

Vale John Demos

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John Demos proved that art can create bridges and promote acceptance, and will be remembered as one of Australia's great artists.



John Demos with his work "Antitoxic" at Big Fag Press in 2013; courtesy Big Fag Press

John Demos died this past Saturday. While he was perhaps not the most broadly known Australian artist, Demos was a rare talent and inspired many.

He studied fine arts at both TAFE and the National Art School in Sydney, and was prolific in his making for more than 35 years.

He said in a recent profile: 'The reason I like making it art, it's a challenge, it's expression, it's more than real life. I love to look at art, and I spend a long time looking at art, and I like making art because it's the way that I function.'

Demos considered himself an artist, however, it has only been in the past decade that artists with disabilities were “allowed” to enter the mainstream.

He capitalised on that emerging support network, a key artists of the Project Insideout supported studio based at Macquarie Hospital in NSW, and developed a long bond as resident artist at Big Fag Press print studio.

Big Fag Press dedicated a web page to Demos this week (<http://www.johndemos.net/>). They also produced this video with filmmaker Josh Charles a few years ago.



John Demos at the Big FAG Press (<https://vimeo.com/74101498>) from Josh Charles (<https://vimeo.com/joshcharles>) on Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com>).

Demos created text-based work using various source materials from paper to wood, ceramics and detritus. His repetitive use of words and motifs ‘map out the physical and social environments that he inhabited.’

It was a unique aesthetic vocabulary and was imbued with great humanity and curiosity. He loved making prints. As he said: ‘I always loved to work with machines, and print making is a lot about machines.’



John Demos, Calling all Robots, 2010, Texta on board, 50cm diameter. Photo: Josie Cavallaro and Kristina Tito. Image courtesy the artist.

Anyone who met John would remember him for his gentle demeanor and his pocket full pens. I first had the pleasure of being introduced to his work at a symposium held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) in Sydney in 2013 by the [Supported Studio Network \(http://aarts.net.au/supportedstudios/\)](http://aarts.net.au/supportedstudios/) (SSN), in association with Accessible Arts.

At the time, Louise Kate Anderson of Big Fag Press [captured the dilemma \(http://visual.artshub.com.au/news-article/news/visual-arts/gina-fairley/is-outsider-art-finally-over-197406\)](http://visual.artshub.com.au/news-article/news/visual-arts/gina-fairley/is-outsider-art-finally-over-197406) shared by colleagues: 'We wanted to promote John as an artist in the mainstream, as that is what would be best for his career, but at the same time it was difficult to talk about the project without mentioning that it was funded by Accessible Arts and NSW Health, and that it was part of the Supported Studio Network, so it is this double-edged sword.'

She continued, 'John is funded by these bodies that help him get to the art world and yet just speaking about them means that he's put in a box we don't want to put him in.'

Anderson worked with Demos on a project exhibited at Sydney's Cross Art Projects (2013). His work has also been presented in exhibitions at Macquarie University Art Gallery SCA Gallery University of Sydney, Big Fag Press, and was included in the touring survey exhibition of Australian Outsider Art, Renegades (2013-15), curated by Camille Masson-Talansier.

Demos found a community at Big Fag Press and his making flourished. He went on to say in that video profile: 'I like to think that younger people, people with disability, I hope that maybe I have influenced them in their life towards art.'

Demos will not only be remember for inspiring a younger generation of artists with disability but will be remember as one of Australia's great artists. As activist, artist and friend Ian Milliss posted this week: 'It was an honour to know him and I hope there will be a major show of his work soon.'

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