

# COFFEE TALK

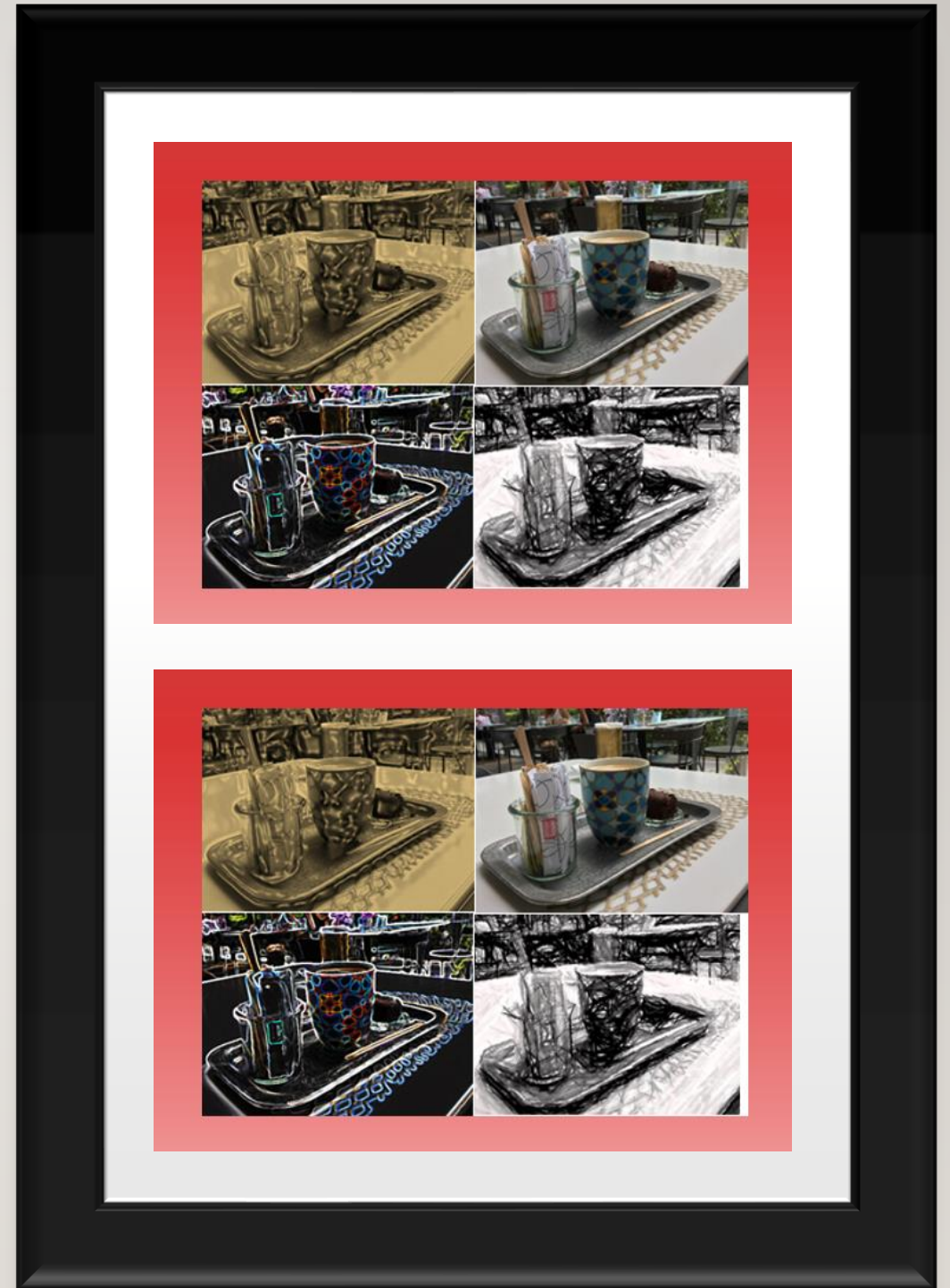
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THE RIGHT TO BE AN ARTIST: Operationalizing  
Studio Art Practices for People with Cognitive  
and Intellectual Disabilities

by Christina Yarmol

A part of a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate  
Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

October 8, 2020



# Coffee Talk

Christina Yarmol



All portraits in Coffee Talk are completed by van Duffelen, E. and Yarmol, C. (2019), [Felt tip marker and pencil crayon on cartridge paper, 8½" x 11"].



