



Georgie Burgess

SHARE



Honest, holistic and moving: Pictures of You opens at Belco Arts



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What started as an ordinary volunteering trip to Fiji in 2017 ended with John Brookes in severe organ failure and being told he only had three months to live.

Five years later John is opening the latest exhibition at the Belconnen Arts Centre, *Pictures of You*.

Sparked by a desire to leave something behind after being told he didn't have much longer to live and realising there were too many stories to ever fit into one book in such a short amount of time, John sat down with a painter to create a memorial portrait.

Throughout that process—as the artist and John got to chatting—the pair discovered that they were learning about themselves as they learned about each other. It was through this journey that *Pictures of You* was born.

Opening on Friday 2 December—a day ahead of International Day of People with Disability—this collaborative exhibition features a series of portraits of

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people living with disabilities in our region.

“I think the key thing was to humanise people with disabilities and to give them the rare chance to actually be part of the conversation around how they are depicted in media because often that depiction is forced upon them by stereotypes.” John says.



In 2015, Melissa Hammond was involved in a car crash and at that moment her whole world changed.

Since then, Melissa has become homeless due to chronic and debilitating pain that has given her an invisible disability, something often misunderstood in the community.



“One cannot assume that just because a person does not have an obvious health problem that they are well and able. It is fluid. I wanted to show Melissa’s beauty and resilience against adversity.”

‘A picture is worth a thousand words’, this is something often quipped and for Melissa, her portrait is a layered representation of who she is, telling a large part of her story through a single snapshot. However, the short abstracts beside each portrait also unlock another chapter to the story.

“Do you see what I see? A person in pain? A person who struggled to get dressed and do their hair that day? A person calculating what they will have to give up in their week to recover from this? My battle is not only with my body, it’s the part of me you can’t see.”
Melissa wrote.



“We wanted it to be a holistic representation of people with a disability because they’re not defined by it and it doesn’t stop them being a human being on the inside.”
John says.



This exhibition is hopefully the first instalment for a series of *Pictures of You* exhibitions and John has just received a grant from the Capital Arts Patron Organisation to continue his work in the arts and disability sectors.

THE ESSENTIALS

What: Pictures of You exhibition

When: Friday 2 December until Sunday 5 February 2023

Where: Belconnen Arts Centre, Emu Bank, Belconnen

Web: belcoarts.com.au