

Interviewee Name: Joanne Braddy

Interviewer Name: Annie Rolfe

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Location: Online via Zoom

Length of Interview: 27:23 minutes

Transcript

Annie: Can you tell us a bit about yourself? What do you think we need to know about who you are, where you're from, and what experiences have helped you become the person you are today so that we can understand your work and you can tell me a bit about your art form. I've I've had a bit of a look at your website. You're a visual artist?

Joanne: Yes, visual artist.

Annie: So could you tell me a bit about yourself?

Joanne: Yeah. Okay. I've been working as a professional artist for 15 years, so I started at Ithaca TAFE

Annie: Okay.

Joanne: When it was. It's been knocked down now.

Annie: So when were you there?

Joanne: I was there guess probably about 15 years ago or so. I started when I was about 25, so it's been quite a while and I went into there because I was dealing with mental health

Annie: right

Joanne: I needed an outlet and I always loved art, but. I never really went that direction, had the funding to do that. So I started going to TAFE and I started to realise who I was and that I wanted to pursue awareness for mental health.

Annie: Right.

Joanne: Because I felt very silent myself about it at that stage. So I didn't particularly feel comfortable talking about it to a lot of people.

Annie: Yes.

Joanne: Because of the stigma that was around it. So I started to do a massive amount of drawing to do with the subject for my own personal breakdown recovery. And then I started to do a series of paintings that I displayed through through TAFE doing, going through visual arts. So I found it very confronting at first. And so I was going for every thought and every emotion that I was going through at the time. So and then putting it out to the world. And I started to realise that this was who I was and I wanted to pursue this. And from then on I've been having multiple exhibitions to do with self awareness. So it's definitely been a journey.

Annie: So did you do art when you in your childhood or when you were at school?

Joanne: Yes, I did. Just I think I had an art teacher when I was in primary school, and she said that I was talented and I did draw a lot when I was younger. I did have like a visual diary. I do remember that. And then I started pursuing it a bit later in life. And then the poetry words was coming out as well with the paintings.

Annie: Right.

Joanne: So they were coming out quite instantly as well. So that was pretty amazing. And so, yeah, and then I started going into sculpturing as well.

Annie: Okay.

Joanne: I started doing the the sculptures. So I found they were very you couldn't kind of look away from them, though. They kind of draw you in because of the 3D effect of the paintings were quite powerful and I felt that they were helping people. A lot of places where I was exhibiting them and still are. But the sculptures, that was something special because the three D they just couldn't get away from that, that journey of them. Hmm. And so, yeah, I'm originally from Moreton Bay.

Annie: Okay.

Joanne: And I do go around Moreton Bay and do poetry in nature as well. And I have that on Instagram and going to put that through a YouTube channel as well.

Annie: Right.

Joanne: So that connects with my art and to do with my journey for mental health and how I it was something I used to do when I was on my own journey, but I never videoed it. Yeah.

Annie: That's interesting. You've experienced a few different art forms there.

Joanne: Yeah.

Annie: Are there experiences, events, or people that stand out in your memory as really formative in terms of getting you interested and involved in drawing?

Joanne: I think I think when I was at TAFE with Art History, with Julia Hester because I didn't know a lot. I didn't know a lot about art when I got there, so I didn't know if you had to paint this way. We had to paint that way. And then I saw her, I did a project on Hester and I realized, Wow, she's very similar to me. So I realised that you can talk about your emotions and you can talk about your your health, because that's what she did. She did talk about her health and her works were very deep. And so I think she was the one that kind of made me feel like it was okay to see that really deep, intense stuff.

Annie: Yes. So so what made you go to the TAFE in the first place? Was it to explore art? Is that.

Joanne: Yeah, I think it was to explore it to see who I was. I didn't know what who I was and what I wanted to do in a sense, because I've tried other things, but it just didn't seem right. So it felt right.

Annie: Yes. Okay. So you talked about a teacher in your primary.

Joanne: School who.