Yarmol, C. (2020). *Coffee Talk Title Page*. [Digital photograph of 7 finished albums, 9" x 11" each, book binding cloth, matt board, Japanese paper, double-sided tape, PVA glue].

Please note that artists were beginning drawings & paintings for an art show invitation when Covid 19 struck.

# WHY SELECT THIS FORMAT?

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- Artist and art researcher Sandra Weber (2008) states that artistic images, “Can help us access those elusive, hard-to-put-into words aspects of knowledge that might otherwise remain hidden or are ignored (p. 6). The use of visual images is not a luxury or [an] add-on to scholarship but, in many situations, essential” (p. 5).
- Visual art is an integral part of this dissertation. The purpose of these Powerpoint presentations is to give the viewer/reader a virtual experience of the artwork created.

# WHY THE COFFEE TALK TITLE ?

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- Creative Village Studio facilitator, Harold Tomlinson believes in a “comfort before skills” approach: “The artists come in early, have a hot beverage, relax and then get to their artwork” (Personal conversation, November 25, 2019).
- Participants frequently spoke about the coffee and tea they enjoyed at the studio with their colleagues.

# IMAGE OF SEVEN COFFEE TALK BOOKS



The exhibition consists of a series of hand-sculpted, Elbum\*-structured books.

The researcher learned the *Elbum technique* at the Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists Guild in Toronto, ON.

\* The Elbum style is a book binding technique developed in France by bookbinder, Benjamin Elbel in 2013.

# WHAT IS INSIDE THE BOOK?

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- Inclusive artwork project ⇒ hand-drawn portraits of artist-participants, volunteers, parents and art instructors by Christina Yarmol and Evelyn van Duffelen
- Individual artists' profiles ⇒ photographs of artists' art portfolios and co-constructed statements about their artwork
- Artwork ⇒ researcher's artwork as data accompanied by artist's statements (Note: The artwork acted as an introduction to each chapter of the dissertation.)

# THE VERSATILITY OF THIS ART FORM

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Why the Elbum construction?

The advantage of the structure of these albums is that they can be enjoyed individually, or pages can be withdrawn from the central concertina spine and exhibited in a public space along side an artist's artwork.



# CONTENT CAN BE ENJOYED INSIDE THE BOOK



- An articulated narrow pocket inside the centre of each book grips pages

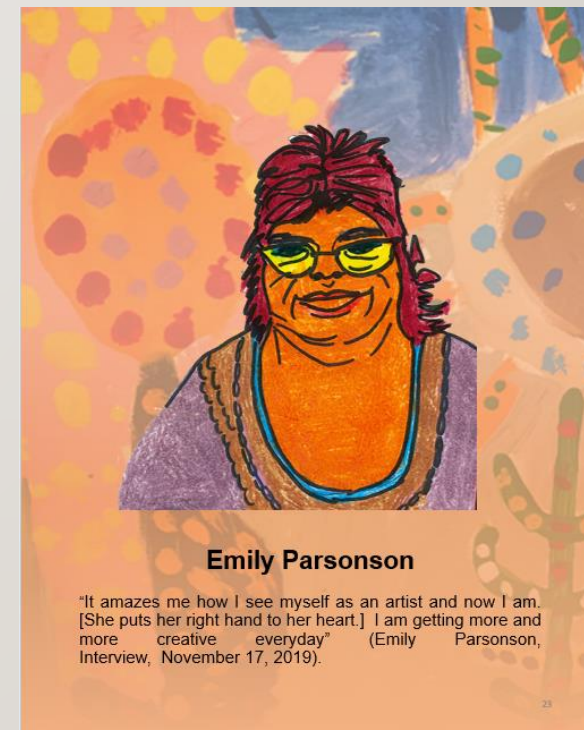


- Artist's artwork and statement inside of book



# CONTENT CAN BE ENJOYED OUTSIDE THE BOOK

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**Emily Parsonson**

"It amazes me how I see myself as an artist and now I am. [She puts her right hand to her heart.] I am getting more and more creative everyday" (Emily Parsonson, Interview, November 17, 2019).

