

**Interviewee:** Digby Webster

**Interviewer:** Ruth Williams

**Date of Interview:** 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023

**Location:** online via Zoom

**Length of Interview:** 30:02 minutes

## **Transcript**

**Ruth:** So, first question.

**Digby:** This is one of mine, by the way.

**Ruth:** I love it. I love it. Tell me a bit about yourself and your art making.

**Digby:** Well, my art making just. When I was a little tiny kid and I just got into creative stuff. I was brought up with the creative people around me, and they are a good influence for me in the way of art. So I've got a couple of people that I need to mention, but it's on the piece of paper over here, so people that I work with.

**Ruth:** Lovely.

**Digby:** And the very first person named Alison Richardson, and she worked at Riverside Theatre, Parramatta for a very long time and ... Um, she now works with a place in Mackay, Queensland and she works with another disability group up there. And the name, I think it's called Crossroads Arts. Yes, she worked with them, but before she worked with them, she used to live down here, and did a drama group in Sydney, and it's called RUCKUS. I was in it, plus a couple of my friends. Like my friend Audrey and my friend Chris, a couple of young men and ladies were part of it. And now we're no longer. And also, Imogen Yang, a nice beautiful young lady, and she, her background is audio description for people who are blind and hard of hearing. And that's her work.

**Ruth:** Audio description, did you say?

**Digby:** Yeah, well, see, that's her main thing to do. And then I worked with Rosell Flatley. And she worked with a place called New Moon. It's like. New Moon, it's like another thing of artists who have residencies there. And she worked with a couple

amazing young ladies and they're all lovely. And she's lovely is her background is the Philippines. And she is so nice to me, in a way. And then I used to have a one, one solo show of my own work in the past at the place called DNA. And the lady who runs it, and got me in to it, is Liz Nowell. And she asked me to put my artwork on the walls there. And from that stage, all people came and seeing the exhibition and my art just sold out. So. And then I did some Olympic mural at the Olympic Park on the ground. It's a very big board game. People join their families into, it's called Snakes and Ladders. And I done that with another artist, whose name's Nadia Odlum. She does this incredible art form, she does, it's like lines, like zigzag lines, and I joined with her and she did that kind of lines and I did some colourful creatures around the game. And she put all the lines around the whole thing. And, I don't know if it is still out there, it might be. And I did an exhibition at PACT theatre.

**Ruth:** At which theatre?

**Digby:** PACT theatre, in Erskineville, I did something out there with a guy called James Nguyen and he's an artist, and I did something with him called Wild Things.

**Ruth:** Wild Things.

**Digby:** It's like his friends and my friends all got together and did this amazing, kind of arty kind of thing on stage and stuff. It's really cool. And then I, with my artwork, I did a thing called 'Blockhead and Sparkles: Flood of Tears'. It's a short, animated film, based on my own artwork. And the lady who made it, her name's Rosie Louis Gung. And I know her personally because I used to go to primary school with her and her brother, so that's why I worked with her on that film. And it got shortlisted in some Film Festival. And I'm proud of that, too. I doo some murals and paintings, with an amazing guy called Neil Tomkins, everybody knows him as 'BirdHat'.

**Ruth:** As what sorry?

**Digby:** Well. His real name is Neil Tomkins, but when he does the murals up on the walls, everyone knows him as another name, BirdHat.

**Digby:** Yeah. Yeah. And he's lovely. And I did some residencies, one at Bundanon, and a bar in Redfern called the Bearded Tit, and I did the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital as well. Yeah. Yeah. So that's one, two, three, four, I did four residencies. And one, two, three groups that I'm part of. One called Front up, is emerging artists in Seven Hills, and they are a very inclusive bunch, a group of people with different kind of disabilities. I was part of that. And also they asked me to be their person to open their exhibition. They asked me to come in and cut the ribbon and. Open the show. And then I did something for Cushman Wakefield. Yeah. It's a corporate business in the city. Yeah. And they got me to do two Vivid paintings. You know Vivid, the whole thing at night-time with the bright coloured lights? I did something for them. In a little park, in Darling Harbour. I did something there with them. And then also, they put my artwork on umbrellas. And then I, my own artwork got bought by a group called Artbank. So they put my artworks around the city like that, like very fancy restaurants or something. Then they need colourful things on the walls and they asked Artbank to put my work there. Yeah, I'm happy with that.

**Ruth:** I bet. Yeah.

**Digby:** So that's all the things I need to tell you about little things because. I'm like, right now to you, we are doing this beautiful talk? You make me feel calm, and this is the real me.

