

# Case study

## Crossroad Arts and the story behind *Dancing with Ansel* by deaf blind artist Brenden Borellini

**Crossroad Arts resident artist Brenden Borellini travelled to the USA in November 2017 for a screening of the film *When Brenden Met Hiro*, in which he starred as a principal actor, and to understand new ways of “seeing” through his photos.**

### What

Photographer Brenden Borellini, a resident deafblind artist at Mackay's Crossroad Arts, attended the screening of the short film *When Brenden Met Hiro* at the 2017 Superfest International Disability Film Festival in San Francisco: <https://vimeo.com/243050710>

The film, directed by filmmaker Steve Mayer-Miller from Crossroad Arts in conjunction with Able Arts Japan, features Brenden and Japanese blind photographer, Hiroe, who met at a photography workshop in Sendai, Japan.

While in the US, Brenden further developed his photographic skills by studying the iconic landscape of American photographer Ansel Adams in preparation for the exhibition, *Dancing With Ansel*.

The exhibition, presented in 2018, featured 2D and 3D photographs for people to feel, accompanied by artist statements in braille so that audiences could share in the exhibition experience.

Crossroad Arts, a multi-arts organisation, focuses on artists with and without disability and artists in aged care, and works locally, nationally and internationally offering employment opportunities and workshops.

Brenden has worked with Crossroad Arts since 2011, where he has cultivated his techniques in visual arts and performance.

### When and where

1 – 17 Nov 2017: Brenden Borellini in the US  
12 April – 17 May 2018: *Dancing With Ansel*  
Mackay, Queensland.



*Brenden Borellini at work on location in the US. Photo: Steve Mayer-Miller*

### Arts Queensland investment

\$120,000 per annum to Crossroad Arts through Arts Queensland's [Organisations Fund](#) 2017 – 2020.

The Organisations Fund supports the core operations of small to medium organisations in delivering arts and cultural activities that generate value to Queensland. This value is derived through innovation, inclusivity and economic growth; including the employment and promotion of Queensland artists and arts workers.

## Key stats

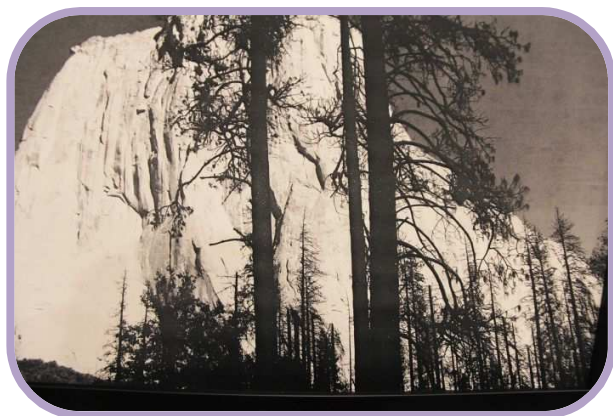
- Crossroad Arts employed 14 artists and arts workers in 2017
- More than 11,000 people attended or participated in Crossroad Arts' practice including audiences in regional Queensland and internationally in Japan.

## Outcomes

- To further understand new ways of seeing from a blind and non-blind point of view and how that affects our understanding of the world around us
- Crossroad Arts emerging artist Matt Tandy and filmmaker Steve Mayer-Miller accompanied Brenden to the US. This enabled Matt to develop his own skills as a future arts worker under the mentorship of Steve Mayer-Miller.
- Brenden and Crossroad Arts expanded their international networks in the disability arts community
- The experience culminated in the public exhibition *Dancing with Ansel*, presented by Crossroad Arts from April to May 2018.

## Artist comments

"I cannot see or hear you [but] I feel wind on my face. I smell the heat." Brenden Borellini



El Capitan in Yosemite National Park. Photo: Brenden Borellini

## Tips for others

Brenden creates a special tactile print enabling all viewers to experience the work regardless of sight. The photos are converted to black and white to increase the contrast. They are then printed onto a special resin paper which is run through a heating machine to raise the dark elements in the image to create a 3D photo which can be "seen" through sight and through touch.

## Reflections and learnings

Brenden can see every part of the photographs he takes, from the ridges of a mountain in Yosemite National Park to a wave splashing against a rock at his local beach. But he does not see them with his eyes. He sees them with his hands.

Sophie Meixner, ABC Tropical North

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-04-21/brenden-borellini-blind-deaf-photographer-mackay-disability/9662008>

The question most often asked by people when they hear that Brenden takes photographs is "How does he do it". It's often followed by "What's the point if he can't see the photograph?"

The answers go to the very heart of trying to understand what is actually meant by the term "seeing" and the tensions between the physical act of seeing something through your eyes and "seeing" as something that is felt and understood. Trying to unravel these mysteries was what motivated Brenden, Matt and I to travel so far, through the deserts of Utah, the hills of San Francisco and the peaks of Yosemite.

*From Steve Mayer-Miller, Crossroad Arts*

## Reviews and feedback

We enjoyed having you at Superfest and sharing your story, which hits home with so many of our attendees. The energy in the room was so palpable while your film was screening. *Emily Smith Beitiks, Associate Director*

## What next?

In November 2018 Crossroad Arts presents *Windows into Worlds*, a large-scale braille poetry project giving audiences a tactile experience of poetry from local, national and international poets. Brenden Borellini will help people to create their own braille street poetry.

## Find out more

Alison Richardson, Artistic Director/CEO, Crossroad Arts, Mackay

E: [artisticdirector@crossroadarts.com.au](mailto:artisticdirector@crossroadarts.com.au)

Phone: 07 4953 5122