Artist-participant's artwork

# CONTENT CAN BE ENJOYED OUTSIDE THE BOOK



Christina Yarmol



Yarmol, C. (2020), *Fly on the Wall & Fly on the Bench*. [Egg tempera on wood panel with faux silver leaf and size, 16" x 18" & 8" x 10" ].

I agree with a/r/tography theorist Rita Irwin's claim that, "A/r/tographers understand that who they are is embedded in what they know and do" (2008, p. 2). I was keenly aware of my artist, art educator and researcher identities throughout the research process. As a researcher, I found it challenging not to constantly share knowledge deeply embedded within these identities with the study participants. Letting the artmaking process naturally unfold by refraining from offering advice or sharing commentary that might interfere with instructors' art facilitation and artists' production of their own ideas was of paramount importance at the outset of the observation sessions. A mantra resounded, "Be a fly on the wall Yarmol!" or "Be a fly on the bench!" These phrases are what Irwin et al (2008) would term as a metaphor — to be still and to use my senses to actively attend to what was evolving around me.

The fly's anatomy helps to strengthen this metaphor: the fly's compound eye made up of various lenses makes up most of its head affording the fly with accurate three-dimensional sight. The six legs each equipped with a tarsus, a pair of claws and a fleshy, adhesive glandular pad called a pulvillus assists the fly with walking across walls and ceilings suspending itself in various locales around the studio.

I communicated to the studio's facilitator that I would share my reflections about the studio's processes after the research data was analysed however, if an art researcher acts simply as a stiff observer who purposefully does not respond to the artists' queries about their work, opportunities are denied and the resulting fieldnote data and observations become less rich. I found that I was constantly balancing on a sort of teeter-totter thus I found myself moving toward the participant-observer role creating small landscapes in my sketchbook with the excess paint left on palettes at the end of sessions. My interactions with participants, their artwork and artistic processes resulted in increased communication and caused the effect of validating me as an artist-participant. These resulting *impressions* are represented by pigment smudging left on the panel at the base of the fly's pulvillus.

The choice of an ancient method of egg tempera is purposeful in that pigments are very thinly applied in transparent linear washes. The layering of the egg tempera is slow and methodical building up layers of paint to avoid crumbling and cracking. The utilization of this process was also reflective of a/r/tographic processes which "build up knowledge" through lived experience like the way I carefully approached the data collection at the research site.

# INCLUSIVE ART PROJECT PORTRAITS

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**Quyên Ngo**

"I like to come here. It is quiet. I come. I draw. I like this one [He looks at me but points downward firmly with one finger at one of his still life flower paintings.]. I decide. I paint it" (Quyên Ngo, Interview, October 23, 2019).

- Residing between each of these pages are colour reproductions of artwork that Evelyn van Duffelen, Creative Village Studio artist and the researcher created for this project.
- The researcher sketched portraits of each study participant at the studio and Evelyn selected and applied the colours in her preferred medium of pencil crayon.
- Key phrases from the interviews with the participants are positioned below each portrait.

# SELF-AUTHORED ARTISTS' STATEMENTS

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- Inclusive arts researchers, Alice Fox and Hannah Macpherson (2015) say:

Self-authored artists' statements offer another opportunity for the artist's voice to emerge for individuals to represent themselves rather than to be, once again observed and talked about. However, supporting a learning-disabled artist (terminology in the United Kingdom) to write an artist's statement is an art in itself, and one that needs to avoid an overly simplistic wordy, sentimental or sympathetic response. The best work in this area tends to emerge from well-established relationships (p. 41).

N/B: Texts depicted here are from the *Coffee Talk* exhibition book.