**Ruth:** Can you tell me a bit more about RUCKUS?

**Digby:** RUCKUS is a group, a theatre group, that does different theatres, well not different theatres, but different shows. One called Love Heart Cardigan. One called See IN Me. We did one called Speed of Life, with another group out in Cambodia, called Epic Arts, we got involved with them out there in Cambodia. And these are some of the things we did. And one of our friends is a big fan of funny shows, but in RUCKUS he make his own show, using people like us acting in his comedy sketch and stuff. And I've got to show you, some images. Yeah. This is a couple of my artworks. They're all cut out from the original work I did and in this photo they are hanging inside of The Bearded Tit.

**Ruth:** Oh, yeah.

**Digby:** So that's the cut outs one. Yeah. They are beautiful. I love them, they're nice. Yeah. Yeah. Sometimes I think a couple of these ones got sold. And then I've got the Bundanon residency here.

**Ruth:** So what did you do on your residency.

**Digby:** doing outside painting.

**Ruth:** Outside?

**Digby:** Yeah, Outside. Sometimes. Indoors? Yeah. And I've got paintings here. I look at them and they are the things that I've done at a place called Bundanon. Yeah. And I've got, I think something for Tin Sheds on City Road close to Newtown. And then someone from the Opera House, got a couple of my works there, I did some for them too. So this is me in the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Talking about the Dutch Masters.

**Ruth:** Tell me that again. Sorry, I didn't hear.

**Digby:** This is an exhibition, called Dutch Masters, that's me there talking about paintings.

**Ruth:** Dutch masters.

**Digby:** Yeah, you know that country called Dutch, yeah Dutch Masters, well their paintings. It came to an Art Gallery down here, an exhibition, and I was the ambassador for Front Up and I spoke up about this exhibition. In the gallery. Yeah. So I done that. And a couple more. This is called Sounds of Space. And that behind there is a show of RUCKUS called 'Love Heart Cardigan'. And this is one of my artworks for Front Up. I don't know what happened to it, I don't have it, but this was up in the Cutaway in Barangaroo.

**Ruth:** And was that a really big piece?

**Digby:** Yeah. Yeah, it is. And then I was a part of this, called Don't DIS my ABILITY campaign. Because I was there, not a model, but people with disability go to their functions. And right before RUCKUS, I did another theatre company, it was out in Rozelle, this is, I made this name up, called the Ever After Theatre Company, one of my original old drama class I did, we did a show, How to Handle a Fractured Heart, at the moment we've just been doing things on Zoom, but next month... So this is at Rozelle, this is called Ever After. These are my friends, Tara, Tom Hancock, and these are all friends to me, but I know them through the group called Ever After. And we did a show, How to Handle a Fractured Heart. It was a beautiful show to make, and all of my friends were part of it and one of us is still doing it.

**Ruth:** What's the show about?

**Digby:** It's a story about people with disability, how to express ourselves, what our feelings and stuff. And it's the same photo, but it's bigger. Yeah. This is Tom Hancock. My friend made a very funny thing. At the Australia Council, on my birthday they made a little card and stick my head over James Dean's body! And she put her head over Natalie Wood! It's funny, it's cute, but it's a card. Yeah, but everyone, all the old people, that I know wrote something in that card, it's so special to me.

**Ruth:** How long have you been working at Australia Council?

**Digby:** Well, this year, 13 years. Yeah. Yeah. And I did an exhibition at... where is it ... out in... Oh Chatswood, an art gallery there, and I did an exhibition called Eye Flowers, and this one is Under The Sea, like coral reef, and that used to be down on the main street in Annandale, in Albion Street, they've got this thing there and they put this painting of mine, bigger, on the, on the wall panels and I've done it at my friend's place and my friends studio. And my friend Neil, he got me a part of that, on Albion Street. So they made this bigger. And a close friend of ours bought that piece. And here's a cover I did. Of the dance group called Dirty Feet.

**Ruth:** Yeah. Dirty Feet.

**Digby:** Yeah. To know that. No. Megan Exton from Australia Council. Yeah. Yeah. Because she knows what her friends outside work. Our friends. All part of this group. So that way I know Megan through this group? Yeah.

**Ruth:** So did you dance with them?

**Digby:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. They did an amazing thing. They employ people with disability to take classes and helping and educating children. Got to go and make them take the class. So things like that. And I was part of Bus Stop films for a while.

**Ruth:** Yeah.

**Digby:** And we done this film called The Interviewer. Yeah. And this is the film, The interviewer. Yeah. It's based on a story about a young man with Down Syndrome wants to interview clients and this other actor in that film. And he says you stole one of the clients I wanted to interview, and he wants to do what the others did, so he copies them. And then you've got RUCKUS here. This is called See IN Me, that's me, this is all my friends, this is my best friend, that's Nathan, James, Gerard, Audrey and Rachel.

**Ruth:** And what was See IN Me, was that drama again?

**Digby:** Yeah. Drama. Yeah. It's all part of this.

**Ruth:** Of RUCKUS. Yeah.

**Digby:** It's the show, part of this. And the film, called Blockhead and Sparkles. So these characters are my characters. I made up for that film. This here is my other character and he's crying, and that's why it's called Flood of Tears because when he cries very loudly, it makes a whole, whole wave of tears.

