



Resilience in Regional Creative Arts Communities CASE STUDIES: **Janet Bromley**



Place of arts practice:

Bendigo

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I would like to personally acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands that I journey upon and pay my respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Personal vision and background

‘In aboriginal art, going to the past is important, but there needs to be a future view. After the traditional there needs to be storytelling for the generations who follow.’

Looking backwards looking forwards... Janet has great capacity to move between communities, and between past and future. She moves also between forms, from photography to weaving to pastels/paints/pencil, describing herself as a weaver and maker. Her art work explores her cultural heritage, displacement, past life experiences, vulnerable people and our management of waste materials.

Janet is a Yorta Yorta woman, who started university in her 60th year and is now a Masters candidate in Visual Arts. Starting from a pirate ship sculpture on her front lawn when very young, she has always had a strong interest in the built environment, and is currently working with recycled clothing, plastic, found objects and natural elements from the bush.

Janet is active on social media, in fact this is her online gallery, showcase and discussion forum. On Facebook she features her work from *Clutch & Release*, a recent exhibition at La Trobe Art Institute. On her everart twitter feed she is constantly linking others in to her broad-ranging topics and discussions. On her myarttime Instagram she captures past/future, always sharing her vision with others.



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Title: Sea View 2019
 Woven from recycled plastic, nylon and yarn, the abstracted seascape conveys the paradox of the ocean – that it is invaluable yet fraught with pollution; sublime yet frail.
Sea View 2019 was the winner of the Creative Victoria Award for Excellence in Any Media at the annual Koorie Art Show, exhibited at Federation Square in Melbourne during summer 2018-19



Title: there's a hole in my bucket 2019
Size:
 height: 33 cm
 width: 30cm
Format: recycled wire.

I try to use recycled materials in my work, get given something and play around with it till I find what it should make. I have a series of baskets made from various materials.



Title: Our Country 2019
Size: Height: 104cm
 Width: 50cm
Format: loom woven, recycled materials – plastic, shredded clothing, possum, wire paperbark
 This work is part of a triptych about my family. This weaving depicts the Country we walk on. I use recycled materials to lower the footprint of my work.

Making art is a way of expressing who Janet is. During her work life, art was ‘my mental health saver.’ Her creativity now expresses her full and interesting life, her commitment to making for others, sharing her voice and strengthening her understanding of where she is coming from. ‘I don’t feel like I need to answer to other people; this is for me. This is a healthy way to live in the world.’

Personal engagement with community resilience building in arts practice

When talking about community resilience, Janet is interested in that whole issue of the artist as both maker and marketer, the combination of being able to build a network to sell confidently, and finding time and space to make art. Artists are generally introspective, and emerging artists may well have a fear of moving beyond the internal artmaking space and the studio, to put work on public display and meet potential clients.

Her answer to this for herself has been to consider why she makes her art, her storytelling across her communities. She is comfortable with attending group sessions and asking for advice from such



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organisations as the Bendigo Council. She also looks to her indigenous community through her Facetime groups and twitter feed.

Her Artist-in-Residence exhibition at St Kilda Town Hall in 2019 at *Embolden* (a three day festival challenging ageism and building respect for older people), focused on making a statement about waste in our world. She talked of the 'strong element of my culture in the underpinning of traditional practice that drives my work and the act of gathering materials as my ancestors would have to make baskets and coverings.' Janet works with recycled or non traditional materials now, within a traditional practice.

Also in 2019, Janet curated the Womnjeka exhibition at Arnold St Gallery in Bendigo, bringing together eight Bendigo and regionally based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. This curation was about exposing the artists to a whole new audience, mentoring exhibitors.

For Janet, ego isn't an issue – she makes for others and openly shares on Instagram. She moves across communities and is respected both as an artist and as an arts advocate.

Identification of issues and gaps in regional creative sector

The issue that Janet immediately identifies is the need for a community space, such as an Aboriginal art gallery. She believes it is a bit of a lottery on getting space to exhibit, particularly in Bendigo, as there's lots of demand. There are no specifically allocated community spaces for local artists, while there is a burgeoning energy for developing artist groups. She suggests the process needs to be observed from all sides – the artist, the curator, the technician who hangs the show – to broaden connections across the arts community. A community space can encourage this broadened skills network.

Another interesting aspect for her is the tight knit groups without clear interactions between them. For instance, the different artist groups in Castlemaine and Bendigo could share their practice with weblink connections, but these diverse communities are not actively searching out communal arts spaces and discussions online. Being active on social media, developing these spaces, can lead to practice-connections.

Janet suggests that art which is different needs to actively look for support, maybe through Instagram to deliver this sort of art (personal, experimental or without specific audiences) into diverse communities. This is the value of the internet and its weblike qualities, which can enable smaller groups to reach out to a wider community, or to share and deepen their personal groupings.

Potential strategies for building regional creative sector resilience

Janet believes the Bendigo Council group sessions provide great advice. However she suggests that bringing in outsiders, different advocates who can share the arts exhibition spaces, will bring diverse people together. There is a need to cross-fertilise the arts culture in Bendigo, to develop collectors who will do more than buy a particular artist. She would like to see purchase of emerging artist works beyond family and friends, perhaps exploring the opportunities for Bendigo businesses looking for art. Her vision is to see the opportunities also for the court system to develop art as a skills development for those in the judicial system, particularly young people, as an expression of their experience and their voice.



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Digital arts stories...



[myarttime #Notdotpainting](#) 2006

This painting is part of a series from when I first started to find my Aboriginal heritage.

Size: height 91cm width 61cm

Format Acrylic on canvas

Years ago I had a [#solo](#) exhibition at Australia on Collins. I found these behind my wardrobe when moving things around today. [#Notdotpainting](#) rather showing the [#layers](#) that hide us that come between us and the things we seek. A veil between what we know and what we struggle to find.



Title: My Grandmother's Country 2016

My Grandmother was stolen generation and did not talk about her Aboriginality. The Murray River is now a place we can ground ourselves while we reconnect to our Yorta Yorta roots.

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Researched and written by Dr Karen Le Rossignol, Deakin University, June 2020