## Steve Nicholson

Steve paints the places he has visited around the city and objects in his daily life. Steve's style vacillates between realistic scenes and abstractly painted compositions. He likes to experiment with bright colours, geometric shapes and various painting techniques to get new, astounding results.

Steve says, "It's always a surprise when I combine different styles to create a new visual experience."

## Sabrina Simonyi

Sabrina is passionate about the disciplines of drawing and painting. She has many sources of inspiration and sharing them with others brings her great happiness and joy. She likes to select subjects that interest her like animals, film characters, and landscapes. Her artistic style ranges from simple and boldly coloured organic compositions to intricately detailed subject matter with complex patterns. Sabrina says, "I like to experiment then practice new techniques in classes to expand my skills and then work on my own ideas. The studio gives me the chance to learn and to grow".

## Astra Milberg

Astra loves to experiment with colour, texture and assorted materials for personal mixed media applications.

Astra explains, "I like pretty and colourful imagery. I like making princesses into brides. Anything that resembles love attracts me. I want to get married but if I can't be a bride, I can still paint about my wedding day. I enjoy painting and journaling and can spend hours in my own world."

## Patricia Habuda

Patricia has always loved flowers. She has learned how to boldly and colourfully paint her subject matter on a large scale. She also likes to create greeting cards so that her art can be accessible to everyone. Patricia states, "Flowers are my passion. I take my time to make my paintings and drawings perfectly. I am an artist and I sell my work. I love art. I want to learn more! I'm very proud of the work I have made." Patricia is very devoted to her work. She enjoys adding happiness to the lives of others through her art.

# ARTIST'S STATEMENT



Photograph by H. Tomlinson

## Quyen Ngo

Quyen draws on his friends, family, nature, culture and everyday objects as inspiration for the diverse imagery in his artwork. Overtime his style has matured dramatically from basic organic shapes to the addition of more complex and repeating patterns. He often outlines his shapes with a solid coloured contour line and uses vibrant colors to create emphasis in his work. Quyen creates distinctive pieces that are quite recognizable to the casual viewer. The mood of happiness always prevails in his work. Quyen states, "I painted a little when I was young. Painting is easy for me. I like seeing my paintings hanging up on the walls".



- Artists shared details about the subject matter and the contents of their artwork\*.
- Key points of each exchange about the artwork were edited and presented along side photographs of their selected artwork.

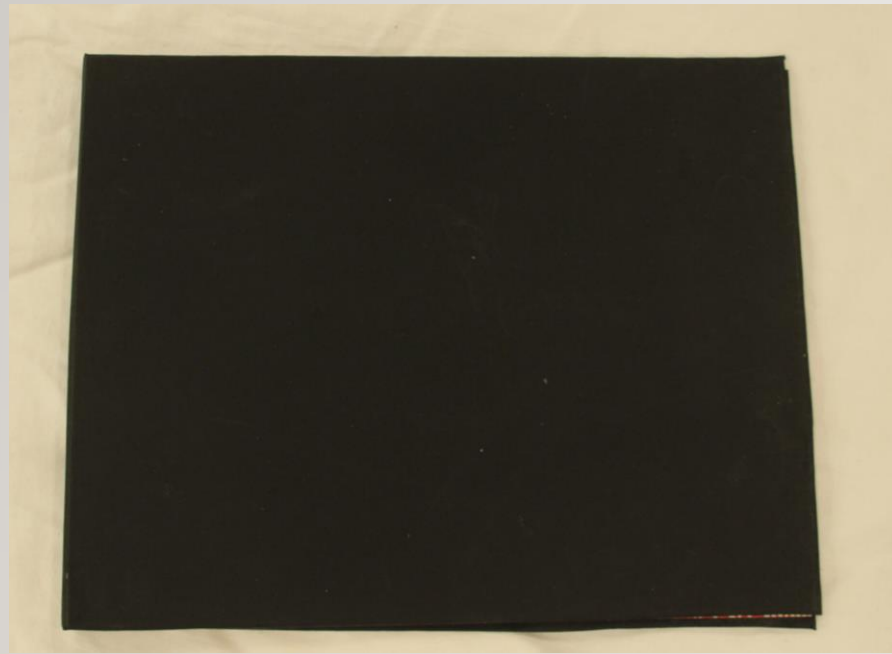
\*This endeavor was supported by the studio's facilitator Harold Tomlinson.

