shows will be in the style of the enormously successful StickybrickS which was set in the carpark of the Northcott Building and was a highlight of the 2006 Sydney Festival. This time, instead of tai chi, enormous white blocks, and opera, think country music, flat bed trucks and, very possibly, big hats. Although there will, quite probably, be some opera in there too.

The material will also be used to develop a major show at the Griffith Regional Theatre in the second half of 2008, which will tour to other regional centres and major capital cities. Big hART Artistic Director Scott Rankin will write and direct. ■

Vanessa Bates is an award-winning writer who has worked with Big hART for 7 years. Vanessa will be a collaborating writer on Gold.

Big hART works in small towns or in cities where groups of people lack opportunity because of policy decisions, circumstance, survival issues or personal choice. Website www.bighart.org

April

Until 22 April

 *Monaro Textile and Needlecraft Exhibition* Features patchwork, quilting, embroidery, felting, weaving and a trading table. Raglan Gallery **COOMA**
Tel 02 6452 3377

25 April — 5 May

 *The Ghost Writer* A knife edge thriller about the disappearance of a child. \$49/\$35; Hothouse Theatre, **WODONGA**
Tel 02 6021 7433
Website www.hothousetheatre.com.au

26 — 28 April

 *Candy Man* The story of Sammy Davis Junior as a high-energy song and dance show. \$42/\$33 IPAC, **WOLLONGONG** Tel 02 4226 3366
Website www.ipac.org.au

28 April

 *Carl Barron* An evening of hilarious laughter as Carl Barron entertains with his unique style of comedy. \$31.90/\$34.90 **BATHURST** Memorial Entertainment Centre
Tel 02 6333 6161