

# CREATING CONNECTIONS WITH LOCAL ARTISTS



**A** 'maker space' requires time, money and real estate that many libraries do not have but it is the people, both in the community and the facilitators, who create great library programs.

We as librarians and information professionals are in a great position to make connections with the local artistic community. By tapping into the skills and energy of that community we can better create libraries which are places of lifelong learning, creativity, community connectedness and the library as a 'third space'.

In May 2014, I travelled to Washington DC, USA to attend the 42nd Annual Conference of the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS-NA), supported in part by a grant from The Copyright Agency Career Development Fund. My trip focused on how public libraries can support professional art practices and the art community. The theme for the conference was Art+Politics and within that theme there were identified intersections Of, By, and For the People and Fostering Creativity. The emphasis on creative programs and maker spaces, outreach to local artist groups, and collection projects such as digitisation projects and special collections attracted my interest with regard to public libraries.

Practicing artists are a great resource for public libraries with broad range of skills: performance, painting, drawing, printmaking, 3D work, video, animation, sound and technology, conceptual, working with paper, textiles and more. Artists come in all forms but almost all artists share a strong hands-on and problem-solving approach, and a willingness to share their knowledge and to learn from others. In this way they are much like librarians. Often too, artists already have experience teaching or running workshops.

To make connections with the local artist community, in the same way we currently do with local literary communities, will create an opportunity for strong discussions and debate. Artists are not only creative thinkers but also often have a strong understanding of contemporary issues. Art is a reflection of the time and place in which it is made, which puts artists in a prime position to engage in such discussions.

What can we give in return? Libraries are in an excellent position to support artists through collections and resources for inspiration and research, spaces for exhibition, performance, screenings and practice, and through people and support.

So how do we go about this? The creative community is already in your local area it is just a matter of finding it. Talk to your local community centres, your council arts workers or local galleries. Is there a studio complex in your area? An art supply store? Just one connection can open the door. (If your library is planning on hiring artists, be sure to check the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) website at [www.visualarts.net.au](http://www.visualarts.net.au) for information on appropriate award rates.)

The Australia & New Zealand Chapter ARLIS/ANZ will have their conference in Auckland in October, 2014. For more information visit their website at [www.arlis.org.au](http://www.arlis.org.au).

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