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Visual Arts and Disability in the UK: a snapshot in 2024

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This report was commissioned by the British Council and produced by Disability Arts Online. Aside from the Foreword, the views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the British Council.

Cover image: Rachel Gadsden, TransHuman Action Art performance. Photo: Gadsden-Hayton

Foreword

 [Listen to the Foreword](#)

About one in seven people in the world is disabled – that’s over one billion individuals worldwide. Yet, too often disabled people face barriers to inclusion in society. These barriers might be physical, to do with other people’s attitudes, or because of systemic discrimination. As the UK’s international organisation for cultural relations, we build enduring cross-cultural relationships through the arts, education, and English teaching. Our commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion brings people together, enriching experiences and fostering more inclusive societies. That is why we have such a strong commitment to arts and disability.

The intersection of art and disability has long been a site of both opportunity and challenge. By working with international sector experts, disabled artists and disability inclusion professionals, we have seized opportunities to raise profiles, support collaborations, change perceptions and build legacies for decades as captured in our 2021 report [Reflecting on Change](#). The challenges which obstruct the participation of disabled artists and audiences are captured in two reports commissioned in the framework of [Europe Beyond Access](#), a large-scale cooperation project funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union. The first report, Time to Act, revealed, amongst other factors, how a continued lack of knowledge creates barriers for disabled artists and audiences.

When the occasion arose to support the first pavilion entirely dedicated to the UK’s [Disability Arts Movement at the Biennale Arte in Venice, curated by Shape Arts](#), it signalled an opportunity to engage with the visual arts sector. Consequently, in June 2024 we invited two international panels to consider what disability aesthetics can offer and how we can embed institutional change. Through the guide’s four essays, further insight was gathered on the different approaches taken when reflecting on the state of disability in the visual arts. The supporting directory of artists, curators and organisations working in the UK at the time of publication, provides a snapshot of how D/deaf and disabled artists offer unique perspectives which can lead to new ways of looking at the world.

We hope this guide will lead to greater awareness and appreciation of the different approaches and practices that exist, encourage others to become more inclusive in their own practice and will inspire organisations to take action by addressing challenges and eliminating barriers for artists and audiences.

Emma Dexter

Director Visual Arts and British Council Collection, British Council

Introduction: Scope for Optimism

[▶ Listen to the introduction](#)



Aidan Moesby is an artist, curator and writer bringing an emotionally nuanced context to climate change and the deep interconnectedness between the natural and social environments. Foregrounding care and accessibility, his practice includes both Disability Arts and mainstream representation. He works nationally and internationally across physical and digital platforms.

[Reframed: Disability Aesthetics and Institutional Change in the Visual Arts](#) was an online event on the 26th June 2024. It was presented by Disability Arts Online and the British Council, and curated by me. It brought together professionals from Europe and beyond on two panels discussing the eponymous themes.

The significance of the British Council commissioning the event with Disability Arts Online in such a large international context should not be overlooked. It indicates an unprecedented interest in the visual arts and disability. What materialises remains to be seen, but this comes off the back of [Shape Art's exhibition Crip Arte Spazio: the DAM \(Disability Arts Movement\) in Venice](#) and Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen showing at the Finnish Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale.

This publication builds on the event, including four essays, each taking a different approach to reflecting upon the current state of disability in the visual arts in the UK.

Disability Arts Online's founding editor and disabled artist Colin Hambrook opens with an overview on the [Disability Arts Movement's](#) history and direction of travel. He explores some of the key artists, support structures and changes that have led disability in the visual arts to where it is now. He also makes the case for [disability as an aesthetic](#) and curatorial concern which offers a unique take on the human condition not seen in the rest of the art world.

Rachel Fleming-Mulford reflects on the experience of a period of research and development exploring how she could continue to work as a freelance curator with acquired access needs, given the barriers she faces. She goes on to highlight where good practice is occurring and

where it has yet to evolve. Refreshingly, she takes an intersectional perspective, placing focus on, amongst others, the often neglected aspects of parenthood and class.

Jennifer Gilbert presents a very personalised view from the perspective of being a gallerist and curator. She writes about the context and process of her current exhibition [Kaleidoscopic Realms](#) at Nottingham Castle which she co-curated with multidisciplinary artist [Christopher Samuel](#). She discusses the development of a toolkit she co-produced for the Plus Tate Network: How Galleries and Museums Can Better Work With and Support Deaf, Disabled and/or [Neurodivergent](#) Artists. Gilbert is not afraid to ask difficult questions and calls for real accountability when it comes to lack of access.

[Ashokkumar D Mistry](#) is an artist and writer concerned with the representation of disabled artists beyond the reductive aesthetic of using the disabled body as source material and product. Here, he wrestles with language and suggests the possibility of a new aesthetic developing in disability arts, beyond agitprop and art as activism. He challenges the seemingly small pool of artists who do get represented and the manner in which this is manifested. His struggle is almost palpable as he calls for increased nuance and understanding through his unapologetically neurodivergent approach.

From these different perspectives we glean a snapshot of the current state of disability in the visual arts in the UK. There are persistent clouds on the horizon; such as the spectre of Covid, access barriers and the precarity of life as a disabled artist or curator. But from my perspective, there is scope to be optimistic about the future.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the importance of identity and intersectionality – the shifts in wider society have been reflected in the disability arts sector.

A distinction is developing between artists who clearly identify with the Disability Arts Movement – making politicised work informed by lived experience – and those who belong to a new, mostly younger, cohort. These latter artists sometimes vocally identify as disabled, yet their work does not fall within traditional Disability Arts aesthetics. This work is clearly contemporary and could sit in any white cube without reference to disability.

There is a nascent but growing discourse about the critical robustness of the work, although rigorous critique of disabled artists is still almost seen as a taboo. This serves to keep a critical disability discourse out of the art press and simultaneously deprives us of the oxygen of exposure and representation within art institutions. Fleming-Mulford and Gilbert both refer

to these issues in their essays. Gilbert's observation that institutions cite a lack of knowledge or fear of getting it wrong feels like an excuse which is running out of validity, if it ever had any. Maybe there is a lack of language around how to engage with and write about disabled artists, but there is no excuse for not creating one or learning the one which exists.

I have been fortunate to be part of this process with [Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art](#) (MIMA), as part of [DASH's Future Curators Programme](#) (FCP). FCP creates the opportunity for a disabled curator to work within a mainstream arts organisation for a year to learn about curating in an institutional setting. This is not about doing the emotional labour of teaching the organisation about access or disability. The organisations must commit to an intensive period of training before they host a curator. In the first iteration there were three of these organisations, this year another three have joined the network.



Aaron McPeake, *Same Same but Different* (installation detail), 2017. Included in *Towards New Worlds*.
Photo: Aaron McPeake.

This increase in capacity of disabled curators will undoubtedly impact on the representation of disabled artists in the future. The additional benefit is the embedding of access, inclusion

and care across staff teams and the way in which this influences the culture of organisations to change, and takes these conversations to the wider sector to catalyse a bigger shift.

MIMA is committed to authentic, meaningful change manifesting in the wider inclusion of disability within its programmes. Since completing my residency as part of FCP, we have collaborated on [Towards New Worlds](#), an exhibition which I have curated, featuring fifteen disabled, deaf and/or neurodivergent artists at varying stages of their careers. The work explores interconnectedness, ecological consciousness, social justice and care. The exhibition runs July 2024 – February 2025.

It feels like an exciting time, ripe with potential to be a disabled artist and curator. I can hear the gentle murmur of conversation getting louder and I see more situations where we as a sector and individuals are getting profiled. To quote Greta Thunberg “We are the change. And Change is coming”.

Disability Arts is Dead: Long Live Disability Arts

[▶ Listen to Disability Arts is Dead](#)



Colin Hambrook has been working at the hub of the Disability Arts Movement for 30 years, having been editor of Disability Arts In London magazine from 1994 until 2000. He is the Editor of Disability Arts Online, which he founded in 2004. Colin is also a disabled artist in his own right and has published two illustrated poetry collections: 100 Houses (DaDaSouth, 2010) and Knitting Time (Waterloo Press, 2013) which was longlisted for a Ted Hughes Award.

Introduction

In this essay I will give an overview of the history of Disability Arts within the visual arts, exploring work by some key artists, alongside the support structures and shifts that led to us getting to where we are now. I will touch on some of the key challenges and issues, asking how do we navigate the potential for a [disability aesthetic](#) to be understood as a genre for curation and critique.

Art from a Social Model perspective

From my perspective disability arts is a platform for innovation, if we understand great art to mean work that challenges and educates its audience to think more deeply about the human condition. A key idea that informs my own artistic practice as much as my approach to critiquing the arts as a disability journalist, is to ask what an artwork reveals about the artist's life. Art that talks poetically or from a narrative that leans into a universal experience, has always excited me. It is relational and conveys meanings that have a clear and direct bearing on who we are as a society.

Historically, there was a massive resistance from artists, who were specifically critiquing oppression from within the mental health system, to an alignment with the [Disability Arts Movement](#). This was largely down to misconceptions around identifying as a disabled artist. From a philosophical point of view framing 'disability' from a [Social Model](#) understanding of the art being about 'what's happened to you?' as opposed to 'what's wrong with you?' was a key shift towards realising an aesthetic based on the lived experience of barriers.

In the mid-1990s I found a burgeoning Disability Arts Movement within the London Disability Arts Forum based at the Diorama in central London. Forums in different parts of the country were producing exhibitions with titles like *Out of Ourselves*, *How We Like It* and *Defiance: Art Confronting Disability*. Artists like Tony Heaton, Nancy Willis, Adam Reynolds, Lucy Jones, Eddy Hardy and Tanya Raabe-Webber were making work about the body from the inside out, talking a language of art that was new and innovative.

For example, Heaton and Hardy were both exhibiting sculptures and prints from the tracks left by their wheelchairs. These were visceral artworks conveying positive, powerful and defiant messages about identity. Those wheelchair tracks were saying 'We are here! Get used to it.'



Tony Heaton, *Shaken Not Stirred*, performance photograph, 1991. Courtesy of the-ndaca.org CC-BY-NC

The visual art being exhibited reflected societal changes instituted through the Thatcher years (1979-90). Historically, disabled people had been locked away within institutions that the British government deemed to be no longer financially viable. The introduction of disability benefits meant the emergence of an insistence on autonomy. With the bringing down of institutional walls came a sharper critique of charities who had insisted on using [Medical Model](#) ideas, defining people by impairment, with a reliance on patronising tropes that demeaned the lives of disabled people.

