

Interviewee Name: Paul Calcott

Interviewer Name: Annie Rolfe

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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?

Paul: Wow, yeah, there's a bit there. Well, my name's Paul. I'm a community elder here. I'm a proud Wiradjuri man now living on Cubbie, Cubbie country on the beautiful Sunshine Coast. The communities made me very welcome, and I'm a community elder here, so I do a lot of work in community around disabilities. And. And I'm a polio survivor. I contracted polio back in 1960 as a child. So. So yeah. So I grew up in an area where there wasn't a lot of supports and services around. My father was very protective. My mother was a feisty little Irishwoman, but my father's younger brothers and sister were part of Stolen Generations. So my father told me that he was very fearful of having a fair skinned son with a disability that I may be taken away so we didn't do a lot of accessing of services and supports that were around and when the social workers did come out to check on me, Dad wouldn't be around. He was scared that if they saw that we had an Aboriginal Dad, that it might raise alarm bells and we lived in a little settlement down in the Lane Cove River, a place called Bradfield Park, which was next to the migration hostel, and a mixture of people that were quite poor and waiting for housing. It was a mixture of Aboriginal families and other families were there and, and then we've actually got a house in the suburbs of Sydney, a housing commission place where I grew up, and I think all of those things have impacted on who I am today and and having my own disability.

Paul: I worked in the area of disabilities, my Mum worked in disabilities, my sisters work in disabilities. So I'm a strong advocate around a voice for people with disabilities and to be seen and to make contributions to community. I think a lot of that has made me who I

am, and I'm also a member of the LGBTQ+ communities and other coming out thing as well and I've been with my partner for 25 years and in 2019, when they finally approved same sex marriage in this country, something I thought would never happen we got married and we held a sort of traditional indigenous sort of ceremony up here on the coast where the elders come along and did a blessing and blessing for us to come together. So there's been lots of things in my life, I think that impact on who I am now and I'm still hopefully got a long journey to go and I will still continue to learn and things will still happen that will impact on my perspective of the world and disabilities as well.

Annie: And so how does that inform your artwork?

Paul: I think with my artwork I've always loved art. I did art at school and my Dad loved painting. He didn't paint traditional, but he painted everything and used lots of colour. I remember once he painted out our fence posts all different colours. We wanted them to look nice and my father had a disability as well. He lost all his fingers on one hand in an accident as a teenager, but he was an amazing man. I still just managed to build things and that as well so I think that impacts on my art now, where I love to tell stories around disabilities, I like to tell stories of strength. I like to identify issues that our mob overcome so it's not just issues about woe is me, but I like to celebrate the achievements of community and people with disability and the contribution they have to make and and it's connected me with some amazing people and storytelling and I think that's what drives me to do that and occasionally I get a paid commission, which is wonderful but and it's lovely to be appreciated. Would people actually want to pay you for your work? It's it's a lovely feeling. But also I love when I can donate work to different organisations as well, or just the people or the post-polio network. I love to donate artworks and to raise funds, so I think whatever you are given you need to put back into community as well. Yeah.

Annie: Yeah, yeah. That's wonderful. So are there experiences, events or people and you've talked about this a little bit that stand out in your memory as really formative in terms of getting you interested, and involved in art? You're talking about your Dad just then?

Paul: Yeah, Look, I my Dad was, you know, loved painting and colouring drawings and that as well and I loved out of school and but I think the main thing when I started to

really get into it, I have to say, was from my husband, because I constantly talked about how I want to paint in the style of my father's people and I wanted to somehow look into that and I don't want to do it as a connection to my culture and my story and I just constantly talked about I think it'd be a lovely connection and I had this yearning to do something that connected me and and my culture and contributed back and and my 50th birthday, he just bought me a whole heap of paints and paint brushes and an easel and canvases wrapped them all up and said, "It's time to stop talking about it and it's time to start doing it" and that was when I started on this amazing journey, and I think the ancestors just opened up all these paths and I start to meet all these people and storytelling, and I think I probably wasn't ready to paint until then because I don't think I had enough experience and life stuff around disabilities to have a story to tell. So that age was a good time when I had enough experiences and stories to start having a bit of a story and telling the story and supporting other people and and just meeting incredible people along the way.

Annie: Yes. So had you done art at school or had you dabbled in art before that?

