



Deaf and Disability

ARTS

PRACTICES

in Canada

RESEARCH REPORT

UQÀM



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for the Arts

Conseil des arts
du Canada

Canada Council for the Arts

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The UQAM is located on unceded Indigenous territory.
Tiohtiá :ke (Montréal) was historically a meeting place for many First Nations,
and various Indigenous and non-Indigenous people live there today.



Background:

In May 2018, the Research, Measurement and Data Analytics Section at the Canada Council for the Arts (the “Council”) signed a contract with the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) and a research team, requesting that they conduct a study to document the arts practices of Deaf and disabled people. This project was made possible with financial support from the Canada Council for the Arts.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the authors and study participants. They do not necessarily represent those of the Canada Council for the Arts.

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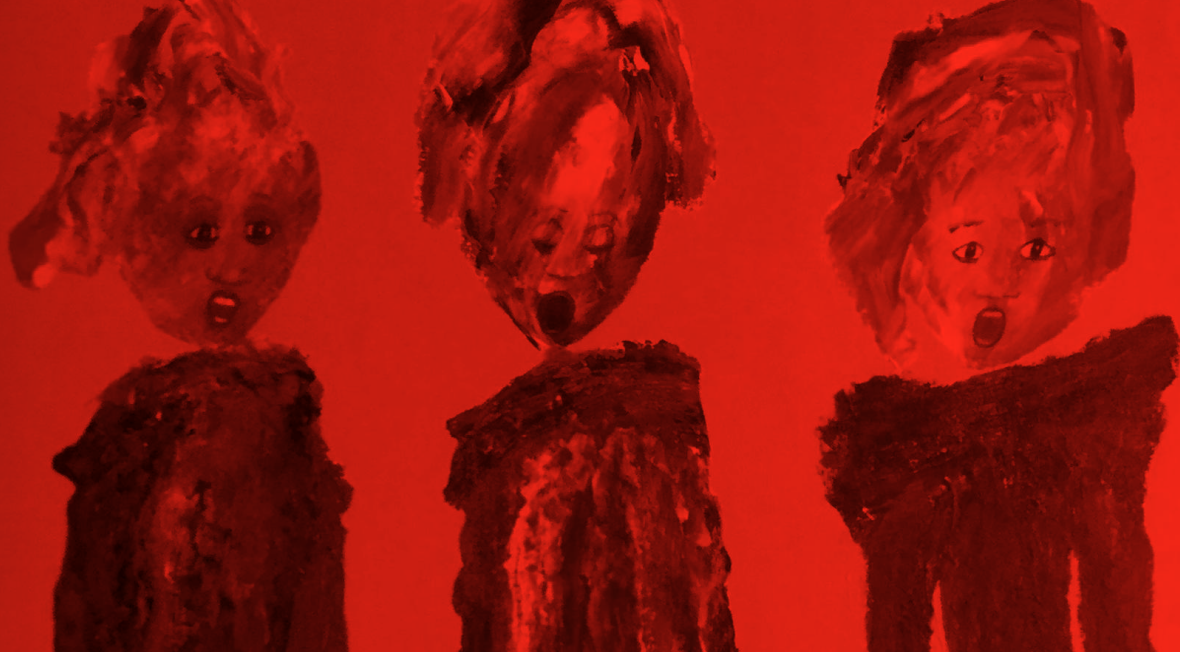
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Disabled people don't seek merely to participate in Canadian culture, we want to create it, shape, stretch it beyond its tidy edges.

Catherine Frazee¹

*In memory of Marilyne Turcot (1991–2018), an artist and former director of **Libre et sauvage**, an organization dedicated to youth with and without functional limitations in arts projects.*

¹ Catherine Frazee (2001), cited in Eliza Chandler. "Crippling the Arts in Canada," 2016. Canadian Journal of Disability Studies, Call for papers.

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SPÉCIAL

INTRODUCTION

Who are Canada's Deaf and disabled artists? What are their arts practices? How do they contribute to the arts and culture sectors? What obstacles do they face? What are their thoughts on the cultural representation of Deaf and disabled people? What do they suggest in terms of equitable, inclusive and accessible practices in artistic and cultural milieus? Those are some of the questions addressed as part of this study.

Sponsored and funded by the Canada Council for the Arts (the "Council") and conducted by a team of Deaf, disabled and allied researchers and artists from various universities, this pan-Canadian study documents the arts practices of Deaf and disabled people² in Canada. The research is based on the premise that "Deaf and disability artists create countercultural narratives that bring valuable artistic and cultural insight" (Canada Council for the Arts 2019: 3). But barriers remain significant. Deaf and disability artists face economic inequality, systemic oppression and exclusion. The sociocultural context contributes to discrimination, a negative perception of disability and Deafness and an undervaluing of the achievements and contributions of Deaf and disability artists, thereby depriving them of real opportunities for professionalization and collaboration. Eighty-five artists and cultural workers from six Canadian provinces took part in this study, whose aim was to arrive at a keener understanding of the issues around the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled and to generate courses of action that could lead to the recognition, support and promotion of such practices.

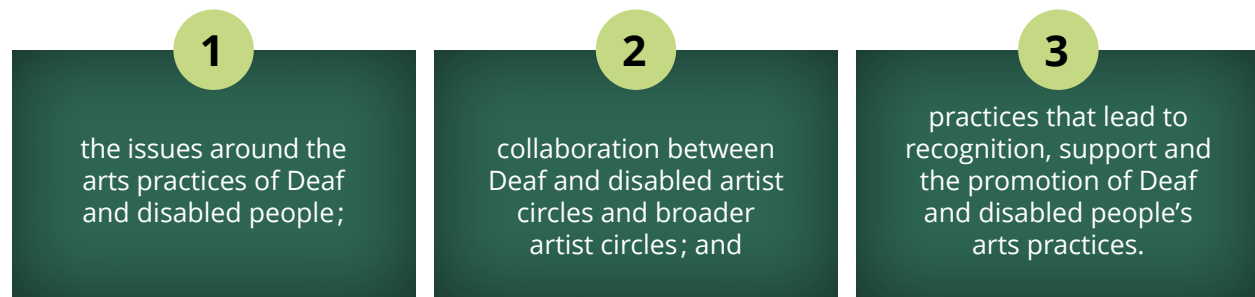
² This expression refers to people who identify as Deaf or disabled, people living with a disability or functional limitations, people who are hard of hearing, deafened, deaf-blind, Usher deaf, neurodiverse or neuroatypical, people who have a cognitive or an intellectual disability, people with mental illness or mental health issues, people who identify as mad, as having mixed abilities or as anything else not listed here.

The introduction to the report provides the background for and goals of the study. Following the methodological approach, the first part presents the results of the examination of secondary data: a demographic statistical picture of people and artists who are Deaf or disabled in Canada, an overview of institutional practices that support artists and a review of the literature. The second part covers the results of the primary data analysis: artists and their practices, practice environments and collaborations, relationships with the broader arts community, and funding. Then, based on the experiences and points of view of the artists and cultural workers interviewed, a list of potential solutions and best practices is proposed. Finally, a brief conclusion focusses on the main issues and key points. The appendices include a list of cultural organizations or initiatives that support artists who are Deaf or disabled, as well as a directory of institutions and organizations that participated in the study. A glossary, detailed methodology and bibliography³ round out the report.

1.1 Background and goals of the study

The study aims to provide a keener understanding of the current context of Deaf and disability artists' practices in Canada and how the arts sector has evolved in recent years. While the Canada Council has previously conducted never-published studies and initiated conversations with key players in the field, a report titled "Focus on Disability and Deaf Arts in Canada" was published (Jacobson & McMurchy 2010) in 2010. Nearly a decade later, it is clear that the sector has changed and that challenges persist. This study provides an opportunity to update and expand the scope of the 2010 study.

The goal of the study is to lead to a better understanding of



The Canada Council for the Arts promotes equity and access for all to its programs and services so that the arts reflect today's Canada. While supporting artists who are Deaf or disabled is a priority for the Council, this study is not limited to funded artists—it also documents the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled in a more holistic way.

³ The glossary, detailed methodology and bibliography are available online at <https://canadacouncil.ca/research/research-library/2018/05/deaf-and-disability-arts>.

A blue-tinted illustration of a woman and a child in a garden. The woman is in the center, holding a small object, possibly a flower or a tool. To her left is a young child with curly hair, also smiling. The background shows other figures and plants, creating a sense of a community or a shared space.

METHODO- LOGY⁴

2.1 Research strategy

The broader research strategy is based on a collaborative approach that emphasizes participatory and inclusive methods and a willingness to address and mitigate power relationships between researchers, practitioners and community members. For example, taking crip time⁵ into consideration has led to research practices and recruitment strategies being adapted based on each individual's abilities, both for the research team and study participants. In keeping with the values of equity and self-determination, the research team consisted mainly of people who are Deaf and disabled, as well as allies.

⁴ La méthodologie de recherche détaillée est présentée dans un document séparé, disponible en ligne : <https://conseildesarts.ca/recherche/repertoire-des-recherches/2018/05/arts-sourds-et-handicapes>

⁵ This term and many others are defined in the glossary, which is available online at <https://canadacouncil.ca/research/research-library/2018/05/deaf-and-disability-arts>

The study included a literature search and interviews.

Literature search	Interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statistical data• Articles• Research reports• Websites• Social networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 34 interviews and 8 discussion groups in :• 8 cities across 6 provinces: Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montréal, Québec City and Halifax• Conducted in four languages: French, English, LSQ and ASL

2.2 Conceptual foundation and theoretical underpinnings

The conceptual foundation and theoretical underpinnings of the study draw on critical disability studies, *Deaf studies* and cultural studies, and are based on an approach rooted in intersectional feminism and decolonization. Disability studies, in response to the biomedical paradigm (in which disability is seen as an inherent pathology), have developed a social model of disability that takes into account the structural components that make up disability by establishing limits in terms of social, cultural, political and communicational accessibility (Barnes 1991 ; Davis 2010; Goodley 2011). For example, they view “the condition of having a disability as a social relationship characterized by discrimination and oppression rather than as a personal misfortune or individual inadequacy” (Garland-Thomson 2001 : 1). This social model was criticized in the 1990s by authors in the same field of study who felt that this paradigm did not sufficiently take into account the emotional and experiential consequences of disability (Barnes 1999; Davis 2002; French 1993; Goodley 200; Hughes and Paterson 1997). From this perspective, the socio-subjective model (Baril 2018) allows for the consideration of both societal barriers and the subjective dimension of living with a disability. In the cultural field, the affirmation model of disability (Swain and French 2000) is particularly relevant: disability and Deafness are seen as positives to be valued. *Deaf studies* differ from disability studies due to the cultural and linguistic approach they advocate. They emphasize a sense of cultural belonging based on sign languages (Daigle and Parisot 2006; Dubuisson and Grimard 2006; Gaucher 2009; Lachance 2007; Leduc 2015; Marschak and Spencer 2010). Thus, the cultural model identifies Deaf people as a cultural and linguistic minority. *Cultural studies*, on the other hand, offer a variety of critical perspectives on the links between culture, the arts, equity and power relations (Hall 2008; Jenkins 2006). Among other things, they place particular emphasis on cultural democracy and the democratization of culture, as well as on cultural representations, which we present in subsections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

The *intersectional feminist approach* and the decolonization approach are very useful in considering the various power relations that cross the field of arts practices of Deaf and disabled people. The intersectional approach is one of the major contributions of feminist studies (Anthias 2008; Baril 2013; Bilge 2009; Corbeil and Marchand 2006; Crenshaw 1991; Harper et al. 2012; Hill Collins 1998; Masson 2015) and, more specifically, of Black feminist thought and the political demands of African-American feminists (Hill Collins 1990). It takes into account the interweaving of multiple identity markers (gender, race, ability, language, age, social class), considers the various instances of oppression and privileges that shape experiences, and offers a deeper understanding of social, cultural and arts practices.

The adoption of a decolonization approach aims to recognize the existence of current power relations and illustrates “the hope that colonization should cease in all areas—not only in politics and economics, but also in thought and language, as well as in culture, which, at first glance, is everywhere”⁶ (Mencé-Caster and Bertin-Elisabeth 2018).

The concepts that we borrow from these various approaches to critical power analysis are namely the ableism and audism detailed in subsection 2.2.3.

2.2.1 Cultural democratization, democracy and deconstruction

Cultural democratization or the democratization of culture refers to all initiatives that aim to make culture accessible, particularly to groups that have historically been marginalized or outright excluded. The issue of the democratization of culture has been discussed in Canada since the 1930s (Trépanier 1986), but more particularly since the creation of the arts councils in the late 1950s (Paquin 1996). In line with this, Deaf and disabled social movements have been demanding access to arts and culture for several decades. Some countries such as the United States, England and Ireland gave themselves legislative frameworks for this purpose in the early 1990s (Jacobson and McMurchy 2010: 12–13).

Cultural democracy is in line with cultural democratization, but goes further. For people who have historically been excluded, it is not just a question of accessing the cultural spaces of the dominant culture, but of having the means to develop their own specific cultural expression. Moreover, this approach considers culture as a whole, in that “the cultural democracy model calls for a broader definition of culture that includes traditions, backgrounds and ways of life” (Santerre 2000). In this sense, cultural democracy is closely related to the notion of self-determination for Deaf and disability arts practices.

Lastly, the notion of cultural deconstruction is in line with cultural democracy, though it does raise certain considerations. It is rooted not only in minority groups’ desire for cultural expression, but also in an approach seeking to deconstruct the oppressive roots of certain cultural practices. The concept of deconstruction has been used by several authors in the field of critical studies on disability and on Deaf studies. Briefly, deconstruction is a practice that stems from a critical posture aimed at understanding, or even demonstrating, how something (a theory, a practice, a point of view, etc.) is constructed in order to explore other ways of theorizing an issue or other ways of considering praxis.

Although quite recent in Canada with respect to people who are Deaf or disabled, advances in cultural democratization (e.g., cultural accessibility practices), cultural democracy (e.g., support for the practices of artists who are Deaf or disabled), and cultural deconstruction (e.g., deconstruction of cultural representation) contribute to the cultural citizenship of people who are Deaf or disabled

Cultural citizenship is the set of practices that determine the possibility for people to feel like they belong to society, particularly when they are from a minority social group (Poirier 2017; Miller 2001; Rosaldo 1994). The concept of cultural citizenship encompasses social participation, cultural and artistic production, a sense of belonging and the visibility of the social players concerned (Poirier 2017; Rosaldo 1994). For marginalized sociocultural groups (including Deaf people), the concept of cultural citizenship serves as a cornerstone in the mobilization against cultural exclusion (Lister 2007; Boele Van Hensbroek 2010). (Leduc, forthcoming)

⁶ All quotations in French, Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) and American Sign Language (ASL) have been translated into English.



