



ADVENTURES IN ART AND BEYOND



Writer
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Images
Courtesy of Art4All

A dining room in Acol has been transformed into a studio for a neurodivergent collective who show us the power of imagination



Sandra Hampton's partner Paul suggested she transform the dining room at home into a space to teach art in 2015, after Margate's Royal School for Deaf Children (RSDC), where Hampton had worked for more than 20 years, tragically closed down.

With a degree in both fine art and teaching, and 14 years' experience teaching art to children, Hampton moved swiftly to make her dining room a place for creativity.

By the end of January 2016, Sandra Art4All was established, providing an art studio for young artists who have cerebral palsy, autism, CHARGE syndrome, Down's syndrome, global developmental delay, multi-sensory impairment or hearing impairment. Since then, Hampton has been teaching at full capacity, describing her work as "a privilege and an honour".

Hampton doesn't describe those she works with as students, but as artists, saying: "I haven't set up an art school, I've set up a working artist's studio. We are a creative team sharing a common goal: showing you what we can do."

There is no such thing as a typical lesson at Art4All - Hampton works intuitively with each artist at their own pace. Gentle encouragement is used to bring her artists out of their comfort zones, which can sometimes take years. Introducing colour, for example, to an artist who will only use black and white, it can take weeks to make a breakthrough.

While they are encouraged to paint, use collage, stencils, drawing, and doodle if they want to, Hampton will take the lead from her artists as to what they want to make work about. Portraits, birds, landscapes and even streams of consciousness can be found upon the studio walls.

The personal circumstances for each artist that attends the Art4All studio are unique: some live in care homes, are home-schooled or attend special needs schools. One thing they have in common is a love of art. In Hampton's studio, the process of creativity is both transformational and nourishing.

Each year Art4All holds local exhibitions showcasing and selling the artists' works. In the autumn of 2020 Hampton curated an ambitious exhibition at The Margate School featuring 16 artists and more than 80 pieces of art. 36 pieces sold, proceeds of which were paid directly to the artists, something that Hampton feels is a vital part of the Art4All experience. Some of her artists also work as cleaners or earn with paper rounds, and Hampton wants them to see they can also make a professional life from their creativity.

So far the success of Art4All has been by word of mouth. Students are enrolled by parents or carers, although some came with Hampton from the RSDC and have stayed with her ever since. Lessons are paid for, which means Art4All doesn't run as a charity. The hours Sandra can give to the

exhibitions are limited. "I would love to find more exhibition opportunities for my artists," she says, "but I also really need volunteers to help with curating the shows and wall space that I don't have to pay for. Giving these experiences to the artists is so important."

Hampton's care and respect for her team of artists is no doubt what lies behind the success of this studio. She won a Unique Arts Award for Special Needs Teacher in 2019 for Art4All, and is fully proficient in British Sign Language. "Communication difficulties are a barrier for many of the young artists. I always endeavour to use a student's preferred method of communication," says Hampton.

Her commitment to her artists is beyond professional, it is emotional. "Some of our artists may walk through the door with clear anxieties. It is my aim that they leave the studio at least a little less anxious, if anxious at all," Hampton says. "The studio is not just about art, but is a space where art is used as a tool to support these young people to grow and be as independent as possible."

Sandra Hampton has a Youtube channel, Art4All Sandra, in which she teaches simple and do-able techniques that can be enjoyed at home. The Art4All Summer Exhibition will be on show from August 10 - August 30 at The Margate School, 17-18 The Parade, Margate CT9 1EY



▲ Artists from the Art4All collective show their work. Images courtesy of Sandra Hampton

◀ Opposite, from top: Margate Beach by an Art4All artist Sandra Hampton in the studio. An artist shows their work The Art4All studio

WAYS THAT YOU CAN
SUPPORT SANDRA'S
ART4ALL AND HER ARTISTS

Donate art materials via Sandra's Amazon wishlist. The link can be found in the Instagram bio for @sandra_art4all

If you can offer exhibition space free of charge or are an artist with skills to share, please contact Sandra directly at sahampton32@hotmail.com