Heaton's [Shaken Not Stirred](#) is a sculpture made out of 1760 red charity collection cans, presented in the shape of a pyramid. In 1992 as part of a disability protest called the [Block Telethon campaign](#), the artist used it as part of a performance piece. Telethon was a television show that sought to raise money for disability charities. During a press conference in which journalists were faced with disabled people's disapproval of being patronised and commodified, Heaton rushed into the room and hurled a prosthetic leg into the pyramid. This symbolic demolishing of the hierarchies charities rely on to keep disabled people powerless and submissive was a defining moment.

It was the first time the Disability Rights Movement's struggle to counter the influence of mainstream media in defining disabled people's lives and identity became headline news. It also marked a significant shift in the development of Disability Arts in embracing performance art as a vehicle for challenging normativity.

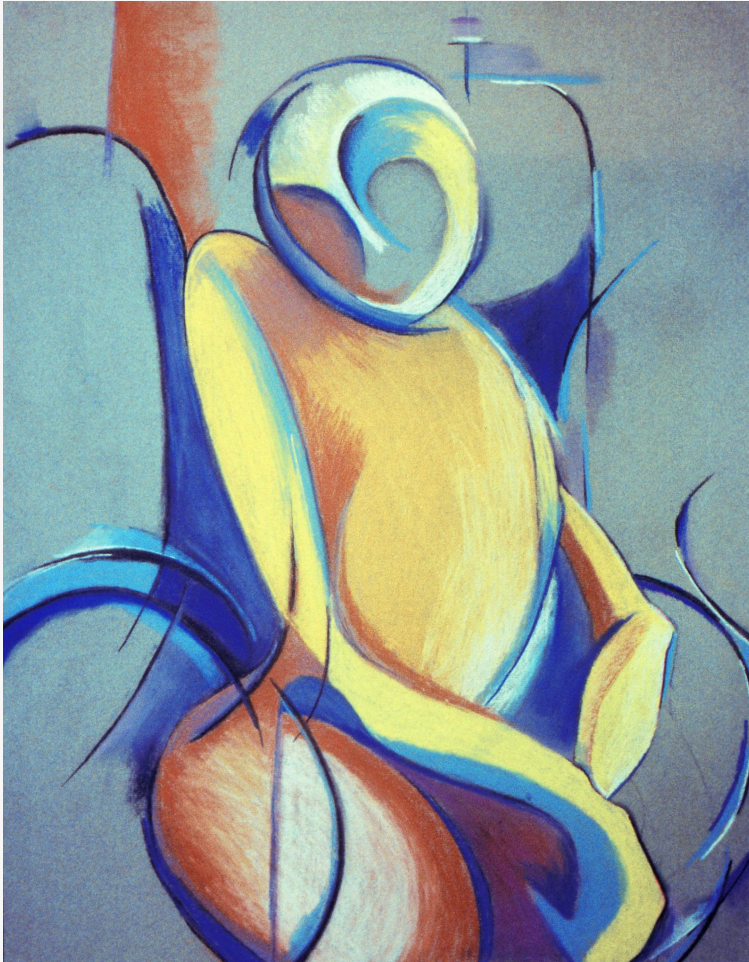
As early as 1987 Irish artist Mary Duffy, born without arms, created a series of photographic self-portraits called [Cutting the Ties That Bind](#) for an Arts Council Ireland commission. She developed the work in a 1995 live performance posing naked in an act that confronted the medical and social gaze.

"The performance showcased disability as the source and site of creative production and the disabled body as a work of art, while Duffy projected an empowered, self-mediated body image into the social arena. In a self-objectifying act, Duffy explained how her body was already objectified in society, and in the act of talking back, Duffy's monologue became social dialogue."¹

¹ Ann Millett-Gallant, *The Disabled Body in Contemporary Art*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Disability Aesthetic

It could be argued that at the foundation of a disability aesthetic lies a conscious challenge to society's perception of disabled lives within a [Deficit Model](#). Mary Duffy was possibly the first artist to use the disabled body to hold up a mirror that confronted the medical profession's framing of disability as tragic, pathetic and in need of a 'cure'.



Nancy Willis, Self-portrait.
Courtesy of the-ndaca.org
CC-BY-NC

Nancy Willis also exhibited artworks in the 1990s that presented a framing of disability within a personal narrative, weighing power and fragility in equal measure. Willis speaks of her motivation in creating these artworks:

“In the fairy stories of our childhood, physical perfection and beauty represented goodness, while imperfections and deformity were reserved for the wicked and cruel. In art history, Disabled people appear as beggars, victims of war, or pitiful candidates for miraculous intervention. Embarking on a series of self-portraits, I

wanted to create new images of disability as a true expression of the lives we were living.”²

Whilst there were many artists making images that set out to challenge the prevailing stereotypes about disability, the opportunities for commissions and for professionalising arts practice through the 1990s and into the 2000s were few and far between. The movement as a whole was more focussed on theatre, where collaboration and group support in companies like [Graeae](#) was intrinsic to the artform. Visual artists working in isolation had less opportunity to define a disability aesthetic unlike the performing arts where authenticity and access became prevailing principles of a disability language understood by the gatekeepers as powerful dramaturgic components for innovative theatre.

Increasing ‘professionalisation’

When Arts Council England implemented a new strategic policy in the early 2000s, it created a challenge for the Disability Arts forums that had grown up around the UK, because at its core was an intent to no longer fund community art. Instead, there was a greater emphasis on ‘excellence’ and ‘professionalisation’. The title of this essay is a quote from Geof Armstrong – one of the founders of the UK Disability Arts Movement who sadly passed away in 2020. Armstrong was passionate about the grassroots base for Disability Arts and the resilience of disabled people to use art as a tool in the fight for human rights and for access. However, there was a tension between art intended to raise consciousness of disability oppression made for disabled people and art that had academic rigour behind it.

The Disability Arts forums had been supporting and commissioning individual disabled artists within the movement but the projects they funded largely had a community arts frame of reference. Art schools were inaccessible and opportunities to become versed in the arts were few. The projects the Disability Arts forums created were intended to influence the ‘mainstream’, but without knowing the language of the arts, the movement was on a hiding to nothing.

The pressure to prove the ‘professional’ worth of the work being produced preceded the closure of many of the forums. Disability Arts attempted to open up to the ‘mainstream’ through festival arts. However, work was being made without critical reference points and for many disabled artists there was a lack of serious artistic thought behind what was being produced.

² The Incurables: Perspectives on Disability Visual Arts in the 20th and 21st Centuries (DASH, 2016).

Aaron Williamson argued in an essay for [Parallel Lines](#) how the departure of Disability Arts into festival spaces to please a mainstream audience was counter to any intent to challenge disability stereotypes. There was too much aspiration towards art that was celebratory rather than transgressive, and in so doing the work fell into a trap of presenting disabled people as using art to convey a message of triumph over adversity.

Williamson identified a key opportunity for Disability Arts to reflect on its intent. He said that whilst other rights agendas posit difference as a constructive attribute an individual owns:

“the impaired person is defined by what they don’t have, by what they are considered to ‘lack’...In opposition to this debilitating perception, it is imperative that disabled people assert that impairment need not be a reduced circumstance, that it can be a meaningful, central aspect of their experience, culture and identity; an attribute.”³

Sidestepping the gallery system with performance art

Without any validation from gatekeepers within the public gallery system the only way forward for disabled artists working within the visual arts was to embrace performance art as a genre of choice. Under the direction of Lois Keidan many disabled artists found a home within the [Live Art Development Agency](#). Their curatorial projects and programmes sought to respond to the challenges of contemporary society and embraced ideas of the intersection between art and identity with a passion.

[Restock, Rethink, Reflect](#) is an ongoing series of programmes that began in 2006, firstly exploring race before moving on to Live Art and disability in its second iteration in 2009. UK based artists like Katherine Araniello, [Aaron Williamson](#), [Noemi Lakmaier](#), Martin O'Brien, [Bobby Baker](#), [Sean Burn](#) (aka gobscore) and Simon Raven were programmed alongside US artists Sandie Yi and [Amanda Cachia](#) to create radical work that pushed the boundaries of Disability Arts into new, exciting territory.

In 2007 London Disability Arts Forum produced a debate at [Tate Modern](#): Should Disability and Deaf Arts be dead and buried in the 21st Century? It was chaired by broadcaster [Melvyn Bragg who, writing in the Guardian, pronounced](#) that he was “struck by Yinka Shonibare's comment that disability arts can be seen as the last remaining avant-garde movement.”

³ Aaron Williamson, 'In The Ghetto? A Polemic In Place Of An Editorial', in *Parallel Lines* (Serpentine Gallery, 2016).

Disabled performance artists Araniello and Williamson defined their practice by principles of resistance, using art to create mayhem, whilst remaining true to an established academic framework. In 2006, they exhibited *The Disabled Avant-Garde Today!* at the Gasworks in London. It was an exhibition of 'homage' to the artists' influences. Everything from Tom and Jerry, Leigh Bowery, Busby Berkely and the Chapman Brothers were pastiched in outrageous lo-fi video tributes intended as a critique of the oppression required by normalcy to fit in with an ableist society.

[The Disabled Avant-Garde](#) understood fundamentally how the disabled person is subversive by their very presence and created radical performances like *Assisted Passage* (2007), *No Room at the Igloo* (2008) and *Charity Stall* (2007, 2008) which drew on the insidious nature of ableism endemic within society's attitudes. They lampooned the Disability Arts Movement mercilessly, mounting two uninvited stage invasions at the London Mayor's Liberty Festival in 2011, dressed as the grim reaper, pronouncing the death of Disability Arts.

Expanding innovation and language

Innovations in Disability Arts practice then arrived in Britain from Europe. [Niet Normaal · Difference on Display](#), a visual art exhibition originally conceptualised and curated for the Beurs van Berlage, Amsterdam, in 2009–10, was brought by [DaDa in Liverpool](#) to the [Bluecoat](#), [FACT](#) and the [Walker Art Gallery](#) in 2012. It stepped outside of the box to present work that asked broader and deeper questions about the collective pursuit of 'normality' and the contradiction within the field of genetics that shows that variety is the norm as far as our genes are concerned.

It was around this time also that established artists like Baker who founded Daily Life Ltd. in 1995, began to affiliate more readily with Disability Arts. She had been making work continuously that amongst other things tackled misogyny and injustice in the mental health system and sought to lead advocacy for change in the way people think about women, and the undervalued and stigmatised aspects of daily life. Baker's [Diary Drawings: Mental Illness and Me 1997–2008](#), were launched at the [Wellcome Collection](#) (2009) and her live show, *Mad Gyms & Kitchens* (2012) was commissioned as an [Unlimited](#) project for the Cultural Olympiad.