Cultural accessibility

While cultural democratization promotes the inclusion of social groups historically excluded from the arts and culture (Bellavance 2000), cultural accessibility more specifically provides access to the arts and culture for people who are Deaf or disabled:

cultural accessibility is a set of recommendations and practices aiming to make policy, venues and artistic and cultural practices accessible [...] accessibility practices (e.g.: subtitles and sign language interpretation) are a condition of possibility for cultural citizenship (Poirier 2017), making social participation, a sense of belonging and visibility possible (Emery 2009 and 2011; Leduc 2016; Brault 2013; Lister 2007; Miller 2003; Probyn 1996; Chouinard 2000; Fougeyrollas 2010). (Leduc, forthcoming)

Relaxed performances⁷ are an example of practices that make the cultural offering accessible. In 2016, shortly after the emergence of this approach in England in 2009, the British Council's pilot program, Access Awareness & Relaxed Performance, trained artists and cultural organizers in Ontario. Initially developed in theatre, the approach⁸ is now being adopted by a growing number of cultural institutions and companies, some of which also offer a visitors' guide to help them prepare for the event.⁹ In addition, we are seeing the cultural offering increasingly being translated into Quebec Sign Language (LSQ) or American Sign Language (ASL) in the field of theatre, and cultural institutions (museums, galleries, theatres) are making an effort to make their programming accessible.

7 "[Relaxed performances] were geared toward those with sensory differences (e.g. Autism) and were often referred to as 'sensory-friendly.' They have since been imagined as providing access to anyone who may feel excluded from 'typical' theatre contexts, including people with learning disabilities, Tourette's syndrome, people bringing children to the theatre, people living with chronic conditions, people unfamiliar with the culture of contemporary theatre" (British Council 2020).

8 Namely Alberta Theatre Projects, the Carousel Theatre, the Segal Centre, Corpuscule Danse, the Inside Out Theatre, Joe Jack et John, Les productions des pieds des mains, Luminato, the National Arts Centre, the Stratford Festival, the Sudbury Theatre Centre, Summerworks, Tangled Arts + Disability, Theatre@York / York University, Theatre Passe Muraille and the Young People's Theatre.

9 Namely Espace Libre. "Guide préparatoire avec repères visuels pour les représentations décontractées" [preparation guide for relaxed performances with visual cues] [French]. 2018. http://espacelibre.qc.ca/sites/default/files/guide_de_reperes_seances_decontractees_vf.pdf.

Some cultural accessibility practices are long-term, while others are one-offs. A number of resources have been developed to equip practice milieus and support the development of Deaf and disability arts practices as well as equity and cultural inclusion practices. These include, for example :

- [Expanding the Arts II: Deaf and Disability Expression and Engagement Strategy \[bilingual\]](#)¹⁰
- [Accessibility Toolkit: A guide to making art spaces accessible](#)¹¹
- [Creative Users Accessibility Icons \[images\]](#)¹²
- [WorkInCulture's Inclusive HR Toolkit](#)¹³
- [Deaf Artists & Theatres Toolkit](#)¹⁴
- [Alter Go Training and CDEACF accessibility toolkit \[French\]](#)¹⁵
- [The Art of Inclusion: A Guide to Developing and Delivering Accessible and Inclusive Programs within Arts and Cultural Organizations](#)¹⁶

10 Canada Council for the Arts. "Expanding the Arts: A Guidebook for Working with Artists who are Deaf or have Disabilities." 2015. <https://canadacouncil.ca/-/media/Files/CCA/Commitments/Equity/ExpandingTheArtsGuidebook.pdf?la=en>.

11 Zbitnew, Anne, in collaboration with Tangled Art + Disability board members Kim Fullerton, Lenore McMillan and Fran Odette. S.d. "Accessibility Toolkit: A guide to making art spaces accessible." Humber College. http://www.humber.ca/makingaccessiblemedia/modules/06/pdf/Accessibility_Toolkit_Final.pdf.

12 Creative Users. S.d. "Accessibility in the Arts Icon Set." <http://creativeusers.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/creative-users-projects-accessibility-icons.pdf>.

13 WorkInCulture. S.d. "WorkInCulture's Inclusive HR Toolkit." <https://www.workinculture.ca/Resources/Inclusion-in-the-Creative-Workplace/Inclusive-HR-Toolkit>.

14 Cahoot. "Deaf Artists & Theatres Toolkit (DATT)." 2016. <http://cahoots.ca/datt/>.

15 In Montréal, Altergo provides such training (<http://altergo.ca/fr/formation-altergo>) [French] and the CDÉACF provides a toolkit (<http://cdeacf.ca/boite-outils-accessibilite>) [French], such as an event planning guide with various resources and references that can help when planning universally accessible events: http://www.altergo.ca/sites/default/files/documents/accessibilite_universelle_evenements_altergo_0.pdf.

16 McMichael. S.d. "The Art of Inclusion. A Guide to Developing and Delivering Accessible and Inclusive Programs within Arts and Cultural Organizations." <http://mcmichael.com/wp-content/uploads/artofinclusion.pdf>.

Developing cultural expressions

While cultural democratization practices are essential, they are not sufficient to ensure full cultural citizenship for people who are Deaf or disabled. Indeed, Deaf and disabled people do not only wish to have access to the dominant culture—they want to participate in it fully. Cultural democracy is based on support for cultural artistic productions and self-determination for Deaf and disabled people. To this end, support structures such as funding, training and dissemination are essential.

Access to training is a major issue for artists who are Deaf or disabled. While there are initiatives such as the university-level theatre class open to people with cognitive disabilities offered by the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta (Doolittle et al. 2016), they are the exception. In general, Deaf and disability artists' access to traditional training venues is either limited or impossible.

Support for dissemination is another significant issue. Several of the 55 cultural organizations, foundations, or private or community initiatives identified in Canada (Appendix 1) contribute to the dissemination of Deaf and disability artists' practices in Canada, through the programming of plays, exhibitions, and festivals that support the self-determined practices of Deaf and disability artists. In addition, a growing number of organizations in the broader arts community disseminate the practices of artists who are Deaf or disabled. For example, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, in Winnipeg, which is accessible to people who are Deaf or disabled thanks to an equity package, programmed *Sight Unseen* in 2016, an exhibition of works by blind photographers from several countries around the world, and is “the first museum in the world to showcase three-dimensional tactile fine art printing” (Global Accessibility News 2016).

Cultural deconstruction

In addition to being based on access to culture and cultural affirmation, full cultural citizenship for people who are Deaf or disabled depends on the deconstruction of certain cultural practices, particularly in the wake of the affirmation model of disability.

In this sense, people with disabilities who consider their disability, malformation or physical differences not as something shameful to be hidden but as something to be proud of have reappropriated the insult “cripple”—hence the derivative *crip* (Leduc 2016a). Starting in the mid-2000s, after the book entitled *Crip Theory* (McRuer 2006) was published, “crip perspectives were adopted by activists and became theorization objects and fields of study” (Baril 2017, online). This is also how the expression “cripping the arts” was coined; it means “developing new ways of creating art and sustaining art practices, changing the kinds of art we encounter, and innovating new ways of engaging with art” (Chandler 2016). The quote at the top of this report fits into this paradigm perfectly: “Disabled people don't seek merely to participate in Canadian culture, we want to create it, shape, stretch it beyond its tidy edges” (Frazee 2001 cited in Chandler 2016).

For example, the exhibition *Le peuple de l'œil* was presented in Montréal at the Écomusée du fier monde in 2015, and subsequently in Winnipeg, Toronto and Gatineau. The labels for the works included descriptions in LSQ and ASL. Non-signing hearing people could get a booklet with a translation from the reception desk, thus reversing the power relationship.

2.2.2 Cultural representation

Cultural representation is all the ways in which a social group is represented in cultural, artistic and media circles, but also the presence of people from different backgrounds in a society's decision-making and executive bodies. As noted by Stuart Hall, a cultural studies theorist who studied the ways in which power relations are embedded in culture, "the cultural industries do have the power constantly to rework and reshape what they represent; and, by repetition and selection, impose and implant such definitions of ourselves as fit more easily the descriptions of the dominant or preferred culture" (Hall 2008: 120).

If cultural representations of people who are Deaf or disabled are "constitutive of what we can consider as being of the realm of the possible and the intelligible" (Sandell, Dodd and Garland-Thomson 2010; Garland-Thomson 2011)" (Leduc 2015: 139), it is important to deconstruct stereotypes and diversify representation, whether in film, theatre or news media. Contemplating non-stereotypical representation is in keeping with what critical disability theorists refer to as the desirability of disability (McRuer and Wilkerson 2003), i.e., to argue that various body types, abilities and languages are equally desirable.

The importance Deaf and disabled people being represented in culture by Deaf and disabled people is one of the major current issues (Johnston 2010). The presence of Deaf and disability artists on stages and screens and their active participation at every step of the creative process is recommended.

2.2.3 Ableism and audism

We live in societies marked by multiple systems of oppression. Sexism, racism, colonialism, classism and ageism are well known. But ableism and audism are less well known. They are normative systems that subordinate people with disabilities and Deaf people through a set of practices, actions, beliefs and attitudes that favour able-bodied and hearing people and their ways of life, at the expense of a diversity of bodies, mobilities, and (sign) languages (Bauman 2004; Campbell 2008; Lane 2010; Humphries 1975).

Deconstructing ableism and audism enables us to recognize that we live in societies thought-out and developed by and for able-bodied and hearing people. Further, considering disability from a social perspective and Deaf people as linguistic minorities enables us to celebrate human diversity by focusing on structural, attitudinal, architectural and communicational barriers that affect their quality of life and impede the overall quality of life of the communities they live in.

And ableism and audism can sometimes be subtle. For example, if we pay attention to the language of social recognition, we note that several expressions use notions such as voice and hearing ("to lend an ear," "to speak," "to make oneself heard"). These expressions don't refer to one's voice and hearing so much as to perspectives on the world that are worth considering (Couldry 2010, Leduc 2017). In general, expressions referring to physical abilities are used as metaphors for the strength or weakness of a person's character ("to be upright citizen," "to lie down and roll over"). In doing so, metaphors of the disabled body are frequently used to illustrate weaknesses or failures ("the government is blind," "this person is absolutely mad," "dialogue of the deaf"). This type of language is detrimental to people who are Deaf or disabled, because most of the time, the terms that evoke them in the media and cultural productions do so in a derogatory way.

2.3 Participant profiles and disclosure of identity

The artists and cultural workers who took part in the study have varied profiles, both in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics and their area of practice. Table 1 presents a profile of the study participants. Figure 1 illustrates the diversity of the sectors the study participants work in. Focus group participants include a total of 45 cultural or community institutions or organizations (Appendix 1). Most participants (84% / n=71) are involved in one or more arts or culture organizations. Figure 2 details their various roles within those organizations.

TABLE 1. PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Participants (n=85)		
	n	%
Language		
French	40	47 %
English	21	25 %
ASL	20	23 %
LSQ	4	05 %
Gender		
Female	55	65 %
Male	22	26 %
Queer, n-b ^a or trans	8	9 %
Ethnocultural identification		
White	63	74 %
Racisée	17	20 %
Racialized	5	06 %
Age^b		
18 to 25	4	05 %
26 to 35	16	19 %
36 to 45	29	34 %
46 to 55	17	20 %
56 to 65	14	16 %
over 65	3	04 %
Non-binary	2	02 %

NUMBERS

Figure 1. Sectors in which artists and cultural workers participating in the study work in

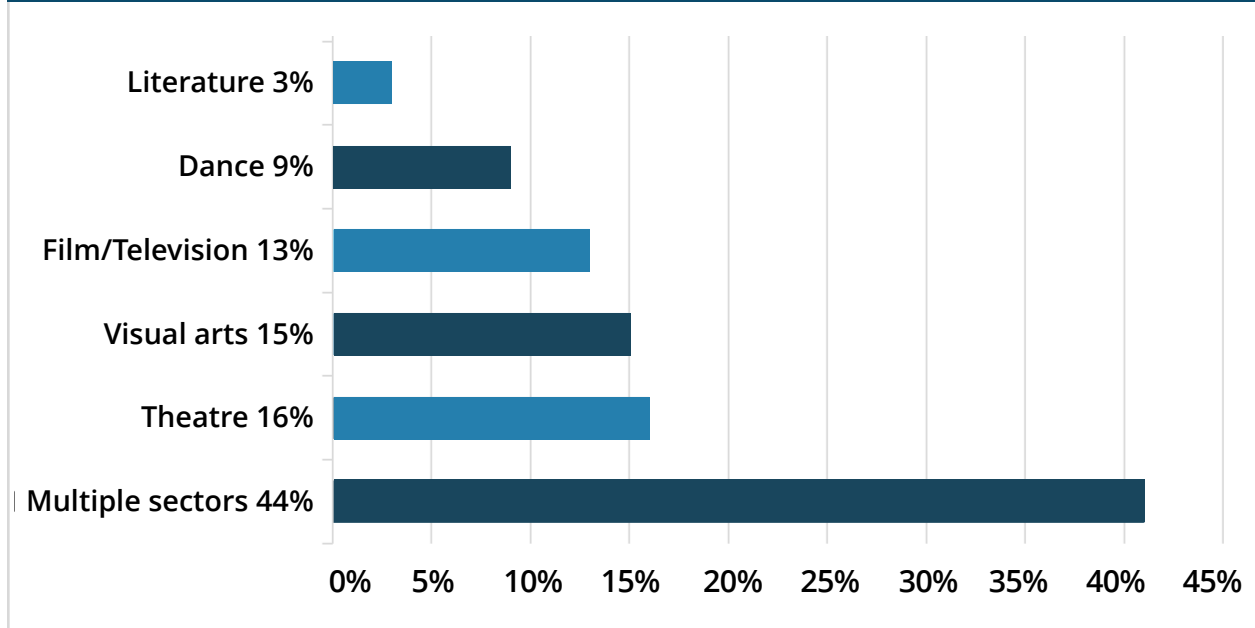
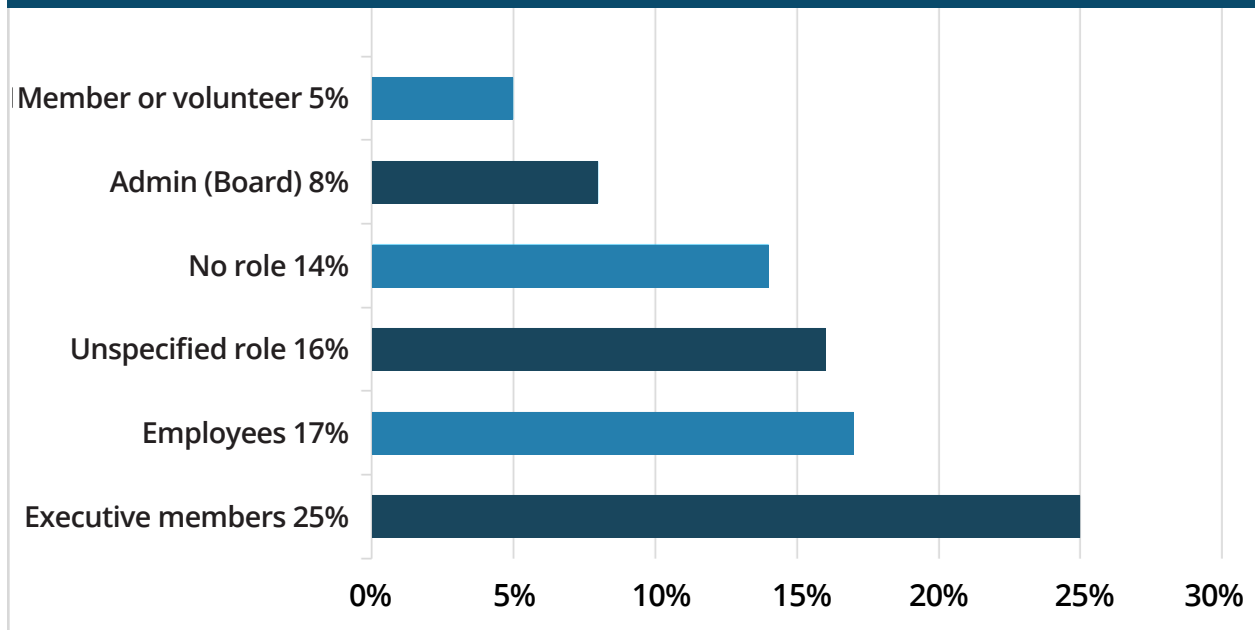