Paul: Oh, yes. Yes. I loved art at schools, it was my favourite subjects. And I still remember. It's funny how you remember things, but I remember a teacher when I was in third class. I was about eight years old, and she came in and bought because I don't think we had any resources. I think she was trying to be very creative. But I remember she brought in used paper and chalk and wanted us to draw something with the chalk on use paper, which was a horrible texture and feeling medium to paint with, I remember was just not pleasant. But she want us to say, if you are floating through space and looking at the porthole of a space ship, what would you see? Yeah, and I just. Isn't it funny? I was eight years old. I just thought. And I loved doing it. Even even the texture was hard. But it's funny. I remember that. That's like, you know. Nearly 60 years ago. But but so I've always found it fascinating to do that. Even as a kid, I remember my bedroom. I would cover the walls in tinfoil or I would paint things on the walls. I just was always looking for some sort of creative outlet. And I was allowed to do that. I was supported to do that. But I remember my teachers in high school were amazing teachers and they were just very creative and just let you do things and experiment with stuff and not always absolutely just been drawn to it, but I've bowed to the culturally. Many of our mob don't paint until later on in life.

Annie: That's interesting.

Paul: Yeah. And I think it might be because it's until you've got some stories to tell or something's been passed down to you that you can start painting it but that's not to say there are some amazing young artists doing stuff, but I think for me and for many people, it's it's to paint something because I did like all terraced houses and where I lived and used to draw our house and everything else and, and the garden and trees and did all that sort of thing. But it wasn't until I think I was ready.

Annie: Yes.

Paul: Yeah. Stuff and do it right and, and be respectful about it as well.

Annie: That's amazing. Did you learn from anybody in particular?

Paul: I, I started just to do it myself. I think it was in me. I started to do stuff. And I did. I did. Look, I used to follow a couple of Wiradjuri artists, so look at that. So I was interested in the styles and the story because I was very conscious that particular styles belong and I never wanted to do anything that was disrespectful but when I first started, that's one of the things that I was amazed that I was so privileged to do, is I worked for an organisation co-ordinating respite, supports and services, and I mainly work with the local Indigenous community, people with disabilities and when I was going out to organise respite and meet people, I noticed that's when everyone was painting, they could paint or whatever they could find and it just became this huge connection that we had and then I got to sit down with other elders and people with disabilities, and I think that was the inspiration. There was, there was a dear elder who was who was palliative, she was passing away, she was crossing over, and she was this wonderful, wonderful woman and she sat and shared some of the techniques and styles with myself and others and I remember it was a very funny thing that she said. She said, "Oh, Paul: when you do this, you've got to be gentle, like painting, like you're stroking a woman". And then she looked at me and she realised, Well, I'm gay, and she said "Oh forget it. You just do men's business. Just go for it". I think I've been supported and inspired and been around people that I think have helped me develop stories and styles. And then we shared alternative things like different ways to do stuff and and mixing

paints and things like that so I think it's been a process of many people and we've shared stories and I think you just constantly evolve.

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

Paul: I think the motivation, there's a couple the big one is just a cultural connection. When I'm painting and telling stories, because traditionally all our artwork and stories from what I am aware of were around basically country ceremonial bushtucker so disability, there isn't even a word for disability in most of our languages, in my language. I think the closest is 'wirrganha' or 'gugan' or 'gugan darra' , which just talks about a limp or disability or a lame.

Annie: Yes.

Paul: So to me it was a whole new way of looking. Well, how do we do stories about disability? And you know that eight or so years ago, sitting with a group of young people, I come up with a design to represent what a person with disability. So I think my motivation now is to. She had a story of disability and how it impacts on our culture and the history and to make people aware of our community with disabilities and the contribution we make to culture and the community and on a spiritual level, it's how I find my place to connect and to do my bit in keeping our culture and our stories alive and, and and hopefully young artists I get to work with coming through will keep telling the stories of disability in our art and and how it incorporates into our traditions and that as well. So I think that's my motivator and I have this studio used to be a garage, and it slowly morphed into my happy place and, you know, and fixed it up and fixed up the peeling floors and I spend a lot of time out here now and other elders come over and we sit around a big table and just have a yarn and work on projects and had a young fella come and play Yidaki in here. And we've had smoking ceremonies. So it's a space where other community members, we come together and just sit around and are very welcome and we talk and talk about projects and what we're going to do and all that kind of thing and just really support each other.

Annie: Yeah, that's wonderful. Yeah. So do you think your style has changed over time?

