

Belinda Uwase: All right. Welcome. Thank you everyone for joining us tonight. I'm super honored to be hosting this panel. Thank you [inaudible 00:00:10] for being here. This is our first panel talk for the 2022 CreateSpace Residency. Some general housekeeping again, just for those joining us, please remember to stay muted. We also have close captioning available. So please see the CC icon on your Zoom toolbar below for any subtitle settings that you may require. We also have an ASL interpreter, Christina, who is pinned, but if you need to pin her, please remember to do so. We will also be taking questions towards the end and the chat box will be available as well.

And for those of us just joining, this is also recorded for archival purposes and to be shared later on. So thank you all for joining us for the Art and Accessibility and Public Spaces panel talk. I will be your host for tonight. My name is Belinda Uwase and I'm the arts programs coordinator with STEPS. A little bit about STEPS, if you're not familiar with us, we foster dynamic and inclusive communities through public art and creative placemaking. We transform urban spaces into vibrant places through cultural planning, community arts, and artist capacity building programs. I specifically work on the CreateSpace programming such as the '22 Public Art Residency.

But all of our information will also be linked in the chat below. If you wish to stay in touch, all of our socials will be available there. Before we begin our discussion, I would just like to share a land acknowledgement and STEPS wishes to acknowledge the sacred land on which we operate out of. And where many of us are meeting today. It has been the site of human activity for 15,000 years. The territories include the Huron-Wendat, Anishinaabe Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations and the Métis Nation. The territory subject of the Dish with One Spoon One Wampum Belt covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peacefully share and share resources of the Great Lakes taking only what is needed and ensuring the dish is never left empty for others.

Today the meeting place [inaudible 00:02:59] is home to a large active and diverse urban indigenous community for many nations across Turtle Island. And we are grateful to use this land to share ideas and generate creativity. As a public arts organization, we recognize our privilege in working on stolen and unseated lands and are working to unlearn colonial structures to move forwards and towards reconciliation. In the chat, you will see that we have shared a link to the [nativeland.ca](#). This is a great starting point to help learn about the traditional indigenous territories that we currently reside in, as well as treaties, communities, and languages. We recognize that this is a virtual event and we all reside in different places. And therefore we encourage everyone to learn about the lands that we call home and about the indigenous communities that we share this land with today. Without further ado, we will now begin our panel talk. I thank you all for joining us tonight and I'm going to pass it off first to

Jenel, and then she will pass it off to our three panelists today, Queen, Ysabelle and Salima. Thank you.

Jenel Shaw: Thank you.

Belinda Uwase: No worries.

Jenel Shaw: So before we get started, I just wanted quickly, as you guys know a little bit about arts accessibility [inaudible 00:04:31] with STEPS on this presentation or this panel discussion. So Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba is a regional, not-for-profit artist run organization dedicated to the full inclusion of arts, artists, and audiences within... Oh, sorry, my screen keeps going funny. The full inclusion of artists and audiences with disabilities into all facets of the arts community. Our mandate is to facilitate a network of artists and stakeholders from both the arts and the disability communities that supports artists with disabilities in achieving individual artistic excellence, promotes higher visibility of these artists within all disciplines and promotes policies and practices intended to make the arts more accessible to all. I'd also like to acknowledge the land that AANM sits on and that we operate. So AANM is located on Treaty 1 territory, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene's Peoples, and on the homeland of the Métis Nation [inaudible 00:05:38].

Winnipeg's water is sourced from Shoal Lake 40 First Nation. And I would like to acknowledge that it wasn't until the fall of 2021, that the members of the Shoal Lake 40 First Nation finally had access to the safe drinking water with the building of a new treatment plan, which ended their water advisory, which was on for 24 years while everyone in Winnipeg was able to enjoy fresh water. So I just wanted to acknowledge that. We respect the treaties that were made on these territories. We acknowledged the harms and mistakes to the past, and we dedicate ourselves to move forward in partnership with indigenous communities in the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

Okay. So now that that's out of the way, let me tell you a little bit about myself. First off, I'll just give you a visual description for anyone who's blind or a little vision there. I'm a white woman in my mid-30s. I have a long brown hair with purple ends that's in a ponytail, and I'm wearing a grayish shirt. I'm going to be [inaudible 00:06:46]. I'll be helping guide the discussion. It's going to be a very casual discussion and very loose and it should be fine and be very interesting to hear from everyone.

So personally, I'm a self-taught artist and my art focus is learning on new ways, new crafts to explore autistic expression. I graduated with my master's in disability studies from the University of Manitoba. My dissertation was called an auto ethnological study of art as a tool of empowerment. And with that, I examined my own experiences of mental illness and disability art. Currently I'm the executive director for Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba as [inaudible

00:07:24] for the Manitoba Cultural Society of the Deaf. [inaudible 00:07:32] introduce our speakers who are going to let introduce themselves. So we're going to start with Salima. Why don't you tell us a little bit more about you?

Salima Punjani: Thanks, Jenel. My name is Salima Punjani. I'm a brown skin woman with curly reddish brown hair. I'm wearing earrings made with a lot of love from a friend that have macro made yellow yarn on them with lots of different speckles of color and are really fun to comb while I'm wearing them. I would say that I'm also a self-taught artist. I would describe my art as multisensory and I try and create as many entry points as possible so that folks can experience my art in lots of different ways. So what that means is that there might be vibrotactile or the vibrational energy of sound. That's one part of my work. Another part is tactile photography for folks that are blind or low vision, to be able to touch photographs. I use smell and lots of different things so that people can interact with my work in a lot of different ways. I also have a master's in social work in which I focused on the intersection of the arts and care. And I thought a lot about how to do trauma-informed relational artwork. And that's the end of my thought.

Jenel Shaw: Great, thanks Salima. Next, we're going to go with Ysabelle. Why don't you introduce yourself?