Figure 2. Roles of the participants within cultural organizations



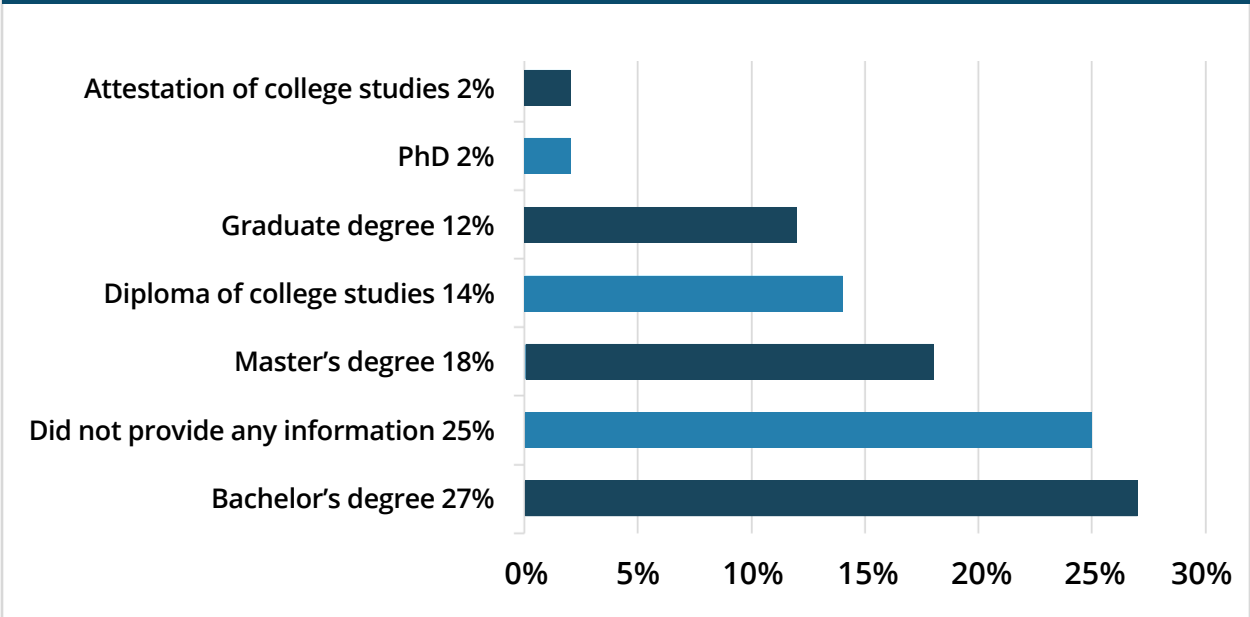
Of those who provided information about their training (60% / n=51), 48 have training in the arts. Table 2 illustrates the type of arts training received by the 48 participants; some have received more than one type of training.

TABLE 2. ARTS TRAINING

Participants (n=48)		
	n	%
Junior college		
Diploma of college studies	8	16%
University		
Bachelor’s degree	15	29%
Graduate degree	10	20%
Professional training		
Vocational school	14	27%
Specific training	10	20%
Workshops	15	29%

Of those who provided information about their level of education (75% / n=64), 100% of participants reported having a post-secondary degree or diploma. Figure 3 illustrates the participants’ level of education.

FIGURE 3. PARTICIPANTS’ LEVEL OF EDUCATION



In the research, public disclosure of identity was optional. For example, participants could agree to have their responses tied with their name or a code. This is consistent with the practices of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), which encourages researchers to consider the possibility of disclosing the identity of research participants when they consent to do so; this allows for recognition of their contribution to knowledge building.



2.4 Limitations of the study

This study has limitations in both the secondary and primary data analysis components. The secondary data was examined between May and September 2018. Regarding the examination of statistics, given that self-identification as Deaf or disabled is a voluntary practice that institutions cannot require, the study is limited to data relating to artists who have self-identified as Deaf or disabled. The examination of documentary sources is based on a portion of selected literature, not on an exhaustive literature review. It is important to keep in mind that Deaf and disability arts practices are not documented very much and few macro-sociological analyses on this topic exist. Some artistic fields, such as theatrical practices, are better covered in the literature, but there is little to no documentation on artists living with mental illness or who identify as “mad” or neuroatypical and their practices.

The primary data was examined between May 2018 and June 2019. After ethics certification regarding the study was received in May 2018, primary data was collected between June and September 2018, coded between October 2018 and March 2019, and analyzed between April and June 2019. Further analysis of the primary data would have required more time and resources. This report provides an overview of the data collected and an analysis of key issues. While the study covers a wide range of practices and artists, some individuals could have been better represented—people who are blind, those living with mental illness or who self-identify as mad, those who are neurodiverse or those with cognitive disabilities. Still, some individuals from these groups did take part in the study.



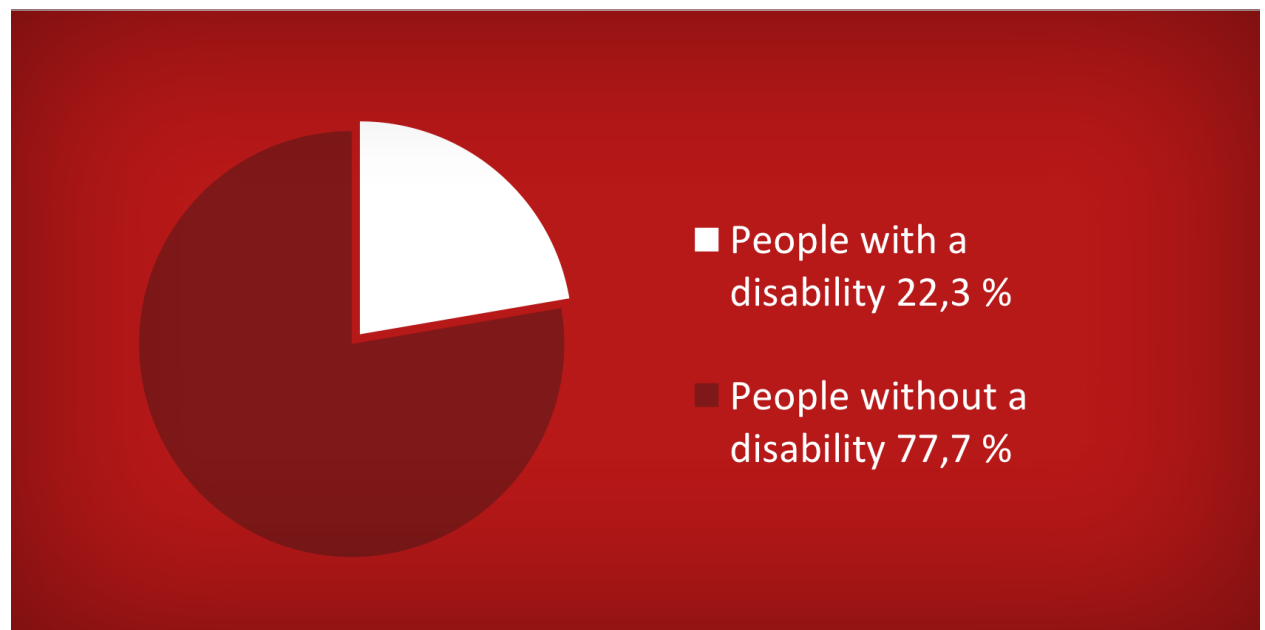
PART 1: EXAMINING THE SECONDARY DATA

DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICAL PICTURE

3.1 Deaf and disabled people in Canada

In Canada, one in five people 15 and over has a disability (Statistics Canada 2019). This represents 6.2 million people, or 22.3% of the population. The Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD 2017) refers to the “social model of disabilities,” which defines disability as “the relationship between body function and structure, daily activities and social participation, while recognizing the role of environmental factors” (Statistics Canada 2017).

FIGURE 4. CANADIANS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES (STATISTICS CANADA 2019)



Among people living with a disability, women, Aboriginal people and people 65 and over are the most impacted. The CSD breaks down limitations using a “disability severity score,” taking into account the number, the type and magnitude of disabilities, and the frequency of activity limitations. The most common types of disability have to do with pain (14.5%), flexibility (10%), mobility (9.6%), mental health (7.2%), vision (5.4%) and hearing (4.8%) (Morris et al. 2018; CSD 2017).

Other data specific to Deaf and hard-of-hearing people shows that 40% of adults aged 20 to 79 have mild or more severe hearing loss and that 4% to 12% of them identify as Deaf or hard of hearing (Canadian Association of the Deaf 2012; Institut de la Statistique du Québec 2013; Caron 2003; Pinsonneault and Bergevin 2006; Statistics Canada 2016). Organizations such as the Canadian Association of the Deaf believe that the census form does not accurately reflect the reality of Deaf people (CAD 2015). It is thought that the census is difficult to access for them because it is written in English and French, and their first language is often a sign language (the LSQ or ASL, for example).

Conducting a census of people with disabilities has also been criticized. Statistics Canada recognized that the 2012 CSD was not sufficiently inclusive and revised its methodology in such a way that it is now felt that “the results of the 2017 CSD are, therefore, more inclusive of all persons with disabilities and more reflective of today’s Canada” (Furrie 2018, CSD 2017).



3.2 Deaf and disability artists in the Canadian arts sector

In Canada, among those aged 25 to 64, people with disabilities are “less likely to be employed (59%) than those without disabilities (80%)” (CSD 2017: 4). According to the latest available data, 12.9% of the workforce reported their activities being limited due to a physical or mental condition or health problem, and the statistic rose among artists (15%) (Hill Strategies 2014: 25).

In 2016, artists made up approximately 1% of the total workforce (0.87%) and earned an average of \$24,300 annually (Hill Strategies 2019).¹⁷ According to the latest available data, artists’ average earnings were 39% lower than those of the overall workforce (Hill Strategies 2014: 35). The earnings of artists whose activities are “often limited” or “sometimes limited” were 44% and 48% lower, respectively, than those of people in the overall workforce with the same frequency of limitations (ibid.: 46). The earnings of artists whose activities were “sometimes limited” (10.1%) were 48% lower than those of people in the overall workforce with the same frequency of limitations (ibid.: 46).

3.3 Section summary

The number of people 15 and over living with a disability in Canada is significant—6.2 million people, or 22.3% of the population. Among them, women, Aboriginal people and people 65 and over are the most impacted. According to the Canadian Survey on Disability (2012), people who are Deaf and hard of hearing account for more than 3% of the Canadian population aged 15 and over, while associations and organizations estimate that they actually make up between 4% and 12% of the population aged 15 and over. People with disabilities aged 25 to 64 are less likely to be employed (59%) than those without disabilities (80%). The average earnings of artists whose activities are “often limited” are 44% lower than those in the overall workforce with the same frequency of limitations.

¹⁷ For more statistical information about artists in Canada, visit <https://hillstrategies.com/resource/statistical-profile-of-artists-in-canada-in-2016/>



INSTITUTIONAL ARTIST SUPPORT PRACTICES

There are practices in Canada at various levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal) that support Deaf and disability artists and cultural accessibility through equity policies and measures, as well as funding programs.

In recent years, cultural institutions have developed equity policies, some of which target people who are Deaf or disabled as priority minority groups to be supported. However, not all institutions have such policies, and since the strategic priorities are recent, their performance cannot yet be measured accurately. A few arts councils include a voluntary self-identification form as part of their grant programs to better target and document their equity support. Still, some of the organizations contacted did not have a self-identification form for artists who are Deaf or disabled, so no specific data is available.

The following is an overview of the main programs, policies and measures implemented by the organizations consulted, sorted by field of action.

4.1 Federal organizations

Canada Council for the Arts

For several decades now, the Canada Council for the Arts has been involved with artists from minority and emerging communities. Support for the practices of artists who are Deaf or disabled has evolved over time, starting in the 1970s, with the Explorations program. In the years that followed, some projects by artists with disabilities were funded through various discipline-based programs. In the 1990s, the Council undertook to recognize certain marginalized groups. Following a national consultation, the Equity Office¹⁸ and the Aboriginal Arts Office were established in 1991 and 1993, respectively. These offices provided greater support to minority artists, particularly in the areas of organizational capability building, sector development and networking.

In its strategic plan, *Moving Forward 2008–2011*, the Council officially recognized the arts and disability sector as a new field of exploration. In light of this, the Council created the position of Program Officer – Arts and Disability within the Equity Office, with a mandate to lead the development and implementation of *Expanding the Arts: Deaf and Disability Arts, Access and Equality Strategy* (Canada Council for the Arts 2012). The strategy, adopted in 2012, allowed for an understanding of the sector and distinguished between the practices of artists who are Deaf or hard of hearing and those with disabilities. Key achievements include the development of policies to improve the accessibility of programs (e.g., documents available in LSQ and ASL, audio and captions), the publication of a guide on accommodation protocols, and the implementation of access and priority funding mechanisms in all programs. Lastly, there has been increased engagement from artists and arts professionals who identify as Deaf, disabled or living with mental illness as peer assessors. By the same token, the Equity Office consulted with artists who are Deaf or disabled to identify areas where the Council could act strategically—through policies, grant programs, mechanisms or partnerships—to support equity practices. In addition, the Council's Equity Office has expanded its Capacity Building Program to enable organizations working with people who are Deaf or disabled to build their administrative, artistic and organizational capacity. For example, multi-year funding was provided to *Corpuscule Danse*, *Stage Left Productions* and *Tangled Arts + Disability*, thereby contributing to the sustainability and stability of their respective operations.