# TAKE A LOOK INSIDE EACH BOOK IN THE SERIES


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- The following images demonstrate the exterior binding cloths, end papers, coloured concertinas, artists' statements, joint art projects contained in each book of the *Coffee Talk* exhibition series.
- Close up images of the books' contents are in the *Coffee Talk* slide deck included in the dissertation package.

# BOOK I



**Coffee Talk**  
Christina Yamal



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**Christina Yamal**

Christina Yamal is a professional writer and editor. She has worked for several years in the publishing industry, where she has been responsible for editing and proofreading a wide variety of books. She is also a frequent contributor to various magazines and newspapers. Her work is characterized by its clarity and attention to detail. She is currently working on a new book about the history of the coffee industry.



**Neil Clifford**

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# BOOK II



# BOOK III



**Christina Yarnol**

Christina Yarnol is a young woman who has been a member of the church for many years. She is a very kind and helpful person who always has a smile on her face. She is also a very talented artist and has many beautiful drawings and paintings. She is a very active member of the church and always helps out with the various activities. She is a very loving and caring person who is always ready to help anyone in need. She is a very beautiful and talented person who is a true blessing to the church.



**Astra Wilson**

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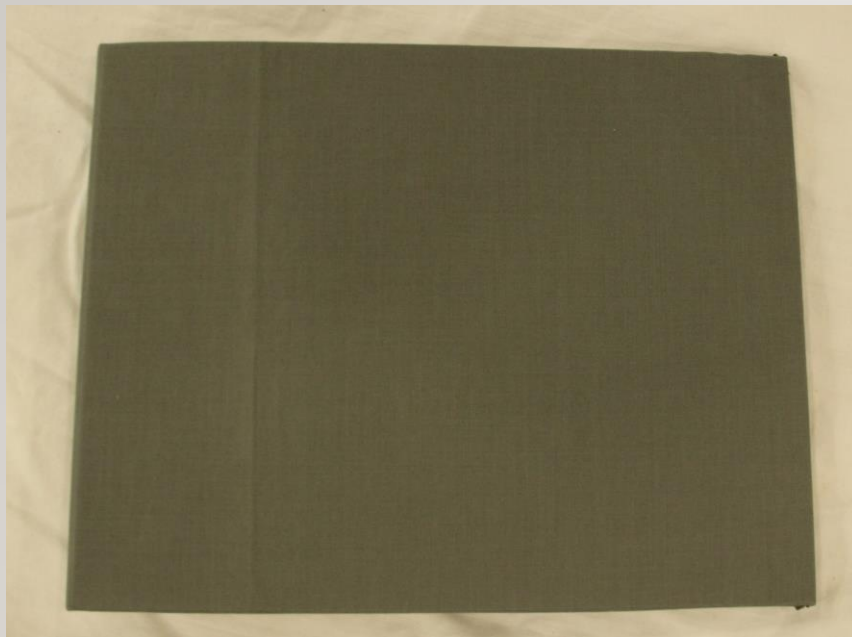


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# BOOK IV



**Christina Yarnal**



Christina Yarnal is a young woman with dark hair, wearing a blue top. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**Sandy Johnson**



Sandy Johnson is a woman with short, curly hair, wearing a purple top. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a vibrant, abstract pattern of colors.

**Sandy Johnson**



Sandy Johnson is a woman with short, curly hair, wearing a purple top. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a collage of various images, including a sun, a flower, and a group of people.

**Betsy Johnson**



Betsy Johnson is a woman with short, curly hair, wearing a purple top. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a starburst pattern.

**Betsy Johnson**



Betsy Johnson is a woman with short, curly hair, wearing a purple top. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a collage of various images, including a sun, a flower, and a group of people.