Paul: I think so, yeah, I think. I think I'm becoming more, different ways of experimenting, but just also how I can tell the story around disabilities and I've had to change my style because it's not something as part of our culture, I've sort of had to develop new ways and stories and symbols of ways of representing different stories, but still using traditional symbols that are around so through to our storytelling. And because I feel the symbols we use in our artwork are our language. They're our letters and our words. So when I do a painting, it's like writing a book or telling a story.

Annie: Yes.

Paul: And I think the more you do that, the better you become at identifying and translating things into stories and that as well. And and so I think my style has changed because I do more of it. I'm feeling a bit more confident about it but also over the years, I just reconnect with my community and I think that changes your style because it gives you that confidence, that storytelling and just being in that space sort of thing, gives you that connection. So it becomes it's a very spiritual thing. It's not it's a little bit of yourself. You're not just doing a bowl of fruit or a landscape or something like that. It's really telling your story and putting it out there and and that can be quite confronting because you don't know what people are going to respond to your story. So I think I've become more, more confident in telling the story and and realizing that not everyone's going to agree with my story but it's my story and and it's my interpretation and my experiences. And I think I've become better at helping other people do that as well. I mean, I've had amazing I feel incredibly blessed and I know that might sound a bit trite, but I've worked with some young people with disabilities who I've seen grow and tell their stories and their art, and it just is such a wonderful experience to be part of that.

Annie: Yes.

Paul: And I think, too, when I sit down with some of the young people and paint, it grounds me because they're just doing it for the pure joy of telling their story. They don't care what anyone thinks and I think that grounds me and thinks this is what it's all about and to be part of that so I think my style has changed where I've been able to support other people and I mean, one story is a young fella who has Down syndrome, a young indigenous fella, and he did a painting and he used to paint different sort of little things, which between people used to outline for him and he'd do some painting around them.

But I sat with him once and we did this amazing painting. I just sat there with him and just sort of guided him a bit, but it was all his story and he was so precise and got so into it. There was amazing story about his journey as a young man who has a black belt in Zen Chi. So he has that. He's a qualified instructor and he told this beautiful story and we talked about what do you want to put in it? And he had his Dad in there watching over him and the footy fields where he plays.

Paul: Footy had yarnning circles with his mates. He had used a little brush to put his black belt on, his artwork and everything else, and we exhibited that over in the United Nations in Geneva. And the wonderful thing was when I got to ring his Dad and say, I hope you don't mind, but the Australian Embassy in Switzerland just bought your son's painting and could you let him know so to be part of that was just such an incredible experience and I feel so privileged and honoured to be part of that and to experience that and that changed me as well because I thought it changed my perspective and supporting other people with disabilities and that's that's what I love to do, is we support our selves all around that having a voice and, and just showing that we make valuable contributions to culture and storytelling and raising awareness. Yeah.

Annie: So where are you presenting your work?

Paul: At the moment? We haven't. I have a web page I have stuff on and people get in touch. I'm very lucky I get commissions, but I also do just sometimes things just for charitable stuff. So I'm actually not presenting it, I just put it in if I get a chance. We're actually talking at the moment with the NuunaRon group, the group of artists that I work with, with NuunaRon, and that's after Nuuna who is an amazing saltwater woman who passed away and a beautiful artist and was the one that was showing me how to do different style like mix paint and Uncle Ron, who is a Kamilaroi man and they've both passed but they were dear friends of the art group and valuable people and valuable friends to me and mentors to me as well and we had we named the art group after them because their families are really happy for us to do that because it represents male female energy, remember, and it represents salt water, freshwater energy as well so we do a little exhibitions recently, I think it was last year we did one at the local here on the Sunshine Coast at the Botanical Gardens. Yes, right. And we've done some commissions for the hospital and for health centres and community centres, but we're actually now in the early stages of having a conversation to see if we can do an

exhibition at Brisbane Parliament House as part of International Day for people with disabilities.

Paul: Yes, so we did one there a few years back and I approached them again to say, “Would you like to have another go” at It was back in 2019 Covid's been really weird and a lot of people are on board with it and we would love that and the artists are really stoked about it and there's no funding for it. We're just doing it as a group of artists to exhibit and have that put our stories out there, but also to have the Queensland Government support it as well.