Definitions of Disability Arts began to broaden. DaDa produced the *Art of the Lived Experiment* exhibition which pioneered new philosophical approaches to understanding art as an expression of transformation through ideas of representing alchemical processes to create change within society.

[Benedict Phillips](#) who had originally published his activist manifesto *Agenda of the Agresiv Dislecksick* in 1995, became a leader in a form of Disability Arts practice defining itself under the label of [neurodivergent](#). Later, younger artists like [Sam Metz](#) began creating work that explored more nuanced ways of understanding the relationship between body and mind.

Increasing recognition

Disability Arts agency [Shape](#) pioneered the [National Disability Arts Collection and Archive \(NDACA\)](#) opening a wing in Bucks New University in 2018, creating resources to share some of the rich history of the movement. Alongside exhibitions like [Art and Social Change: The Disability Arts Movement](#) at [Midlands Arts Centre](#), *Art, Life, Activism: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Disability* at [Attenborough Arts Centre](#), and most recently Shape Arts' [Crip Arte Spazio: the DAM in Venice](#), we've begun to see increasing recognition of the value and importance of the Disability Arts Movement.



Tanya Raabe Webber, *Portrait of Deborah Williams*, 2011. Shown as part of *Art and Social Change: The Disability Arts Movement*. Courtesy of [the-ndaca.org](#) CC-BY-NC.

Disability Arts had long been associated as the inheritor of the ethics and ideology of the DaDa Movement of the 1920s. Both movements were born out of political situations of inequality and oppression and on 2nd July 2022, the 102nd anniversary of the first Dada Fair in

Berlin, an iconic moment happened with 31 disabled artists staging interventions that appeared in 30 Plus Tate members' venues with the support of DASH. [The DaDa-inspired performances in 'We Are Invisible, We Are Visible'](#) ranged from the surreal and absurd to the sublime, representing a takeover of galleries the length and breadth of Britain and Northern Ireland. It was a glorious moment presenting the visual art sector with a challenge to embrace an artform that takes the human condition as material for curatorial ideas that attempt to challenge and educate in equal measure.

The movement has come a long way in defining a disability aesthetic in terms of the precedents set by visual artists in exploring the experience of disability as a political construct. From where I am situated the aesthetic is rooted in the body from ideological, intersectional and historical perspectives that cross all boundaries of age, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, race, ethnicity and economic situation. Disability affects everyone and remains a valuable framework for curators with an interest in work that foregrounds critical reflection about the value of art to make us, as a society, think with greater empathy about what it means to be human; how we navigate the demands of the future and the global crises that we see looming on the horizon. Disabled people have always had to learn resilience to adapt and survive and a curatorial language that encompasses that experience will only enrich arts practice.

Accessing the Visual Arts: A Disabled Curator's Perspective

 [Listen to Accessing the Visual Arts](#)



Rachel Fleming-Mulford is an independent curator with more than 20 years experience in the visual arts and museums sectors. Her practice is artist-led and highly collaborative. It is rooted in an intersectional feminist approach that centres equity, access and social justice. Amongst other things, she is currently International Curator for the disabled-led visual arts organisation DASH.

Introduction

Over the last year I have had an [Arts Council England DYCP grant](#) to support research and development relating to my curatorial practice. As a disabled freelance curator with acquired access needs and an eight-year-old child, this R&D was fundamentally about trying to figure out how I could continue to work in the visual arts sector, given the barriers I face. I wanted to gain clarity of practice and broaden my network, and consider how I could use any learning to influence systemic change. I wanted to meet artists, disabled curators in senior mainstream roles, and cultural leaders doing 'the work'. I wanted to know where good practice was happening and where the gaps were.

Underpinning this research was my intersectional feminist, decolonising, and anti-racist approach.⁴ I come from activist roots: my parents ran a radical feminist press in Bristol in the 1970s and early '80s.⁵ They instilled in me a passion for thinking about the ways discrimination and oppression can be layered and overlapping. For example, if you're both disabled and working-class, or you're a woman from the global majority who is also [neurodivergent](#) and a mother, or you're non-binary and an expert by experience of the

⁴ Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American law professor, coined the term 'intersectionality' in 1989. [In a Time article](#) in 2020, she explained Intersectional feminism as "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other".

⁵ Falling Wall Press published pamphlets and books on radical education and intersectional feminism such as Wilmette Brown, *Black Women and the Peace Movement* (Falling Wall Press, 1984); and Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Falling Wall Press and a group of individuals from the Women's Movement in England and Italy, 1972).

mental health system. As Audre Lorde stated “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle as we do not live single-issue lives.”⁶

Where to begin? My year was structured around brilliant mentoring and coaching, research trips, and training. I reached out to interesting people, followed my nose, and asked everyone I met for recommendations. I signed up to many new lists and avidly searched the Internet. I wanted and needed to deep-dive into more background reading – something that requires the paid time the grant afforded me. I read a lot of work by [crip](#), intersectional feminist, and/or queer writers, mostly from the global majority. My work is indebted to them, as well as to the conversations I had with the 40+ people who agreed to meet with me. This text gives a small snapshot of some of the things I uncovered and learned.

What change is happening?

It took me months to find and meet other disabled curators as I discovered we largely remain hidden. Ableism is alive and kicking and when you work in the mainstream visual arts there is still real precarity in openly stating that you're disabled (e.g. in online biographies). My grant period ended before I met more than three of us: Livi Adu, a freelance e-curator who is on the [Museums Association's](#) Anti-Ableism Panel;⁷ Jade Foster at [Primary/Black Curators Collective](#); and Hannah Wallis at [Grand Union](#). All are pushing debate and change in different ways – through programming, advocacy, budgeting – and by being unapologetic and in the world.

Happily, I found two disabled-led development programmes for emerging disabled curators, suggesting change is in the making. [Future Curators Programme by DASH](#) is for curators working in the visual arts. [Curating for Change](#) – delivered by [Screen South](#) through the [Accentuate Programme](#) – was for museum curators. It has evolved into Curating Visibility for 2024-25. These programmes support individual participants and encourage systems change – from recruitment to [resources](#). They offer UK-wide opportunities at respected organisations – a huge game-changer, particularly in the visual arts, where the optics of where you've worked can make a significant difference to career progression.

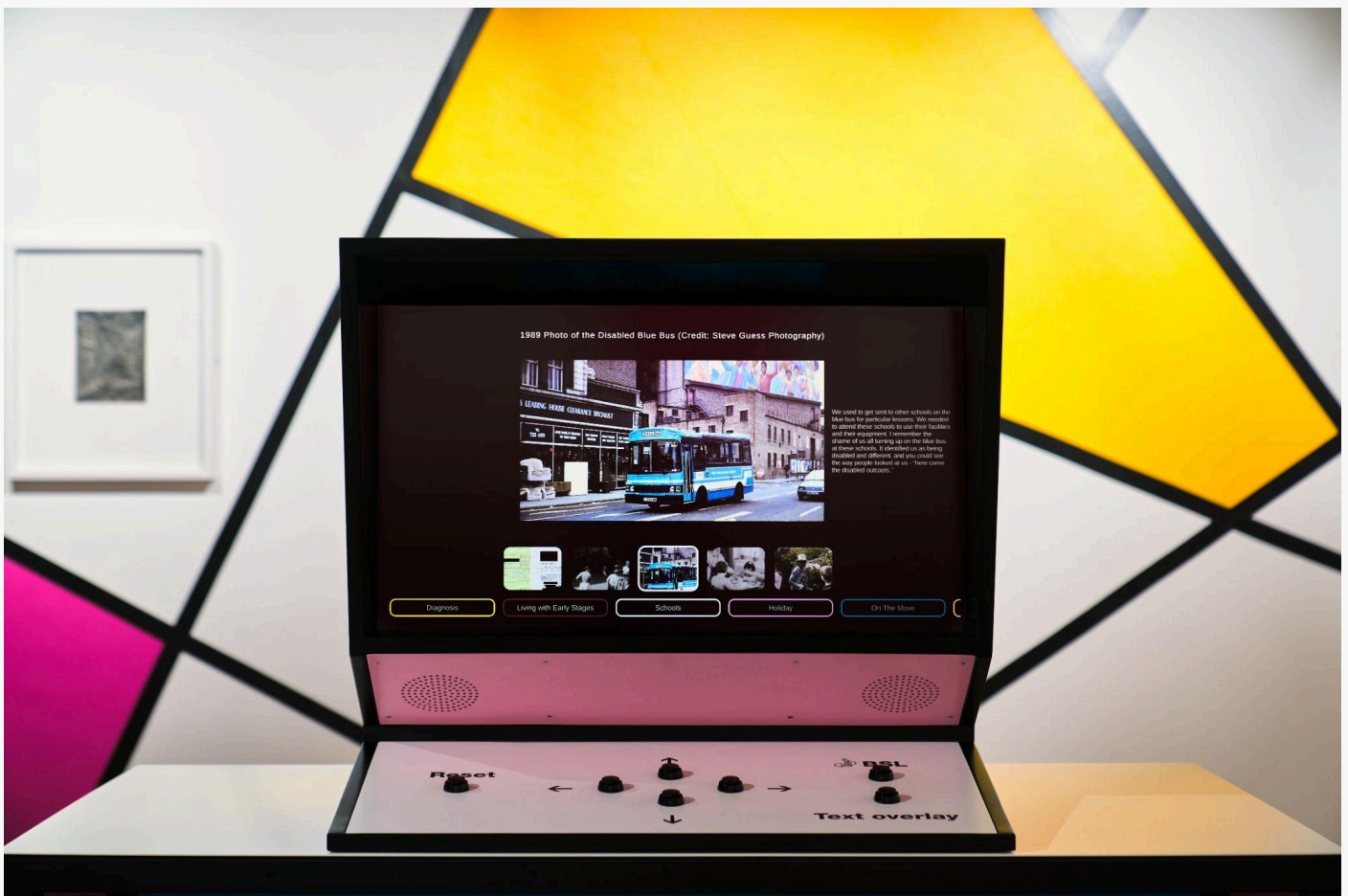
Employing disabled curators is a long-term strategy for change. Not only do we bring the combined skills of professional and lived experience, we help embed anti-ableism and access

⁶ Audre Lorde, 'Learning from the 60s', in *Sister Outsider*, (Penguin Classics, 2019) p.133.

⁷ This panel was established to support [a special anti-ableism edition of Museums Journal in Autumn 2023](#).

into programming because we know that these changes are essential.⁸

This work, however, can't just be left up to crip individuals. New leadership schemes such as [Clare's Inclusive Cultures](#), which began in 2021, are resulting in increased numbers of disabled and non-disabled cultural leaders with better skills and understanding of the complexity involved in making systemic change. Originally developed by [Diverse City](#) and Clare Diversity Associate, Sarah Pickthall, it remains disabled-led. I was in its first cohort, which had notably few others from the visual arts, something that's now changing. Like other Clare leadership programmes, it has the powerful benefit of creating a network of alumni, strengthening knowledge, support and influence.