Ysabelle Vautou...: Hi, my name is Ysabelle Vautour. I am currently on treaty of the peace and friendship. Sorry, the Peace and Friendship Treaty in what's known as Fredericton or Woolastook. I am a visual artist as well. My practice is focused on like a playful, playing with the ideas of ableism, and I want people to view things differently through art. I've been working with installation and I'm currently in a mural training program with the Inspire Festival here in New Brunswick.

Jenel Shaw: Wonderful. Thanks, Ysabelle. And last but not least, we have Queen.

Queen Kukoyi: Hi, everyone. My name is Queen Kukoyi. I am a Black woman with a head wrap on and kinky curly hair. I have on a burgundy shirt with a burgundy and gold necklace. I am a Black Bajan of Igbo and Lokono ancestry. I'm queer gender fluid. I'm presenting a mother and an author, an arts educator. I won an award for my work for my school doing search work, Centennial College, international artists. My new art practice, so my background is in spoken word poetry and digital collaging and animations, but I've been exploring Zentangle art more intentionally as a form to support helping me focus about different topics that I'm exploring around my mental health. Just trying to understand more how in the past I've been using Zentangle art as a form to support stimming for focus.

Jenel Shaw: Great. Thanks, Queen. Before we get started with the panel, could one of the STEPS people will take the stop screen sharing so we could see the panelists better. Ah, there we go. Great. So let's just start right off and start with our first question. So how does making accessible public art increase access for all

participants, not just those that are deaf or disability or disabled? Does anyone want to take a shot at it first?

Queen Kukoyi: I can go. I think in any case, if we're talking about equity, like ensuring that the most marginalized groups are heard, understood, and cared for first will have everything accessible for all.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, absolutely. Salima, Ysabelle, do you guys have any thoughts on it?

Salima Punjani: Sure. Yeah. Hi, it's Salima speaking, or Ysabelle, would you like to go first?

Ysabelle Vautou...: Oh, go ahead.

Salima Punjani: Okay. So I think for me seeing people interact with my work and being able to touch and play and move things around and feel vibrations and things like that, I think having all of these different senses integrated into work helps to create a really embodied way of being with art. But then also, I feel that using multiple senses helps to create environments where people can deeply listen a bit better, whatever listening means. I don't just mean like by hearing, I mean, in lots of different ways. So if listening means maybe holding vibrations or taking a big smell of a cushion or something, I know that sounds a bit weird, but I feel that just seeing people interact with my work, whether they're disability identified or not, I think it does help to create these environments of listening and receptivity and connection and empathy. And that's the end of my thought.

Ysabelle Vautou...: I don't think your artwork is weird. I think your artwork is fantastic, Salima. I really want to experience it one of these days when either you come to my province or I come to yours or your artwork's all over the world, and I can see it. I think that when we create spaces to start discussion around ableism, accessibility, anything with even just leadership with persons with disabilities, I think this kind of gets people thinking, because a lot of the issues have to do with just old ideas. And when we bring new ideas in an art space, I feel like people are more receptive to take them in to... This week is, or at least where I am, this week is disability awareness week. I feel like a lot of people are aware that persons with disabilities exist.

It's not what... But maybe they're not aware of the systemic barriers, the little comments, the nitty gritty of what it feels like to be in a different body than a enabled [inaudible 00:15:05] person might feel. Because I feel like this community tends to be overlooked a lot or forgotten about a lot. It's just not in people's minds. There's like the default and then, oh, oh, yeah. So if it's right out there and people are talking about it, then it's more in people's minds and maybe a little bit more access happens, if just a little bit more access happens, then it just becomes a little bit more normal, then it kind of may grow is my thought.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah. And since you brought in the word ableism, I don't know if too many people [inaudible 00:15:43] that term. So I thought I just talked a little bit, and maybe we could talk a bit more about that as well. So ableism is kind of the idea that someone is looked as less as, or discriminated against for not being able-bodied. And so it's like Ysabelle said, all those microaggressions place aren't expecting you perhaps, so they don't let attendance in for free, or they don't have ASL or they don't have a ramp.

Yeah. And so I think ableism is something that we really need to talk about and acknowledge. And the more we talk about it, the more we can make change. So have you guys ever encountered any ableist kind of actions in your artwork or have you had to... So I'm kind of throwing a question that you guys don't know about yet. So I apologize for that, but that's something that I run into quite often when we're trying to say, find a venue for space, we call a space and they don't even know what their access is. And so that's an example of ableism.

Ysabelle Vautou...: Yeah, for sure. There's definitely things to think about. Like for myself, because of my disability, I don't drive and say, simple things, like when I need to get to different places and where I live, it's quite rural, so there's no bus. And if there is a bus, it only goes at once in the day. So that means I'll have to stay overnight to wherever place I want to go for say an hour, or it's so far, you know what I mean? Like there's all these things that accumulates. So if I don't know ahead of schedule where things are going to be, I need to find somebody to take me to those places. And not only just take me to stay, because I don't know how long things go because in the arts, there's a lot of that like, oh, can't you just be flexible? Can't you just stay a little longer? It's like, yes, I can, but the person who is helping me may or may not want to. So it's not just me. It's other people sometimes. That's just one example that happened to me recently, but yeah, for sure.

Jenel Shaw: What about Salima, Queen, have you guys encountered anything? Or if not, that's okay, too.

Queen Kukoyi: I mean-

Jenel Shaw: It kind of goes in with a second question of... Oh, yeah.

Queen Kukoyi: Oh, like navigating, like panic attacks when things aren't going well in a professional setting is it's never easy. Sometimes I feel embarrassed by them. I've been late to things because I've had panic attacks because I've gotten lost or sometimes for no particular reason at all and then... And because people don't understand mental health or there's a stigma around mental health, it's hard to explain. Like I kind of turn it almost into a joke when I arrived like, "Yeah, I had like a little mini panic attack." Sometimes people they look at you a type of way trying to explain a way why your art is the way it is, why I include... Looking at my mental health, through a Afrofuturist lens. It's hard for people to understand at time when I'm trying to elaborate on that. So really trying to understand

language I can use to describe these things, I guess. And I feel like we shouldn't have to make things accessible for people who don't have accessibility issues, but just discovering language and stuff like that, it's been tricky to navigate.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, absolutely. I can definitely relate to down playing or joking off with your disabilities. I mean, I have panic attacks too, and I cry. So I've definitely had a few meetings, well, I just keep crying and like, I'm okay. I'm just going to cry and it's very embarrassing, but yeah, It's something. What about you, Salima? Have you run into anything like that?