Annie: Yes,

Paul: recognise the value of those people's ideas with disabilities. So it's a bit of a win win thing just to have this conversation and raise the profile. So that's our next one and we don't know what will happen in between. Now we're ready at the drop of a hat. We often get things, Oh, we're doing this because you put some artwork up. Yep, we'll put something together and get it there. So to put an art exhibition can be quite expensive. But we're also have a good relationship with the Novotel Hotel Group and. Yeah, with exhibitions there and they've put on spreads at very, very reduced costs and we've done a bit of a swap where I did some artwork for the lobbies and back inkind access to venues. So we sort of bargained . Yeah.

Annie: Yes. Yes. So do you think people in the past were aware of the work you were doing and your peers work?

Paul: I don't even know if there was much going on in the past. I think from my recollection, there was a place in Victoria that did some artwork with artists with disabilities from up north. But I did a lot of work travelling around through art, different art groups and not adding on countries to the Northern Territory and the fact that disability is not talked about as part of diversity. There was not always this independent identification of artists having disability. Mm hmm. So I think as far as I know, it's like probably over ten years ago, back in 2009 /10, when the organisation, the NGO is working for the provided respite was when we first started to even talk about art and disabilities and when I was trying to track stuff down, I couldn't find anything, anyone else doing it and the stories and actually identifying artists with disabilities, talking about

their stories and stuff. So I don't think there was a lot before our group got together, and I think it's grown over the last 12 or 13 years, and different organisations I've worked with have been supportive of it, but there hasn't been a big investment in it. I mean, I think we've got I think the first one we did with one organisation, we got a grant from the local council to get some resources on that and we never had a venue. We recently had a venue up here, we had an ILC grant, but that grant ran out at the time and we didn't have ongoing funding too, so we had to pack up the premises and when the lease finished,

Annie: yes.

Paul: So. So there's still not a sort of getting recognised more with government, you finding artists with disabilities very interesting and acknowledging it. Yes. Still to see a big investment.

Annie: Yes.

Paul: Yeah.

Annie: So that leads me into the next question. Do you think the profile of visibility of your work, of disability artist's work has improved?

Paul: Oh yes it has. It's just the fact that groups like the advisory board where on where the conversations are starting and the fact that things like this have been recorded and that I've seen huge changes because there was none of that. There was nothing. So I have to say I've I've seen massive changes. I've been it's been wonderful to be part of a lot of that and participate but I have seen huge changes in recognition and I think it will only get better and I think as the profile grows and when we start to have this sort of information with artists with disabilities being seen and having a voice and telling their stories, I feel that more organisations will have a bit of an aha moment to think, Wow, this is really interesting and this is really worth investing in and how do we support this and get on board? And it's starting to happen. We're seeing bits and pieces, but yeah, we're getting there. But I have seen improvements and I really have great hope for the future to see young people coming through and the supports and the work of older people like myself and other artists with disabilities. You know, we'll pass the baton on

and support younger people coming through as well and, and, and keep that momentum happening. And I think that's our role to do this. But I just see I've seen huge improvements and I think they'll continue.

Annie: So what do you think the public would say are the key milestones or big major happenings in the history of disability in Australia? Disability arts in Australia?

Paul: I really don't know what the public is caus I don't even know if the public were that aware. So I think seeing things, what I've seen myself is on a local level, but even internationally where, you know, presenting, I've had the opportunity to present at different events overseas like the United Nations on disability and the arts and using art as that, and it seems to generate a lot of interest in that respect as well when people weren't aware of it. I've seen people come to our exhibitions here and are really interested as a whole new thing about the artists and their stories, and I feel people are becoming more aware of the story behind the art and the artist and what they did rather than the aesthetics of it all, which are still stunning, absolutely beautiful. But it's more I think it's why people I've seen the public start to be more engaged at or interested in it and sometimes the visibility of people with disabilities is changing. I remember the first art exhibition we did up here with the Artist, our art group with all indigenous artists with disabilities, and it was mainly developed to address social isolation. The people like to come together and art was the catalyst, our cultural connection to come together, and that a thing that belonged just to us. Yes, to tell your story and to share. When we had our first exhibition at the Novotel Hotel, which was supported by an organisation on the coast called Suncare, and to see the artists who were people that were very socially isolated and disconnected and living you know, our artists have physical disabilities, cognitive impairments, living with mental illness, psychosocial and neurodiversity all come together and I remember that opening night, the impact where the artist turned up dressed to the nines. Everyone looked amazing and as well and standing in front of their artworks, holding court with people who are interested in their story and and aware that this person had a disability because it was in their in their artwork and suddenly that person was the educator.