Christopher Samuel, *Archive of an Unseen*, 2023. Photo: Reece Straw.

D/deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent visual artists were easier to find. As well as the established artists within the [Disability Arts Movement](#), there is a new generation that is not

⁸ This came up in several meetings, including with inspirational cultural leader, Suzanne Alleyne (founder of the research project, [The Neurology of Power™](#)). DYCP research meeting between Rachel Fleming-Mulford and Suzanne Alleyne, 10 October 2023.

only making unapologetic work but is also being programmed in mainstream galleries. Recent shows ranged in topic from health inequality to feminist photography (organisations included The NewBridge Project, Primary, Nottingham Contemporary, LUX, Chapter, Wysing Arts Centre, South London Gallery, and Drawing Room). Artists also spoke at events such as the [Disability in British Art Research Group](#) and two talks at Tate.⁹ A 2022 [online panel discussion at Studio Voltaire, *The Art of Access Adjustments*](#), was essential viewing.

I met with artists whose work explores the important intersections of disability and race, such as [Jameisha Prescod](#) and [Christopher Samuel](#); and mid-career and established artists choosing to finally 'go public' with their crip identities. For example, [Jo Longhurst with her project Crip](#) and Heather Peak's new role as Artistic Director at [DASH](#).¹⁰ It is empowering to decide - to paraphrase Livi Adu - that the only way forward is to "work with your disability rather than against it".¹¹ However, I also met artists who are navigating various late diagnoses and what this means for their art and artworld profiles. There are a range of thorny realities that come with disclosure. These include - like artists from other underrepresented groups - your work being pigeon-holed and seen only through this lens (a whole other essay).

This increase in programming of D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent artists is good for both artists and audiences. What needs to follow this is greater attention from critics and arts press, something raised in a conversation with Christopher Samuel.¹² One way is to use the model from University of the Arts London's 20/20 commissioning programme for UK museums/collections for artists from the global majority.¹³ Here, budgets include commissioning critical essays for every artist. This raises profiles, gives 'artworld credibility', and enables curators to better understand artists' work, especially if not seen in person.

⁹ ['Collecting, Curating and Interpretation- Benchmarking Best Practice', Disability in British Art Research Group](#), Monday 27 November 2023; two discussions on neurodiversity chaired [by artist Jack Ky Tan for Tate, 18 January and 1 February, 2024](#).

¹⁰ Here Now was the first iteration of Jo Longhurst's ongoing project, Crip, and was shown at Studio Voltaire in 2023, curated by Lisa Slominski.

¹¹ DYCP research meeting between Rachel Fleming-Mulford and Livi Adu, 6 October 2023

¹² DYCP research meeting between Rachel Fleming-Mulford and Christopher Samuel, 8 April 2024.

¹³ 20/20 is an ambitious 3-year programme announced by the Decolonising Arts Institute in November 2021, with funding from Freelands Foundation, Arts Council England and UAL. The [National Disability Arts Collection and Archive \(NDACA\)](#) is one of the 20/20 partners. The NDACA is delivered by the disability-led arts organisation [Shape Arts](#).



Chill Out Room. Courtesy of Wellcome Collection.

Throughout my research, I found growing but inconsistent good practice for audiences. Quiet rooms, some of which have dimmed lighting, bean bags, cushions, sofas, stimming toys, and noise cancelling headphones, can be found at some venues - examples include [Tate](#) and [Wellcome Collection](#) in London, and [RWA Bristol](#). [Turner Contemporary](#) in Margate is championing alternative (alt) text on visual content. My closest gallery, [LUX](#), provided various thoughtful yet relatively inexpensive access provisions for their recent exhibition of Nina Thomas.

As a disabled person, I feel more psychologically safe in an environment when I see intention and thought for my wider crip community. This means for *all* programming - not just shows of D/deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent artists; and providing information on what access *isn't* available.¹⁴ Some things that personally help me include: making it clear how long artist films are, noting approximate reading time for texts and including voice recordings. At events,

¹⁴ As writer, artist, and musician Johanna Hedva writes "because institutions love to say how they've made their event accessible, but would prefer not to include the inaccessible bits, which are, of course, the bits that the disabled community actually needs." In ['Why It's Taking So Long', Johanna Hedva](#), published March 13th, 2022.

having proper comfort/rest breaks, streaming or recording so they can be attended later/at home, and sticking to schedules (or making it really easy for people to leave if things run over). Information that is wrong or careless can have a knock-on effect for days/weeks. Also, rather than free tickets for disabled 'carers', can these please just be a disabled person's +1? Lots of work has already been done by crip artists and artworkers to provide ideas, resources, and provocations around access and care (e.g. see [Johanna Hedva's online bibliography](#), [VASW](#), [Access Docs for Artists](#), and [Roo Dhissou's Aftercare Zine](#)).

Andrew Miller MBE is [UK Access Scheme Champion](#) and is spear-heading [All In](#) - a UK-wide access scheme with Arts Council England, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Arts Council of Wales, and Creative Scotland. This is committed to improving the experience of D/deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent people when attending creative and cultural events. Let's hope many visual arts organisations, galleries, artist studio providers, artist-led spaces and museums sign up.

Why is change happening?

Covid created a situation where vast numbers suddenly experienced the benefits of remote working, online events and exhibitions - something the disabled community were already skilled at. This "mass disabling event" saw a "huge wellspring of disabled culture, collective care, communities, love, grief work, joy. A crippling of the world, more than ever before", as Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha has written.¹⁵ Compared to when he co-founded [#WeShallNotBeRemoved](#) during the pandemic, Andrew Miller believes there is now a much greater willingness from museums, galleries, and umbrella organisations to address issues around access, inclusion and anti-ableism.¹⁶

Covid was just one of a number of catalysts for sector change for those facing discrimination and underrepresentation. From anti-racism and decolonising work in the wake of the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement after the racist murder of George Floyd, to the climate crisis and cuts to arts funding (particularly local councils) together with growing poverty - there have been numerous reasons for renewed anger and action.

¹⁵ *The Future is Disabled: prophecies, love notes and mourning songs*, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2022, chapter 18, p. 325.

¹⁶ DYCP research meeting between Rachel Fleming-Mulford and Andrew Miller, 27 March 2024.

[#WeShallNotBeRemoved](#) is an intersectional UK disability arts alliance formed as an emergency response to the pandemic.



Examples of some of the access provision at LUX, London, during Nina Thomas: Place Setting, 7 April, 2024 – 19 May, 2024. Research photo taken by the author.

Tackling such change in an intersectional way is powerful and vital. Notable mainstream visual arts examples include *Industria* (more below) and *CVAN*.¹⁷ The latter is headed by Inclusive Cultures alumna, Paula Orrell, who told me about *CVAN*'s Fair + Equitable report, toolkits and events.¹⁸ These address "the complexity of the barriers facing marginalised and underrepresented communities in the visual arts sector".¹⁹

Other networks are pushing for change that would clearly have wider benefits. The [Art Working Parents Alliance](#) (AWP), founded by Jo Harrison and Hettie Judah in October 2022,

¹⁷ [Industria](#) is an artist-run organisation, examining and challenging the current conditions of the 'art world'; [CVAN \(Contemporary Visual Arts Network\)](#) is an organisation where the visual arts meet policy change. It works in partnership with regional networks to campaign and advocate for the visual arts sector at a national level.

¹⁸ DYCP research meeting between Rachel Fleming-Mulford and Paula Orrell, 19 May 2023.

¹⁹ The report came after a pilot year (September 2021 – October 2022) and a 'Survey of Individuals' 2022. See the [toolkit on intersectionality](#).

has over 400 members (including me). AWP builds on Jo and Hettie's past work, including Hettie's *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*.²⁰ Many of the latter's recommendations, and issues raised in AWP meetings, echo wider needs, including those of crip curators and artists. As Katherine Böhm says: "I think the art world should...adapt to the fact that many of us have barriers to travelling non-stop, being available non-stop, being able to respond non-stop and look in general at expectations of availability and flexibility."²¹

A greater acceptance and drive for flexible working models could help change this. For example, more openness to job shares at a senior level would mean less isolation, more peer support, and alternative working hours. This would be one way to make leadership roles more appealing and manageable for both mothers and disabled folk.²²

Where is change not yet happening?

Low pay in the visual arts sector is a huge underlying barrier to diversity. In June 2021, [FRANK Fair Artist Pay](#) was set up by artists Anne Hardy, Lindsay Seers and curator and writer Fatoş Üstek. In March 2023, [Industria](#) and [a-n](#) published [Structurally F-cked](#). The latter's searing report highlights how low pay and employment practices for visual artists compound wider forms of discrimination. Its section on disability states:

"Only 11% of respondents were informed about the possibility of a separate access budget in addition to the artist fee and production budget. 44.5% were not told whether there was one, and 44.5% said there was not. This...implies that in most instances the responsibility is on disabled artists to request support."

The issue of low pay and workplace precarity also, of course, affects disabled curators, especially those of us who are freelance. [Activist Shani Dhanda repeatedly raises the issue of the disability price tag](#): "disabled people face many unavoidable extra costs due to living with a condition or an impairment. On average, these costs add up to £583 per month" and "for every £100 a non disabled person has, the disabled equivalent is £68". [Unlimited have created templates](#) for disabled artists and freelancers to use when offered unpaid work,

²⁰ See Jo Harrison's *Repronomics* – an ACE-funded research project exploring the intersection of reproduction and economics through the lens of visual arts; and Hettie Judah's *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*, (Lund Humphries, 2022).

²¹ Artist Katherine Böhm quoted in *How Not to Exclude Artist Mothers (and other parents)*, (Hettie Judah, Lund Humphries, 2022), p.82.

²² All parents, but gender discrimination is relevant.

reducing the labour of asking for a fee. I know, anecdotally, that they're being used successfully.



A0 flower press at Bella Milroy's studio-allotment (documentation image courtesy of the artist), June 2022.

Artist Bella Milroy told me she wished there was more centring of chronic illness within the disabled arts community and more widely.²³ Rather than simplistic approaches to access, it is a progressive, bold organisation that is fully person-centred and accommodates the flex required for artists, curators and other staff with chronic pain or health issues. The ability and willingness to shift deadlines, change exhibition formats or even cancel shows is radical, and is not generally supported by funders. Examples are out there, but not enough, and I found none in the mainstream (please reach out if you know of any).

So, what next?