Queen Kukoyi: [inaudible 00:20:03].

Jenel Shaw: Pardon?

Queen Kukoyi: Yeah, it's happened in meetings. I'm like, "I'm fine. Just keep going."

Jenel Shaw: Keep going. Yeah.

Salima Punjani: Hi, it's Salima speaking. So I think for me, it may not be such obvious things, but when I think about having MS and having cognitive fatigue and general fatigue, I need a lot more time to do things. And I'm often put in positions where I'm rushing, or there's not structures of care, whether it's real transparency over what is, and isn't possible. I think I feel pretty lucky that I've had a chance to learn from folks at tangled arts and taking part in different trainings and things where I've had a chance to learn about how to really ask for what I need.

And I think one of the things that I find a bit challenging sometimes is that even if people have the intention of wanting to welcome whatever I need, or like that conversation, that sometimes there's just not organizational capacity to actually do the things. And so I think for me, in terms of thinking about accessibility and my needs and ableism, I think that transparency, even if folks maybe don't have the capacity is super important because at least then I can make an informed decision and I can offer the ability to make an informed decision to other disabled folks of whether or not they feel they can participate in something. And so I think that's kind of how ableism shows up for me. It's like, there's the intention and then there's honesty. And I would really prefer the honesty instead of just a nice intention. It's the end of my thought.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, I think we could all definitely agree with that. And one thing that you talked about, which [inaudible 00:22:01] term before Crip time, and what that means is that sometimes things may take a little bit longer, you need breaks and that sort of thing. And a lot of times people are so rush, they want to get through things quickly and it's just not possible. So thank you for bringing that up. And this kind of goes into our next question about what access means to you. What do you think of access and what does it mean?

Queen Kukoyi: I like what Salima said about transparency and being able to vocalize what your needs are. I think that that's what access means to me, like feeling safe enough to be able to do that. Like I have a really amazing business partner who's in the audience right now, Nico, who like, the type of organization we're trying to build, it centers mental health and wellness, and being able to have open dialogue about things like burnout, things when I'm overwhelmed or if I'm struggling to write email, because sometimes I have bipolar too. So sometimes to write three sentences can take me 45 minutes because of the overthinking. So sometimes when it's like that, she'll support me in those ways with like forming my thoughts or helping me refocus on something like that. And she's overwhelmed. She's able to convey those things to me as well. And access to me means being able to vocalize those things. But I feel like you can't do that in a regular workplace and the hope is eventually for people to be able to vocalize those things. Queen speaking, and I'm done my thought.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah. Being able to say what you need is very, very important. Ysabelle, Salima, what about you guys for access?

Ysabelle Vautou...: I think it's the ability for participation would be the main thing. How can I interact? Can I interact as much as other people? Am I supported? Do I feel safe? Like Queen said, to do these things, I think too, that hesitancy or fear to, or not hesitant... Like I find myself doing this too. Like a few of you said where if to almost justify your existence, it's like, oh, I do this weird thing. I'm this weird disabled person. And I do this weird thing and I need to explain it to you. And it's like, why? Why do I have to explain? Why can't you... Like anything that's remotely not normal. And it's like, what's the percentage? Like the percentage in my province is one fourth of people. So if you've got four people in the room, likely one of them has a... It's not that uncommon is what I'm trying to say. So I feel like there's more, but that's my thought for now.

Jenel Shaw: No, that's great. I think in 2017 there was a study they did to find out the numbers of disability. And it's something about one in five or 20% of Canadians identify as having a disability. Well, quite the large of minority.

Ysabelle Vautou...: Yes. Yeah.

Jenel Shaw: Salima, what about for you? What is access mean?

Salima Punjani: I mean, it means a lot of things. I think that sometimes access can... Like people, whenever I'm asked about access, because I'm often asked about like, how can we make things more accessible, or what should we do or whatever? And I think sometimes people expect a checklist. And to me that's not what access is. It's really about listening and asking people what it would take for them to feel cared for, or to be able to be present, whether that's on a live stream or whether that's in person. I think the thing that I would really emphasize on that is that access needs can be competing. They can be ebbing and flowing and consistently changing. And so I think access for me is like this, I guess,

commitment to care and commitment to listening and commitment to trying my best to welcome folks and whether that's through my artistry or through my advocacy.

I think too, when I think about accessibility, it's also about having fun and having... It's like, who can I invite to the party? It's fun. It's thinking about how to hack the senses, it's thinking about not only how to create work that invites people to experience it in a lot of different ways. It's about thinking about how fun it is to consider taking a photograph to touch. How fun it is to think about recording sound, to be held in vibrations. I think sometimes thinking about the word access can feel like heavy or there's this heaviness to it, but I'd like to bring a kind of alternative view of access is, I mean, Access Is Love isn't my thing. I believe that's Alice Wong's movement, but I really honor these Crip ancestors and what they've brought to create this space of thinking of access is love. And that's kind of what I think about. That's the end of my thought.

Ysabelle Vautou...: Yeah. If I could add quickly to that, I think seeing disability-led spaces, I think is amazing. It makes a huge difference because there is that commitment there. It's not like, oh, I thought about this one time and I put it in the paper and it looks good. It's like, no, there's a care, like Salima said, and that there's a attention, a commitment. Yeah, for sure. You can definitely tell the difference.