Annie: yes.

Paul: And it has changed that whole dynamics. Yes, someone being seen with a disability, I feel as being someone that had to be accommodated for someone was being celebrated.

Annie: Yes.

Paul: And seen as, wow, this is amazing. I didn't know this was going on. And the same thing happened overseas with a young fella that went over there from Hugh has as DS and I did a beautiful painting. It was also exhibited in Geneva. And he has FASD, has an intellectual disability here and in the schools here in mainstream education he's in a special class, right? Because of these needs and he went over there, he was an amazing young man. He was only 17 at the time, and his artwork was all about his stories. He's keeping the stories of his grandparents alive, the cultural dances, the things he'd done and suddenly you had this young fella who out here is in a special ed class and the support we had, I think there were seven or eight diplomatic representatives from all around the world standing there listening to his story. We changed the subject matter and the environment and he became the teacher.

Annie: Yes.

Paul: It changed their attitude towards this, but it also impacted on his family back here, his self esteem as he was actually commissioned by the UN to do a standalone artwork.

Annie: Wow.

Paul: So they're the little milestones that I see where suddenly I see the physical. I actually see before my eyes the perceptions of people and the person with disability changing and then finally changing. Yeah. And if we can start doing that, we just increasing that and increasing it. And if we can do that on such a huge level and change that, the impact that it will have will be so.

Annie: Yes. Yeah. What about policy changes or I guess you were talking a bit about social changes, so changes in society. Do you think that there are influences there that have been or milestones there that have influenced disability arts?

Paul: I have. I've seen some changes in policy and the art codes and that to start recognizing, working with artists with disabilities and the way to to acknowledge that I've seen some changes in wording. There was a document the other day I still saw where it was physical. It was classified as physical deformity with all of that needs to be changed, but there's still some old words out there, and I think some of the things I'm seeing change as well is the term we're talking about our disability community where it's not ours as it doesn't belong to anyone. It's the disability community. So it's saying I've seen little subtle changes like that. So policy recognition and more. Some of the funding and the grants being more supportive around that as well. So I have seen some change policy in that recognition and even the fact that there's some is different advisory groups that I sit on and as I said here, it's starting to have that voice around artists with disabilities and the things. So I'm seeing those changes. I'm seeing some policy, I'm seeing recognition and and I think we're getting there. We still have a long way to go. But it started the journey started, the conversations have started. And I see some amazing artists who are living with disabilities out there as well, just having a voice, being recognized for what they do and say. And I think those things are also going to impact on what policy looks like and and and how to engage with community.

Annie: Yeah, it's great to see the changes that are occurring.

Paul: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We still yeah, we still need a way to go. It's still getting there. But I think I'm, I'm optimistic that it's all happening because I see this stuff that wasn't around, you know, in my sort of younger years and days. And I thought, yes, I was part of the Richmond report when I started to move people with disabilities out of institutions into community environment. So I've seen at a time when people with disabilities overall weren't even accepted, our cars used to get graffiti by neighbours who did not want these people with disabilities living in their streets and all that kind of thing. So and so I've seen huge changes and I don't say accept accepting, but also respecting, yes people with into communities and having that contribution and making those contributions and the arts has been part of it.

Annie: Yeah. Yeah, that's great. Yeah. So is your art political and do you think art should be political?

Paul: I kind of think it's both. I do think it's political because I think art is a wonderful way of looking at worldviews and different things in a different perspective. And I love how sometimes there's been some amazing political artists and that as well, like Heath Harding back in the nineties around the AIDS epidemic as a gay artist and his artwork is very controversial, political and but I think that's the role of an artist is to put a mirror up to the world what's going on at the moment, how it looks and it can be done with humour. It can be done with drama writers, right? Are artists. But in my perspective, I think it is. Artists hold a mirror up to what's going on in society at that time and what's happening and, you know, art can be very decorative and very pleasing and that as well. And but it can also just be very powerful in telling stories. Art, it's often very much the stuff I do just for connection to culture and just something that the spirituality side but a lot of my art is telling stories and the strengths of people with disabilities and the journeys they're on and and how that can be interpreted and the one I did ages ago is the many spirits dreaming, and that was an artwork that I was very passionate to me.

