

Media release

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## **Melbourne startup empowering disadvantaged artists**

The intricate beauty of Jacqui's art hides a story of abuse, homelessness and a life lived in fear.

But despite being homeless and living out of her car for 11 years, Jacqui's bright smile and ability to produce detailed works of art are testament to her courage and determination.

Completely self-taught, Jacqui's drawings take up to a week to complete, working on them from sunrise to sunset.

If her car remains in the same place for two days, she will often be moved on by her local council, resulting in a book full of half-completed drawings.

Art is Jacqui's escape. She loves the effect it has on people: "It's a big thrill knowing I'm making someone happy and that someone likes what I've done ... it's a great feeling knowing I've achieved something".

Jacqui is one of 16 artists whose work is for sale through Open Canvas, a social enterprise empowering artists who have experienced homelessness, a disability or other adversity by helping them exhibit and sell their art and merchandise with their art on it, such as mobile phone covers, greeting cards, tea towels and puzzles.

All of the Open Canvas artists have stories of adversity.

Some have lived on the street; some have experienced substance abuse and addiction; some are on low incomes within supported and crisis accommodation; and others live with mental health issues and disability. All are united in their desire to be recognised through their art.

The inaugural Open Canvas exhibition, *Between the Lines*, will be held at fortyfivedownstairs from February 7 to 18. A crowdfunding campaign is raising money to cover the costs of the exhibition, including gallery hire and framing works.

Open Canvas founder Dan Rath said artists receive a minimum of 70 per cent of profits from purchases, providing them with an opportunity for repeat income.

"When you buy art from Open Canvas, you are making a positive impact on the lives of these artists," he said.

"They are empowered through recognition of their talent and a sense of achievement."

Original art and other merchandise are available at [www.opencanvas.com.au](http://www.opencanvas.com.au). To contribute to the crowdfunding campaign, go to <https://chuffed.org/project/between-the-lines-open-canvas-exhibition>. Information about the exhibition can be found at [www.fortyfivedownstairs.com](http://www.fortyfivedownstairs.com)

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