Salima Punjani: Totally, and it's Salima speaking again. I think too, access is not thinking about something last minute, again, coming back to time. I think about how I write grants now and it's like, there's audio captioning and description and ASL and everything included within the grant writing process itself. So it's not an add-on after the fact, it's like, I've tried my best to integrate that into the planning of projects that haven't even come to life yet. So that's another part of it that I think is important to add.

Ysabelle Vautou...: Yeah. Like I said, I feel like there's so much more to explore that question. You can go on and on.

Jenel Shaw: I love that idea though, of access is care, because that's really what it is. It's about caring for the individual that's coming into your space and welcoming them and trying to find the ways that they're most comfortable in that space. So I love that idea of access is care. That's great.

Ysabelle Vautou...: You know what, I [inaudible 00:30:07]-

Jenel Shaw: Just before go to the next-

Ysabelle Vautou...: Sorry, I just had an example of sometimes it's like, yes, to fit it to that individual. But sometimes it's when somebody, when I enter a space and my needs were thought of, without even me having to say anything is so amazing. It's rare that that happens, but it feels so good. It's like, oh, wow! Feel so welcomed in this space. Yeah, sorry.

Jenel Shaw: No, that's a very good point because always constantly fighting for access and the accommodations you need is tiring. It can be exhausting. So to have that in place, when you go into a space, it just does, it makes that you feel welcome. You feel loved. You know it's a safe space. So it's very important. I just want to let everyone know before we go on to our next question, in about 20 minutes, we're going to take a five minute break and then come back. So that'll be at 5:55, we'll take a five minute, but until then, let's move on to our next question. I'm sure you guys have really good answers for this, and I'm really excited about this question is how do you include accessibility into your art practice? Salima, did you want to start, because I know you do a lot with multisensory, and touch and feel, so do you want to kick it off for us?

Salima Punjani: Sure, yeah. Well, I think in a couple different ways, one thing that I'm really getting into these days is learning more about audio description. And so I recently had this documentation of work that had the captioning audio description, everything included in one film. And so that's one way thinking about the documentation of work and the different things to bring to it. Another part is like, and I've mentioned it a couple times, so I won't go too much into it, but like having tactile things, things that people can interact with having smell and touch, I mean yet to use taste, it's a bit harder and even smell because of synthetics, it's competing access needs of I don't want to trigger a migraine in someone, but, or whatever sensitivities and yeah, just kind of really thinking about different ways that people can interact with work, but then also giving people the option not to, they don't want to.

So it's like just being really clear of that the choice is up to the view or the audience member, and then also in terms of what I'm hoping to include more, but quite honestly, it's hard to be an artist and focusing just on my artistry, which is already integrating access. But then also thinking about doing all the accessibility consulting for my own work at the same time. So it's a lot that ends up falling on my shoulders of thinking about making visual stories, of how do you get there? How do you... What kind of space is it? Are there washrooms that are gender neutral? Are there washrooms that are accessible? All of these things of like, it's not only about the artistry and that work, but I think as well, the things that come around, people making a choice of whether that work is something that they feel it would be welcome to experience. That's the end of my thought.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, that's good. I love the idea of having it open. They can choose whether or not they want to experience the different aspects of it. Queen, Ysabelle, how do you guys include accessibility into your art practice?

Queen Kukoyi: I think... Sorry, Queen speaking. Nico and myself as an artist collective try to, whenever we're doing a project, to do like... I can't remember the phrasing now, but something like a community call out, like when we're going to do a project, we'll ask the people around us, our audience what they might need from us in regards to doing the program. We tried to do explore the landscape and the

setting to which we're entering into to try to make things as accessible as possible, including things like ASL. And I like what Salima said about including more audio stuff. I was like, oh, we should do that. So thank you for that. Thinking about ways in which that we can include things like that in our practice, participating in talks like this, whether it's panelists or as observers to learn more about what the needs are of the community we serve.

I think it's also done through evaluations before and after. That was the word I was looking for, evaluations. Before and after, and then making sure that we embed those things the next time we do things, so that we're constantly getting better and constantly making things more accessible for our audiences, but also future audiences that we might not even know want to participate or want to be a part of anything that we're doing. In my personal art practice, my art has just mainly been for me and if people like it, they like it I think. I've been practicing for a while, but it's been a struggle to even see myself, I guess. As an artist, I've kind of just been putting stuff out there to foster opportunities for dialogues, mainly around conversations around my mental health and other folks who struggle with mental health to try to normalize the conversations around mental health and history and all these different things. So yeah, Queen and I'm done speaking.

Jenel Shaw:

Yeah. I think that's really important what you said about community consultations and speaking with the community and getting the feedback afterwards, because accessibility is ever evolving. As we go on, we learn about new access needs from people. So there's no one space that can be a hundred percent accessible because it's always changing. So I really love that idea of including feedback so that you can keep on improving. That's a wonderful idea. And what about you, Ysabelle? How do you include accessibility?

Ysabelle Vautou...:

Much like Queen, I had that feeling of like, oh, I want to make art for myself. And that's how I started my practice a few years ago. So I'm still new to creating work that is accessible. It's never as accessible as I'd like it to be because I'm perfectionistic that way. And most of my work was created for me only. And then it got out there and it's like, oh, now it's in the public. Now I have to think about this thing afterwards instead of integrating it. So now that I'm creating new work with displaying it, then it's a different shift in what I need to do.

So one of the things that I did, I created the NB Disability Art Collective because I know what I need. That's not a problem. I know how to make something accessible for me. And when I think about accessibility, I literally think of people that I know. I'm like, oh, well, how would so and so enjoy this? How would they experience this? And that's literally how I go about it. And I think, okay, blah, blah, blah. I feel like I'm a party planner like, oh, this person likes this, and this person like this, and dah, dah, dah, dah. And that's literally how I go about it.