Annie: Encouraged you. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Joanne: It was only very small. She used to just come in and do small classes. We used to draw trees. I remember drawing trees and she said, I did amazing trees. And I just naturally was drawn to art and naturally talented. So I did find quite a few. And then I went to TAFE and then I had the teacher as well pick up on that very quickly. They just all came to me very naturally.

Annie: And have there been people since in your journey that you that have helped you to continue with art or with exhibiting?

Joanne: Just trying to think I was with art from the margins for a little while. There was Tony that was running Art for the Margins for quite a few years and he had the Brisbane Health Festival. I was part of that and that gave me a lot of confidence the first five years of my career. So definitely they've been a big influence. But I did. I'm not with them. I didn't well, I wasn't actually with them for quite a few years and I've come back recently getting help from them. So they've been very, very helpful.

Annie: Okay. And how do you feel about the work that you're currently doing and exhibiting?

Joanne: Well, I'm doing a lot of poetry at the moment because of what's happened with COVID. The art industry is going a little bit on hold. The opportunities are basically stopped so getting my work out there, it's it's a little it's a very hard so I just been pursuing other parts of my creativity just to everything that's up again. Yeah.

Annie: So can you talk a bit more about the drivers and barriers to the success of your work?

Joanne: My work hasn't always fit into the normal mainstream of Brisbane. I found it very difficult to find galleries that I fit into. Rather a lot of them do have mainstream things. So I have tried multiple galleries and I haven't had the opportunity to exhibit in them so that it's very difficult because I talk about different subjects and there isn't many of me here that I know of anyway.

Annie: Yes, you're unique.

Joanne: Very, very unique. So finding that place where I belong, it's been very difficult. I am still looking for it. I worked with Susan at Cornell Gallery. I had a show with her. So, yeah, definitely it is. It is very difficult and I have numeracy and literacy problems with my intellectual disability. So that's a huge barrier as well. I'm trying to look for a mentor at the moment. I've been interviewing a few people trying to work out the right person that can work. There is a lot of barriers.

Annie: Yes. Okay. So what motivates your work today?

Joanne: I think I think the same thing is the, I think the silence that people feel trying to cope with these different issues - depression, disability, not being heard. I think my work gives a voice to the people that can't be heard. I think that's what drives me. I have a lot of followers that rely on my feed that goes on social media, and I've had them for quite a lot of years. I think that's what motivates me is to keep pursuing it and keeping having a voice, I think.

Annie: So has your motivation for creating your art changed over time?

Joanne: No, it's always I've been very driven with it. I don't think it's ever changed or wavered. I've always known that it's meant to go very far. I feel like it's going to take half of my lifetime. But, you know, that's okay.

Annie: Yeah.

Joanne: Doing what it's doing. Like I'm happy.

Annie: Yeah. That's great. And you've talked about a couple of different art forms that you've been working in. Can you tell me about how you've made that change of art form?

Joanne: I think. Definitely. I originally was the drawings and then the drawings going to paintings, and they're very instant. And then the 3D came in and they go with my paintings. So everything's connected in some way, and the words generally come out after the painting. So it's all very instant and it's all interconnected.

Annie: So why do you think they have changed? Why do you think you've moved on from drawing in the first place to painting to sculpting to poetry?

Joanne: I think they've always. They've always been there. I've always done.

Annie: You've done. Ok

Joanne: I guess. I've always been a multiple artist. There was poetry. There was drawing. There was painting. There was a little bit of 3D, but I didn't go into 3D about five years ago.

Annie: I came right. So you talked about presenting your work in galleries before. Can you tell me a bit more about where you want to present your work?

Joanne: I've been entering about six competitions a year, so I'm trying to reach my work out to be seen and then find where I belong. I'm still trying to find that connection. I have been into galleries and. Representation but I haven't found somewhere where I'm, that's where I am, type thing, where I fit or whatever. I think for the future, I definitely I want my work to be representation by gallery and have a strong amount of body of work out there and have someone really support me what I'm doing and, and have something and have a gallery I can trust and be with and not be taken advantage of. That's a big thing in the industry that I really think needs to be worked on because it multiply happens. Yes, I want to be more professional and be able to protect myself as well.

