

Jump the Moon Art Exhibit Now Open in the Sorenson Center's Lyndsley Wilkerson Gallery

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Michael Bingham, founder of Jump the Moon, stands beside "Wonky Self Portraits," a joint work of 12 artists currently on display in the Making Friends: The Power of Art to Connect People exhibit at the Lyndsley Wilkerson Gallery.

A new art exhibit created by a collaboration between artists with disabilities and other Cache County residents is on display at Utah State University. *Making Friends: The Power of Art to Connect People* is an exhibit by artists from the Jump the Moon studio and the PEER Project (a post-high program of the Cache County School District). The exhibit is now open to the public in the Lyndsley Wilkerson Gallery in the Sorenson Legacy Foundation Center for Clinical Excellence at Utah State University. A gallery reception is scheduled for Friday, July 26, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. The exhibit showcases the art works of individuals with disabilities who have discovered an outlet for artistic expression at the Jump the Moon studio and gallery, a Logan-based nonprofit organization. The art studio and gallery are the brainchild of Michael Bingham, renowned artist, USU alumnus, and retired art teacher from Cache County School District.

Each of the art pieces hanging in the exhibit are recent creations by people in the community who visit the studio, and each one is carefully selected by Bingham. "This is where my 42 years as an artist comes in," he says. "Everything we create isn't worthy of hanging in a gallery. There needs to be some magic in it, and I'm good at spotting the magic. Our artists will make things all day long and every once in a while, I'll say, 'This one has the magic.

There's something about this art piece that feels like it needs to be in a frame and on the wall."

In total, there are only 17 art pieces on display in the Making Friends exhibit, and the limited number of artworks is intentional. Bingham believes that having less to display is a benefit when it comes to attendees' experiences. "There's something special about featuring just a few pieces with a lot of white space. There's nothing crowding the work, so people can really look at them and see what's been created."

The mission of Jump the Moon—to utilize the arts to bring joy and empower individual ability, expression, and dignity, especially for those presumed to be limited—is very personal to Bingham. As a child, he dealt with constant insecurity due to learning challenges that made school difficult for him. "We moved eleven times before I graduated from high school, which I liked because when I got to a new place, no one knew I struggled," he recalls. "I had a chance to fake it until they figured it out."

When he was a sophomore in high school, Bingham's architecture teacher inadvertently changed the trajectory of Bingham's life in five words. "It was so simple," Bingham says. "He stopped by my drawing table and said, 'You're really good at this.' That was all it took. Every person—with a disability or not—needs to have something that they're good at. It's what I craved as a kid. And it didn't take very much success to make a huge difference for my life."

The Jump the Moon studio is open for anyone—children, youth, and adults of any ability, with or without artistic skill—and all art supplies are provided. "Every once in a while, we get someone who has dreamed of being an artist, but the majority of people who come in don't think they have any talent. They are just willing to give it a try," says Bingham. "And whatever their challenge is, they think it's going to get in the way, but we find a way for everyone to make art."

Amy Macfarlane, a program coordinator at Stride Services in the Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice (IDRPP) at Utah State University, relates, "I have taken clients to Jump the Moon and am so impressed with Michael's creativity. One of my clients is nonverbal and very limited in what he can hold in his hands. Regardless, Michael comes up with creative ways for him to create art. More importantly, Michael makes every participant feel seen and cared about. He is truly a gift to the Cache Valley community."

The studio opened in 2017 on Main Street in Logan, and not long afterward, Bingham fell twenty feet from a ladder in his living room and broke his neck. Doctors said that the fall should have killed him, but he miraculously recovered. "While I was in the hospital, I came to know that Jump the Moon is my mission," Bingham says. "This is why I got a



second chance."

In the summer of 2020, the pandemic forced Bingham to temporarily close the doors of Jump the Moon, move everything into storage, and search for a more affordable building. In time, an invitation to use some available space for the short-term came from Matt Wappett, director of the IDRPP. For two years, Jump the Moon was housed in the IDRPP basement, but it has recently moved to its new home at 48 North 100 West in Logan.

Now in its seventh year, the studio and gallery rely almost exclusively on grants for funding. It is largely staffed by dedicated volunteers, many of whom are USU students hoping to impact lives through service opportunities. The only full-time employee is Bingham, who is assisted by a part-time bookkeeper.

Keeping a nonprofit afloat is a bigger challenge than Bingham anticipated. He keeps a jar in the studio and suggests a \$6 donation from each visitor. "I never want money to be a barrier for anyone to make art," he says. "If people have the ability to contribute, it is greatly appreciated. Paying the bills and keeping the doors open is by far my biggest challenge."

Bingham is living his dream. "My goal has been to provide a place where everyone can have some sense of joy and fulfillment and success and accomplishment. Take this art show, for instance. This is a real gallery, and it is a great honor for our artists to see their work on display."

Considering the financial instability that small nonprofits, including Jump the Moon, face, he continues, "We're still here, helping more and more people find their happy place. As people see what we're doing, I think it's obvious that this is a good thing that should continue."

The exhibition in the Lyndsley Wilkerson Gallery is free of charge and open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday until August 5. For more information about the Jump the Moon Foundation and to provide a donation, visit the [website](#).