The Council's *Cultivate* initiative (2014–2017) has addressed the artistic and professional development needs of the Deaf and disability arts sector. It followed an extensive review and redesign of the Equity Office funding program. Its main goal was to reduce the gap in access to the Council's various programs for marginalized artists, e.g., those related to dissemination, research/creation and networking. The success of the program and the quantity and quality of applications submitted led to the Council recognizing the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled as distinct fields of practice in its new funding model (2016). As part of the new model, the Council is committed to integrating designated groups into regular programs and to increasing funding and dissemination opportunities for Deaf and disability artists through significant investments (including core grants) in organizations dedicated to them.

18 For more information about equity at the Council, visit <https://canadacouncil.ca/commitments/equity>

These advances are primarily the result of an analysis of the way available funding is distributed. The 2012–2013 Annual Report presented the following data:

- Deaf and disability artists: 15.1% of artists, 0.7% of artist funding
- Culturally diverse¹⁹ artists: 10.6% of artists, 6.5% of funding
- Indigenous artists: 2.4% of artists, 4.2% of funding
- Francophone minority artists: 1.3% (mother tongue) and 2.6% (chosen language) of artists, 2.3% of funding
- Anglophone minority artists: 4% (mother tongue) and 4.7% (chosen language) of artists, 4.2% of funding.

The Council found that for the Deaf and disability arts sector, “[p]eer assessors and grant share fall well below the benchmark” (Canada Council for the Arts 2013: 17). Between 2011–2012 and 2016–2017, Council funding to support organizations or artists who are Deaf or disabled more than doubled (143%), increasing from \$1.1 million to \$2.8 million. In 2017–2018, \$4.7 million was invested.²⁰

Following the first policy, *Expanding the Arts: Deaf and Disability Arts, Access and Equality Strategy* (2012–2016), the Council launched the *Expanding the Arts II: Deaf and Disability Expression and Engagement Strategy*²¹ policy as part of its 2016–2021 Strategic Plan. The second policy focusses mainly on two areas: supporting the expression of artists who are Deaf or have disabilities (e.g., through funding, accessible infrastructure and promoting best practices) and increasing the engagement of people who are Deaf or have a disability (e.g., through engagement strategies in the broader arts community and support for accessible arts content practices). This strategy is in line with the Council’s efforts to recognize and support minority artists: “Deaf and disabled artists are creating countercultural narratives that advance the principles of artistic autonomy and cultural authority. Much of this work frames Deafness and disability as a sociopolitical identity that brings valuable artistic and cultural insight” (Canada Council for the Arts 2019).

Today, in addition to recognizing the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled as a distinct field of practice, the Council provides application support²² and funding for accessibility-related expenses (e.g., LSQ and ASL interpretation, services for people with disabilities, etc.) for “individual applicants who are Deaf or disabled (including those living with mental illness), as well as groups focussed on the practice of artists who are Deaf or disabled.”²³

19 The Canada Council for the Arts uses “culturally diverse” to respectfully identify racialized groups that correspond to “visible minorities” under the Employment Equity Act. These are Canadians of African, Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern and mixed racial heritages (mixed racial heritage includes one of the above groups), who have been historically disadvantaged as a group and may experience discrimination based on colour, culture and race. Source: <https://canadacouncil.ca/glossary/culturally-diverse>.

20 Information on support measures (<https://canadacouncil.ca/commitments/equity/access>) and data on funding distribution (<https://canadacouncil.ca/research/data-tables>) are available online.

21 Canada Council for the Arts. “Expanding the Arts II: Deaf and Disability Expression and Engagement Strategy.” <https://canadacouncil.ca/commitments/equity>.

22 Canada Council for the Arts. “Application Assistance.” <https://canadacouncil.ca/commitments/equity/application-assistance>.

23 Canada Council for the Arts. “Accessibility – Access Support.” <https://canadacouncil.ca/commitments/equity/access>.

National Film Board

Since 1989, the National Film Board (NFB) has been committed to systematically subtitled all the films it distributes. Despite this commitment, a cursory search has revealed that many films are not subtitled, both on DVD and online. In partnership with channels such as AMI-tv, however, the NFB has made more than 300 films available in described video over the past three years and hopes to do more in the near future. The federal cultural institution has committed to developing a strategic plan in the near future in which inclusion and diversity will play a substantial role, but for the time being, only its 2013–2018 strategic plan is available and it does not contain any measures for Deaf or disabled people.

Canadian Heritage

The construction or renovation of venues must meet accessibility standards to receive Canadian Heritage funding. In addition, a consultation with 11 arts organizations with disabilities identified access barriers to the Canada Arts Presentation Fund (CAPF) program and strategic priorities to update it and make it more inclusive (Green 2017).

Téléfilm Canada

In its 2018–2020 strategic plan and its 2020–2022 three-year plan, Telefilm Canada speaks to notions of equity, diversity and inclusion, without identifying measures for people who are Deaf or disabled. At its 2019 Annual Public Meeting, Telefilm struck a working group on diversity and inclusion to gather comments and suggestions and finalize an action plan. Unions, guilds and associations from both language markets will be involved. The working group will also include representatives from Talent to Watch partners who work with underrepresented groups, representatives of people with disabilities and experts in the field of diversity and inclusion.

4.2 Provincial, territory and municipal organizations²⁴

BRITISH COLUMBIA

BC Arts Council

In its 2018–2022 strategic plan, the BC Arts Council identified strategic directions in its service offering, including equity, diversity and accessibility. Deaf and disability artists are not specifically mentioned, but “underserved communities”²⁵ are generally identified.

ALBERTA

Alberta Foundation for the Arts

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts has an expert committee on which artists who are Deaf or disabled are invited to sit to ensure greater accessibility and improved representation. From 2007 to 2019, the organization provided an annual amount ranging from \$106,325 to \$244,139 to nine organizations supporting collectives or artists who are Deaf or disabled.

²⁴ The Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council, the Yukon Arts Advisory Council, NWT Arts Council and the Nunavut Arts and Crafts Association either do not have a self-identification form for funding recipients to identify Deaf and disability artists or were unable to provide specific or recent data on the practices of Deaf and disability artists. For an overview of the funding allocated by the Canada Council for the Arts to each province and territory for the practice of Deaf and disability arts, see <https://canadacouncil.ca/research/stats-and-stories>.

²⁵ BC Arts Council. “Priorities.” <https://www.bcartscouncil.ca/bcartscouncil/priorities/>

Edmonton Arts Council

The Edmonton Arts Council (EAC) has created an Equity Committee for marginalized people who “represent various genders, age groups, cultural diversity, abilities and artistic disciplines” (Edmonton Arts Council n.d.). Under the Arts Project Grant program, the Cultural Diversity component enables culturally diverse artists and organizations to apply for an additional amount of up to \$15,000 per project. This amount is intended to offset barriers related to language, disability, and ethno-cultural and socio-economic factors. The EAC has identified proposals submitted to its community arts program by organizations or artists who are Deaf or have a disability. Between 2012 and 2017, 20% to 57.9% of grant applications were submitted by organizations and artists who are Deaf or disabled.²⁶ In 2016 and 2017, these organizations and artists accounted for respectively 8.3% and 10% of the overall applications submitted under the cultural diversity component. Under the other programs, they represent a maximum of 5% of recipients. The EAC notes that the proportion of organizations and artists who are Deaf or disabled applying or being funded has tripled since 2008. Furthermore, between 2013 and 2017, 1.4% of juries were composed of people who are Deaf or disabled. However, the EAC does not have a funding policy or program specifically for artists who are Deaf or disabled.

Calgary Arts Development

Calgary Arts Development has awarded approximately \$31,000 annually to initiatives or projects related to the practices of artists who are Deaf or disabled since 2016. In 2019, in addition to this annual funding, Calgary Arts Development awarded an additional \$33,000 to artists who are Deaf or disabled. Their latest census of funded artists and arts organization employees shows that of the 3,000 respondents, including volunteers, 2% voluntarily identified as disabled, 2% as being Deaf or hard of hearing, 11% as having a mental illness and 4% as having another disability.

The organization supports artists who are Deaf or disabled through its ArtShare grant program. ArtShare aims to provide equal access for individuals and groups who identify as part of diverse communities and who often face barriers to arts practice. ArtShare is dedicated to artists, arts organizations and initiatives that aim to contribute to a diverse and inclusive arts community for all of Calgary’s citizens. It is regularly used to support artists who are Deaf or disabled and who have encountered barriers in traditional funding programs.

MANITOBA

Manitoba Arts Council

The Manitoba Arts Council received 266 applications for funding between 2010 and 2018 from 92 artists who are Deaf or disabled. In 2017, the Manitoba Arts Council implemented an accessibility plan that included equity measures such as financial assistance for the grant application process.²⁷

Winnipeg Arts Council

Since 2018, the Winnipeg Arts Council has implemented funding to cover accessibility-related expenses for professional artists who are Deaf, disabled or living with a mental illness.

²⁶ The demographic data collected by the Edmonton Arts Council is based on a mix of common and existing knowledge and artists’ and organizations’ self-identification. This means that certain Deaf and disability artists and organizations may not have been counted.

²⁷ Manitoba Arts Council. “Accessibility – Financial Assistance for Grant Process.” <https://artscouncil.mb.ca/grants/accessibility/accessibility-financial-assistance-for-grant-process/>.

Ontario Arts Council

The Ontario Arts Council (OAC) has made significant strides in terms of financial support for Deaf and disability arts in recent years. In 2014, it launched its strategic plan, *Vital Arts and Public Value: A Blueprint for 2014-2020*, which identified artists who are Deaf or disabled as a new equity priority group. The OAC has three grant programs: the Deaf and Disability Arts Projects program supports creation, production or professional development up to \$10,000 per project; the Deaf and Disability Arts: Materials for Visual Artists program provides up to \$500 for the purchase of materials and supplies to produce works; and the Dance Training Projects: Equity and Access program supports the dance practices of people who are Deaf or disabled up to a maximum of \$1,500 for artists and \$7,000 for companies for dance training. In addition, the OAC calls on Deaf and disability arts organizations for external consultation through the Exhibition Assistance and Theatre Creators grant programs. The OAC recognizes that these organizations have the knowledge and expertise to adequately review applications from Deaf and disability artists.

In addition, the OAC has two accessibility funds: ²⁸ the Accessibility Fund: Application Support provides up to \$500 per year per artist; and the Accessibility Fund: Project Support provides up to \$5,000 for accessibility expenses related to an accepted project application. The OAC also provides alternative services and processes for artists who are Deaf or disabled, including alternative ways to participate in events and meetings or to receive services from the OAC; alternative means or formats for communicating with OAC staff; alternative formats and timeframes for submitting applications, final reports, or other required documents; and alternative means or types of support for individuals to sit on OAC panels as assessors.

In 2015–2016, the OAC received 225 grant applications from artists who are Deaf or disabled and organizations dedicated to Deaf and disability arts. In all, 85 grants were awarded for a total of \$590,913. In 2016–2017, 277 grant applications were received, and 132 grants were awarded for a total of \$1,067,230. This is an increase of almost 50% in a single year.

In 2018, the OAC tabled its Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for 2018–2021, which prioritized cultural and artistic accessibility to improve access to its programs, services and policies. Lastly, the OAC has an external advisory committee made up of people who are Deaf and disabled. Grant programs designated by the OAC for artists who are Deaf or disabled are assessed by a committee that ensures fair representation. The OAC also provides for a separate assessment committee for the Deaf arts, where the number of applications warrants it.

²⁸ Ontario Arts Council. "Alternative Services and Application Processes." 2016–2020. <https://www.arts.on.ca/access-equity/alternative-services-and-application-processes?lang=en-ca>.



Toronto Arts Council

The Toronto Arts Council (TAC) currently has four equity priority groups, including “individuals who are culturally-Deaf, deaf, or have hearing loss, as well as those who identify as hard-of-hearing, oral deaf, deaf-blind or late-deafened. Persons with disabilities and persons living with mental illness include individuals with physical, psychosocial or learning disabilities that may be long-term, temporary or fluctuating and may or may not be apparent” (Toronto Arts Council n.d.). Drawing on the Public Service Alliance of Canada’s definitions of disability models, the TAC’s approach is grounded in the social model of disability, which views disability as a consequence of environmental, social and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in society, as opposed to the medical model of disability, which focuses on a person’s so-called physical or mental limitations.

The TAC has an equity policy, an application support program and a TAC Accessibility grant program. The Application Accessibility Support program provides a maximum of \$500 per eligible applicant in each calendar year to cover the cost of accessibility measures related to applying for a grant as an artist who is Deaf or disabled.²⁹ In addition, the Web page explaining this measure is available in ASL. In addition, through its Accessibility grant program, the TAC provides up to \$5,000 for accessibility expenses incurred in the course of a project. Costs include but are not limited to interpretation (ASL and LSQ), audio description, captioning, communication assistants and attendant care. From 2016 to 2019, 80 accessibility grants were awarded, for a total of \$218,689.

²⁹ Toronto Arts Council. “Application Accessibility Support.” <https://torontoartscouncil.org/grant-programs/application-accessibility-support>

QUEBEC

Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec

In 2017, in its Plan d'action à l'égard des personnes handicapées (2017–2018), the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ) indicated that it must adopt measures to reduce the barriers faced by artists with disabilities. The measures relate to financial support for artists, accessibility to venues, online materials and services. In March 2018, an initial financial assistance measure was implemented “to cover a portion of project expenses stemming from additional needs specifically related to the disabilities of grant recipients or any of their collaborators” (Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec 2018). However, the CALQ does not have any relevant data at this time.

Conseil des arts de Montréal

In its 2018–2020 strategic plan, the Conseil des arts de Montréal (CAM) is focussed on equity and representation. In 2019, the CAM adopted an equity and inclusion policy identifying various priority groups, including Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit artists; artists from racialized/visible minorities; artists from ethnocultural minorities; artists who cannot take advantage of the Council's services (first-time applicants); artists with disabilities (artists who are Deaf, disabled, living with mental illness, etc.); artists from the LGBTQ2+ community; artists from disadvantaged, unstable or marginalized areas; and Anglophone artists in minority situations and allophone artists. In the same vein, individual self-identification and organization self-assessment forms were introduced in 2019. In 2020, the CAM began work on developing an action plan in connection with the adoption of its equity and inclusion policy. At the same time, a consultation project with key players for the implementation of inclusive practices in order to pursue these initiatives and to reflect on the development of a resource centre was launched.