Numerous people I met agreed with me that the UK visual arts still have a long way to go and are behind other parts of the sector. For example, with #WeShallNotBeRemoved, "all of that

²³ DYCP research meeting between Rachel Fleming-Mulford and Bella Milroy, 1 May 2024.

work was primarily driven with figures from the performing arts; with networks, umbrella groups within the performing arts” (although CVAN were an early supporter).²⁴

We need more mainstream, non-disabled gallery directors and curators, studio providers, and visual arts organisations to step up and be more engaged so that anti-ableism is embedded everywhere. The reality is: “All of the low lighting and noise-cancelling headphones in the world are not going to provide protection from antagonistic colleagues.”²⁵ Anti-ableism needs to be intrinsic to sector best practice and we can’t just rely on disabled leaders/practitioners to do this work. “Accessibility [needs] to be seen as the political movement it is,” to [quote Johanna Hedva](#).

We need to be even more open to sharing knowledge and ideas amongst organisations. I know that funding scarcity breeds competition, but collaboration is powerful. Also, although there are many areas and eccentricities specific to the visual arts, cross-sector conversation and learning – including between the visual arts and museums – helps ensure we’re not reinventing the wheel ([What Next?](#) is another good example).²⁶

Growing the number of crip curators and sector leaders can only be a change for the better, but there also needs to be considerably more recognition, and funded support, for the additional labour that comes with being the individual disabled change-maker, especially when you’re a figure-head. Too many are “teetering on burn-out”.²⁷ This includes the time and effort it takes to do ongoing, person-led, access and care work. Clore recently ran a workshop I attended for D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent cultural leaders.²⁸ The findings will be published later in 2024 as part of proposals for how sector leadership might respond to the challenges it is facing.

And lastly, not least given the context of this text, I am looking forward to more work that supports disabled curators and visual artists working internationally. Since January, I’ve been working in the newly-created role of International Curator at DASH. Collaborating closely with Heather Peak, we’re researching who is doing ‘the work’ globally, and how future

²⁴ DYCP research meeting between Rachel Fleming-Mulford and Andrew Miller, 27 March 2024.

²⁵ [Letter to the Guardian](#).

²⁶ What Next? is a free-to-access movement that brings together small and large organisations and freelancers to debate and shape arts & culture in the UK.

²⁷ Anonymous quote from one of Rachel Fleming-Mulford’s DYCP research meeting during the grant period 2023-24.

²⁸ “Part of [Leadership Now](#) – a series of assemblies for cultural leaders, run by Clore in partnership with Arts Council England, to explore the complex and rapidly evolving world of work”.

commissioning and partnerships can be seeded and funded. This is complex, gnarly, exciting work - something Heather and I both delight in. What happens when we're working in very different cultures where disability might mean different things? Or when individual travel access needs clash with each other, and also sometimes with the environment? I can't wait to find out.

Thinking Outside the Tick Box: How the Sector Can Better Support Disabled, Neurodivergent and Self-Taught Artists

▶ [Listen to Thinking Outside the Tick Box](#)



Jennifer Lauren Gilbert is an independent gallerist, curator, and producer with over sixteen years' experience working within this sector. She is the founder of Jennifer Lauren Gallery which aims to champion, advocate for, empower and exhibit disabled, neurodivergent, learning disabled, self-taught, deaf and overlooked artists from across the globe. She holds a BA (Hons) degree in Graphic Design and Illustration from Central Saint Martins, a foundation in Art Therapy, a Masters in Art, Health and Wellbeing and is a Clore Fellow.

I am a gallerist, curator, producer, and mentor, who passionately advocates for access and inclusion for all. I have worked with and alongside deaf, disabled, [neurodivergent](#) and self-taught artists for over sixteen years across a range of settings from day centres and community groups, to museums, commercial galleries, and contemporary art fairs. I currently run the [Jennifer Lauren Gallery](#) alongside my other roles. The importance of art to improve health and wellbeing, as well as to save lives, and the importance of disability representation to challenge stigma and to create level playing fields are of utmost importance to me. I endeavour to challenge the UK's visual arts sector about whose art is displayed and why, as well as seeking conversations with curators and gatekeepers at larger galleries and museums. The following snapshot is based on my perspective of how things currently look in the UK for disabled artists (mainly from the perspective of those who do not make work about their disability), where change is happening, and where work still needs to be done.

Kaleidoscopic Realms: an exhibition of learning disabled and neurodivergent artists which doesn't focus on disability

Recently, I co-curated a new show with Christopher Samuel entitled [Kaleidoscopic Realms, at Nottingham Castle](#) (on until 3 November 2024) that focuses on the work of eight learning disabled and neurodivergent artists working out of UK supported studios. This exhibition was born out of project [SHIFT](#) that exists to amplify and give recognition to the voices of these artists through film and conversation. Although [NDACA \(the National Disability Arts Collection & Archive\)](#) exists, it is focused on the Disability Arts Movement and disabled artists making disability-focused art.



Kaleidoscopic Realms at Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery. Photo: John Hartley.

Kaleidoscopic Realms is pitched as showcasing eight contemporary artists who have all travelled different paths to firmly ground themselves within their art practices. Their artwork and how they made it is at the forefront, with films showcasing their practices. For me, this means that people enter with an open mind and no preconceived ideas. Commissioned texts from curators, gallery directors and writers offer new angles to look at the work through. The exhibition can also be accessed through captioned film, Easy Read, BSL videos, Braille and audio descriptions, enabling audiences to engage in a way suited to their needs. But this is very rare in a gallery or museum. Many institutions have said they fear it will cost too much, often admitting this decision is made without even knowing the costs beforehand. With clarification of these costs and where things can be sourced, it is hoped more galleries and museums will now begin to further embed access across their exhibitions and programming.

Kaleidoscopic Realms was co-curated with [artist Christopher Samuel](#) who makes work about identity and representation as a working class, black, disabled artist. Christopher was part of my initial discussions when setting up SHIFT (a project celebrating the work of UK-based learning disabled and neurodivergent artists) and it felt important to have his voice as part of

the selection and curation. Not only did we travel the UK together to select the work alongside the artists, where possible, we tried to embed access from the outset. We built the exhibition to be fun, colourful, and joyful, and to promote conversations about representation. In a commissioned video that is part of the exhibition, Christopher said:

“I think what's important here is take the content, remove any labels. You put these works alongside established, well-known artists, these works can sit on their own....on their own merit. I think curators, galleries, organisations need to take a leaf out of this kind of book and think of ways to include artists who are, I feel, side-lined on the margins. Lack of inclusion creates bad perceptions. Through this exhibition I hope people who may not come into contact with people with disabilities or learning disabled will change their perception of what they think is possible or their low expectations.”

Adding to this conversation, we hope that disabled curator Aidan Moesby's group exhibition [Towards New Worlds](#) opening at MIMA in July 2024, highlights the same discussion points alongside exceptional artwork. Aidan was part of [DASH's Future Curators programme](#) – three disabled artists were placed into three institutions to learn about curation for a year, with the hope of diversifying staff teams and bringing lived experiences into gallery conversations. A new cohort will soon be selected by DASH to continue this training and diversification.

A toolkit for working with deaf, disabled and/or neurodivergent artists

For over two years I have been working alongside the [Plus Tate Network](#) and [Triple C/DANC \(Disabled Artists Networking Community\)](#) on a toolkit: How Galleries and Museums Can Better Work with and Support Deaf, Disabled and/or Neurodivergent Artists. Five deaf, disabled and/or neurodivergent artists were involved in the content creation and many of the disability steering groups associated with Triple C/DANC have also provided feedback before its first iteration. The content has been created from online Zoom sessions with the network and people with lived experiences present, with a solution-focused approach to issues raised. When we originally questioned the network on why they rarely worked with disabled artists, alongside the cost issue mentioned above, they said: a fear of using the wrong language and being unsure how to work alongside/with disabled artists – and the one I couldn't quite get my head around – not knowing where to find or how to reach disabled artists. I urge the visual arts sector to do some deep diving into all the incredible UK supported studios like [ActionSpace](#) in London and [Venture Arts in Manchester](#), as well as reaching out to disability

arts organisations like [Disability Arts Online](#) and [Shape Arts](#), who can point people in the direction of UK-based deaf, disabled and neurodivergent artists.

The first iteration of the toolkit has been sent around the network for feedback and a new version will be circulated more widely this autumn. This includes new additions, but also will be broken down into smaller sections so that, for example, just the language and terminology section could be given to certain staff members who don't necessarily need to read or be overwhelmed with the whole document. It covers everything from: language and terminology; what neurodiversity means; how to hang accessible exhibitions and put on accessible events; how to make callouts more accessible and wide reaching; putting simple contracts in place; and more. This is all underlined with the firm message that each artist is different with differing needs so be sure to have those conversations early on.

When the toolkit was released late last year, each network partner had to pledge one initial change they could make moving forwards. Pledges included: setting up BSL tours, making sure front of house staff and volunteers read the language section, and looking at setting up relaxed openings. To date, the toolkit has been well received, and actions are being implemented in galleries and museums. We now need to make sure all organisations read and use the document for change to take place.

Looking across the pond for best practice

For me, America seems further ahead in terms of representation, acceptance, and visibility for disabled artists in the visual arts. Many contemporary galleries hold solo shows for disabled artists as part of their main programming: Dan Miller at Diane Rosenstein (LA), Marlon Mullen at Adams and Ollman (Portland), Susan Te Kahurangi King at [March Gallery \(New York\)](#), and [White Columns in New York](#) programmes at least one exhibition a year for an emerging disabled artist. I think because of this programming, more collections and contemporary art collectors feature the work of disabled artists, a recent notable example being a Judith Scott wrapped sculpture that I spotted in the [Shah Garg Foundation's](#) 2024 exhibition in New York. The foundation highlights the achievements and innovations of women artists, and it featured alongside well-known artists Simone Leigh and Rachel Jones. In 2022, White Columns' Matthew Higgs also used Instagram to call out [SFMOMA's](#) incoming Director Christopher Bedford to look at the work of the supported studio [Creative Growth](#). Many transformational visits and conversations later led to SFMOMA spending over \$500,000 to acquire 114 works from Creative Growth, [Creativity Explored](#) and [NIAD](#). Christopher said: "These are artworks and narratives that disrupt our common understandings of the trajectory

of art and deserve substantially greater presentation and public engagement.” This historical moment is the largest ever disability art acquisition from a museum, and we hope more of this continues, and that the UK takes note.



