

A Creative Case for Disability Arts

OUR RESEARCH

- This paper is a summary of bottom-up, collaborative, comprehensive research into Disability Arts & Culture *practices* across Canada.
- Our research highlights the untapped potential for the exponential growth of disability-identified artwork in all of Canada's professional arts disciplines.

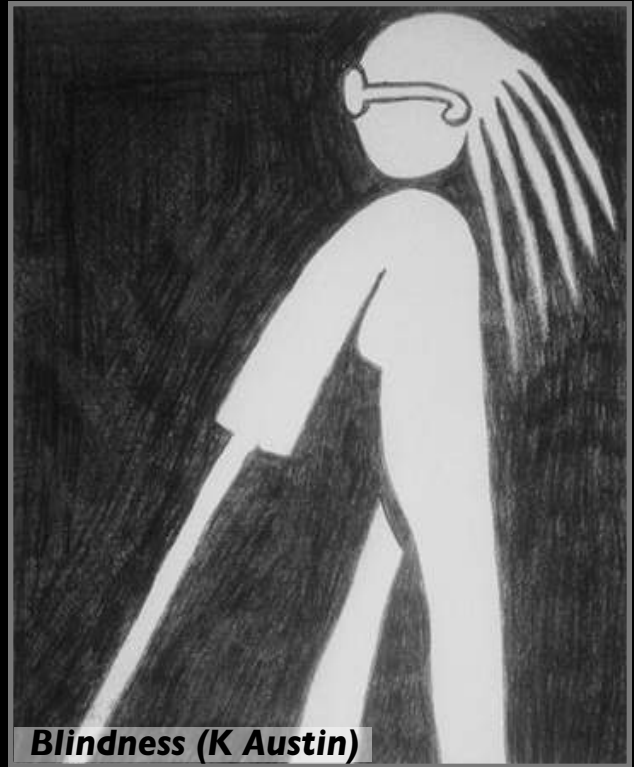
OUR LANGUAGE

- We're using "disability" and "Disability Arts & Culture" as inclusive of artists with impairment(s) who identify as Disabled, Mad, Deaf, deaf, an artist with a disability, or an artist, period!
- This choice of language is for ease of reading, not to minimize the cultural distinctions that exist among us.
- The domain is also inclusive of non-disabled collaborators working in the Disability Arts & Culture milieu.

OUR ALLIANCE

- DDMAAC is a part of Stage Left's national arts support programming - for artists who live with impairment(s) and desire to: Forge national artistic solidarity; Advocate against the many inequities we experience; and Promote our unique contributions to Canada's professional arts ecology.

2014



Blindness (K Austin)

*exhibited by In-Definite Arts
in Balancing Acts Disability Art Festival*

DISABILITY ARTS IN CANADA

- Shared Cultural Purpose
- Distinct Artistic Vision
- Unique Artistic Practices
- 2500+ professional artists & 25+ arts organizations
- A \$20,000,000 investment in the professional arts industries
- **Untapped potential. . .**



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Disability Arts: Shared Cultural Purpose

ART

- To promote the many distinct ways that impairment informs and enriches artistic expression and appreciation, and offers unique perspectives of the human condition.
- To reject notions of the "healthy" or "normal" body as the only source of aesthetic assessment and appreciation.
- To foster Disability Pride through the promotion of art work of high artistic merit and through equity in artistic production and engagement processes.
- To contribute to canons of Traditional, Contemporary, and Alternative forms of art, within all artistic disciplines.

ATTITUDES

- To challenge the notion that Disability Arts practices are primarily forms of rehabilitation or therapy for people with impairment(s) and/or a form of education or awareness for people without impairment(s).
- To challenge the notion that Disability Arts work is only of interest to the disability community.

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*“My disability is a part of who I am...
part of what makes my body beautiful
and me a beautiful person.”*

Alan Shain

multidisciplinary performing artist

Alan's artistic intention is to advance a vision of social equality that embraces disability.

His artistic work is based on a commitment to disability activism and taking personal responsibility for creating social change.

Knowing all too well the transformative power of performance, Alan's art work seeks to broaden our cultural notions of beauty, power, and community – thereby expanding ideas around disability.