In 2018, a three-day training session on how to organize relaxed performances was offered to Montréal organizations in collaboration with the British Council. That same year, seven professional arts organizations received financial support to organize relaxed performances. In addition, three arts organizations received financial support to participate in a training conference with the Access Activator network in Ottawa, in partnership with the British Council, on the theme of relaxed performances. In 2019, five organizations received \$2,500 in funding to organize or develop relaxed theatre performances and one organization received \$4,000 in funding to organize a performance in a sign language.

From 2014 to 2018, the CAM granted between \$41,882 and \$85,440 annually to organizations or artists implementing inclusive practices. The grants were awarded for projects, residencies, touring, but also for organizations' operational expenses. In 2019, the first call for the Programme de soutien aux pratiques inclusives was issued and 16 organizations were supported for a total of \$99,000.

NOVA SCOTIA

Arts Nova Scotia

Through a partnership with the Canada Council for the Arts' Equity Office, Arts Nova Scotia (ANS) piloted an equity funding in the arts initiative from 2013 to 2017 and then developed its Arts Equity Program. The initiative offers grants for creation, production/presentation, professional development and special travel. Designated communities of artists include Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit artists, culturally diverse and visible minority artists, and artists who are Deaf, disabled or living with mental illness. As part of the pilot project, the Canada Council for the Arts funded a total of \$450,000 in grants from 2014 to 2017. In 2018, at the end of the pilot project, ANS committed to continue the funding program on its own. The funds allocated remain the same as before at \$150,000 annually.

SUMMARY

4.3 Section summary

Government institutions are a cornerstone of support for artists. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 on funding practices demonstrate some progress in this area but nevertheless point to efforts that need to be made to foster the recognition and outreach of Deaf and disability arts practices. In addition, data tracking is not systematic in most of the institutions interviewed, and self-identification forms, where they exist, are completed on a voluntary basis, making it impossible to identify all artists.

Arts funders with programs that provide support for people who are Deaf or disabled include the Canada Council for the Arts, the Winnipeg Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council,³⁰ the Conseil des arts et lettres du Québec, the Conseil des arts de Montréal and Arts Nova Scotia.

In addition to equity measures and funding from public sector cultural institutions, there are a number of practices that promote the development and outreach of Deaf and disability arts practices. Appendix 2 provides a list of 55 cultural organizations, foundations, or private or community initiatives that support Deaf and disability artists in Canada.

³⁰ The federal, Ontario and Toronto arts councils all have programs that offer support for accessing services and application writing assistance, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec has an additional assistance program for accessing services, and Arts Nova Scotia has a specific program, the Equity Funding Initiative.



LITERATURE REVIEW

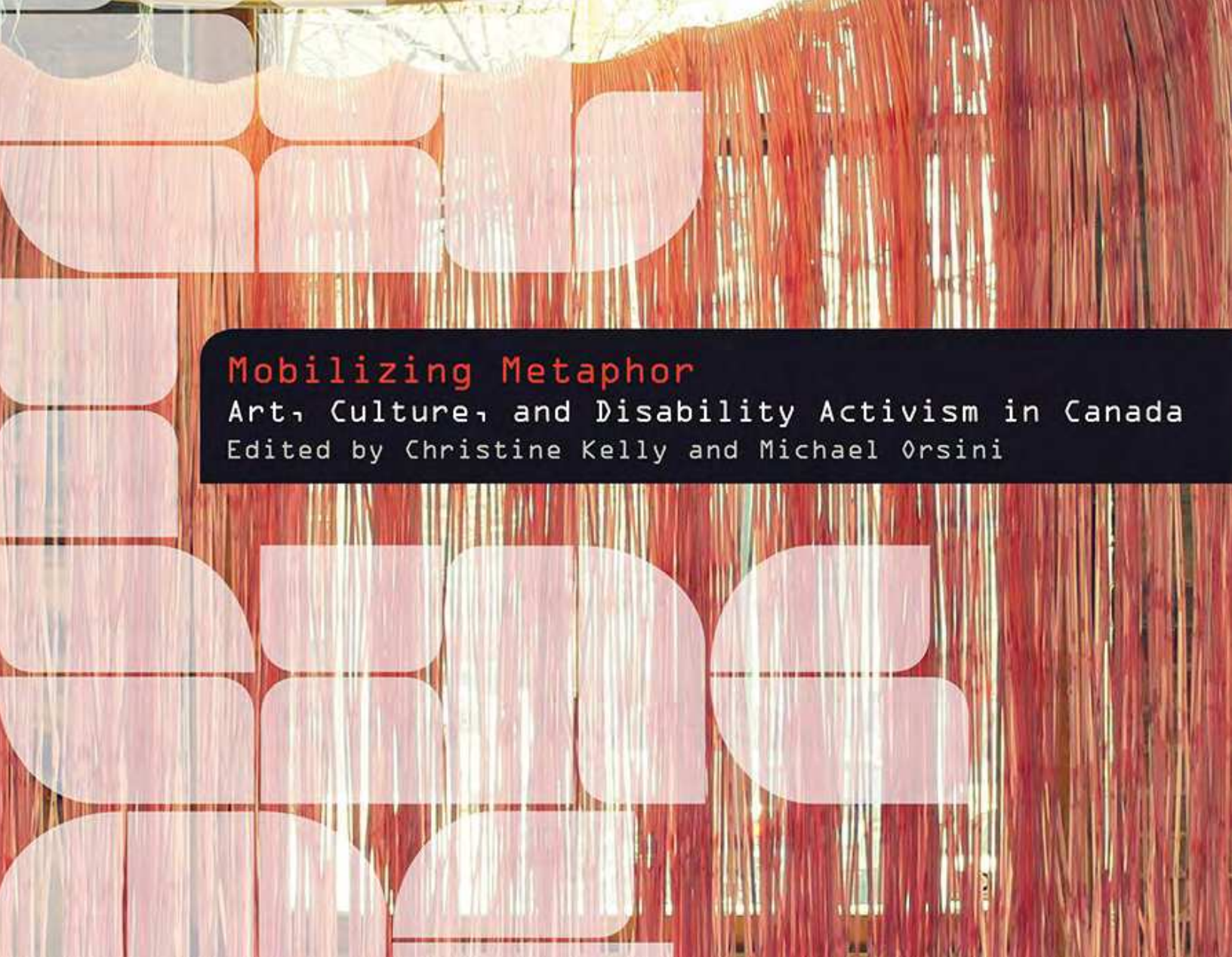
The purpose of this component of the study was to identify sources in scientific literature, public policy, grey literature (reports, press and documentation produced by the cultural and artistic communities) and video-recorded literature in various sign languages.

The literature review highlights the importance of the Deaf and disability arts as a subject of study and discourse in recent years in Canada. This is evidenced by the increase in institutional support practices outlined in the previous section.

Although a large number of references are published primarily in English, this does not mean that the Deaf and disability arts are less significant in Francophone environments or within the LSQ and ASL communities. Francophone, ASL and LSQ literature appears to have been included to a lesser degree in critical disability studies and Deaf studies to date, compared to English literature. Notably, this has resulted in translation issues and the lack of specific terminology in French (Parent 2017).

The results are presented in four components:

- 1) the current literature and research identified;*
- 2) the similarities and distinctions between the Deaf and disability arts communities;*
- 3) self-determination within the Deaf and disability arts, which addresses the importance of self-directed practices and self-determined spaces for dialogue and decision-making; and*
- 4) social media and digital platforms.*



Mobilizing Metaphor

Art, Culture, and Disability Activism in Canada

Edited by Christine Kelly and Michael Orsini

5.1 Current literature and research

The practices of Deaf and disability artists have been the subject of publications and research in recent years in Canada and have become an increasingly common subject of study and analysis in the academic community. For example, the book *Mobilizing Metaphor: Art, Culture, and Disability Activism in Canada* (Orsini and Kelly 2017) paints a picture of the diverse Deaf and disability arts and their transformative political potential in exploring disability rights activism. In addition, the *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* recently devoted an issue to “Crippling the Arts in Canada” (Chandler 2019).

Among the players contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field are research teams such as Wingspan Dis/Ability Arts and Culture & Public Pedagogy, curricula such as “Making Media Accessible: Accessible Design in Digital Media” at the Humber College Institute for Technology and Advanced Learning, in Toronto, study groups such as the Critical Disability Studies Working Group at Concordia University, in Montréal, and academics who identify as Deaf or disabled, and allies.

Elsewhere in the world, literature documents the Deaf and disability arts and representation of disability. These include the books *Studying Disability Arts and Culture* (Kuppers 2014) and *Disability Aesthetics* (Siebers 2010), published in the United States, and a set of scientific articles included in the bibliography.

5.2 Similarities and distinctions between the Deaf and disability arts communities

A characteristic Deaf and disabled people have historically had in common is the fact that they have been considered by the biomedical model as individuals who are lacking in relation to a standard according to which Deafness or disability is considered a condition. They also have in common social mobilizations that have led to the rejection of the biomedical approach and their political, social and cultural affirmation. Moreover, some Deaf people do not consider themselves people with disabilities, but as a cultural and linguistic minority distinct from hearing people (Dupuis-Déri 2005; Leduc 2015; Gaucher 2009; Poirier 2005).

Within the Deaf arts, language is a fundamental issue that is not present in the disabled or mad arts. While some Deaf artists create in English or French, others create in LSQ or ASL. These creations raise new political and aesthetic issues in terms of both the way they are received and translated (Chateauvert 2016; Leduc 2015), in a predominantly hearing society that did not officially recognize Quebec, American, and Indigenous sign languages as the first languages of Deaf people in Canada until 2019³¹ (i.e., after the interviews and focus groups for this survey had been conducted).

Deaf cultures are recognized, and sign languages are an integral part of them. In this sense, some authors have questioned the existence of disability cultures. **Although some reject the term, particularly in the absence of a shared language and a common history, there nevertheless seems to be a multifaceted and plural disability culture:**

Disability culture is not a monolithic term, which essentializes one world view or experience of disability, but a term which both presumes a sense of shared and open-ended identity rooted in disability experience and which “rejects the notion of impairment difference as a symbol of shame, and stresses instead solidarity and a positive identification” (Barnes and Mercer 102) (Johnston 2009b: 155).

A commonality shared by the Deaf and disabled communities is that they are populated by communities based on the positive affirmation of a belonging to minority group in the context of audist and ableist societies. Moreover, the diversity present within the communities makes it possible to consider them from an intercultural perspective (Johnston 2009).

5.3 Self-determination within the Deaf and disabled communities

In the literature review, few documents present the perspectives of Deaf and disability artists. Articles dealing with the performing arts generally present the perspectives of people who are hearing or able-bodied. It is therefore through their eyes that the work of Deaf and disability artists is studied. However, there are also contributions by artists who identify as Deaf or disabled. These are particularly useful for studying self-determination discourses and practices (Kuppers 2014), which are essential to the full cultural citizenship of Deaf and disabled people.

³¹ Bill C-81, the Accessible Canada Act, was passed on June 21, 2019.

5.3.1 On their behalf

When cultural players and artists from the Deaf and disability arts communities speak about their practices, they discuss advances, but also the issues and challenges they face. In a context where hearing and able-bodied people often speak on their behalf,³² the self-determination of Deaf or disabled people within any arts practice concerning them is currently a major issue that raises ethical and epistemological questions (Campbell 2009).

In his article “Le handicap, nouveau territoire d'étrangeté spectaculaire?” [Disability—a new territory for spectacular oddity], Pascale Caemerbeke establishes a link between the phenomenon of the exhibition of bodies considered abnormal, which lasted from the 19th century to the middle of the 20th century, and contemporary theatrical productions that feature actors who are designated in relation to their disabilities or atypical bodies, which she describes as a construct of difference and otherness (Caemerbeke 2014). While Johnston (2016b) acknowledges the prominent place of theatre in the Deaf and disability arts as a place of innovation and reflection by and for Deaf and disability artists, Caemerbeke notes a historical continuity in the otherness of disabled people. These two perceptions of theatre present opposite points of view: one makes artists agents with the power to transform the way Deaf and disabled people are represented, while the other considers that they only serve to the “other-ize” Deaf and disabled people.

For some, the self-determination of Deaf and disability artists cannot be achieved without the recognition of cultural diversity within these communities. **Artist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha thus underlines the many issues of belonging and self-definition with respect to the Deaf and disability arts:**

I write for all the people who are my many communities—the mixed brown kids, Lankans of all kinds, diasporic desis [people, cultures and products of the Indian subcontinent or South Asia], queer and trans black and brown and indigenous folks, sick and disabled folks, queer femmes and the broke-ass. (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha in Balakrishnan 2013: 46).

These identity-related issues directly pertain to the question of intersectionality, as artist Syrus Marcus Ware points out:

We need a disability discourse that talks about gender, that talks about the ways that we experience racialization, that talks about sexuality. We need this because this intersectional approach will make for stronger analysis, stronger research, stronger frameworks for understanding marginality. (Marcus Ware in Site-Specific 2014).

Belonging and identity are interrelated, meeting at the intersection of otherness; they are lived, represented, performed and created circumstantially, at socio-historically specific points of intersection. The lack of intersectional analysis within the discourses on Deafness and disability makes it difficult to understand the realities of people who identify with multiple communities or identity markers.

³² Case in point, a documentary, re[présent]ations (Rouleau 2016), which was made in response to the discussion around the lack of diversity in Quebec culture, looks at the film Take Me (Barbeau-Lavalette and Turpin 2014), which was made by two able-bodied people.



5.3.2 Self-determined spaces for dialogue and decision-making

Deaf and disability artists' networks favour self-determination practices through the active participation of Deaf and disability artists in spaces for dialogue and decision-making that concern them.

In her article, "Whose Disability Culture? Why We Need an Artist-Led Critical Disability Arts Network" (2011), Rachel Gorman discusses the 2006 creation of the National Disability Arts and Culture Network by Alberta-based activist, producer and playwright Michelle Decottignies. The network was made up of six dissemination organizations, four of which were led by disability activists and artists. It was mandated to discuss how to improve support for the disability arts sector. From the first two gatherings (in 2006 and 2007), differences of opinion emerged within the network. As a result of the discussions, **Gorman emphasized the importance of the sector being led more by artists who are Deaf or disabled in order to meet their needs :**

We need, in fact, to create an artist-led network in order to put our lobbying, networking and presenting skills to collective use [...]. We need our allies, especially the ones with privilege and connections to funder and donors, to lobby for the inclusion of critical disability perspectives in mainstream arts programmings and festivals, rather than trying to direct the movement [of Deaf and Disability arts] (Gorman 2011: 51).