Annie: So do you think that exploitation occurs just with disability art or with all art?

Joanne: I think it happens with everybody, yeah.

Annie: Okay.

Joanne: Yeah. Unfortunately, it could happen more so with people with disabilities because the fact of what I can't read or write properly. So there's things that I don't understand that I need somebody to explain to me. So that makes it a bit of a hard, hard thing because you don't know what you're going into.

Annie: Yes, yes.

Joanne: Way to protect yourself. Like contracts and things like that. Like that's definitely something somebody with a disability needs help with.

Annie: Yeah. Okay. What do you think spectators think of your work?

Joanne: I've had a lot of people say they've connected with their own personal journey to do with mental health, or it helped them in some way. People find it very moving. Some people find it very deep and confronting. I think I just put it out there and it just does what it's meant to do. So it's meant to do and meant to affect them the way it needs to affect them. I didn't even have to be there. The work just does itself all the time.

Annie: So is that really important to you? That response from spectators and by spectators I mean public or media or other artists or funding bodies.

Joanne: Yes. It's very important because it's making, reducing the stigma of mental health and changing things. Things need to be changed and I feel my work can do that. It can help with that. That's more important. It's not about money for me because artists don't get paid much money. It's this type of well where I am in my career. So it's just about what I'm doing and I just want to keep doing it.

Annie: Yeah, I understand that. So do you think when you first engaged with art 15 years ago, do you think that people in the past were aware of your work or your peers work or this type of work?

Joanne: Nah. No. It was very confronting to my peers and around me as well. I did get quite a bit of stigma for what I was doing. I could, I could feel that around me.

Annie: Why do you think that is?

Joanne: I think it's because people maybe 15 years ago, people weren't comfortable with it or maybe they were silent themselves by their family members or by their friends. So I feel definitely, I feel like it's easing up a little - the stigma around it, but there's still a lot more to do.

Annie: So what besides your work is the best expression of mental health that you described.

Joanne: Like which piece or which type.

Annie: So what I mean is, are you aware of other artists who do similar work and it doesn't have to look like yours, but just the expression of that internal struggle or your, where you are with mental health.

Joanne: Yes. I do recognize it in some people's work. Definitely.

Annie: Yeah.

Joanne: But I'm not really I don't interact with a lot of artists, especially with COVID as well, like by Zoom.

Annie: Yeah.

Joanne: Yeah. It's very isolating at times.

Annie: And were you were you collaborating more before COVID happened?

Joanne: Yes, I was part of an art group for recoveries that was on every Friday. So I was around other people that were dealing with mental health and stuff.

Annie: Okay.

Joanne: Yeah. So I have interacted with quite a lot of different groups and I have done artist talks for big large groups of people, and so there's definitely a lot of people wanting to do that.

Annie: Yeah. And so do you think the visibility of your work and of art from people with disabilities, do you think that's improved in the 15 years that you've been involved in art?

Joanne: Is there more of it? Is that what you mean?

Annie: Well, do you think people are more aware of disability arts?

Joanne: Um. I don't know so much well, disability is mental health. It all falls in the same category. I guess I feel like because of COVID, everybody's looking for an answer and everybody's looking for hope and, you know, and somebody's feeling the same way. So definitely there's a lot bigger crowd of people looking for this type of work.

Annie: Yeah.

Joanne: Covid times, maybe beforehand there was always people. There's always people wanting a voice. I've always noticed that.

Annie: And so. Just going back to the groups you haven't joined into a group this year?

Joanne: Yes, I have.

Annie: Okay.

Joanne: Development group Art in the Margins. It's about 5 to 6 people. And they're all have mental health issues or so. Yes. I have been with lots of a new group. That is true. I have. It's just by Zoom. It's harder to connect with people in Zoom.

Annie: Yes. Yes and so have you connected with artists outside of that mental health art sphere?

Joanne: Yeah. I do know of other artists out of that. I do know quite a few artists in the community and stuff like that.

