

The Art Factory

An Overview

by Kristina Tito

The Art Factory facilitated by the Riverina Community College in Wagga Wagga, is a unique contemporary arts studio that has established itself as a leading regional 'supported studio'. It has a mission to provide quality professional development and artistic opportunities for a growing number of artists in the Riverina community.

Progressive art studios or 'supported studios' sustain the creative and professional development of artists with learning disability. These studios emerged both nationally and internationally, out of the social justice and community arts movements of the 60s and 70s. They envisioned access to creative participation for all and enabled de-institutionalisation of the paternalistic care infrastructure of previous decades.

More recently and beyond the 'participation model', art studios like the Art Factory have developed as creative hubs, makers' spaces and agencies that support the professional development of disabled and non-disabled artists, alike. These spaces and the artists that connect with them come together in a variety of creative exchanges that enable individual and collective artist career development.

The impact of these evolving art studios and artists on the visual arts and disability sectors in Australia has been transformative.

The visual arts sector is witnessing progressive change, social integration and inclusion of disabled artists on a number of contemporary art platforms. Artists are being included in major art festivals, exhibitions and art collections. Disability-led practice is changing the systemic and inherent power dynamics by enabling agency and the voice of artists to be heard, and valued within the arts.

The disability service sector is seeing new artistic programs and models of best practice develop within the provider landscape due to expectations in the quality of delivery and the strong relationships, and connections these services have to the arts sector as a whole.

With the advent of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the individualised funding support for people with disability that it enables, Australia is in the midst of a new social paradigm shift. The NDIS aims to support individuals in building skills and capabilities, so that people can participate in broader community and employment opportunities. The Art Factory and the Riverina Community College is a registered NDIS provider.

In this context the Art Factory and similar studios, play a significant role in supporting the emergence of professional artistic practice, meaningful employment and leadership opportunities for people with learning disability in regional NSW.