**Ruth:** And that was an animated film?

**Digby:** Yeah. Yeah. So that's why my mum made this folder for me to show it to you.

**Ruth:** It shows how many, like a wide variety of art making that you do like theatre and dance and animation and murals. Do you have. You have one that's your favourite that you enjoy doing the most, or do you like doing so many different things?

**Digby:** Well, I do like to do different things, but the ones the things that I like to do in my highlights. Um, just making art that involves maybe short films. And also I got, I like making art on clothes too. And the one thing one person I like to mention, and he's a big thing in my life, not just my dad's family, but it's also about a guy called Reg Mombassa. You know that man called Mambo?

**Ruth:** Mambo.

**Digby:** Yeah. Well, I own a couple of Mambo's original shirts in my room here, and he's a good influence on me because, his work on, like, short sleeved shirt with buttons. And I want to do something like that with the. The.

**Ruth:** So is that something you'd like to do next? Some different.

**Digby:** Yeah. That's what I like to do. Next step in my career. Yeah. So I want to kept doing short film, making my artwork in a short film, and one is just making, really do a sample of clothing. Yeah. The.

**Ruth:** It must feel amazing seeing people walk around in your t shirts and seeing other people in them enjoying them.

**Digby:** Yeah, I like that. But I don't. I know I'm a young man with Downs Syndrome, but I just want to see people at work or people that I work with, wearing clothes made by myself. It makes me very happy to see it.

**Ruth:** And when you talk about yourself, do you describe yourself as an artist with disability?

**Digby:** Well, I am just the same [...] I know I was born with disability, but I don't really keep saying disability, because I know myself, I love doing art making. I'm enjoying myself and everything goes really well. Yeah. Yeah, that.

**Ruth:** So are there any other. You've mentioned quite a lot of your friends in your in Ruckus and things like that. Are there any other artists that you think are particularly special or important?

**Digby:** Well, for me, way I've got two friends I like, as an artist, here and I think one lady, Nadia. Neil. Those two are amazing. Young man, and young lady in the art world. But I'm very close with Rosell Flatley from New Moon and close friends with her in a way. So she's amazing person. And I haven't seen her for ages since I...

**Ruth:** So Neil is the guy who does the murals with you. Yeah, And who was Nadia again. Sorry.

**Digby:** I thought, Well, her name is spelled in N a d i a.

**Ruth:** And what does she do?

**Digby:** No, I told you, I'm showing with my hands. The lines. Yeah.

**Ruth:** Yeah, that one. Olympic park.

**Digby:** Yeah. Yeah. Bit more back in my area here, too. Out on the street, for little children to react to those drawings. Yeah. She is that kind of amazing, playful person. Yeah, I like that.

**Ruth:** It sounds like you really like to see your artwork out in the real world as well as in an art gallery, but out where people can really get involved with it and play it or walk on it or watch it.

**Digby:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, I like that. But one of the things I like the most about art, though, is I think this thing is still on out there. Vincent Van Gogh is incredible artist himself. And he got the whole room. Amazing room to be very extra dark. But when you go in it's all this incredible light on the walls, different walls around. And when you look at them in. In a world of Vincent Van Gough's world, and paintings all around you. Yeah, I like that experience.



**Ruth:** Yeah. The big immersive experience.

**Digby:** Yeah. Yeah. It's amazing.

**Ruth:** We should do a Digby Webster one.

**Digby:** Yeah, I like that!

**Ruth:** Your work would look amazing like that with all the big faces around.

**Digby:** No, just my faces is my background, too. Yeah, Yeah, my background. Landscapes. Yeah, yeah.

**Ruth:** Yeah. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about? It's been really you told us some really great stories and about some really great projects.

**Digby:** Thank you.

**Ruth:** to tell us about?

**Digby:** do all these things at the moment. There's one more person I love to mention. It's a very extra old lady whose a personal, family member in my family, she's almost 100. She's 99 now, I don't know when her birthday is. But they're going. Well, she's the one that got me in to clay work.

**Ruth:** Clay?

**Digby:** Yeah Clay work, like pottery like I do. And I do like I've got some things here on, near my TV. She got me into these things.

**Ruth:** Oh, they're like tiles, almost.

**Digby:** Yeah, like tiles. Yeah. And I guess I'll make some flower vases. I made some. And I enter in a show called Castle Hill show. And I got a ribbon and a champion ribbon, too. So.

**Ruth:** Wow.

**Digby:** And this is one of the vases I made. Wow. Yes. Well, I. I'm a theatre dancer. Like a playmaker.

**Ruth:** Sculptor.

**Digby:** Sculpture. Yeah. And I like doing clay work it's nice, get your hands in.

**Ruth:** That's been really brilliant. Digby, thank you very much.

**Digby:** Very welcome.