The National Disability Arts and Culture Network no longer exists. In 2012, a group of artists and activists working in the field of Deaf and disability arts founded the Deaf, Disability & Mad Arts Alliance of Canada (DDMAAC). As Co-Chair, Michelle Decottignies conducted a survey of the disability arts sector in Canada. The most significant finding of this survey (2016) was that there is a large variety of artistic and equity practices in disability artistic productions. While the survey found that Deaf and disabled people are increasingly included in the practices and initiatives of the broader arts sector, it also highlighted the importance of supporting Deaf and disability artists in becoming empowered and self-determining.

For DDMAAC, this means educating people about the difference between inclusive disability art and disability art. According to Decottignies, inclusive art is a practice in which Deaf and disability artists are placed in a situation where they are depending on people who have access to the arts, while disability art promotes self-determination (Decottignies 2016). Additionally, it requires the promotion of disability artists and disability arts practices as a means of "addressing the systemic issues that have negatively influenced disability equity in the disability arts domain" (Decottignies 2016: 46-47).

Networking is important in the development of self-determination discourse within the Deaf and disability arts. In this regard, in 2014 SPILL.PROOpagation organized a forum gathering 12 Deaf artists in order to :

*reflect on phonocentrism and deconstructing Deaf arts practices. It was facilitated in International Sign by Jolanta Lapiak, a world-renowned Deaf performance artist. It was a mix of Derridean philosophy workshops and the dissemination of a manifesto on deconstructing phonocentrism*³³ (SPiLL.PROOpagation 2014). (Leduc 2016a: 100–101)

In 2015–2016, several major events dedicated to exploring issues concerning the arts practices of people with disabilities in Canadian theatres took place. Kirsty Johnston's article, "From republicans to hacktivists: recent inclusion initiatives in Canadian theatre" (2017), draws on five of these events to address possible advances in inclusion. According to the author, The Republic of Inclusion (February 2015), ACK Lab (December 2015), The Summit (April 2016), King Arthur's Night (2015–2016), and the Crippling the Arts symposium (April 2016) provided opportunities for dialogue that highlighted the challenges faced by artists who are Deaf or disabled. **Referring to the lack of institutional support for artists, the author notes that:**

All of the 2015–2016 events noted above included dialogues about ways in which these kinds of support have been largely inaccessible to disabled artists. At the 'Republic of Inclusion' event, well over a hundred disabled artists, activists, scholars and others travelled far and in extremely cold winter weather to be part of the dialogue and argue for specific supports that are as yet elusive or unreliable. (Johnston 2017: 357).

In addition, the 2016–2017 Cycle: Artists who are Deaf, Disabled or Living with Mental Illness and Inclusion, held in Ontario, provided an opportunity "to consider how we design our participatory spaces to include people with differing physical and communication priorities" (Bulmer 2016: 258). Recent events that have brought together artists who are Deaf or disabled include the two editions of the Crippling the Arts symposium in Toronto in 2016 and 2019 (British Council et al. 2019) and the Vibes: Confronting Capability and Audism through the Arts symposium in Montréal, in 2018 (Critical Disability Studies Working Group 2018). The interest and participation in these events attest to the growing need to create spaces for discussion by and for these artists.

5.4 Social media and digital platforms

Social media and digital platforms are important devices for increasing the visibility of Deaf and disability arts and for networking among artists and cultural workers. For example, hashtags such as #disabledartist, #disabledart, #disabilityarts refer to numerous posts.

Social media makes a vast network of organizations, artists and collectives visible and promotes the creation of intersectoral and intersectional links. For example, Tangled Art + Disability's Facebook page is a great way to discover Accessible Media Inc. (a dissemination organization that aims to make information accessible to all), the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts (a collective of professional artists with developmental disabilities) and Girl Crush (an evening of intersectional feminist lectures).

These examples highlight the role of social networks in the visibility and promotion of artists and organizations, as well as the way the Deaf and disability arts are related to race and gender issues. People can align with multiple identities on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, by juxtaposing hashtags (#POCArtistsUnite and #DisabilityArtistry, for example). They also allow for positive self-definition by politicizing artistic identities and practices (#mymadnessispolitical and #myartispolitical, for example) or to promote practices specific to certain groups, such as those of Deaf people as a cultural and linguistic minority (#deafartist, #deafart, #deafartists, #deafartcommunity and #deafart).

Canadian digital platforms such as Creative Users Projects and Canadian Art also enable artists to network (Sandals 2016).

³³ This manifesto both echoes and departs from the DeVIA – Deaf Visual and Image Art manifesto created at Deaf Way, an international conference on Deaf culture documented in Erting et al. (1994). It echoes DeVIA in the sense that it is about Deaf arts but departs from it where it distances itself from the Deaf experience that was at the heart of DeVIA by focussing more on signers and deconstructing phonocentrism.



SUMMARY

5.5 Section summary

The scientific and grey literature on the Deaf and disability arts addresses different arts practices and demonstrates that they have become an important subject of study and discourse in recent years in Canada. However, they are often not produced by the artists concerned and few exist in French, LSQ or ASL.

Deaf and disability artists expressing themselves in the literature focus on the problems they encounter in their journey towards greater autonomy and ways to better support their artistic environments and practices. The desire for self-determination is one of the main drivers of these practices in the face of hearing and able-bodied representation. The networks promote self-determination practices, including the active participation of Deaf or disability artists in the places where they are discussed and decided upon. In addition, social media and digital platforms support the visibility of Deaf and disability arts and the networking of artists and cultural workers.

PART 2: EXAMINING THE PRIMARY DATA

The data presented here is based on transcripts of individual interviews with Deaf and disability artists and focus groups with artists and cultural workers. The data provides an overview of the current state of practices, the changes underway and the main issues related to the recognition, support and promotion of the practices of Deaf and disability artists. The results are presented in four sections, representing the project themes:

- 1) *artists and their practices;*
- 2) *practice environments and collaborations;*
- 3) *relations with the arts community in general; and*
- 4) *funding.*

THE ARTISTS AND THEIR PRACTICES

The first part of the primary data analysis focuses on six aspects:

- 1) *background and professionalization;*
- 2) *arts practice;*
- 3) *aesthetics;*
- 4) *the cultural representation of Deaf and disabled people;*
- 5) *self-determination; and*
- 6) *experiences of support and recognition. As with each section in parts 1 and 2 of the report, a summary will highlight key points.*

6.1 BACKGROUND AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

The first section describes the journeys of the artists interviewed, starting with the experience of oppression that marks them in a global way. It then discusses the presence or absence of educational and training support. Artists' backgrounds and training opportunities partly influence the way they define artist or employment status, as will be discussed in the final section.

6.1.1 Systemic oppressions

Artists' artistic journeys are marked by obstacles resulting from systemic oppression, among which are, in a variety of ways, ableism and audism, but also other matrices of oppression such as sexism, racism, colonialism and classism.

I feel like there is a lot of oppression [...] People look down at us and say, "Oh, they're Deaf, they can't," and they kind of shove us aside. So, I suppose that would be oppression. ³⁴ OE2 – **Simone** ³⁵

I feel very clear that I get more support as a white artist than some of my disabled peers who are also people of colour. ME8

The experience of oppression results in feelings of injustice or resulting frustration. This is the case when barriers hinder artists in their journeys, particularly when the equity measures necessary for training, creation and dissemination are not available (e.g., an LSQ or ASL interpreter to facilitate dialogue between a Deaf person and hearing colleagues, extra time to paint canvases or rehearse a performance with actors with cognitive disabilities, a transcriber to write scripts, musical scores in Braille for a blind pianist, or simply access to materials. These essential resources meant to ensure equity and accessibility are not always available or funded, thereby hindering the professionalization of artists, their creative process and their experiences of support and recognition.

I think there's some systemic problems. Many of us are impoverished, so we don't have... we can't afford the materials we need, the space we need to create our art. Simply to make it, to get it out there. TE1 – **Rick Miller**

The various obstacles created by systemic oppression take various forms: stigmatization, lack of accessibility, marginalization in the arts community in general, difficulty in accessing funding, difficult relationships within communities and networking difficulties between artists are among the most common barriers mentioned.

6.1.2 Teaching and training

Educational and training institutions play a key role in the career path of Deaf and disability artists. Some participants discussed the positive learning and support experiences they had had in various institutions. **One artist spoke enthusiastically about a university-level introductory photography course for which she received ASL interpretation:**

They said that they provided interpreters and note takers, or closed captioning or whatever your accommodations were, said that they would accommodate as per the rules [...] I did not have to pay for it. That's the college's responsibility. They acknowledged that, and so they provided the interpreter. [...] I didn't feel like there were any barriers at all. OE2 – **Simone**

34 Quotes are rendered in the language of the report (English or French). LSQ and ASL interview excerpts have been translated into English.

35 Codes were assigned to participants in order to facilitate data analysis. To disseminate the results, we have kept the codes when quoting participants, as they help identify the city where the interview took place. The first letter of the code is the city (V=Vancouver, E=Edmonton, W=Winnipeg, T=Toronto, O=Ottawa, M=Montréal, Q=Québec City and H=Halifax). The other letters specify whether the quote is pulled from an interview (E) or a focus group (FG).



The fact that educational institutions are taking responsibility for providing equity measures and managing resources relieves some of the mental burden of accessibility for Deaf and disabled people. The support offered to Deaf and disabled people has enabled some of them to pursue higher education in the arts. This is the case of one artist who decided to pursue studies at Ryerson University, which is cited as an exemplary institution in terms of support for the educational experiences of Deaf, disabled and mad artists. However, employment opportunities were still scarce for him after his studies, and he lived in great poverty after graduation.

Other participants, however, had a positive experience with accessibility services only rarely. They described their experiences in the institutions as discriminatory and as being at odds with their accessibility needs. People's attitudes and ignorance are major barriers to accessing education. **Because of inaccessibility, one particular artist was not able to take courses related to the arts or to deepen her knowledge, but this changed as soon as linguistic and cultural access was made possible:**

There weren't any classes that were accessible to me, seeing as I didn't have access to an interpreter [...] After I got my university degree in 1998, I wanted to expand my arts knowledge, but nothing was accessible. [...] When the APVSL [Laval association for people living with Deafness] announced they were offering an oil paints free expression workshop facilitated by a woman who knew sign language basics, my interest was piqued immediately. OE3 – Pamela Witcher

The financial inaccessibility of certain courses is also a problem. For many of the participants, finding the money to pay for art classes or university tuition is a huge challenge. **Despite this, participants identified various organizations and associations from which training was available :**

I founded... I am the Director of Les Muses, centre des arts de la scène, which offers full-time dance, theatre and singing training to people with disabilities. The goal is to integrate people with disabilities in professional company productions. MFG4 – Cindy Schwartz

There's an association called SPiLL PROpagation, and they offer training, especially in the performing arts [...] As well, the Société culturelle Québécoise des Sourds is an organization for Deaf people who present performances by world-renowned Deaf people. MFG9 – Sylvain Gélinas

Yet, some training programs that are offered are perceived as less than: "You have training, we [at Entracte] believe it is very important to train our disabled artists, but the training is not the same as the one I received at the conservatoire," says QFG2 – Jean-François F. Lessard.

One artist shared his hopes of seeing Canadian school systems adopt arts curricula that are accessible to students with disabilities from an early age:

I would love to hear and see in our school systems, all across Canada, that students with disabilities have the opportunity [to access] the visual arts [and] drama. If young people have that opportunity earlier in life, maybe after high school, they could have something to go after. TFG2 – Ken Mackenzie

In summary, study participants expressed a desire for greater access to recognized education and professional training opportunities that are accessible to them.

6.1.3 Employment/artist status

Ways of identifying as an artist (independent, community or emerging) vary and may overlap over time. Some are reluctant to define themselves as professional and/or independent artists. This is illustrated by ME6 – Maxime D. Pomerleau, who describes her current career as independent, while working in the media as well as in larger theatre productions. Thus, she does not identify as a professional artist—at most, she identifies an artist who is both independent and professional, since she does not work full time for any specific company and also carries out a lot of contracts as an independent artist.

In addition, some of the artists and cultural workers interviewed hold positions in the areas of production and dissemination (e.g., festival, dissemination centre, etc.).

6.1.3.1 Professional artists

Professional artists believe that the method of remuneration or the level of training distinguishes professional artists from amateur or emerging artists. Others, such as QE2 – Rolland St-Gelais, point out that the workload or the time devoted to arts practice plays a role in a person identifying as a (semi-)professional artist. The professionalization of Deaf and disability artists notably relies on training, networking, remuneration, public funding and dissemination opportunities that appear to be lacking. Consequently, a combination of circumstances and opportunities often prove to be a determining factor in professionalization. **For these reasons, arts and culture organizations that support the professionalization of artists play a crucial role:**

Legislation states that professional artists are remunerated, recognized and receive a salary or wage as a professional artist. But some have mentioned that they want to become professional artists [...] Further to that, we thought, 'OK, let's try to help out,' and what we want to do is to include them in the entire research process, give them a salary, the same as the professional dancers, so that they already have recognition as professional dancers. And now they're going to go out into the world on their own, whereas the last time we were the ones reaching into their world. QFG6 – Daniel Bélanger

Integrating a community of artists and then receiving funding from public organizations thus contributes to professionalization.

6.1.3.2 Self-employed and independent artists

A majority of participants identified as self-employed individuals or as independent artists. Some did so by choice, others by necessity, i.e. when they did not feel welcome in the spaces dedicated to their arts practice. Some participants have been affiliated or employed by organizations for a while and then become independent due to disillusionment, differences of opinion or changes in artistic direction. Others started as self-employed or became self-employed as a result of job losses and remained that way because it was the best fit for them.



Some independent or self-employed artists point out that their practice does not receive the financial support they had hoped for, as some have never received funding for their arts practice. Identifying as a Deaf person of colour, one artist pointed out that the lack of financial support particularly affects racialized independent artists :

This pointed to the issue of the overrepresentation of white Deaf artists in the Deaf and disability communities, and was an issue related to their self-identifying as independent artists because they have less access or space within formalized art spaces. TE3

While financial resources and formal artistic spaces may be lacking for self-employed and independent artists, the artists have relevant personal skills and resources. For example, several participants linked their independent status to a self-taught practice. Artist *QE3 – Roselyne Chevette* publishes her own works: *"I'm an independent poet. I publish them myself. An autodidact."* Others have acquired skills in other fields of work or in previous careers that are transferable to their work as an artist. For example, *QE1 – Jean-Audrey Chabot* says his human resources training has helped him a lot in his self-entrepreneurial activities.