So for our first show that we had earlier this year, we put the artwork at wheelchair height because one of the members was in a wheelchair and it's like,

well, she wasn't able to read the tickets. It's not like she asked me to do this. And then she was like, "Oh," and then she was like, "Yeah, I never," and it's like... It's good to consider or anticipate people's needs that way. I am learning as much as I can about audio description. Being a person of the blind community, I appreciate the creative aspect of audio description. So a lot of it, I like to do myself. Of course, I can't do it all myself. There's certain things that I can't do, but I do like to integrate it in the work. So it's not like the stale voiceover thing that you have to pay these other people to do.

Like it feels detached from the work, and I like it when it's more creative, but that's just a personal style. And the other thing is that right now I'm doing an artist residency with a local group called the New Brunswick Coalition of Persons with Disabilities. That's sponsored by the New Brunswick Arts Board. So essentially I am like an art facilitator in my residency. So I will be hosting Zoom meetings once a month and will talk about the art that they want to create. I suggested maybe like identity is a theme, to explore who they want to be with the kind of art that they want to make and the various mediums that they want to make it, because I feel like people's voices are important to be heard.

And I think that one of the ideas for that we may do is puppetry because it has different forms. So the writing of it could be one person could do it, right? The physical making of the puppet is the sculptural aspect. The puppet could have a sculptural base with joints and things, but then the head would be painted, which is another... You know what I mean? Like I love what I've learned from being disabled human for all of my life is that the more options you have, the better people can participate. I'm sure there's more, but that's what I got for the time being.

Jenel Shaw: No, that's great. And I agree with you, audio descriptions or image descriptions, they're an art form all on their own, if done correctly, because you don't want to read some dry, this objects here, this object there. You want to hear passion, so you want to be able to-

Ysabelle Vautou...: Yeah, like I don't-

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, exactly [inaudible 00:41:23]-

Ysabelle Vautou...: I don't care how many things are in this. I want, what is it, you know what I mean, before you start describing all these... Anyway, and it's like there's only so much space that I have in my head, but... I was going to say something and I forgot. I do, oh, yes, the advocacy and the consultation is mostly how things get done. It seems like when I apply for a lot of art calls and things like that and often it seems like I'm either one of the first people to ever apply to something like that. So then I become the representative and then it's like, I feel like I'm setting the... It's like what, this is not my job, but then it piles on me and then the overwhelm. And so it kind of becomes my side job while I'm doing my

current art job. And then we talk about prep time and it's like the window, and then the chronic pain and then, oh, the window is so small.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah. That's like the burden that artists with disabilities have is that they're constantly having to advocate for themselves and exert that extra energy, which often we don't have, but we find it somewhere, because it has to be done. Yeah, it's can be very frustrating and tiring.

Queen Kukoyi: Yeah. I was just thinking about something Ysabelle just said. It's about chronic pain and I have limited mobility, so I cannot... A lot of my things that I do are super heavy. So I need support with that stuff and often have to hire on people to support, because Nicole can't lift everything, and because my arm's not in a sling at the moment because I'm not in as much pain. People don't see the limited mobility that I have. And I find myself people looking at me like, why aren't you helping? Have to be like, oh, I can't lift things. And constantly feeling I have to repeat that or just putting on the sling to go. So I don't have to explain it to people. Yeah, sorry, just [inaudible 00:43:45]-

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, no. I mean, that's the great debate, between invisible illness and visible disabilities, right? Oftentimes those with visible disabilities, they get more help, but they also get more pity and people thinking they can't do anything while those with invisible disabilities are constantly saying like, sure, I didn't use a cane today, but I need it today. I didn't use one yesterday, but today I need it. And people not understanding or if you're in a wheelchair, doesn't mean that you can't walk, some people can get up and walk, but only for a few steps, right? And [inaudible 00:44:23] defend your disability. Any more thoughts about accessibility in the art practice before we go to our next question?

Ysabelle Vautou...: I feel like that thing that you explained with invisible disability versus the visible ones is that's where a lot of the ableism comes in the question, because then it's like, if you have a visible disability, then you can't take that off. It just that's how you exist. But people who have an invisible disability, some of them, they can't play the role, but some of them can like, I can do that. I have these weird accessibility tools that like, why would you wear a telescope on your face? It's a weird object. People look at you funny and it's fine, I'm used to it, but all these thoughts and it's not that whole...

I remember when I was young, I didn't want to wear it because it's like, oh, it's not cool to wear that. [inaudible 00:45:36] why isn't it cool to be a person with a disability? We're cool. Have you listened to these other people in the panel? Seriously, you guys are cool. And it's like the aesthetic of the... I don't know what do you want to call it, like a Crip aesthetic or a disability art aesthetic that it's cool to have that look or whatever, or if you have that look, there's certain connotations of what that look means. And that's the problem that you're kind of talking about when we talk about those two different things. I've been thinking about that a lot this week actually. It's funny you bring that up.

Jenel Shaw: Well, since we're so close to a break, maybe we'll just take our break now and save the last question for when we get back. So it is what? In Winnipeg 5:50, but it's somewhere 50 something, 50 where everyone else is. So we'll take a five minute and come back at 5:55 or 55, 56, 60, wherever you are, five minutes. So I'm making it way more confusing. [inaudible 00:46:51] take five and we'll [inaudible 00:46:52].

Speaker X: Thanks, Jenel.

Queen Kukoyi: Thank you.

Jenel Shaw: You know what, actually, let's just get started. [inaudible 00:47:16] can join in when she comes back. So our last question that we're going to talk about is how to make safe spaces for artists who are neurodivergent or have mental health. So Ysabelle, or Salima, did you guys want to get us started? Just to give an example of something that we do at AANM is that I have a little bowl full of fidget toys that are free for anyone who comes in, who can take one, whether they be children or adults, everyone takes one. It seems just to give them something to play with with our hands to concentrate that fidgetness that some people experience. So that's one thing that we do at my space.

Salima Punjani: Hi, it's Salima speaking. I think one thing that I find helpful is considering a trauma-informed approach in which giving people [inaudible 00:48:17], I guess, the option to participate in the way they feel, or they don't feel. And so not having any pressure to talk if they don't want to, or like, if I'm facilitating more so, I think being clear if there are moments of obligatory participation or something, just kind of creating the space for people to just show up as they are. But I feel like I think that's all I can really say about that question.

