

SPOTLIGHT ON AMBER NORRISH

EDUCATION OFFICER,
BUNBURY REGIONAL ART GALLERY



In Bunbury's big pink gallery, Amber is the warm and vibrant personality who's passionate about making art more accessible, more inclusive and more inspiring to every visitor and member of the community. To Amber, it's so much more than six gallery spaces full of amazing art. It's a regional tourist attraction that creates a sense of place. It's a space where she can be herself, and every individual she connects with gets to enjoy a safe and immersive creative learning experience.

I love creating and experiencing that feeling of belonging in the community as well as giving visitors to our region a real sense of place!

Give us your bbq pitch. What do you do?

I make contemporary art accessible to everyone through arts events, classes, workshops, exhibitions, gallery tours and engagement programs. If I had to nail it in one short sentence, I'd say I engage the community in visual arts and cultural events.

Did you always plan to work in this industry?

I'd always planned to do something with art. My original goal was to get into art journalism, but six months into studying I realised it wasn't the right fit for me, so I switched to a visual arts degree. I'd just completed my first semester when I got the opportunity to train as an Olympic rower and decided to defer uni for a year.

I competed in the state and national championships, which was amazing. But I had another eight full-on years of training sessions ahead of me to reach Olympian standard, and I was really feeling the pull back to my art. So I chucked in the oars and put my all into studying a Bachelor of Visual Arts at Curtin University, majoring in fine art.

So, how did you get into arts and cultural events management?

I was in my final year at Curtin when my mum spotted an ad in our local 'Muka Matters' newspaper recruiting a co-ordinator for the Mukinbudin Spring Festival – a seven-day arts and cultural event. I was 23. I'd never co-ordinated events before, but this was in the home town where I'd grown up, so I just put my hand up.

It was a steep learning curve, but such a hugely rewarding first experience in the arts industry. I went on to co-ordinate the festival for two more years while I took on an internship at Success Arts in Perth. And that volunteer experience took me from the front desk to working with local government and peak art organisations, to managing all the communications and marketing! That pretty much set me on the path to another amazing internship at Art on the Move in Fremantle and to where I am now, in my dream job in Bunbury.

How would you describe yourself?

I'm as passionate and enthusiastic about arts as I am about connecting with people and giving them a great customer service experience. And I still have a big thirst for learning and bring loads of initiative to every single project and program.

What do you love most about the industry?

Our arts industry in WA is so accessible, inclusive and welcoming to everyone. I love that the industry accepts me for who I am and loves me for it. I especially love that I get to be creative with what I wear every day!

What's the best part of your job?

I've been in the role for three years now and still feel like it's my dream job. The best part for me is the community engagement. I love creating and experiencing that feeling of belonging in the community as well as giving visitors to our region a real sense of place. I love being able to connect with different people through art and seeing the positive impact that has on individuals – especially through our disability, youth and Noongar arts programs.

What's your best advice for anyone starting out?

Go out and find work experience, whether it's for one day, one week, or one year. Find a place, a space and a community that you really love and feel passionate about. Then your work will never seem like work!

And what's next for you?

Keep learning and growing so I can keep developing more accessible, inclusive creative learning experiences that engage more audiences and groups in the community.

Connect with Amber on LinkedIn

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