In hopes of making a living, most independent artists join more groups and diversify their sources of income and the venues in which they exhibit or perform. They wear many hats in a highly competitive art market that faces many obstacles.

6.1.3.3 Community-based artists

Although few of the artists we met with identified as community-based artists, a sense of belonging and a connection to diverse communities are at the heart of the arts practices of many of them. *OE1 – Kim* creates primarily within a community centre; participating in an arts program has encouraged her to develop an arts practice. *"I think most of us just started when the facilitator began sessions at the community center,"* she said. In this way, community initiatives enable Deaf and disabled people to develop an arts practice, thus promoting the professionalization of some of them down the road.



6.2 Arts practices

6.2.1 Description of the arts practices

The Deaf and disability artists who participated in the study have various practices: painting, performance, music, poetry, etc. Four distinct but complementary aspects regarding the arts practices of Deaf and disability artists emerged.

The first aspect has to do with whether or not someone's identity as a Deaf or disability artist is publicly explicit. Sometimes nothing in the arts practice suggests that the artist may be Deaf or disabled—one cannot guess that such-and-such an artist is Deaf just by contemplating his painting, that such-and-such an artist is disabled just by listening to them play the piano, or that such-and-such an artist is neuroatypical just by looking at her photographs. On the contrary, other art forms highlight the fact that artists are Deaf or disabled by showing their atypical bodies or by using sign languages such as LSQ or ASL.

The second aspect relates to the themes addressed in arts practices. Some of them deal with key notions related to lived realities (e.g., audism, ableism, Deaf culture, etc.), explicitly or implicitly, as attested to by one artist: "My madness or my mental health difficulties are—again, just, they're kind of the impetus for doing some of what I do and the content of what I do, but also they are... they help me stay well because I think I'm proud of them," HE3. Some artists provide artistic reflection on audism, write poems on intellectual disability or paint disabled characters, while others do not mention any particular themes with respect to their singular realities in their artistic creations.

The third aspect has to do with actively integrating atypical bodies or sign languages as creative mediums. In this case, it is not so much a question of revealing a sense of belonging or addressing a theme related to that sense as it is of actively mobilizing it through an arts practice. Artists dance in wheelchairs; pose as nude models, revealing atypical bodies; or use sign languages creatively in their work.

The fourth aspect is that of deconstruction. Some artists champion the principles of artistic deconstruction from a disability point of view or through the deconstruction of phonocentrism.³⁶ The creation of signed music is an example cited by artist OE3 – *Pamela Witcher: challenging the assumption that music is an essentially sound-based art form by creating signed music renews practices from the point of view of Deaf and disabled people.*

³⁶ The deconstruction of phonocentrism consists in producing "works through practices that aim to question and redefine phonocentric constructs in order to create new iterations of knowledge and foster social transformation" (Lapiak et al. 2014).

6.2.2 The influence of identity and a sense of belonging on the creative process

Many artists are reflecting on links between identity, sense of belonging and arts practice: should they publicly identify as an artist, full stop, or as a Deaf and disability artist? For some of the artists we met with, this tension is particularly felt in the context of grant applications. Others deal with issues around belonging and self-identification based on context. **In all cases, the links are complex and ever-changing:**

There are going to be some times in an artistic career where that is not the focal point in their artistic career. So there's disability, there's artists with disabilities, and then there are disability artists. WFG2 – Gerry Atwell

We welcome all abilities, all genders, all cultures into our work. So it's not about a specific group, it's about how do you bring artists together to collaborate and create [...] we don't like to do that, put labels [...] this person has this or [that]. [...] We have a young man who's very talented, is autistic, but doesn't want to identify that way. But, as you say that for funding, if we listed everybody, we would get the money. VFG6 – Susanna Uchatius

Several participants insisted on the openness of the categories of identity and on taking into account the particularities of each one. For example, identifying as a mad artist is complex and polysemous, as are the terms “disability,” “Deaf” or “deafness.”

About the categories that need to be checked [...] sometimes, these categories don't fit. It's the same for Deaf people who have to check these boxes. There's only one “Deaf,” while there are actually several other categories such as hard of hearing, deafened, cochlear implant, hearing aids, and, they'd be able to determine which category fits their profile, one more than another, but with only box to check, it isn't happening. We need more categories, which would provide more options. WFG4 – Cheryle Broszeit

Belonging and identity sometimes inform the creative process. **They fuel one's power to act by enabling artistic expression in terms and in ways determined by the artists themselves :**

One thing I think is amazing about art is that it allows people to express themselves completely under their own terms. You basically get to develop your own language for communication. And so I think that's an extraordinarily powerful thing [...] particularly in disability where so much of it is asking the person to fit into a standard form of communication that isn't necessarily made for them, this is an incredible opportunity to see what happens when those kinds of constraints aren't placed on somebody. OFG5 – Rachel Gray

According to **TE1 – Rick Miller**, an artist who identifies as mad, his mental illness has made him a creative person. Sometimes, a sense of belonging translates to self-identification, which some people find necessary to develop their careers. **For many artists, disability and Deafness act as a vehicle for self-transformation and affirmation of an arts practice :**

I found painting again through my disability [...] Life forced me to stop... I used to walk and run, but I didn't know where I was going [laughs]. Nowadays, I've stopped running, but I know very well—my journey is very clear, now. So, disability has served me well. ME1

It's not just sign language. It's all these movements that boost our expression, our creativity. We tend to be more creative than hearing people. Hearing people struggle with body movements, how to move there and there. We have it! We just have it. TE2 – Catherine Mackinnon

Belonging to several groups and intersectionality also shape the practice of certain artists. Some of them mention that identifying as a Deaf or disabled person is not necessarily central to their creative process: *“I would be doing what I’m doing if I weren’t disabled. I might be doing it differently, but no matter.”* QE4 – **Laurence Brunelle Côté**. For others, intersectionality is central. WE2 – **Katarina Ziervogel** explained how her practice fits within her background as a Deaf and Aboriginal woman, hoping that her work could serve as a model for other Deaf and Aboriginal artists. Artists who identify as female, as queer or non-binary, or as racialized emphasize the influence of these identities on their work, just as some white people recognize the influence of their privileged situation on their creative process.

Some artists claim at least one identity or affiliation and others prefer to define themselves as artists first and foremost: the creative processes of people who are Deaf or disabled are effectively diverse.

6.3 Arts practice aesthetics

From the outset, the issue of aesthetics made it possible to question terms like “Deaf arts,” “disability arts” or “mad arts,” and the ways in which practices move away from them, approach them or attempt to revisit them. The following sections explore questions of identity and belonging from an aesthetic perspective, first separately based on groups, and then in terms of their similarities and distinctions. Arts practices considered to be new and the role played by self-determination will then be addressed.

6.3.1 Deaf artistic practice aesthetics

Artists describe the Deaf arts as a unique way of looking at the world and an opportunity to put forth the perspectives of Deaf people, allowing others to enjoy and learn about perspectives that may be different from their own. Some artists and cultural workers support the idea that the Deaf arts are primarily based on a visual approach, which is consistent with the experiences of most Deaf people, who say they take in the world through their eyes and not their ears. In this sense, WE1 – **Alice Crawford** sees her work as a representation of how she visually “hears” as a Deaf person. **De’VIA’s art, formalized by a 1989 manifesto (Miller et al. 1989), reflects this visual approach to the Deaf arts :**

De’VIA (Deaf View Image Art) explores Deaf experience on a personal, cultural, and physical level. It tends to use intense colours and contrasting textures, often with emphasis on facial features, eyes, and hands to reflect Deaf insights and values. Many Deaf artists work in the genre by instinct, but are not aware that their work is De’VIA. What makes De’VIA a unique genre is that it grows from within Deaf experience, the Deaf community and Deaf sensibilities. TFG3 – **Joanne Cripps**

For VE3 – **AJ. Brown**, the Deaf arts are forged through processes whereby Deaf artists can be influenced and inspired by other components (not only visual, but also spatial, kinesthetic, etc.) than those that usually inspire hearing people. For example, Deaf and hearing artists do not perceive music and sounds in the same way.

While many Deaf artists have been integrating sign languages into their creations for many years, contemporary artists are exploring new ways of creating. **This can be seen in poetry, for example, in terms of mixing mediums:**

I’m a literary media artist. I work with a variety of media, some video, various mediums (both digital and traditional) and text [...]. Because ASL did not have a written form back then, now I can blend the emerging ASL writing and art into a new domain of ASL arts and explore calligraphy and written ASL poetry, book arts, using textiles, papers and such. EFG2 – **Jolanta Lapiak**

In short, the aesthetics of the artistic practices of Deaf people often mobilize sign languages (among other things), emphasize other modes of expression than the aesthetics of hearing artists and can thus enable audiences to understand art and the world differently.



6.3.2 Disability arts practice aesthetics

Participants celebrate the diversity of aesthetics in the arts practices of people with disabilities :

It's cool that there's a variety. It just goes to prove we're just not a homogenous pass and we're not all the same. ME6 – Maxime D.-Pomerleau

Oh yeah, different styles for sure, everybody has their own. WE1 – Alice Crawford

One artist noted that the Deaf, Disability and Mad Arts Alliance of Canada provides a typology to reflect this diversity:

The Deaf Disability and Mad Arts Alliance of Canada identified three distinct practices of disability art: 1) art and disability, 2) disability inclusive art, and 3) disability identified art. 1) Art and Disability is traditional art forms practiced by artists with disabilities, end of story, but no regard for disability politics or cultural pride and those are the ones that are probably most likely to get mainstream attention. [...] 2) Disability inclusive art is when you say that people receive accommodations that allow non-traditional artists to adapt the traditional aesthetics. 3) And then there's disability-identified art, which is not simply created by disability artists, it embraces and promotes disability politics, culture, pride, prioritizing things like resistance and affirmation and vision. And that of course, [...] a lot of people would say, is the most important kind of art. It's also the one that's the least likely to get any mainstream media coverage. HFG4 – Alex Kronstein

Some initiatives confront this diversity, sometimes even laughing at the paradoxes and tensions that exist among people with disabilities, as they do in any minority community :

Comedy on Wheels [...]. It was a big show [...] there were a lot of very funny pieces. [...] There was a [...] duo, a musical piece, somebody who's blind and somebody who uses a powered chair, who's paralyzed from the neck down, [it] was a parody of "Anything you can do, I can do better"—it was "anything you can't do, I can't do better," it was about the hierarchy of disability. VFG4

However, the diversity of practices has certain limits, including the refusal to perpetuate stereotypes :

There are roles that don't interest me. If a role fuels a perception I've been trying to break down since my debut with Batwheel, if it's miserabilistic, or cliché, or not innovative, I will leave it for someone else. That's all. ME6 – Maxime D.-Pomerleau

In addition to choosing one's roles, the description of one's practices based on the usual aesthetics categories makes it possible to question certain prejudices :

When I try to explain to people what integrated dance and inclusive dance are—even if increasingly I'm just telling people I do modern dance—it makes people ask questions. ME6 – Maxime D.-Pomerleau

Some artists take advantage of their artistic platforms to offer a critique of systems of oppression, such as ableism, and to propose ways of considering disability other than the dominant miserabilistic ones:

I integrated the definition of 'ableism' in the exhibit [...] to demonstrate how heavy-handed the standard is and how it keeps us from just existing as we are, differently. ME1

I suspect people come to CRIPSiE [our company's] shows and they're like, okay, right. There's that, like disability is not tragedy, "Disability is creative and generative! Yay!" EE4

Such a proposal to consider other possibilities builds on the rich and wide-ranging opportunities to explore other perspectives on disability through art, as is the case in this public performance:

[The artist] invited people to go swimming with their collective, which is called the Olimpias Performance Research Project [...] They go into a pool and invite people to join them [...] Do people react well? Is everything in place for things to go well in a context where there is a diversity of people around the pool? Personally, I thought it was pretty radical [...] existing as diverse in the water, in a public pool. QFG4 – Marie-Hélène Doré

This willingness to transform perceptions of disability also takes the form of explorations of disability-related taboos, such as beauty, for example:

The beauty of it is in the very fact of being crippled; that's what makes the people and characters I represent beautiful. ME1

We often see men—less so women, sure—but disabled men can't be handsome, or attractive. I'm generalizing, but you get me. They can't be functional, or have kids, because they'll have disabled kids [...]. That's what I've tried to deconstruct with my work. QE2 – Rolland St-Gelais

And so the arts practices of people with disabilities are expanded through various aesthetic strategies to deconstruct negative perceptions about them and promote alternative ways of perceiving disability and disabled people.



6.3.3 The aesthetics of the arts practices of people living with mental illness or mental health issues, neuroatypical people or people who identify as mad

The most frequently made comment made by participants regarding the aesthetics of the arts practices of people living with mental illness or mental health issues or who identify as mad is that their art is often autobiographical, confessional or personal.

HE3 emphasizes the confessional aspect of the mad arts: "I think sometimes disability art can be fairly confessional, but so can lots of the other arts and I like confessional, I'm all for it. I love hearing people's personal stuff." L'artiste *TE1, Rick Miller*, speaking about a schizophrenic artist, shows how the personal element allows one to recreate the experience from an insightful point of view:

She did a documentary about the impact of mental illness on her family, specifically her brother and sister, and it played through the festival circuit. She recreated it as a virtual reality experience, so seeing a little bit of a hint of how mad arts—how people are using virtual reality to recreate the experience of madness.
TE1 – Rick Miller

Artists note that the art world is increasingly open to mad artists and their mostly biographical practices.

The arts practices of people living with mental illness or mental health issues, neuroatypical people or people who identify as mad question our perceptions of the world and the way we feel, perceive and experience life.

While the autobiographical aspect of the arts practices of these artists characterizes certain aesthetics, they nonetheless share a diversity of experiences with respect to their affiliations or identities as artists, particularly with respect to mental health or neuroatypicity.



6.3.4 Similarities and distinctions

Participants generally noted similarities in being a minority artist, even though belonging to a particular culture or claiming a particular identity forges different relationships to the world that are reflected in various ways in creation.

Artist ME5 – Jack Volpe considers that the Deaf and disability arts are similar in that they strive to be visible on the mainstream art scene and to be known and recognized by society at large, a **point of view shared by others**:

Of course, there can be a few differences, but generally I think it's about the same. It's the expression, the passion of talent. It's different styles, different points of view, but it is generally the same overall. ME3 – **Dada Leroux**

With regard to distinctions, artists explain that the Deaf and disability arts are based on different experiences, resulting in a diversity of modes of expression and themes.