Jenel Shaw: Thanks, Salima. What about Ysabelle, Queen, how do you guys think we can make safe spaces for artists that neurodivergent or have mental health?

Queen Kukoyi: I would say like, except forms, all forms of stimming. I know for, in particular, in the public school system, stimming as what people call doodling is actually a way to support focus. And I found when I was able to, and when teachers were allowed me to use that as an entry point or an access point for being able to absorb information would create these really intricate patterns that would have some of the words adapted it into it from the lesson. And I'd remember everything so much easier. Whereas the teachers that did and I found I was didn't really do well in those courses. I couldn't sit still. I couldn't hear over, I think a lot of people call it monkey chatter, just ongoing in my head. And that was a way for me to absorb the information. So people need to get up and walk around during not expecting people to do what is the norm when they're in a workshop, I think is ways that we can create safer spaces for people who are neurodivergent and have mental health.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah. That's great. Ysabelle, what about you?

Ysabelle Vautou...: I think community consultations are always appreciated to hear from the community directly. I think having multiple spaces, like sometimes having a quiet area or low sensory area... For me, I'm visually impaired and I definitely appreciate darker spaces. I find a lot of the spaces are way too bright. I think having things to know what to expect in advance to be able to have visual stories or ask, is there anything you need? Sometimes when you register for something, you can ask what your access needs are or anything that we can do to increase your participation, things like that. Like multiple feedback channels, having people around, I've heard of things having an active listener, there's all kinds of things really.

But I think I echo what Queen said of also about normalizing, or sorry. Oh, yeah. I guess normalizing stimming behaviors, having something like a visual note taker too, can be more engaging for some minds, but even just having things recorded, because then if you weren't paying attention, you can see it again and watch it again. And there's all these things. I mean, But I think, yeah, just talking to people and getting to know them, then you become more and more familiar with what a person may need in a certain situation.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah. Those are all wonderful ideas. Salima, did you have something to add?

Salima Punjani: I just put in a resource that kind of talks a bit more about relaxed performance. I don't know why that didn't click beforehand, but I don't really have the head space to talk about it. So I just added a link towards it right now.

Jenel Shaw: Great, yeah. Yeah, those are all easy things that people could do today for their events. Having maybe a quiet space, listening to people to what they need, having open-end access questions, not just say, do you need these things, but leave a space for other where someone can fill in what they need is very important

Ysabelle Vautou...: Organization too. I think helps. I find like I'm helping some folks to kind of mentor them and being more professional in their art practice. And a lot of it is problems with like, how do I... I get confused or there's all these things. And it's like just having a structure where things can be organized, seems to help a lot for a lot of people to get rid of that overwhelmed. Be like, no, it's not as complicated, put things in plain language and just kind of use so many acronyms and have things that are kind of clear. It seems common knowledge to me, but I guess it isn't for...

Jenel Shaw: No, that's a very good point, having some sort of access guide where people can see ahead of time, maybe what the venue looks like. What's offered at the venue, what's going to happen. What's expected of you or not expected of you. Takes away a lot of that anxiety that I think folks can feel going to a new space or a new event or new people, or even an old space and old friends, it helps just make folks more comfortable.

Queen Kukoyi: Yeah. I was going to add on even like having questions in advance. I know some panelists are like, oh, you know I want the... I don't want the questions to be feel like rehearsed and stuff like that too. And I understand that, but for me, I get anxiety really bad before I talk. Even if I've talked about the same thing, a million times, sometimes even having the questions, I still get anxiety, but I find it's more helpful having the questions at advanced because I'm able to like, even if I'm not writing it down or taking notes, I can formulate my thoughts prior to having the conversation as well.

Jenel Shaw: Absolutely. Yeah. Anybody else have more thoughts on this last question?

Ysabelle Vautou...: Yeah. I think learning from previous experiences, right? I feel every time there's another person that enters your space, that there's an opportunity to learn of like, yep, well, we need to do these things because next time they enter the space or somebody else or to kind of think ahead. Think ahead [inaudible 00:55:56].

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, that's it. No, that's a wonderful idea to think about ahead of time who do you expect at your event and is your... If you're not expecting certain people, why not? And how can you make them welcomed.

Ysabelle Vautou...: [inaudible 00:56:10]. Inviting them even.

Jenel Shaw: Yeah, exactly.

Ysabelle Vautou...: Like I used to do... I forget what it was called now, audience development. So part of my role was to, I would read feedback that we would get from the gallery space and some of them would be complaints. And how do I transfer those complaints into actions to improve the space? And a lot of it was kind of accessibility, why isn't there nowhere to sit? In the gallery was a complaint like, well, put a bench here. These are easy things. A lot of these things are very easy things, but for whatever reason, people keep the status quo a lot of the time or it's not on the radar. They don't think about it. It's not a priority. So they don't make time for it.

Jenel Shaw: Absolutely. And we had someone in the chat, Alice saying that having a quiet area, if it's too noisy is very helpful. Yeah. So that's a great example as well. Great. Well, I think we're at that point, well, we can open up to you questions from the audience. So if anyone has any questions they'd like to ask, feel free to write it in the chat or raise your hand or however it is you feel asking.

Ysabelle Vautou...: I love questions by the way. [inaudible 00:57:35]-

Jenel Shaw: Well, why we wait, I will throw you guys that surprise question that I had for you earlier, which is what benefits do you get from your disability and your art? So the example that I gave was because of my borderline personality disorder, that means I'm very sensitive. So I'm very empathetic to others and I can very easily

put myself in their situations. So I find that it's easy for me to bring care into my administration work, but physically in my artwork, because I'm a little bit slower, I can pay attention to those details more and kind of draw on those details with the time I take. So I wonder if you guys have experienced that... Some benefits you get from being a part of the disability community.