Disability Arts: Unique Artistic Vision

ALTERNATIVE ARTS PRACTICE

- **Deaf Arts, Disability Arts** and **Mad Pride** are “disability-identified” artistic practices.
- They offer sites of self-determination for artists with impairments(s) whose art work advances disability politics.
- They push stereotypical narratives of “disability” beyond the tidy-edges of “inspirational superhero” journeys or “better off dead than disabled” tragic victim human interest stories.
- Our artistic vision is to “re-habilitate” art itself, as well as outdated notions of disability.
- Disability-identified artists deconstruct hegemonic notions of disability identity to instead represent disability culture and promote disability justice. We do not seek to inspire, but to transgress.
- **These artistic practices have not yet reached their full potential.**

TRADITIONAL ARTS PRACTICE

- **The Arts & Disability** and **Inclusive Arts** artistic practices are not disability-identified; but traditional art practices that include disabled people.
- The shared artistic vision is to increase the participation of disabled people and artists in the arts.

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“While the disability culture movement is an expression of the disability rights movement, the idea of disabled people doing art has also proven itself irresistible to the charitable classes.”

Rachel da Silveira Gorman
dance/theatre artist
visual arts curator

The Disability Arts & Culture milieu grew out of the disability rights movement of the '70s and '80s. It's origins coincide with a general shift toward a concern with representation in cultural production in the '90s.

Whenever Disability Arts & Culture is divorced from disability politics, it can't help but replicate the institutionalization and segregation that sparked the disability rights movement in the first place.”

(from fuse magazine)



Disability Arts: Distinct Artistic Practice

ALTERNATIVE ART FORMS

- **Deaf Arts, Disability Arts and Mad Pride** advance daring innovation in both artistic content and form.
- Deaf Arts, Disability Arts, and Mad Pride are disability-identified artistic practices that seek to immerse artists with impairment(s) in compelling forms of artistic originality.
- Disability-identified artists embody their art work physically, conceptually, and symbolically.
- The goal is to challenge the status quo in both artistic process and product, by re-imagining and re-shaping artistic traditions and notions of disability.

TRADITIONAL ART FORMS

- **Arts & Disability & Inclusive Arts** are traditional forms of art that seek to include artists with impairment(s).
- These artistic practices most often do not deal with “disability” or “disability politics”, in terms of narrative content.
- Processes of adaptation facilitate the inclusion of the disabled, but do not seek to alter the status quo of the art forms themselves.

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“Disability Arts offers sites of self-determination for disability-identified artists with impairment(s) whose art work advances disability politics.”

Stage Left Productions

A leading contributor to Dis Arts

What Stage Left has contributed to Canada’s Disability Arts & Culture milieu:

- 10 Disability Arts Festivals
- 15 original Disability Arts productions
- 30 short Disability Arts digital films
- Dozens of artist commissions
- 2 National Networks
- 1 National Arts Service Organization
- A ton of Disability Arts knowledge
- More than \$1,000,000



Disability Arts: Major Economic Impact

MARKET IMPACT

- Disability Arts & Culture Festivals across Canada have invested more than **\$5,000,000** in the professional arts industries.
- Independent artists with impairment(s) are producing original art work that is valued at approx. **\$2,500,000**.
- Disability Arts & Culture organizations are offering artistic programming that is valued at another **\$2,500,000**.
- Academic researchers, charitable foundations, and patrons from the disability community have invested approx. **\$10,000,000** across the arts ecology.

ECOLOGY IMPACT

- More than **2,500 independent artists** with impairment(s) and **25 disability-focused organizations** are contributing work to Canada's professional arts ecology.
- This unique artistic domain advances perspectives on equity and diversity in the arts that have not yet been largely advocated, considered, or responded to.

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"Each and every time I make Disability Art, I remake a part of myself." (Frank Hull, Mi'kmaq)

Frank Hull
dancer
choreographer
composer
performer

I am a gay, mad, disabled, white-passing Native person, and a recovering Mormon.

Disability Arts embodies all of me.

Disability Arts accepts all of me.

Disability Arts frees all of me.

Disability Arts connects you and me.



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Disability Arts: Minor Artistic Impact

ARTISTIC POTENTIAL

- Only 10% of targeted Canada Council Equity funding has thus far supported disability-identified art work.
- Only 10% of professional Disability Arts work has toured outside of the global Disability Arts & Culture milieu.
- Only 10% of presenters indicate that they'd be able to confidently promote Disability Arts to their audiences.