Creative Growth: The House That Art Built (installation view). Photo: Don Ross, courtesy SFMOMA

The importance of criticism

In the UK there is a lack of critical writing in the mainstream press about anything involving disability arts. If shows are not highlighted, wider audiences are not aware of them. Some writers have said this is due to a fear of saying the wrong thing or using the wrong language, but how about writers having conversations with disabled artists or disabled groups about the language? Disabled artists and organisations have said they would welcome the conversations, to create awareness and level the playing field. A few pieces have been emerging in the last couple of years.

Eddy Frankel wrote about [Venture Arts' group exhibition, Yess Lad at TJ Boulting in Time Out](#) saying:

“This could be any 2022 group exhibition. The difference is that these artists aren’t doing it to make money, or carve out a career in the art world, they’re doing it because they want to. And it doesn’t matter that these artists are learning disabled or neurodiverse, because what they’ve made eclipses the everyday: this is just fantastic contemporary art.”

[Cathy Reay wrote about Headway East London's 2023 Differently Various](#) at the Barbican giving it five stars in the Guardian writing: “Their work is sometimes ugly, sometimes beautiful, often both, and in each case prompts a rollercoaster of thought and emotion. Isn’t that the true definition of artistry?”

Key initiatives in the UK today

Other major initiatives currently happening across the UK are:

- [Curating for Change](#) – sixteen D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent curatorial trainees and fellows are working in museums across England to uncover new stories in collections.
- [Art et al.](#) are pairing disabled and non-disabled artists together to converse, learn and collaborate on new artworks as well as commissioning disabled and non-disabled writers for reviews and critical writing.
- [The Explorers Network](#) now exists (initiated by Project Art Works) which is a place of safety, discussion, learning and activism working to support the rights, representation and opportunity for people who identify as neurodivergent, or have complex or intersecting support needs.

Is formal art education necessary?

In 2023, I sat on a panel discussion at the [Royal Academy of Arts in London](#) alongside artists Yinka Shonibare and Cathie Pilkington, discussing how art education is not a necessity nor a luxury that everyone can afford. Those in institutions gave their reasoning for its importance, while I shared thoughts from artists I support, alongside my own, about the greatness of raw intuitive art and freedom to express yourself in your own way, alongside the joy that creation for no one other than yourself brings. As ActionSpace artist Thompson Hall says: “It shouldn’t be whether you have been educated in art, but about the creative side and the imagination that the individual has.” And, as the great self-taught artist Thornton Dial once said: “I had the

best art school of all, just making artwork.” I truly believe if galleries and museums placed less importance on art education and upbringing, their outputs would be more diverse, and more people would feel they could visit an art gallery and feel represented. I heard first-hand this week from a youth collective for artists with mental health challenges that not seeing yourself reflected is an attendance barrier, as well as galleries and museums not being welcoming, open spaces for those from non-traditional art routes.



RA panel discussion with Hettie Judah, Cathie Pilkington, Jennifer Gilbert and Yinka Shonibare, 2023.
Photo: Molly Bretton

Conclusion

I’m a huge advocate for institutional and gatekeeper change. Those in power need to ask questions and have the difficult and challenging conversations. Funders also need to hold institutions accountable for diversifying what they showcase, how they do this, and accessibility. And all this should become the norm and not the exception. We do not want a box ticking exercise – only open minds and a willingness to learn and change will fix this.

Can We Say the D Word Now? Towards a Disability Aesthetic Beyond the Experience of Barriers

[▶ Listen to Can We Say the D Word Now?](#)



Ashokkumar D Mistry is a Leicester-based, neurodivergent multidisciplinary artist and writer working in the UK and internationally. Subverting technologies and ideologies, he centres on antifascist practice. Mistry's research scrutinises differences to expand an understanding of the human condition that includes impairment/difference and disability.

Introduction

Mark Rothko is credited with saying “A painting is not a picture of an experience, but is the experience”. This statement epitomises the need for an evolution in the thinking of how disability is considered and written about in an arts context. In other words, when we talk about disability in art, we shouldn't crave or fetishise a depiction of disability but acknowledge the unique human perspective it creates.

Following the [Disability Arts Movement](#) of the late 1990s, most art exhibitions featuring a disability narrative have become enveloped in the themes and aesthetics of agitprop, activism and a post Social Model focus on addressing barriers. This is all valid work but as disabled and neurodivergent artists, we have so much more to say if we embrace our disabled selves.

Several exhibitions including Art Life and Activism at Attenborough Arts Centre, Art and Social Change: the Disability Arts Movement, Midlands Art Centre, and the latest, Crip Arte Spazio: The DAM in Venice epitomise this particular disability aesthetic, often foregrounding many of the same few artists.

In this essay I explore disability aesthetics beyond pain, marginalisation, activism and anger which is what I would argue we have been conditioned to associate disability with. I will attempt to unpick disability, neurodivergence and its experience as an important element of humanity that interacts with the creative process and feeds an alternative disability aesthetic that is, in my opinion, far more exciting.



Installation shot of Shape Arts' Crip Arte Spazio: The DAM in Venice, 2024. Photo: Andy Barker.

Working with and writing about the work of other disabled and neurodivergent artists the interaction of the difference brought by the disability or neurodivergence on the creative process is palpable. My theory suggests artists will code their lived experiences of difference into their work.

It is still difficult to investigate this phenomena and bring the dynamics of the difference to the surface especially as many artists either do not outwardly identify as disabled or don't attribute their modus operandi to their impairment/difference. However, there are many artists who now speak openly of their impairment/difference with pride. In this essay, I hope to analyse the work of several artists and explore their physiological or psychological impairment/difference using the language of disability pride. These reviews of their work will be contrasted by theory that explores the experience of the disabled artist within an industry reluctant to interact with this very human experience. I need to emphasise that the analysis of the work of the artists is subjective and based on knowledge and experience of disability theory and interactions with either the artist or their work. I would discourage anyone from interpreting this as gospel.

The “D” word

The language and aesthetics of disability, impairment or difference (as preferred in neurodivergent circles) are seldom seen, much less fully understood in the art world. A solemn note explaining an artist’s impairment might punctuate an article in the art press, to invoke pity, tell a tale of triumph over tragedy or to mine trauma. Disability is written about as an apology similar to those expected by passers by, from parents when their disabled child isn’t ‘playing nicely’.

Disability is rarely regarded as an aesthetic or curatorial theme in its own right. Tobin Siebers reminds us that in the case of other forms of marginalisation, disability is used as the pathological justification for oppressing a marginalised group and denied when the case is made for that group to claim parity of esteem²⁹. Disability is disruptive and is the catalyst for cultural evolution. The paradox however, is that the creative difference disability brings, is sought after, however, the origins of that difference prove to be a difficult conversation. This has led to the trope of the eccentric genius or the dedicated artist who wished to overcome disability and prove their worth.

Being disabled is part of the human experience but is instead characterised as an aberration or an embarrassment. One only needs to read and contrast the obituary of disabled or neurodivergent artists to read that their genius was despite their impairment/difference or as a result of their overcoming disability. Being different has many negatives, though as the [Social Model](#) points out, much of this is down to society and its mores.

To understand the reading of art from a disability perspective it is important to understand how we as disabled and neurodivergent artists code aspects of ourselves into the art we make and how it is the job of art writers to unearth this through understanding difference and making this assessment part of a pluralistic definition of personhood and humanity.

²⁹ Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (University of Michigan Press, 2010).



Anahita Harding, *Are You Comfortable Yet* at Tate Modern, 2022. Photo: Ayesha Chouglay.

Presence and Absence: Anahita Harding

The work of Anahita Harding's varied practice, ranging across visual and live art, speaks to the way in which disabled artists navigate through fissures within the arts sector. Harding's work emanates from the manner in which she codes experiences into the work by the composition of her own attendance. I have often spoken about the idea of introvert extrovert, a state of being which posits a duality of presence within cultural spaces by disabled people. Harding's work exemplifies this idea of presence by playing with its volume through interacting with the built environment and the public. What is overlooked is the way in which Harding weaves stories together through simple actions by adjusting their subtlety and visibility. The performance titled *Are You Comfortable Yet?*, performed at Tate Modern, saw Harding, dressed in a swimming costume, sitting completely still in her wheelchair in a passenger lift. The work explored the multilayered psychology of perception, interaction with and presence with a disabled person. Presence is simultaneously inconspicuous and conspicuous, introvert and extrovert. Presence and absence, beyond the activism.

Disability and Creativity: Rachel Gadsden and Sharif Persaud

At this juncture we need to now understand creativity as territory within which aesthetics is mapped to appreciate whether creativity of the disabled individual is mapped within or outside its bounds.



Rachel Gadsden, Cube Restraint Action Art performance, 2023. Photo: Gadsden-Hayton

Artist and PhD researcher, [Rachel Gadsden](#) has been actively exploring the intersection of disability and creativity to extend the mapping of aesthetics. Through practice-based enquiry Gadsden has researched what happens to the human body when it is forced to move in a way that removes all expectation. Her enquiry is linked to her own work/lived experience of disability and that of Francis Bacon who lived with a similar lung condition to Gadsden. Gadsden's work is reminiscent of Tobin Siebers' concept of Masquerade – the hyperbolic performance of self-abjection to manage the consequences dealt to a non-normative body

(as opposed to Disability Drag – the portrait of the disabled body by a non-disabled performer)³⁰.

Gadsden pushes the limits of her bodily and creative agility to create piercing studies that read as paragraphs of the effort her body is subjected to. The aesthetics of the disabled body are defined through varied gait of the entire body in the picture plain. These works were portraits of the resistance to pathologisation of the disabled body and need to be interpreted without prejudice.

Many researchers exploring creativity through cognition (including Jan Dul³¹ and Jeanne Nakamura & Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi³²), understand creativity as a core human trait and in some cases a birthright. Gregory Feist³³ and Thomas Ward & Yuliya Kolomyts³⁴ suggest that creativity denotes personhood or humanity. The same ways people from the global south were/are considered to be less than human based on the biased reading of their art, so the art of the disabled individual needs a new reading which enables either the territorial bounds of aesthetics to be redefined and a language to be created to accommodate a broader definition to the Vitruvian ideal of the non-disabled human.

When looking at art writing, creativity is not thought to be universal. As David R. Jones demonstrates, the conferring of a person's creativity is problematic as it denotes hierarchy and the creativity of some sections of society including disabled people is therefore thought to be invalid³⁵.

Shattering the trope of the disabled individual as inferior and a passive object, [Sharif Persaud](#) re-codes people, places, events and memory through his unique worldview presenting his cognition as the subject. Persaud plays with what the world refers to as contemporary culture. This is contextual travel, which holds and parses details of existence through an

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Dul, J. (2019). The physical environment and creativity: A theoretical framework. In J. C. Kaufman & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of creativity* (2nd ed., pp. 481–509). Cambridge University Press.

³² Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2003). The construction of meaning through vital engagement. In C. L. M. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived* (pp. 83–104). American Psychological Association.

³³ Feist, G. J. (2019). Creativity and the Big Two model of personality: Plasticity and stability. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 27, (pp.31–35).

³⁴ Ward, T. B., & Kolomyts, Y. (2019). Creative cognition. In J. C. Kaufman & R. J. Sternberg (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of creativity* (2nd ed., pp. 175–199). Cambridge University Press.

³⁵ Jones D. R. (2021). *Banal creativity: Using foucauldian discourse analysis to reveal mechanisms that exclude racialized, gendered, and disabled creators* [Doctoral dissertation, ProQuest, Fielding Graduate University].

autistic lens. The syntactic role of cultural norms is ordered according to his artistic logic which allows gangrene to shine in an electric glow and a well-known comic persona and its politics to be challenged from unconventional angles. Above all, Persaud reminds our professionally obsessed art sector to value and invest in difference, not qualifications. It is vital that a plurality of creativity is present and Persaud exemplifies the value of appreciating the detail we purposely choose to overlook.

Worthy Quotients: Yinka Shonibare and gobscore

It's important to understand disability and neurodiversity in an intersectional frame, as being part of one marginalised group does not stop one from discriminating against other marginalisations and mono-dimensional groupings cause discrimination.

When art and artists are written about, so many external aspects that influence the work are considered. Existential or cultural quotients, such as sexuality, upbringing, ethnicity, travels, religion, interests, experiences, and interactions with other people are all valid, but not one's physicality or psychology. When we consider the acceptable list we notice that all of these are items or situations which reciprocate and are external to the individual; however, the body can't reciprocate because it is part of the individual. I wondered if this is the reason art writing refuses to engage with the disabled body when considering the disability-connected origin story of an artwork.

Exploring the acceptance of the disabled body in art, the work of [Yinka Shonibare](#) – often seen as the poster child of a 'disabled artist' – needs to be better understood, beyond how it is interpreted in the mainstream press. Shonibare deftly explores disability and race and colonisation though this is seldom written about in terms of its intersectional dimension. Shonibare is wrongly thought not to overtly explore disability through his art though he has referenced disability in many artworks, an example being artworks within the exhibition Prospero's Monsters. Beyond these direct references to disability, however, look closely and one can find depictions that relate to Shonibare's experience of disability. In particular *La Méduse* (2008), a diorama of a ship within rough seas, and *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* (2007), an ornately sailed ship in a bottle, which in my opinion, anthropomorphise ships to depict the usurpation of the disabled body by the non-disabled world. Ships feel like self portraits. Also found are depictions of figures without heads; in some cases heads replaced by globes. This leads us to the Guardian Newspaper article titled, *What I See in the Mirror: Yinka Shonibare* in which Shonibare opens with the lines: "I have a physical disability so, as a result, I don't focus

too much on what I see in the mirror. I am not overly obsessed, because I know that I am not going to be taking Naomi Campbell's job any time soon”.

In contrast to Shonibare’s tacit coding of his experience, is the work of [gobscure](#) who is a multiform artist and writer whose creations emerge from within, shattering the silence of all of the subjects we avoid speaking of. Gobscure has written and published extensively and approaches their practice far from expectations of what an artist would be. This disregard of expectations is a cipher of neurodivergent existence, a refreshing delicacy from the humdrum factory floors of university art departments. Understanding gobscure’s work is to understand human existence before we make rules about what – or rather who – is appropriate. Gobscure frets not over grandeur, they are an instinctive artist, reacting to the intersection of their internal world and the external world.



Gobscure, You Have Already Survived, 2024. Photo: John McKenzie © 2023 Baltic

Caring our way forward: Sonia Boué and Roo Dhissou

Care is important though it is subject to being overused and misunderstood. When I mention care in a disability art context, I refer to people understanding each other and seeing each other as equals. Care doesn't just happen at an institutional level, artists have care responsibilities to everyone they come into contact with, as do audiences. Two artists whose work offers a new route to understanding disabled and neurodivergent modes of care are [Sonia Boué](#) and [Roo Dhissou](#).



Sonia Boue, Mona Lisa (after Duchamp), photograph, 2022. Photo: © Sonia Boue

Boué has been writing about her diagnosis and experience of autism for a number of years. Boué's practice is centred around making, and together we have collaborated to explore making in an unmasked way. Boué's work references autism as a personal perspective rather than a trope-laden form. In particular, Boué's photographic work expresses her unmediated inner thoughts. In order to decode Boué's art one needs to understand the reality of access and care. Boué cares about the context and subject and this process creates art that cares for

its memory and its future. Boué's recent experiments explore making through stimming (a repetitive behaviour that is self-stimulating and self-soothing) and even in this context, the care features as an important element both in terms of caring for oneself as an artist, the memory of the theme and the audience who will see the work.

Dhissou is an artist and PhD researcher who has been making art that invites the viewer into her intersectional existence. Dhissou's work depicts her neurodivergent perspective openly. One could characterise it as harnessing emotion to deliver narrative in stillness. Her art is playful and approachable and like Boué cares for all involved. Dhissou encourages interaction and exploration through the Sikh/Hindu concept of *Sevā* (selfless act of service to others) that is multisensory and based on the everyday of her experiences. Artworks take the form of people who help Dhissou attend to the emotional needs of her audience.

By centering their practices around care, Boué and Dhissou suggest a new aesthetic that brings the responsibility of caring to each of the stakeholders in the creative process. Thematically, the subject matter is broken down and the process of making is also slowed and broken into cognitively affordable chunks. What emerges is a laser sharp practice that takes the entire audience on a journey, not just those who can keep up. Both Boué's and Dhissou's processes and the art that audiences see are multisensory and this is palpable when one witnesses them working.

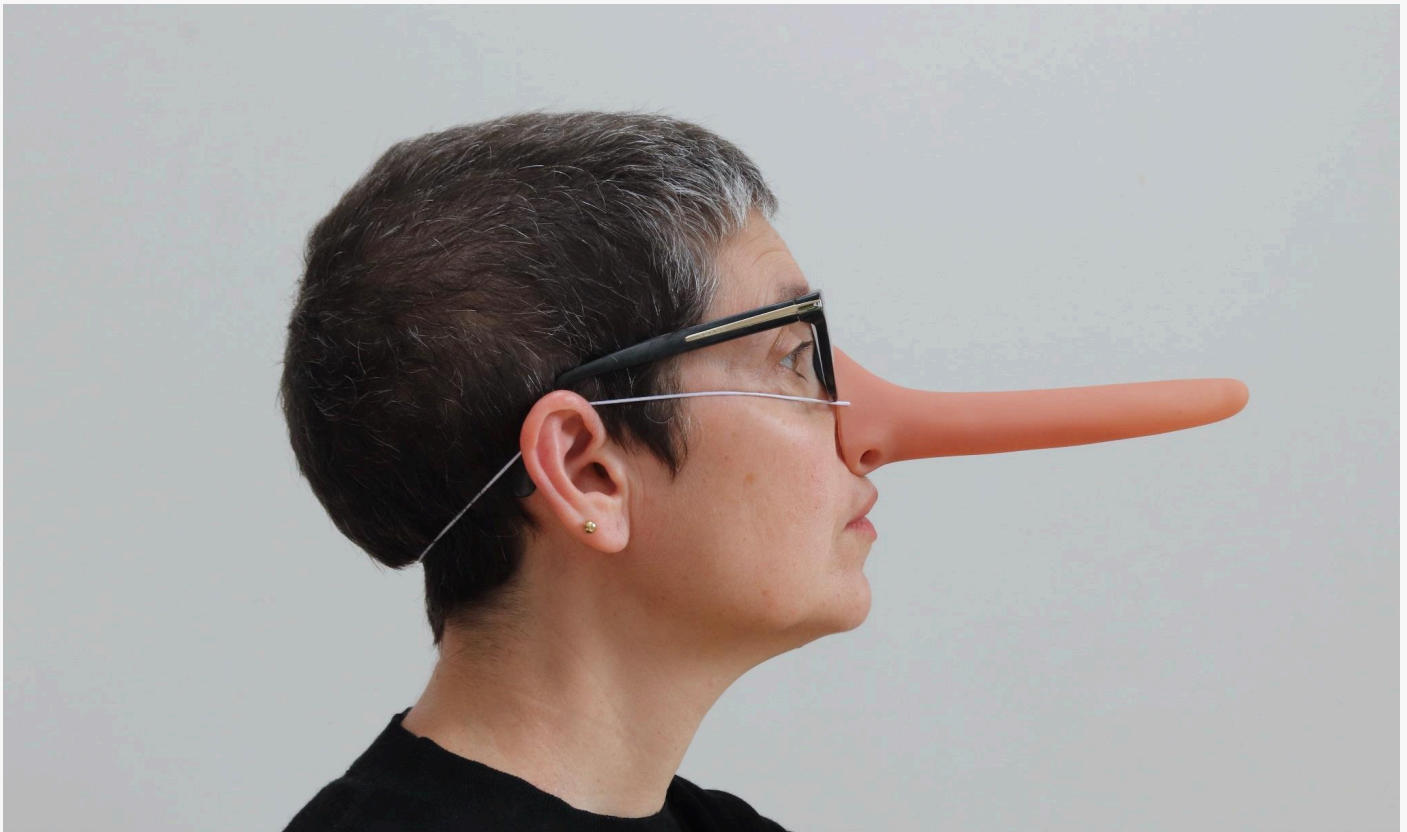
Conclusion

The discourse on art and disability must shift from mere depictions of disability to embracing intersectionality and understanding disability as a dynamic influencing the creative process. The Disability Arts Movement of the late 1990s has often focused on activism and barriers, but disabled and neurodivergent artists have much more to offer. The rich, alternative aesthetics that emerge when art writers embrace the full experience of the disabled artist, moving beyond pain and marginalisation is within reach and neither meekness nor laziness would be allowed to derail the endeavours of disabled artists. We desperately need a new reading of art that recognises the intrinsic value and creativity beyond market forces and grows our understanding of human presence as well as human condition.

By examining the work of well-known artist Yinka Shonibare alongside lesser known artists such as Anahita Harding, Rachel Gadsden, Sharif Persaud, Gobscore, Sonia Boué, and Roo Dhissou, we can see how a new aesthetic can emerge that values care over competition and audiences discover value beyond celebrity.

Directory

This directory provides a **small selection** of artists, curators, organisations and initiatives whose work covers disability in the visual arts. All are either UK-based or work in the country regularly. The selection was compiled by Disability Arts Online with suggestions from the essay writers. There are more artists, curators and supportive organisations and initiatives that can be found within the pages of [Disability Arts Online](#) and [Disability Arts International](#).



