



Marcie Ryan & Frank Hull



Propeller Dance



Rachel Gorman



Andy Blau



Alan Shain



THE ART...

OF DEAF, DISABILITY & MAD ARTS

From Michele Decottignies, for DDMAAC
The Deaf, Disability & Mad Arts Alliance of Canada,
an initiative of Stage Left Productions

for CAPACOA's
The Culture of InClusion Conference



Victorial Maxwell



Lyle Victor Albert



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About Our Language

**“Disability” is used here
as inclusive of all people with any kind of impairment(s)
for ease of communication.**

**We acknowledge that this is problematic for the Deaf community:
A class of people who are a linguistic minority.**

**The term “disability” –
has become overly associated with models of disability
that position the experience of living with impairment(s)
as a form of tragic affliction and/or abnormality.**

Deaf, Mad & Disability Arts disrupt that misrepresentation.



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Deaf Culture

Deaf Culture

is the set of social beliefs,
behaviors, art, literary traditions, history, values,
that are influenced by D/deafness –
which uses visual/ signed languages
as the primary means of communication.



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Mad Culture

Mad Culture:

1. Affirms mad identities,
2. Develops and empowers mad communities,
3. Challenges discrimination, and
4. Remembers and participates in mad history.



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Disability Culture

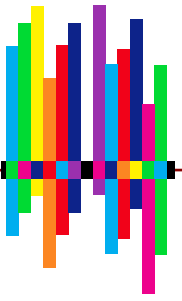
Disability culture inverts the shame of disability into pride.

**“Disability” is understood as
the collective experience of disability oppression.**

**Disability culture promotes the belief that impairment
is a natural and beautiful part of human diversity.**

Disability culture is non-normalizing:

**It rejects the dominant belief that
people with impairment(s) need to “be fixed”.**



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What Disability Art IS

“Disability Art is the development of shared cultural meanings and collective expression of the experience of disability and struggle.

It entails using art to expose the discrimination and prejudice disabled people face, and to generate group consciousness and solidarity.”

(Disability Studies Scholar, Colin Barnes)



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What Disability Art is NOT!

“Disability Art ... is not simply about disabled people obtaining access to the mainstream of artistic consumption and production.

Nor is it about simply expressing individual experiences of living with, or coming to terms with, an accredited impairment.”

(Disability Studies Scholar, Colin Barnes)



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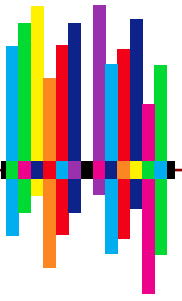
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Disability Art History

Disability Art arose in the early 1970s, out of the global disability rights movement of the 1950s & 60s.

**“Disability Art would not have been possible
without disability politics coming first.”**

(disabled poet Alan Sutherland)



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Disability Arts Foundations

The global Disability Art Movement was built on these foundations:

1. Disability Politics:

Artistic autonomy and self-determination.

2. Disability Culture:

**Collective responses to disability oppression
and shared ways of navigating a disabling society.**

3. Disability Pride:

**Impairment is celebrated as a source of diversity,
rather than treated as an individual deficiency.**



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Disability Arts in Canada

“Disability arts...

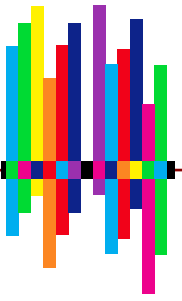
marks the growing political power of disabled people...

[who] use it to counter cultural misrepresentation,

establish disability as a valued human condition,

[and] shift control to disabled people.”

(The Ryerson RBC Institute for Disability Studies Research & Education)



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Global Disability Arts History

The global Disability Arts Movement became established over three stages:

1. Recognize that disabled people are in fact artists, despite a social context which until now has relegated us to 'art therapy';
2. Produce exploratory presentations of disability art 'in house', within the relative safety and support of the disability community; and
3. Take our unique art and our unique messages out into the world.

(Disability Studies Scholar, Pam Walker)



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Canadian Disability Arts History

Stage # 1:

Recognize that disabled people are in fact artists.

1970 - 2000:

Independent Disability Arts production
by professional disabled artists

who established their careers
in the professional arts ecology

while achieving considerable artistic acclaim.

