

OPEN CANVAS

ADAPTIVE ARTS

VISION & IMPACT OVERVIEW

Creating spaces where every artist belongs.

Artists first. Art without limits.

Who We Are

Open Canvas Adaptive Arts creates inclusive art experiences where adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism are recognized first and foremost as artists.

Founded by artist and teaching artist Tiffany Criswell, Open Canvas is built on more than two decades of professional experience supporting people with disabilities and nearly eight years of hands-on adaptive arts instruction. Our approach is individualized, artist-centered, and rooted in a simple belief: every artist deserves the opportunity to create, grow, develop a creative voice, and be recognized for what they make.

Through one-on-one instruction, adaptive workshops, collaborative community projects, public exhibitions, and professional opportunities, Open Canvas goes beyond simply providing art activities. We create meaningful opportunities for artists to build skills, make choices, explore new materials and techniques, exhibit their work, pursue commissions and sales when they choose, and develop an identity as artists within their communities.

Our Philosophy

Artists first. Art without limits.

At Open Canvas, agency and autonomy belong in the studio alongside paint, brushes, strange materials, oversized ideas, and the occasional creative experiment that begins with, “Let’s try it and see what happens.”

Artists are encouraged to make meaningful choices about what they create, how they create it, which materials they explore, and what opportunities they wish to pursue. Instruction adapts to the individual rather than requiring every participant to make the same project in the same way.

The goal is not simply participation. It is artistic ownership, skill development, creative freedom, belonging, and the opportunity to make work that matters to the person creating it.

Why Open Canvas Exists

Adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism often have limited access to individualized, high-quality art instruction and meaningful opportunities to be recognized as artists. Traditional community art classes may not offer the adaptive support, communication methods, pacing, or individualized instruction some artists need. Full-day disability service programs are not available, appropriate, or desirable for everyone.

Open Canvas fills the space between those models. An artist may attend a day program and want specialized one-on-one instruction, work during the day and prefer evening or weekend sessions, be waiting for services, receive no Medicaid waiver support, or simply want a place where art is taken seriously.

We believe there is a profound difference between giving someone an activity to occupy their time and giving an artist meaningful opportunities to develop a creative practice. Open Canvas exists for that difference.

What We Do

- Individualized one-on-one adaptive art instruction
- Small-group adaptive workshops
- Mobile and community-based art workshops
- Collaborative community art projects
- Public exhibitions and artist recognition opportunities
- Partnership programming with disability organizations, libraries, galleries, senior centers, parks departments, community centers, group homes, schools, and other organizations
- Artist opportunity support through the Open Canvas Artist Access Fund
- Original artwork and art-inspired products that help fund materials, artist opportunities, and community projects

Signature Initiative: Art Without Limits: 100 Hands

Art Without Limits: 100 Hands is Open Canvas Adaptive Arts' signature collaborative public exhibition. More than 100 adult artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities and/or autism will each create one original artistic element that becomes part of a larger unified mixed-media work.

The central idea is a community mosaic in concept: 100 individual voices, one work. Each contribution matters. Every participating creator is recognized simply as an Artist.

The artistic process intentionally remains flexible so that materials, methods, and ideas can evolve with the artists and available resources. Participation may happen through traveling workshops, community events, partnerships with disability organizations and residential providers, or individualized sessions. The finished work is intended for public exhibition, allowing the artwork itself to lead the conversation.

The Open Canvas Artist Access Fund

Financial barriers should not determine who gets to create, learn, exhibit, or pursue professional opportunities.

The Open Canvas Artist Access Fund is designed to expand access to individualized art instruction and artist development. Depending on available funding, support may include fully or partially sponsored one-on-one instruction, quality art materials, exhibition and juried competition entry fees, professional artwork photography, framing, shipping, portfolio development, and related professional opportunities.

The vision is simple: when an artist is ready for an opportunity, cost should not automatically be the reason they cannot pursue it.

Art Helps Fund More Art

Open Canvas is developing a growing collection of art-inspired products featuring original and collaborative artwork. Products may include prints, mugs, magnets, cards, totes, and other pieces selected for visual appeal and practical marketability.

Product revenue can help support materials, artist opportunities, and community projects, creating an earned-revenue model that is easy to understand: art helps fund more art.

Or, in Open Canvas language: You buy this mug. This mug buys paintbrushes. You get caffeine. An artist gets tools. Everybody wins.

Founder & Leadership

Open Canvas Adaptive Arts was founded by Tiffany Criswell, an artist and teaching artist with 23 years of professional experience supporting children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and nearly eight years of experience as a teaching artist.

Her professional experience spans direct support, program leadership, administration, and adaptive arts instruction. This combination provides firsthand understanding of both individualized support needs and the creative process. She adapts communication, pacing, materials, tools, and instruction to the individual while maintaining high artistic expectations and allowing each artist's creative voice to lead.

Her creative experience includes ambitious collaborative artwork, award-winning parade floats, and large-scale community projects. Collaborative work created with program artists has earned a blue ribbon at the Kentucky State Fair, and work connected to her teaching practice has been exhibited at venues including the Kentucky State Capitol, Mellwood Arts Center, the Little Loomhouse, and other community spaces.

From Louisville to Southwest Florida

Open Canvas is currently developing and refining its model through early work in Louisville, Kentucky, while building toward the long-term vision of establishing a dedicated adaptive art studio in Southwest Florida.

Louisville serves as the proving ground for early community projects, partnerships, exhibitions, grant development, and the launch of Art Without Limits: 100 Hands. The future Southwest Florida studio is envisioned as a creative home base for individualized instruction, adaptive workshops, quality materials, collaborative projects, public exhibitions, and artist opportunity support.

What Success Looks Like

Success is measured in artists served, workshops delivered, partnerships built, exhibitions created, professional opportunities opened, and financial barriers removed. But the most meaningful outcomes are often harder to fit into a spreadsheet.

Success is an artist developing a recognizable style. Choosing a new material. Returning to finish a piece because the work matters to them. Entering an exhibition. Selling a piece. Accepting a commission. Saying no to an opportunity they do not want. Saying yes to one they do.

It is the shift from being given something to do to recognizing yourself as someone with meaningful work to complete.

In plain language, the strategy is to be visible, create work worth talking about, build genuine relationships, and engage in a little strategic hollerin' when appropriate.

What's Ahead

Open Canvas is growing in stages through earned revenue, community partnerships, grants, sponsorships, product sales, and carefully reinvested resources. Current priorities include launching Art Without Limits: 100 Hands, expanding the art-inspired product collection, building community partnerships, growing the Artist Access Fund, and creating new pathways for artists to exhibit, sell, and professionally develop their work.

The long-term goal is ambitious but practical: build a sustainable adaptive arts organization where artists have access to individualized instruction, quality materials, creative agency, public visibility, and meaningful opportunities to grow.

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