Paul: And it was about LGBTQI+ and perceptions in Indigenous communities and how that was the impact of Western philosophies and Western religions that changed the perception of LGBTQ+ from multiple genders to just two. And and in that book I talked about how many people have been alienated from their families, and I did representation of the suicide rate being three times higher than that of the non-Indigenous community, but also talked about having a voice in Parliament, getting more recognition and the same sex marriage debate and had that impact. And it was one huge artwork and it had everything I wanted to talk about, but it looked amazing. People loved it and I got to present that on the world stage so it was very political but very also positive and that as well and done in a way, it was just a story. Yes, and it was and the Canadian Minister for disabilities at the time now has that and whenever she presents. So anything to do around pride on social media she does it in front of that artwork. Yes, I think artworks can be both, but I think they're very powerful sketching and comedy and storytelling and it's an amazing way to gear up to the world.

Annie: Yeah, absolutely.

Paul: Yeah.

Annie: Yeah, that's great. I just, you've mentioned identity a few times through the interview. I just wondered whether you want to be identified as disabled or with pride, or is it about just being another artist?

Paul: So I think it's a bit of both. I I'm many people. It's like not just one, you know, I'm a husband, a brother, an uncle, a great uncle, community elder, all that and however, whatever environment I'm in is, how I might be acknowledged in that environment. But I think being an artist with disability is very important. I'm very proud of my disability. I don't try to hide it. I don't try to fit in or be accepted into the ability of the abled body world. I don't I don't want to. I'm not ashamed. I grew up with that shame around disability, segregated, put in special schools, treated differently and that as well. So I'm very proud to be an artist with disability, but I'm also a gay artist with a disability. So and all those parts are what impact on my artwork and my storytelling. They're all very, very relevant. So but I do, I do. I think, I think the main thing I like to be identified as is first up is, is a an Aboriginal artist or Wiradjuri artist and Wiradjuri artist living with disability. I always put disability in. It's a huge part of my storytelling, so I never hide it away. I never say I just want to be known as an artist, not with disability. I say to people, I want to be known as an artist living with disability because that's my point of difference and that's what impacts on my storytelling.

Paul: And, and it's impacted my, my whole life. I've lived with it. I don't want to hide it. I can't hide it. I walk with a bit of a limp I use a walking stick. I use a wheelchair sometimes, but it's just one of the facets of who I am because I grew up in an era where to be gay was still illegal. You had to be. You could be sentenced for being gay. I got knocked back jobs because I had a disability. I had to go to special schools and segregated from the rest of the community because we just were accepted. My own family, my cousins and everything else would come and they all looked after me. I went out with my cousins and my family and I just did what everyone else did so I think all those things were things that were minority groups and hidden away and were shamed and not seen or valued.

Annie: Yes,

Paul: part of community. So I don't want to hide them away. Now. I'm quite proud and I want people to see the value. And I thought, you know, I'm a Wiradjuri artist living with

disability and the proud gay man and so sometimes people say it's a triple threat. It's like.

Annie: So do you think there's a commonality or consistency in how the public would identify as disabled think about these things? So.

Paul: Oh, yeah, yeah. Look Annie, it's very different for each person. Yeah. Some people like I think, look, I had a discussion with someone the other day about employment, about people with disabilities being employed, and they were saying, because I would not like to be as a, as a token sort of thing or I wouldn't call it a to be able to say, look, actually we're looking for someone with disability just for a mainstream job just to fit a quota. Yeah, and I totally agree because people with disabilities can do a lot more. But certain things, if it's a role specifically around disability, I think people with disabilities should be in as well as same as people. It's a role representing women or women's rights or women's business. Well, a woman has to be in that role.

Annie: Yes.

Paul: It's the same as the multicultural role sort of person. That culture, I think the same with disabilities. But it's a very it's very different for each person how they, like people are now identifying as Crip and....

Annie: are they really?

Paul: That's a bit cringeworthy to me because I grew up with Cripple was such a derogatory term. That's right and I love that people are taking it back and having ownership. But for me, I can't use that term. No, no, I totally respect other people doing it, I think good on you. So yeah, so it's those so I think it's very different to each person, how they identify and what they do, and it's totally up to them.

Annie: Yeah. Yeah.

Paul: So but I think, you know, if you're an artist with a disability and you get funding through a disability program to do art well, you need to be proud and talk about the fact that you are someone with a disability and your connections in life but it's very different

to different people and, and I can only talk about my journey, my experience, and how I identify.