**John Francis Salazar**



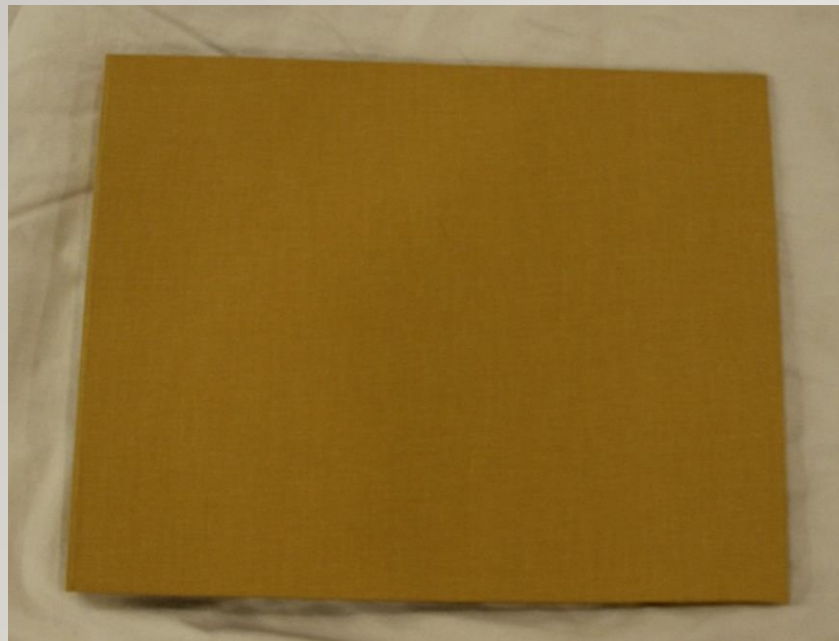
John Francis Salazar is a man with short, curly hair, wearing a purple top. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a brick wall.

**John Francis Salazar**



John Francis Salazar is a man with short, curly hair, wearing a purple top. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a collage of various images, including a sun, a flower, and a group of people.

# BOOK V



# BOOK VI



**Christina Yarnal**



Christina Yarnal is a visual artist and designer who has worked in various capacities for over 15 years. She is currently a senior graphic designer at a major corporation, where she oversees the visual identity of several key brands. Her work is characterized by bold colors, clean lines, and a strong sense of balance and harmony. She is also a frequent speaker at industry conferences and has been featured in several design publications.

**Lee Tachewell**



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# BOOK VII



**Harold Tomlinson**



Harold Tomlinson is a multi-talented artist, writer, and educator. He has spent his life exploring the boundaries of art and literature, often finding inspiration in the natural world. His work is characterized by a deep sense of observation and a commitment to social justice. He has authored several books and articles, and his art has been exhibited in galleries and museums around the world.



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**Volman**

**Paul Reed**

"The greatest pleasure of life is not in the things we do, but in the people we meet." - Paul Reed



**John Laughlin**

"I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life." - John Laughlin



**Randy Burkes**

"I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life." - Randy Burkes



**Instructors**

**Carl Mitchell**

"I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life." - Carl Mitchell



**Yana Kozlov**

"I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life." - Yana Kozlov



**Shannon Croom**



"I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life." - Shannon Croom

**Gallery Owner**

**Sybil Hampan**



"I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life. I am a simple man with a simple life." - Sybil Hampan



# IN THE FUTURE...

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It is hoped that a show entitled *Coffee Talk* can be mounted to exhibit a selection of artwork by Creative Village Studio artists who participated in *The Right to be an Artist: Operationalizing Studio Art Practices for People with Cognitive and Intellectual Disabilities* study and their artist-colleagues. Please view the *Coffee Talk* Powerpoint featuring the artwork and the voices of the artist-participants.

# REFERENCES

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- Elbel Libro Bookbinding | Haarlem. (2019). Elbel-Libro. Retrieved from <https://www.elbel-libro.com>
- Fox, A., & Macpherson, H. (2015). *Inclusive Arts Practice and Research: A Critical Manifesto* (1 edition). Routledge.
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