Annie: Yeah ok. What do you think the public would say are the key milestones or big major happenings in the history of disability arts in Australia?

Joanne: Yeah, that was a question. I was a little confused of. Is that like the whole history?

Annie: Yeah. From your perspective so you know of what you know about it.

Joanne: I do know of artists that do different things for mental health and there is, there is some artists out there. There's, there's actually a local one that I know that does a lot of different things for artists on the spectrum. So I think there is a few I don't know about changing. I was just trying to think of there's a lot of things. There's more societies helping artists in that area, like Access Art, Art for the margins. It would be nice if there was a few more.

Annie: Yes. And do you know of any dates or times that? Have you noticed that change within the last five years? Ten years?

Joanne: I think NDIS came along. The last two years, I noticed that there's a lot more, a lot more things that you can have you have you work in. People want to that there is a lot more opportunities.

Annie: Yes.

Joanne: There wasn't many before that I noticed in that in that disability mental health area, it was very lacking and it was hard. There was people trying. There just wasn't anything funding or anything out there that, that I knew of anyway.

Annie: Yeah. Yeah. I think I think the NDIS has been one of the major changes. Do you think of your art as being political?

Joanne: I actually asked my husband about that. I got confused if it was or not. Like political like Pauline Hanson?

Annie: Not so much, no more in that it's creating change in how people think and act and treat each other.

Joanne: Yes.

Annie: Yeah.

Joanne: I think it does do that. I'm not very political or anything like that so I don't know. But I do feel like it's changing and it's good to have a face for that in the arts. So that's why I go in the competitions, because I'm generally the only one doing it.

Annie: And do you think that's how we should see or think about how we should define success in art? Or should it be about aesthetic quality and appeal to a mainstream audience?

Joanne: I think success as an art is being true to yourself and showing your work as authentic as you are and telling your story. There's a lot of art that's just mainstream and authentic art there isn't many authentic artists telling their story out there so I think that's really important.

Annie: Yeah. Do you want to identify or be identified as deaf or disabled or neurodiverse? Or is it just about being another artist same as any other in the mainstream art world?

Joanne: I'm not afraid of being identified with those things because it's just what they are.

Annie: Yeah. And do you think there is a commonality or consistency in how artists who the public would identify as disabled think about these things?

Joanne: Like if they want to be identified as these things.

Annie: Yeah.

Joanne: I think some people might be afraid to be identified.

Annie: As a disabled artist?

Joanne: Yes, yes. Yeah.

Annie: Why do you think that might be?

Joanne: One, they might not be open about their disability. We might not be open about their mental health. They might be struggling on their own. Yeah, some people are happy with it. Some people are not comfortable with it.

Annie: So do you think there are differences in the way different artists with different disabilities who identify as First Nations or LGBTIQA think about these things?

Joanne: I don't know. I think they just want to be their own self and tell, you know, and just tell their own story. But yeah, they could be a bit of fear around that. Hmm. You know.

Annie: And moving forward, what is your hope for your art?

Joanne: I want to just basically just keep getting it seen. I'd like to get it to be toured and go to as many places as it could and do what it's meant to do. I do have a large body of work from those 15 years that could do a lot of good. That's always been a bit of a dream. But the touring part, I did try to apply for it, but it was too many barriers. I didn't

understand it, I didn't get any support. So the barriers of these applications are huge. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Get some help, I'm trying to get a mentor and some help so that I have a fighting chance.

Annie: Yes. Yeah. And is that mentor an artist or someone to help with the reading and writing?

Joanne: Yeah. They'll have to be the reading and writing, understanding of the art industry, what competitions to enter, what galleries to go to. And somebody that motivates me as well, that's passionate about what I'm doing.

Annie: Yes. Yeah. So is there something we haven't asked about that we should that we really need to know about or understand you or your work or this type of work?

Joanne: No. I think we covered a lot of it.

Annie: Yeah, that's great. All right. Well, Joanne, thank you so much for your time today. It's been so interesting to hear your story.

Joanne: Oh, great you've been amazing. Thank you