MARKET POTENTIAL

- We're reaching less than 10% of our potential to offer audiences unique, compelling insight into the human condition through the inclusion of Disability Arts & Culture work in more company's annual programming.
- Disability-identified art work represents impairment as a rich source of diversity in our pluralistic society.
- It gives artists with impairment(s) full control over the artistic representation of the "lived experience of disability".
- It fosters disability pride; promotes disability rights, and contributes to equity and diversity in the professional arts ecology.

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*"I will continue / to have / my say / in my work / sharing voice / with the unfit / in our perfectly / fitted / world."
(Meg Torwl)*

Meg Torwl

writer
director
producer
performer

Meg worked in writing/ publishing, theatre, and new media, with a career spanning radio, theatre, film, and arts advocacy.

Her career was defined by life-long earning with select mentors, cross-cultural engagement, collaboration, and interdisciplinary practice.

Meg was especially concerned with meaningful collaboration with other women artists from diverse backgrounds.



Disability Arts: Art Over Access

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- The economic impact of Disability Arts is substantial.
- Non-disability arts companies are only benefiting from a very small percentage of that take.
- When arts companies engage disabled artists, we bring with us patrons and funding from the disability community.

ACCESS FOR ART

- Deaf Arts, Disability Arts, and Mad Pride offer audiences something new.
- But too much of the discourse around Disability Arts & Culture is about “access” instead of art.
- Artistic production by disabled artists has not been stymied by the lack of accessible venues in Canada.
- Yet little of our art work is presented outside of the Disability Arts & Culture milieu.
- Disabled people have mastered the art of adaptation, and disabled artists have become experts in the art of access!
- We can show you how easy it is to be both equitable and daring in your programming, by including Disability Arts & Culture work.

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Mantis Dreams

The Journal of Dr. Dexter Ripley



“A poignant and difficult glance into the world of a man battling a . . . debilitating disease. . . a crackling, searing satire that ridicules both political correctness and the restrictive world of academia.”
(Caitlin Press, on Adam Pottle)

Adam Pottle Writer

Adam Pottle’s book of poetry, *Beautiful Mutants*, was shortlisted for the Acorn Plantos Award and two Saskatchewan Book Awards, and long-listed for the ReLit Award.

His first chapbook, *Bereft*, won the 2008 Barry McKinnon Chapbook Prize.

Adam currently lives in Saskatoon, where he is pursuing a doctoral degree in English Literature. *Mantis Dreams: The Journal of Dr. Dexter Ripley* is his first novel.

Disability Arts: Research Result

CONFUSION

- For every 10 people we asked “What is Disability Arts?” we got 10 different answers!
- So we have developed a **framework for the identification, assessment, and appreciation of Disability Arts** artistic practices and art work.

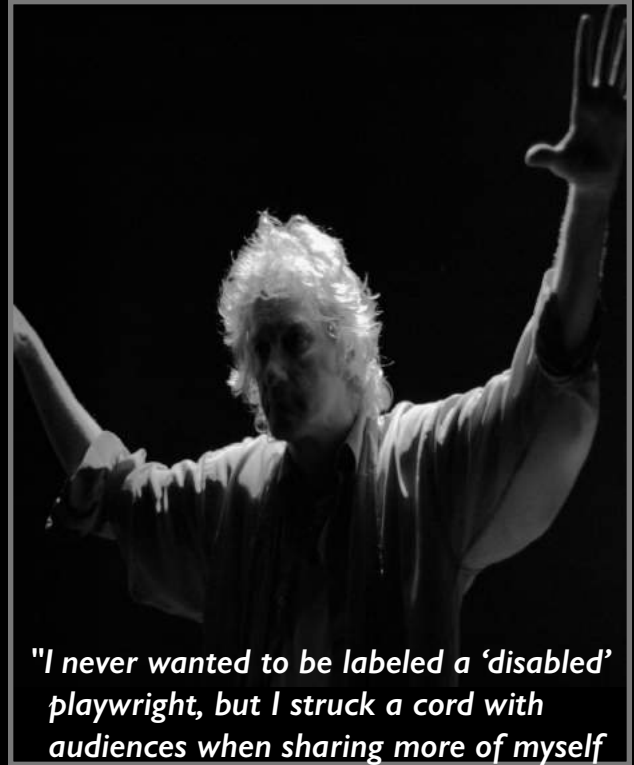
COMPREHENSION

- A significant need exists, within the broader arts ecology, for Disability Arts toolkits such as:
 - Access & Inclusion Guides
 - Presenting Guides
 - Artists’ Databases
 - Examples of Aesthetic Innovation
 - Disability Arts Statistics
 - Disability Arts Studies