Queen Kukoyi: I would say there's two parts, I guess to mine, when I first started exploring what it means to be bipolar too. I spoke to several [inaudible 00:58:36] spiritual leaders and culturally the diagnosis was described to me as, and I'm an Afrofuturist. So it was described to me as existing on several planes at the same time. So I'm on these, I guess the metaverse different metaverses. It could be described in that way, and my physical body is existing in one, but my mental brain is existing in all at the same time. Why I see all these random scenarios coming at me all at once while these random thoughts are coming at me all at once. So thinking about centering, being able to center myself in the present while understanding that my spiritual selves are existing in these different planes and I can tap into any one of them. I feel like that's one benefit. Being able to think about it creatively, I guess in that way has been helpful in healing to me.

And then the Zentangle art, it's I can sit for hours and be hyper focused on this one thing and make these really, really intricate pieces. And everyone's usually like, how did you do that? And I just get lost in the work and I feel like full after creating the pieces and people understanding them after is a bonus. But like the hyper focus, even though there's all these things coming at me all at once, being able to hyper focus, being able to predict a bunch of different scenarios and possibilities, how multiple things can go wrong, how multiple things can go right, and being able to use that as a plan for contingencies, I guess. Yeah, that's all I can think of right now.

Jenel Shaw: No, those are great disability gains. Absolutely. What about Ysabelle, Salima, do you guys find, do you get any disability gains being part of the community?

Ysabelle Vautou...: When I was younger, I had all these tools. I stood out, [inaudible 01:01:13]. I had a raised desk. I had the glasses with a telescope on it. I had a giant telescope for other reasons. You know what I mean? I stood out a lot, so I got used to these embarrassing things, because when you're young, everything you do different is embarrassing. And it's like, I don't care. I'm free from that like, I don't care if I look weird and I think that's a great thing to be free of. So my disability has helped me to be more assertive. I am definitely not the most assertive person. It's still something I'm learning to do, but it definitely, if I didn't have it, I probably be quite unassertive actually, [inaudible 01:02:04] quite shy and would meet much of a reason to, but it kind of forces you to practice and fine tune your ability to communicate with people and problem solve, because it helps me to be extra creative because it's like, okay, you didn't think about this.

Okay. Here are the solutions I have. What if you try to come up with these ideas and sometimes the ideas are ridiculous, but they work and it's fun, it creates this element of fun, which works well in an art space. So one of the projects that I'm doing this summer is a second artist in residence outside. And for me, my visual impairment, bright spaces is quite taxing because the pupil in my eye, that black hole, is supposed to shrink when there's a lot of light, mine just stays open. So I'm like, ugh. So to be outside to try to paint is not conducive. But I'm like, I want to participate in this artisan residency outdoors. I like the location. I think it's interesting. And I want to, and I was like, how can I find a way to participate?

So I thought, what if I created a sort of tent, a sort of structure where there would be shade and there would be ways for me... So I'm thinking about like the built environment that I'm building, all these things. So that would've been... And I thought about that when I was younger, I used to work in an office and I thought like, I've had so much anxiety about being like, well, what if I'm in a call center? Or in a... What do they call it? A Walmart even, or whatever, like a space where all these lights, you can't just dim one. And it's like, what if I had a tent? Wouldn't that be weird, but wouldn't that work? And it's one of those [inaudible 01:04:01], it's working, it's working for me now.

And I think it's just so fun to have that rewarding idea come into place and to make that less weird for other people who it, that might work for and find ways that... I just love seeing an idea come to life, like some sort of concept that's not visible, become visible and then see how that manifests itself and all the possibilities that go with it. I have a newly acquired disability. I'm still kind of navigating that, it's gifts because so far I feel like it's betraying me a bit, but I'm sure with more reflection, I will learn to appreciate it more.

Definitely, it encourages me to slow down, to be more mindful, to choose the priorities that I want to do because I only have a window of time that I feel good to do these things. And I'm the type of person I want to do all the things, I want to live all the lives, and I don't want to choose. And so I have this wrestling a little bit with that, but yeah... And I mean, I'm sure, like I said, there's other things upon more reflection, but I'm curious what Salima has to share.

Salima Punjani:

Hi, it's Salima speaking. I'm not going to lie. I'm a little uncomfortable with the question because I mean having a neurodegenerative illness, it's hard to consider it as a gift. I, on the other hand, I do feel eternally, eternally grateful for the disability arts community. I feel like the dignity and the love and the joy that I feel with my fellow disabled artists is priceless. And I would say that that's kind of more what I feel comfortable sharing about that. That's the end of my thought.

Jenel Shaw:

Absolutely. The disability community is one of the first places that I felt welcomed and could be myself. So I definitely echo that for sure. Okay. So now that we've had that question, we have a few in the chat. Sandra Houle wanted

to ask a question. I don't know if the STEPS people could unmute her so she could ask a question.

Sandra Houle : I think I can unmute. I think it's working. Can you hear me?

Jenel Shaw: Yes.

Sandra Houle : Okay, great. Hi, everyone. I'm Sandra. Thank you so much for being here. It's been great to listen to you. I don't have a very well formulated question. So I'm just going to say what I'm thinking and I'd love to hear your thoughts. I used art a lot when I was going through different mental health issues and it became a really important part of my life. In parallel, I work as an occupational therapist, so I do work with people with various disabilities and I've come to, I guess a place where sometimes I struggle to speak or research or think about art in, I guess, more of a therapeutic way versus more of an advocacy disability movement kind of way. And sometimes I find myself at a bit of a complicated nexus.

So I guess, using art to cure versus using art to just be and explore and for well-being. I don't know if you have any thoughts on that. I think some of you mentioned you also have a background in social work, so you might have also that experience with having to hearing the clinician kind of point of view, as well as the disability communities points of view. So any thoughts that you can share on that, I would love to hear.

Queen Kukoyi: Can I get you to repeat the question? [inaudible 01:08:34].