Canada has the oldest history of disability arts production in the world!



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Canadian Disability Arts History

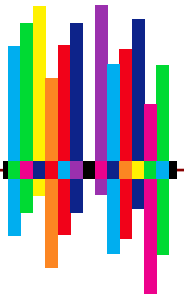
Stage # 2:

Produce exploratory presentations of disability art 'in house'.

2000 - 2010:

Disability Arts presenting
via a national circuit of Disability Arts Festivals

which established Canada's
Deaf, Disability & Mad Arts domain.



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Canadian Disability Arts History

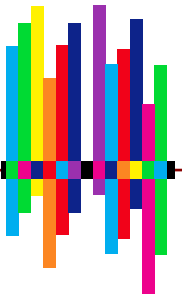
Stage # 3:

Take our unique art and our unique messages out into the world.

2010 - now:

Disability Arts policy, funding and market access collaboration.

Collaborations between the disability arts domain and organizations in the broader arts ecology, like this CAPACOA panel, are increasing market access opportunities for disability-identified art.



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Canadian Disability Arts Practices

Disability Arts in Canada have evolved into three distinct artistic practices:

1. Art + Disability
2. Disability-Inclusive Art
3. Disability-Identified Art



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Art + Disability

**Traditional forms of art
that are practiced by artists with impairment(s).**

**The artistic content, form and process
has nothing to do with disability politics, culture or pride.**

**Artists who produce this type of work often say:
“I’m disabled but my art is not.”**



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Disability-Inclusive Art

**Disability-inclusive art =
Artist-Community Collaboration**

**The disabled are included through processes of adaption
which enable non-traditional artists to satisfy traditional aesthetics.**

“Integrated Art” in the Canadian arts ecology = Interdisciplinary Art.

“Integrated Art” in the disability arts domain = Mixed-Ability.

**“Integrated Dance” =
Arts + Disability combined with elements of Disability Arts.**



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Disability-Identified Art

**Disability-identified art =
created by artists with impairment(s) who embrace and promote
disability politics, disability culture and disability pride.**

Disability-identified art prioritizes:

- 1. Resistance**
- 2. Affirmation**
- 3. Inversion**



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Disability-Identified Art: Artistic Content

1. Resistance:

Most often applied in artistic content.

Cultural misrepresentations

– in the form of disability stereotypes and biases –
are identified, challenged, disrupted and reframed...

Impairment is celebrated as a source of difference,
and therefore diversity, rather than shame or deficiency.



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Disability-Identified Art: Artistic Form

2. Affirmation

Most often applied in artistic form.

Uses impairment(s) and impairment-specific culture(s)
as the primary artistic properties
in the art work produced.

Positions impairment itself
as a source of artistic enrichment and appreciation.



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Disability-Identified Art: Artistic Process

3. Inversion

Most often applied in artistic process.

Through repurposing rather than adaption:

“All adaption allows for is inclusion, period.
Repurposing requires the altering of something,
so that it takes on an entirely new function.

For politicized, diverse artists, repurposing is not just an aesthetic preference but a necessary act of survival: By reshaping and reinventing art forms, we’re redefining reality and representing a more complete picture of Canadian society.”

(Visual Arts curators, Syrus Marcus Ware & Elizabeth Sweeney)



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Disability Aesthetics

Disability aesthetics are non-normalizing:

They position impairment itself as the source of artistic enrichment and appreciation in the art work.

Impairment-specific words, gestures, and symbols – plus shared meanings, histories, and collective responses to disability – that cannot be authentically represented by the non-disabled.

"Disability aesthetics refuses to recognize...the healthy body – and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty – as the sole determination of aesthetic appreciation."

(Tobin Siebers)



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Spectrums, not boxes

It is important to note that this artistic practice framework is not quite as neat and tidy as presented here.

It is primary intended to provide clarifications around the distinctions between practices, rather than absolutes.

There is much overlap between the three artistic practices, and most of us produce and/or engage in all three.

Please consider all of this information in terms of spectrums rather than boxes, when considering what type of disability art is likely to be of most interest to your own audiences.