COLLABORATION

- Market access for artists with impairment(s) is only going to significantly increase through collaboration between disabled and non-disabled organizations.
- Your patrons don’t often attend our programming and our patrons don’t attend yours.
- We have to give them reason to.

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*"I never wanted to be labeled a ‘disabled’ playwright, but I struck a cord with audiences when sharing more of myself and my story of living with cerebral CP."
(Lyle Victor Albert)*

Lyle Victor Albert Playwright and performer

“Vic” began writing for the theatre in 1980. His work has been produced across Canada, in the US, Europe and Australia.

He was writer-in-residence at Northern Light Theatre and Theatre Network.

His published plays include: *The Prairie Church of Buster Galloway*, Playwrights Union of Canada, (1987); *Cut!: Five From the Fringe*, NeWest Press (1986); and *Scraping the Surface: Three Plays by Lyle Victor Albert*, NeWest Press (2000).

Disability Arts: Research Collaboration

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

- Our services can increase your equity and diversity potential. Your services can increase our market access potential.
- We can share with you our expertise in access, inclusion, promotion, equity, and diversity. You can share with us your expertise in the business of the professional arts industries.

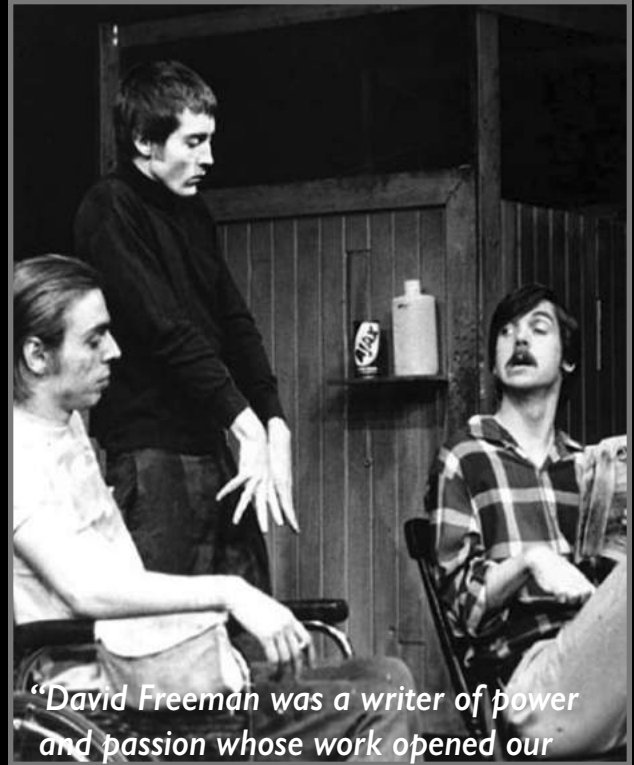
OUR LANGUAGE

- We can provide you the data needed to better include and represent statistics and information about artists with impairment(s) in your papers and toolkits.
- You can survey your members for us. We'd like to know what your members think about Disability Arts, to find out if they want to include our members in their programming (or not!).

OUR ALLIANCE

- Disability Arts contributors are highly experienced and effective advocates.
- We're not afraid to bite the hands that feed us, and we're also no longer afraid of institutions!
- We can promote equity and diversity in the arts... together.

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“David Freeman was a writer of power and passion whose work opened our eyes to the world in a new way.”

(David French)

David Freeman’s CREEPS by Tarragon Theatre

Disability Arts has been contributing to Canadian Culture since the early 1970s.

Playwright David Freeman had cerebral palsy. His early play, *Creeps*, was originally developed and produced by Factory Lab and Tarragon, toured North America to rave reviews, and advanced an utterly unique narrative and aesthetic for its time.

We lost Mr. Freeman a few years ago, yet he remains one of our most respected elders.