

*ACCESS
IS A
HUMAN
RIGHT*

VISABILITY



VISABILITY

27 NOV - 26 JAN 2020

A celebration of identities, minds and bodies.

VISABILITY is a celebration of identities, minds and bodies as artists who identify as having a disability make the invisible and marginalised, visible. The exhibition asks the audience to consider how values, assumptions and falsehoods embedded in our culture and systems discriminate against people with disability - and what might be possible when those assumptions are challenged.

Featuring work by Jasmin Âû, Ibby Ibrahim, Annie Moors, Ngino Amum, Ruby Allegra, Dawn Iris Dangkomen, Leilani Fuimaono, Mereani Qalovakawasa and morag 17 undulatingroses.

Wyndham City acknowledges the peoples of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Owners of the land on which Wyndham Art Gallery stands and we pay our respects to their elders, past, present and future.

Wyndham Art Gallery
Great Art. Deep West.

Image (Cover) : Ruby Allegra - *Protest*

Image (Left) : Dawn Iris Dangkomen - *Broken Mirror*



VISABILITY

Curator's Note by Hannah Morphy-Walsh

#DisabilityIsAnIntersection

#DisabilityPride

We scare you, and not without reason. It is not a good reason. Hatred of Disabled people is written into our shared cultures. From Baba Yaga, to witches whose feet face backwards, to facial differences, even the markings on our skin prove that we are something other than human. Something other than you. But we are found throughout history as equals in every field, lovers and hermits, artists and warriors, even as leaders and culture makers. This fact disturbs many, who have then tried to erase us. Failing that, they have tried to erase our identities. Still, we are here. This fact, too, disturbs many of you.

Our existence is shown as a burden. Spaces and technologies designed for you are hailed as progress, but our rights are viewed as an unreasonable effort. In the broad genre of academic studies sometimes nicknamed water is wet studies, we have learned over and over again through studies of Disabled people interacting with Abled structures that our world and our bodies are not hostile to us - you are. We call this system ableism, and spend lifetimes learning

to lessen its impacts on ourselves and, hopefully, on others around us. While ableism may sometimes be recognised as unjust in its own right, it is less understood as a form of oppression that can act on other forms of oppression. It is for this reason that I think that disability is an under-served intersection. Our disabilities are seen as separate to us, as if we do not live in our bodies. We are not recognised as whole people with our disabilities.

Except by other Disabled people. Humour me, here: I think what really scares you is the idea that we might not need you, that you cannot use our lives to make yourselves feel better about your own. We are here without apology. We are not asking anything from you. You have built us out of your spaces, so we are creating our own, where we are free to exist on our own terms.

(This is Visibility)



Image (Left): Leilani Fuimaono + Nigno Amum - *empress*

Image (Right): Ibby Ibrahim - *Wolverine*

*THE FUTURE IS
DISABLED, QUEER,
BLACK, TRANS,
FAT, MUSLIM,
INDIGENOUS, SEX
WORK, JEWISH,
INTERSEX AND
PEOPLE OF COLOUR*

Creating VISABILITY

Curator's Note by Pauline Vetuna

Hannah Morphy-Walsh and I had one pure, guiding intention in our curation of VISABILITY Exhibition: to showcase the work of largely emerging BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour), Queer, and Trans artists with disabilities.

The reasons for this are complex, but can be reduced to this: BIPOC with disabilities are pushed to the margins of BIPOC spaces; Queer and Trans people with disabilities are pushed to the margins of spaces for Queer and Trans people; and all are marginalised in spaces for people with disabilities.

We wanted to curate an exhibition at Wyndham Art Gallery that, at its core, celebrated our identities, minds and bodies as disabled people living at the intersections of race, culture, sexuality and gender – knowing that the richness of these lived experiences would inevitably lead to a richness of visions, expressed through a variety of mediums.

Image: Ruby Allegra - Protest

In VISABILITY, 9 incredible artists of various ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds who identify as having a disability, have made the invisible and marginalised, visible: through sculpture, design, illustration, painting, installation, photography, origami and video works.

Ruby Allegra routinely makes their body, ideas, and art visible on Instagram – where I initially came across their work. Their designs are playful yet deliberate, pretty yet defiant, personal yet unabashedly political. The way Ruby nurtures online worlds is in itself a rolling work of participatory art; a reminder that whilst nondisabled people quibble about the “toxicity” of social media, for people locked out of spaces due to inaccessibility, it is often our only access point to community and a vital tool in activism. The internet can be a lifeline.

Mereani Qalovakawasa, another artist in our exhibition, has long used the

Image: Annie Moors - *Self-Portrait*





internet in the development of their arts practice and self-care practice, as someone living with a chronic illness. Her two video works in VISABILITY initially debuted on YouTube, where a highly creative subculture of people with disabilities thrives. From our perspective as curators with disabilities, the ideas, emotions and histories being expressed through Mereani's video works, are sophisticated and deeply affecting.