Sandra Houle : Yeah. Just, I guess when I've done some research on how I could utilize art in practice, I've come across some, I guess hesitancy with using it in a therapeutic, like more, I guess with a more curative kind of aspect, but I found it to be really helpful in terms of just managing my own mental health. So I would like to share it with other people, without it necessarily coming across as trying to fix a disability or mental health, for example.

Queen Kukoyi: Well, for me, including narratives and looking at it from... Because someone who doesn't have their master's or their doctorate and social work. So you can't practice art therapy, but you can practice art healing exercises. So researching things around that. And for me, I like to include anything around narrative-based themes and storytelling and retelling stories of resistance and resilience. So looking at those types of things as a tool for understanding yourself better and navigating yourself better has been helpful for me. And also when building workshops or facilitating workshops that are inclusive of those things and we try to include art healing and everything that we do myself and Nico. Yeah. I hope that was helpful.

Sandra Houle : Yeah. Thank you. Yeah.

Ysabelle Vautou...: Yeah. I mean, art therapy has like... Anybody can do art as therapy, right? Art is inherently therapeutic, it has this kind of healing. It's a way of communicating really is what it is. You're kind of communicating non-verbally through a visual or music medium or what have you. I mean, I don't know what the pushback is in the sense of the accreditation parts and all that, because there is definitely that debate there. But I do agree with the storytelling. I feel like persons with disabilities sometimes are these celebrities, like the community knows that one... Like I was that one blind person in my school. And people know who I am, but I don't necessarily know who they are. Like people two, three grades ahead of me and they're like, "Oh, yeah, they know who I am."

They'll be like, "Hi, do you remember me?" And I'm like, I really don't, you know with I mean? Because we never actually talked. You just know of me, like a weird celebrity thing, and they don't get to know me as a person or hear what I have to say as an individual, which is a very different thing. And I find that there's not a lot of spaces to talk about those things. So if there's not a prescriptive, okay, everyone, we're going to do this thing and we're going to do it this way and you're going to do this. And instead of like, what they want to say kind of comes out naturally is favorable in my opinion, but it's just me.

Sandra Houle : Yeah. No, that makes a lot of sense. Thank you.

Salima Punjani: Hi, it's Salima speaking. I think that I would actually be careful about evoking hope. I feel like the Debbie Downer here, but I mean, using kind of words, like cure, healing, and things like that, I think that there's a responsibility that comes with that. And I think that being like... I stop being a clinician. I kind of have left it behind now, but in my practice I did use photography. I did use art, but I made sure to honor the lineage of where I was getting these ideas from, what are the side effects potentially, because I think that it is important to recognize that sometimes creative exploration can bring up a lot of emotion and a lot of pain sometimes. And you never know what can be triggering for someone you never know.

And I think that it's important to make sure that you have the capacity to hold that what comes up and you have the skills for that. And if you don't have the ability to be transparent about what might happen and have the skills of how to help around that, I think maybe bringing in a separate person to be with you, or maybe just giving it as an offering and letting people know how it was for you. But I think that there's a reason why there's art therapy training that's at a certain level. I think that there's a reason why there's a lot of ethics that come around that. And I would actually be a bit hesitant to offer things if I don't absolutely have certainty or as much certainty as possible that I have the capacity to hold whatever will come up. That's the end of my thought.

Sandra Houle : Thank you. That makes sense. Thank you.

Jenel Shaw: Great. So we have another question in the chat from Dina, who's wondering if we know of any books, journals, artists, movies, videos, or podcasts about Crip theory or a disability representation. So if you guys can think of anything, just feel free to throw it on the chat. Mamichi wrote, "I felt like the experience that I've gotten from having a disability was to be able to differentiate my feelings as not normal from others. Thus giving me visual looks about how I, as few others as invisibles and thus those overlooked feelings become in a way that translate into one's world that essentially become unique experience that has the same notion of display, different, unique, original." So that's very interesting. Dina says, "Being weird is radical," and I'm 100% with her on that. And then we have one... Oh, I think we're out of time. So I think we... Well, that's it for the questions. I think Belinda wants to do some closing words, but I just wanted to say thank you so much Salima, Queen, Ysabelle for joining us. It's been a really lovely discussion with you guys. Belinda.

Belinda Uwase: Thank you. Thank you all. I just wanted to thank everybody for joining us tonight. I've just had a wonderful time listening in and learning along with everybody else. I would like to thank Jenel for doing an amazing job at moderating this talk. It's been such an amazing and important discussion, and as well as thanking all of the panelists, of course, thank you Salima, Ysabelle, and Queen for providing all this knowledgeable information. I really appreciate also Ysabelle for you mentioning accessibility [inaudible 01:16:27] and disability awareness week. This was definitely intentional for us to hold this talk during this week to further raise awareness and hold space for these important discussions to take place and have this dialogue. I appreciate all of the conversation about anticipating needs. And I really like, I think Jenel, you mentioned about the access guides and also Salima you mentioning about even within grant proposals, having a lot of these accommodations being incorporated into the work.

And I would also to further normalize accommodations being a part of project planning and event planning as opposed to being an afterthought and also having conversations about different disabilities and learning disabilities, neurodivergency, invisible disabilities, as opposed to just thinking about physical disabilities. So yeah, I've just had an amazing time listening and having this discussion with you all. So thank you all for joining us. I would also like to thank our funders, the CreateSpace Residency as supported by the city of Toronto as a part of ArtworxTO: Toronto's Year of Public Art, TD Bank Group through the TD Ready Commitment, Canada Council for the Arts, and Ontario Arts Council. This panel discussion is also generously supported by the Bulmash-Siegel Foundation. So thank you all so much for joining us. I hope you have a lovely rest of your evening wherever you are, and we appreciate you all for being here with us tonight.

Queen Kukoyi: Thank you.

Speaker X: Have a good evening.

This transcript was exported on Jun 04, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Belinda Uwase: [inaudible 01:18:24] as well. Thank you so much to Christina Morton, our ASL interpreter tonight. Thank you for being here.