Sonia Boué, Follow Your Nose, photograph, Lockdown Series, 2020. © Sonia Boué 2020

Artists

Bobby Baker <https://www.bobbyartistbaker.co.uk/>

Anna Berry <https://www.annaberry.co.uk/>

Sonia Boué <https://www.soniaboue.co.uk/>

Richard Butchins <https://www.richardbutchins.art/>

Caroline Cardus <https://www.carolinecardusartist.com/bio>

Roo Dhissou <https://roodhissou.com/>

Chris Tally Evans <https://www.christallyevans.com>

Rachel Gadsden <https://www.rachelgadsden.com/>

Gobscure <https://gobscure.wixsite.com/info>

Thompson Hall <https://actionspace.org/artists/thompson-hall/>
Colin Hambrook <https://colinhambrook.wordpress.com/>
Tony Heaton <http://www.tonyheaton.co.uk/>
Nnena Kalu <https://actionspace.org/artists/nnena-kalu/>
Fae Kilburn <https://www.faekilburn.co.uk/>
Lady Kitt <https://www.ladykitt.com/>
Seo Hye Lee <https://www.seohyelee.com/>
Jo Longhurst <https://www.jolonghurst.com/>
Cara Macwilliam <https://caramacwilliam.onfabrik.com/>
Letty McHugh <https://www.lettymchugh.co.uk/>
Aaron McPeake <https://www.aaronmcpeake.com/>
Sam Metz <https://www.sammetz.com/>
Bella Milroy <https://www.bellamilroy.com/>
Ashokkumar D Mistry <https://ashokdmistry.com/>
Priya Mistry <http://whatsthebigmistry.com/>
Jade de Montserrat <https://www.bosseandbaum.com/artists/jade-montserrat/>
Poppy Nash <https://poppynash.com/>
Sinéad O'Donnell <https://sineadodonnell.com/>
Sharif Persaud <https://projectartworks.org/makers/sharif-persaud/>
Benedict Phillips <https://benedictphillips.co.uk/>
Jameisha Prescod <https://www.jameishaprescod.com/>
Tanya Raabe-Webber <https://www.tanyaraabewebber.com/>
Juliet Robson <https://julietrobson.com/>
Christopher Samuel <https://www.christophersamuel.co.uk/>
Dolly Sen <https://dollysen.com/>
Yinka Shonibare <https://yinkashonibare.com/>
The vacuum cleaner <http://www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk/>
Kristina Veasey <https://kristinaveasey.com/>
Aaron Williamson <https://aaronwilliamson.org/>

Curators

Livi Adu <https://www.muchaduabout.com/>
Gill Crawshaw <https://britishartnetwork.org.uk/membership/members/gill-crawshaw/>
Rachel Fleming-Mulford <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/rachel-fleming-mulford-33a97b42>
Jade Foster <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/jade-foster-13972ba8>
Jade French <https://www.jade-french.com/>

Jennifer Gilbert <https://www.jenniferlaurengallery.com/about>

Amanda Lynch <https://www.amandalynchart.com/about.html>

Aidan Moesby <https://aidanmoesby.co.uk/>

George Vasey <https://georgevasey.com/>

Hannah Wallis <https://hannahwallis.com/>

Organisations

[Attenborough Arts Centre](#) is a socially and civically-engaged public cultural venue based at the University of Leicester, producing visual arts, live performance, learning, community and research programmes. It has consistently programmed work by disabled artists in its main gallery space.

[ActionSpace](#) seeks out and unlocks talent, creates opportunities and enables learning disabled artists to realise their potential. We work with learning disabled artists across London as a Creative Hub, Supported Studio and Artist Development Agency.

At [The Art House](#) Wakefield, artists and audiences of all kinds are invited to engage with the creative process through a year-round programme of residencies, exhibitions, events, workshops, and professional development opportunities.

[DaDa](#) is an award winning and pioneering disability and Deaf arts organisation based in Liverpool with international reach and impact. It is known widely for DaDaFest, a biennial cross-arts festival.

[DASH](#) is a disabled led visual arts charity. It creates opportunities for disabled artists to develop their creative practice. They are the lead organisations in the Future Curators Programme (see below).

[Disability Arts Cymru](#) is the lead organisation for Disability Arts in Wales.

[Disability Arts Online](#) is an arts organisation led by disabled people, serving artists and arts audiences who face disabling barriers and, in doing so, enabling social change. DAO occupies a unique global position with its website showcasing disability arts content, artist development programmes, partnership and consultancy work, accessible events and a vibrant community of disabled creatives.

[Outside In](#) provides a platform for artists who encounter significant barriers to the art world due to health, disability, social circumstance, or isolation.

[Project Ability](#) is a visual arts charity and gallery supporting people with learning disabilities and mental ill-health to create art.

[Project Art Works](#) is a collective of neurodiverse artists and activists working from a studio based in Hastings.

[Shape Arts](#) is a disability-led arts organisation which works to improve access to culture for disabled people by providing [opportunities](#) for disabled artists, [training cultural institutions](#) to be more open to disabled people, and through running participatory arts and development programmes.

[Together! 2012](#) is a grassroots arts organisation based in Newham, London. They offer a free year-round programme of workshops for disabled people and free disabled-led exhibitions, events, performances and screenings for everyone, culminating in the annual Together! Festival.

[University of Atypical](#) for Arts and Disability (UofA) is disabled-led and is the lead sectoral organisation for arts and disability in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

[Unlimited](#) is an arts commissioning body that supports, funds and promotes new work by disabled artists for UK and international audiences.

[Venture Arts](#) is a Manchester based award-winning visual arts organisation working with learning disabled artists.

Initiatives

[Curating for Change](#) exists to create strong career pathways for d/Deaf, disabled and neurodiverse curators, currently seriously under-represented in museums. The Trainees and Fellows are producing exhibitions, events and blogs, exploring disabled people's histories – while gaining skills for careers in the sector.

Clore Leadership's [Inclusive Cultures](#) is a six-month disabled-led professional development programme designed for cultural leaders seeking to take steps towards systemic change. This

learning opportunity is for individuals who are ready to deepen and broaden their competence and give them the courage to contribute to inclusive culture making and disability justice. The programme draws on Inclusive Leadership theories and practice, and the lived experiences of D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people/communities, and uses coaching techniques to inform both thinking and action.

[All In](#) is a new UK-wide arts access scheme for D/deaf, disabled, and neurodivergent people.

[CVAN Fair + Equitable \(F+E\)](#) is a five year programme and commitment to instituting equity within the visual arts sector in England.

[Disability in British Art \(DIBA\)](#) This British Art Network research group aims to address the historic absence of disabled artists and the active exclusion of disability as a compelling subject for visual art. The group aims to expand the field of knowledge on historical and contemporary British disabled artists and produce new frameworks that increase understanding and expertise around this previously avoided subject.

[Explorers](#) is a national creative programme increasing the visibility and representation of neurodivergent artists in contemporary visual art.

[Future Curators Programme](#) (FCP) is a residency programme for disabled curators within visual arts institutions. FCP is led by DASH and includes partners [Midlands Arts Centre](#), [MIMA](#), [Wysing Arts Centre](#), [Newlyn Art Gallery and The Exchange](#), [John Hansard Gallery](#), [Arts Catalyst](#) and [Disability Arts Online](#).

[Making Space](#) is the Royal Academy's inclusive artist development programme for a group of learning-disabled and neurodivergent artists.

[National Disability Arts Collection and Archive \(NDACA\)](#) brings to life the heritage and rich history of the UK Disability Arts Movement. The Disability Arts Movement began in the late 1970s and continues today.

[Neuk Collective](#) is a new collective of neurodivergent artists, funded by Creative Scotland's Create:Inclusion project.

[What Next?](#) is a free-to-access movement that brings together small and large organisations and freelancers to debate and shape arts & culture in the UK.

Glossary

Ableism

Ableism is a word for unfairly favouring non-disabled people. Ableism means prioritising the needs of non-disabled people. In an ableist society, it's assumed that the "normal" way to live is as a non-disabled person. It is ableist to believe that non-disabled people are more valuable to society than disabled people.

[Source <https://www.sense.org.uk/information-and-advice/life-with-complex-disabilities/ableism-and-disablism/>]

Crip

Crip is a movement that has emerged from the disability community actively rebelling against ableist attitudes, prejudice and stereotypes. A collective of disabled people around the world are re-purposing derogatory language which has historically been used to oppress. Crip is short for 'cripple', a term which was once acceptable, before it was turned around and used to discriminate. Disabled people are now reclaiming the word crip. Of course, the disability community is, like any other, diverse and heterogeneous. Crip is controversial, and whilst some advocate this language, others feel very uncomfortable around it. We must, however, accept and respect how individuals want to refer to themselves.

[Source: <https://nowthenmagazine.com/articles/crip-a-story-of-reclamation>]

Deficit Model

According to this model, disability is seen as a deficit from a perceived 'normal'. Highly linked to the Medical Model (see below).

Disability Aesthetic

Art that has the lived experience of disability apparent in the form and/or intrinsic to the production and meaning of the work.

Disability Arts Movement

The Disability Arts Movement was initiated in the UK in the late 1970s and brought together a variety of activists, artists and creatives of all kinds who campaigned for the civil rights of disabled people and fought against their marginalisation in the arts and culture. The influence of the movement led to the passing in 1995 of the Disability Discrimination Act, which banned discrimination of disabled people in connection with employment, the provision of goods, facilities and services, replaced in 2010 with the Equality Act.

[source: <https://www.shapearts.org.uk/blog/reflections-on-the-disability-arts-movement>]

Medical Model

The medical model of disability says people are disabled by their impairments or differences. The medical model looks at what is 'wrong' with the person, not what the person needs.

[Source <https://www.scope.org.uk/social-model-of-disability>]

Neurodivergent/neurodivergence

Neurodivergent, sometimes abbreviated as ND, means having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal."

Neurodivergence is the state of being Neurodivergent.

[source <https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions/>]

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is the diversity of human minds, the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species. When an individual or group of individuals diverges from the dominant societal standards of "normal" neurocognitive functioning, they don't 'have neurodiversity,' they're neurodivergent (see above).

[source <https://neuroqueer.com/neurodiversity-terms-and-definitions/>]

Social Model

The Social Model of Disability was developed by disabled people and describes people as being disabled by barriers in society, not by our impairment or difference. These barriers are identified as being the physical environment, people's attitudes, the way people communicate, how institutions and organisations are run, and how society discriminates against those of us who are perceived as 'different'. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers disabled people more independence, choice, and control.

[Source: <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/social-model-disability-language>]