An unexpected blessing of being proud disabled people is that gift of perspective; the ability to perceive the brilliance in other people with disabilities, and know what non-disabled people cannot naturally perceive or know – unless we make non-disabled people aware of it. Co-curator Hannah and I have had many conversations about the things non-disabled people miss; things that our disabilities and *Othered* identities allow us to easily perceive.

Disability really can be a superpower. So when we noticed a super alter ego emerging in **lbby Ibrahim's** photo collages, we felt compelled to find out more about this character. Named 'IBBYMAN', the character frequently emerges in the artwork

Image: Jasmin Âû - *Karaihe 2*

Ibby creates in Footscray Community Art Centre's Art Life program – including the works we are displaying in this exhibition.

Ibby's work can also be viewed as self-portraiture; self-portraiture for people largely sidelined by society takes on a sacred and politically important purpose in the face of erasure and systemic violence – particularly for disabled bodies. **Ngino Amum** and **Leilani Fuimaono's** stunning and joyful portrait photography collaboration is at once Divine and political, by virtue of the fact that both the artist holding the camera and the artist in the frame, are queer Black and people of colour with disabilities.

Annie Moors self-portrait in VISABILITY will be recognizable to anyone familiar with her paintings; this time, she used darker hues than the earlier work I first saw exhibited at Blak Dot Gallery in 2017. A proud Yolngu woman, Annie's talent and emotive visual language have been instrumental in gaining independent self-expression as a person born with Down Syndrome, and she expresses all aspects of her reality and emotions in her body of work.

Whilst the aforementioned portraits conform more to traditional ideas of what that is, two works in our exhibition capture the Self in other ways. **Jasmin Âû's** truly beautiful copper wire/mixed media work 'Karaihe' captures the collision of disability, autism, and identity. And whilst much of the work in VISABILITY emphasises disability joy, **Dawn Iris Dangkomen's** work 'Broken/Mirror' represents the other side of the coin; it reflects on how long it took before she realised that disability might have shaped her personality and life struggles.

In Dawn's own words, the piece becomes "a commentary on white, neurotypical, able-bodied society and its limited expectations of behaviour and access: the false idea that mirroring whiteness and 'normality' are the ultimate narratives of success, and lie of a singular mirrored approach to accessibility that erases each of our different needs."



Image (Above): Mereani Qalovakawasa - *Make up is Meditation*
 Image (Right): Leilani Fuimaono + morag 17 undulatingroses - 11:55

Within such a society, disabled people who are BIPOC, Queer and Trans do need each other: for community, solidarity, camaraderie, survival... and love. The 5 artwork collaboration between **Leilani Fuimaono** and **morag seventeen undulating roses** is about such love; the depth of their love for each other throughout ongoing, long term hardship. Through illness, disability, memory, loss, grief and grieving, trauma, pain, friendships, relationships, endings and beginnings, they have loved and supported each other.

This kind of love is the heart and soul of VISABILITY Exhibition. We'd like to acknowledge the allyship of Wyndham Art Gallery; particularly curator Megan Evans, former curator Maree Clarke, and Caroline Esbenshade. We are deeply grateful to Bec Cole, who not only granted us this rare opportunity to curate a show featuring artists with disabilities, but supported every single accessibility measure we requested – including our request to close the upper level of the gallery. We acknowledge too that this does not mean that VISABILITY exhibition is accessible to every single person with a disability; this is the future reality we must still tirelessly work towards.





Nonetheless, our approach to this curation is the beginning of a methodology in Wyndham that prioritises community, access and self determination, over the “normal” uninclusive aesthetic protocols of curation.

Lastly, as you spend time with the artworks, I ask that you keep these words in mind from exhibition artist Ruby Allegra:

“If you exist in a body which has constantly been told it is unwelcome in a space of love, acceptance, romance and celebration, I see you, and I celebrate you.

If today is painful or triggering for you because it serves as yet another reminder of the way in which the world does not hold your body, the way in which it others you, the way in which it isolates you, I see you and I celebrate you.

Today I hold myself.

Today I romance myself.

Today I celebrate myself, and that’s revolutionary.”

Image (Left): Image: Ibby Ibrahim - *IBBYMAN*

Image (Right): Ruby Allegra - *Ode to my wheelchair*



AN ODE TO MY WHEELCHAIR

Go *Deeper:*

Conversations, workshops
and activities that offer
a deeper insight into the
exhibition and the creative
practice of exhibiting artists.





Artist In Conversation

VISABILITY will be unpacked in a rich conversation between artists Ruby Allegra and Leilani Fuimaono, moderated by co-curator Pauline Vetuna.

They will discuss their various contributions to the exhibition, the intersection of politics and art, and developing an arts practice in a cultural sector and world that marginalises many artists with disabilities.

WED 04 DEC 2019
6:00pm - 8:00pm

Image: Leilani Fuimaono - *the sun*



#deepwest
wyndham.vic.gov.au/arts

wyndhamcity