Annie: Yeah,

Paul: but I think overall people are becoming more proud a more aware and and starting to see that that makes up a huge part of how they present their artwork and their story, their writings, their poetry.

Annie: Yeah.

Paul: Dance.

Annie: Yeah.

Paul: Not just the visual arts, but on stage and acting and everything else as well and sometimes it gives recognition as the same as like, you know, we don't see ourselves in proper roles. People, disabilities. It was always someone sad or in a wheelchair or whatever, and it was always like a all forlorn, we're, or non-disabled people playing the parts of people with disabilities. So, so I'm seeing a move towards that. But it's very different, different people, The different journeys and how they identify is the same as sexuality. Like, you know, it's not just two genders gay, straight, lesbian. There's so many different gender diversities. Yes. And actually love it. I love that. It makes me think of things differently when someone presents, I have to go. Wow. Yes. Okay. That's are you way of challenges, my preconceived ideas that I grew up with and yeah.

Annie: So yeah, yeah. That was going to be my next question, actually. Other artists who are First Nations or LGBTQI think about these things. So what you're saying is that there's a diversity, it's individual responses to all of those different minority groups.

Paul: Yep, Yep. I think so too. And in regards to the arts, it's what you're portraying, what the message is or what did your heart at that time that you want to portray in your art? Yes, it could be something within issues come up and you want to present that. So it's very different. And some people, you know, not everyone like are out who are gay in that environment because of cultural differences and that as well. So they're still on that

journey and they may do that. But, but with world pride coming up, you know, there's an artist who would be having an exhibition. He's a deaf Aboriginal artist who does beautiful work and so he's going to be presenting and I think that'll raise the profile of all artists and that as well and, and he's work in the deaf community, so I think. I don't know. I sometimes think that people with disabilities and people of my age in the gay community, we had to act straight for so long so we're really good at pretending to be something we're not and I think with the art, we're very theatrical and the storytelling is just in our genes, in the sort of stuff. It's just who we do it. We tell stories. Our grandparents tell us stories, fairly tell us stories. So we just do this sort of thing. And I think as we develop skills in the arts and theatre and so on, then art is just another way of us sharing those stories, I think very powerful stories, Yeah. I think each individual person, how they tell their story is theirs, and I just think it's wonderful to see.

Paul: You've got to respect that. That's their story and you may not agree with it because your perception is different, but that's their perception and their journey and what they've been through and I think that's just adds to that diversity of how to look at how to look at the world and look differently and I think even with the LGBTIQ+ community, I've started to engage with some artists who are part of the transgender community, and it's just wonderful to see their stories happening because for a long time I think we had all the gay rights and everything else, and I think the transgender community is just still in the background. It's still not accepted, not even within didn't have a voice. Yes. And I think now that I feel personally, this is my journey as a gay man now who's seen these rights evolve and we're still hostile and you still have people who are homophobic, you still get that as well but I think now I want to support my transgender colleagues and community members that as well to say, you know what, I've got a voice, I want to ensure you have a voice as well and you're heard and your story and how you present and your perception on the world is so different to mine and celebrating that sort of thing. And so I think we all have this role. If a door opens for us, we have to hold it open as long as we can with so much to see how many more people can get through.

Annie: Yes. Yeah, that's great. So, Paul, is there something we haven't asked about that we should have?

Paul: Oh, that's like, typical for the top of my head. No, no. I kind of think it's been a I mean, it's been a lovely conversation and it's been a lovely distraction for me because I've said, you know, lots of different things going on in the world at the moment and to have a chance just to have a conversation where I'm not trying to educate someone, fix them, and and I sort of, you know, stick up for my rights or whatever is so nice just to have a conversation about the positive stuff that's going on and I would not be judged on it. It was huge so I'd like to see more of these conversations happening. It would be great, but I can't think of anything that hasn't been, se haven't covered. I'm sure later on I'll think of something.

Annie: Well, Paul, it's been invaluable. Just I've really enjoyed listening to you and hearing your perspective, hearing about your work. So thank you for your time today.

Paul: Look, thank you Annie:. I was thrilled to get the invitation to talk. It was wonderful and, and so thank you very much for the opportunity and, and I hope to still stay involved with the focus group and I know you're all over the place at the moment, doing lots of different things and lots of stuff going on like we all are, but it'll all come together. It all works.

Annie: That's right.