WE1 – Alice Crawford notes that the Deaf arts are developing with Deaf culture, which is fashioning the experiences of Deaf artists. It is a distinct culture shared by Deaf people as a cultural and linguistic minority. **Despite the diversity of identities of Deaf artists, sign languages remain a constant within many practices**:

In the Deaf Arts, “Deaf” refers to hard of hearing, cochlear implanted, deafened and Deaf artists. They all experience barriers and this is what makes our work both unique and necessary. People think of Deaf people as one entity, but it actually includes Deaf visible minorities and Deaf Indigenous groups, LGBT individuals and Deaf individuals in wheelchairs as well as those experiencing mental illness. It is not a monolithic community but has a rich and varied heritage to explore and express through the visual and performing arts, sharing the artistic forms of signed languages, Deaf culture, Deaf community and experience. They all use sign language. TFG3 – **Joanne Cripps**

In summary, both Deaf and disability arts put forth arts practices and realities that are ignored by the dominant culture and are often part of counter-cultural perspectives. They stand out through the distinct experiences of the artists and the group to which they belong, and due to the fact that Deaf cultures are based on their own languages (sign languages).



6.3.5 New arts practices

While some of the participants attested to the evolution and adoption of new arts practices on a creative level, others did not share this view.

Among the new arts practices is artistic deconstruction as noted by Deaf artist OE3 – **Pamela Witcher**: “[Deconstruction] is not very widespread because it is very recent.” The creation of comic strips where the words are not illustrated in speech balloons is an example of deconstruction, as illustrated by Witcher, speaking to the work of Deaf comic artists Jean-François Isabelle and Tiphaine Girault: “In 2018, I note that Jean-François is now using deconstruction in his comics. His images include signs, and the speech balloons are connected to the hands and not the mouth.” Deconstruction aims to start afresh, imagining a world free from oppression: “You have to deconstruct in order to rebuild,” says OE3 – **Pamela Witcher**

The contribution of the Internet and digital media was regularly mentioned as a catalyst in the creation and dissemination of works. In addition, the evolution of technology has enabled some artists to progress in the creative process. TE1 – **Rick Miller**, for example, describes the work of a mad artist who made a documentary about the mental illness that runs in her family using virtual reality to recreate the experience of madness for audience members. ME1 highlights how social networks increase the possibilities for artistic dissemination, citing as an example the dissemination of a video of artist Sue Austin, in which she performed in her wheelchair at the bottom of the sea (scuba diving).

A few participants did not notice any particular or major changes in the area of Deaf and disability arts. This finding is closely related to the fact that ableism and audism are still widely present in cultural circles and that artists are more likely to notice the persistence of oppression than the advent of new practices. Thus, according to EE2, there has been no change in the Deaf arts for fifty years: “Right now what we’re seeing in Deaf art, I think, you know, 50 years it stood still. And I look back and I think it’s time to change how we express ourselves as artists in the Deaf community.” This opinion is shared by some in the disability arts community: “No, I haven’t seen anything new. I’ve seen more things emerge in Indigenous arts than in disability arts, especially in Canada.” ME6 – **Maxime D.-Pomerleau**.

While opinions are divided regarding the existence of new arts practices, artistic deconstruction practices and the contribution of new technologies are potent examples of it.



6.4 Cultural representation of Deaf and disabled people

The two following subsections provide an overview of cultural representation that is considered positive or problematic. The influence of the works and arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled on these representations is then discussed.

6.4.1 Positive representations of Deafness and disability

The question of cultural representation is a complex issue that elicited several reactions and thoughts from the participants. The notions of inclusion, belonging, equity and self-determination are central to the question of what constitutes positive representation. Expressing and disseminating stories created by Deaf and disabled people gives them the opportunity to see themselves represented in cultural content and other social depictions thus feel included both culturally and socially.

The importance of inclusion and recognition stems from the fact that many artists do not feel included in the current cultural representation of hearing or able-bodied people. By viewing voices as perspectives on the world that deserve to be considered, artists with disabilities want their voices to be taken into account and insist that nothing be done on their behalf without their active involvement:

I think, giving voice to artists, there's this idea of 'nothing about us without us.' So, we speak with our own authentic voices now, and we're not—our voices aren't filtered, they're not mediated. So, we can get through to our audiences directly, it doesn't go through... I'm thinking of this idea where curators would collect art from asylums and show it, like, 'Oh, here's the art from mad artists.' Now we have direct access to our audiences, and it's a clear picture of who we are. It's a more honest picture of who we are, because we can speak without fear of being censored, of being muzzled. And that is enormously powerful. TE1 – Rick Miller

For Deaf artists, sign languages make up a significant portion of cultural representation. Moreover, showing the abilities of Deaf people promotes recognition and social justice: *"I guess that would mean showing [that] Deaf people can do whatever." OE2 – Simone.*

The presence of non-stereotypical representations in the cultural space supports the development of conditions of possibility for more inclusive and equitable social practices. Critical of stereotypical representations, artists insist on the importance of considering their perspectives, valuing their voices and their self-determination within cultural institutions and encouraging their involvement in all actions that concern them.

6.4.2 Problematic representation of Deafness and disability

Deaf and disability artists offer a rich and complex critical reflection on cultural representation. For most participants, a systemic problem stems from a pathologizing understanding of Deaf and disabled people that is rooted in the medical model of disability :

We are not disabled; it's society that sees us as disabled. [...] It's more that hearing people are passing judgment on us as though we're different. ME3 – Dada Leroux

I am not "suffering" from a disability, even if that word is used in scientific circles. I'm just living with it, because believe it or not, that's what I'm doing—living. ME6 – Maxime D.-Pomerleau

Focus group participants also pointed out that Deaf and disability arts practices are often misrepresented, not taken seriously, or even infantilized :

I think a lot of people, when they look at work produced by someone with a disability, they expect it to be a certain way and they will not see it outside of that, even if the work itself is loudly proclaiming itself as not part of that mold. So that's something I was really surprised by when I started working at the studio, is just how strong that preset is to see the work as sweet, inspirational or associated with kid's work. OFG5 – Rachel Gray

Critical of stereotypical representation of people who are Deaf or disabled, they also deplore the fact that artists are only hired to perform undeveloped roles, pointing to a certain tendency towards voyeurism :

For almost all of the offers and auditions I get for TV roles, the script says 'paraplegic.' They don't have much imagination. [...] There are still a lot of clichés and a lot of stereotypes that bug me, and still, a lot of that kind of voyeurism. ME6 – Maxime D.-Pomerleau

It was disappointing... hiring a disabled person just to make fun of the disability. [...] Sure, sexuality is funny, but there are deeper levels to disability. ME2 – Alexandre Vallerand

One reason for stereotypical portrayals is that the roles are reduced to the very condition of being Deaf or disabled, with no mind paid to the complexity of the characters. This bias leads to portrayals that are often accented, dramatized, or even miserabilistic. Moreover, the fact that there is very little representation of Deaf and disabled people in the cultural offering gives disproportionate importance to those that actually are featured. Deaf artists fear that the overrepresentation of oral Deaf people creates a form of biased representation that is detrimental to Deaf signers :

This is a[n] [oral Deaf] celebrity who has a lot of influence in hearing society, and what they're telling people is that Deaf children can be like hearing children—they can sing and talk [sighs]. ME4 – Hodan Youssouf

Cultural appropriation or more specifically the usurpation of cultural identity, is another facet of the problem of representation: *"In movies or TV shows, they hire hearing actors to play Deaf roles. It feels as if these hearing people are stealing Deaf people's jobs," WE2 – Katarina Ziervogel.* Artists insist on the importance of hiring Deaf and disabled people to play Deaf and disabled characters.

Lastly, the lack of cultural diversity in Deaf and disabled cultural representation is another issue raised by participants :

I think disability arts in Canada are generally pretty white. EE4

As a Deaf artist, it's great, but there's a lack of diversity in Deaf art. All we talk about is access. Where is the conversation about diversity and culture? They're forgetting about us! They've essentially forgotten about us. TE3

In short, depictions of people who are Deaf or disabled are often criticized. Artists mention worrisome repercussions of these problematic cultural portrayals, such as internalized oppression and exclusion. The participants denounced the impact of pathologizing and miserabilistic conceptions on the representation of Deaf or disabled people, the lack of diversity in representations, cultural appropriation and usurpation of cultural identity.

6.4.3 Influence of arts practices on cultural representation

Some participants stressed how much art enables them to shine a light on little-known and stigmatized realities. Some artists spoke of the educational aspect of their art, e.g. by making the Deaf community known to hearing audiences: *“Because through my art, I become a role model. It shows other people that Deaf people exist, that there is a community out there that signs; they have a language that they value. That could be new concepts to people who haven't been exposed to that,”* says VE5 – **Jessica Leun**. Art can also raise awareness of the needs of Deaf or disabled people among hearing and able-bodied people. According to artist ME4 – **Hodan Youssouf**, art can create links between Deaf and hearing populations by raising awareness of accessibility issues. It can also be part of an activist practice while building bridges between Deaf and disabled and hearing and able-bodied people :

The intersection between Deaf and disability arts and advocacy is very strongly linked [...] I think that is, through building the empathy [...], the compassion for people who have experiences that are slightly different than the status quo. HFG1 – **Laura Burke**

In addition, using disability creatively helps to create other perceptions of atypical bodies, of devices such as mobility aids and, by the same token, of people's power of action :

Socially, wheelchairs have a very bad rep, but when you get onstage or when you're performing, and you're doing more with it than just getting from point A to point B, that probably changes the way people see wheelchairs. [...] There was a figure at one point where [France Geoffroy] was in her motorized wheelchair very close to a wall and where the dancer who was with her leaned—backwards—onto her armrest, so his head was down and his legs were in the air, and he ran on the wall—in circles, obviously—and made a bunch of complicated moves, but she was the one deciding on speed and she was the one controlling movement. ME6 – **Maxime D.-Pomerleau**

Creating strong characters also contributes to providing positive representation :

Even though Batwheel³⁷ is a bit of a unskilled superhero and just not very good, really, she actually is in situations where she is in control, she has agency and is empowered—more than what we generally see in TV media and fiction, among other things. ME6 – **Maxime D.-Pomerleau**

The arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled counter negative representation. By drawing not only on their experiences of oppression, but also on pride in their identity, they contribute through their practices to the creation of portrayals of Deafness and disability that go beyond, and even deconstruct, the medical paradigm by emphasizing positive affirmation.

³⁷ *Batwheel* is a “B-movie superhero fighting crime in a wheelchair.” <http://www.batwheel.com/apropos.php>.



6.5 Self-determination of Deaf and disability artists

When asked how they see self-determination and its importance, artists used a variety of terms and angles to describe what it meant: agency, self-assertion, activism and advocacy, identifying and overcoming obstacles and the power to influence cultural discourse and representation. Belonging to Deaf culture and Deaf communities was also one of the main forms of self-determination for the Deaf artists interviewed.

Self-determination allows for personal and social transformation, resulting for some artists in political engagement in and through their own arts practices :

Absolutely. I do consider myself a politically engaged artist. ME1

Nobody's telling me what to do—I'm the one building, I'm the one deciding to get involved. Sure, certain things can influence me, but I'm the one making choices. [...] I'm the one deciding my journey. ME3 – Dada Leroux

Artists are finding that their self-determination takes the form of opportunities, not only to make their own creations, but to have more control over the message and discourse around Deaf and disabled people and their work. They share their ideas and their points of view about the world, while at the same time having a certain power over their lives and even over the way they are portrayed as people or the way their creations are portrayed. In this sense, some observe that self-determination gives them greater self-confidence in relation to journalists or people who have a role in the construction of cultural and media discourse or representation, while others prefer to distance themselves from the media space that is detrimental to them:

I'm trying to take control more and request to validate articles before they are published. That way I can make corrections to the terminology. But that's not always appreciated. I am giving fewer and fewer interviews, because the use of certain words does impact society's perception. I prefer to use other means to express myself or to collaborate with someone who knows the topic well and uses the correct terminology. OE3 – Pamela Witcher

Self-determination also makes it possible to counter the lack of representation or problematic representation, when it results in Deaf and disabled people being a part of decision-making bodies and processes:

I think we need to be the ones hiring folks, we need to be the ones promoting the shows, we need to be the ones creating the venues, doing all those things [...] Why is the head of every single arts organization, venue, space, able bodied, and why are we ok with that? And why aren't we questioning that, and saying, stopping it? WFG3 – Megan Linton

For many participants, self-determination acts as an inner strength that helps them overcome the obstacles that come with the various administrative and linguistic barriers and the discrimination they encounter in their careers as artists: *"I need something to feel that connectivity, to feel inspired... to me, that is empowerment. I need to feel welcomed. I need to feel like I can relate to it, to have a sense that I'm not alone," QE3 – Roselyne Chevette*

Empowerment is a term that can be associated with self-determination processes. For artists who view it positively, empowerment helps to create connections with others or with a community, reinforces one's sense of belonging by conferring strength and support, and fosters agency via peer support: *"I need something to feel that connectivity, to feel inspired... to me, that is empowerment. I need to feel welcomed. I need to feel like I can relate to it, to have a sense that I'm not alone," TE3*

But empowerment has been criticized, particularly by certain English-speaking artists, who view it with suspicion, given that power relations are not always taken into account, and prefer the notion of agency, which is articulated around the people's power to act.

For Deaf and disability artists, self-determination is necessary and transformative, particularly through the political commitment it instills in their arts practices and the power to influence the media discourse and cultural representation it fosters. It is also an inner strength—the strength to persevere and decide for oneself. In their view, self-determination should be better supported by cultural institutions.



6.6 Support and recognition

Support and recognition take on many forms for Deaf and disability artists. For most participants, strong support from family, their communities and the public contrasts with the current low levels of institutional or financial recognition.

The support of family caregivers allows many to carry out their daily activities, despite the lack of access to social and public services. Thus, participants pointed out that many individuals in their environment (community, family, friends and immediate colleagues) support their work: “I do feel supported, both by my disabled friends and community [...] Also, a lot of my friends who are not disabled are also very supportive of my work,” VE4.

The community is also a source of recognition—the first one, for some: “I think in terms of recognition, I mean... typically, I think the initial recognition comes from the community, you know, the recognition that you’re doing something... the marginalized arts are striving for a higher level of recognition,” says TFG4 – David Bobier.

Still, one participant noted a lack of support from her hearing friends and within the Deaf community: *I definitely lack support from my hearing friends. I don't have a lot of them—I don't have a lot of Deaf friends, either. It's ironic because the Deaf community is so small, but we don't really interact much with each other, we don't know each other very well [...] But, it could work if we made the time and if we had the safe space...* VE5 – Jessica Leung

The community plays a key role in supporting the Deaf and disability arts. At community events, it is not uncommon for organizations to invite visual artists or actors to perform. Although resources are limited and insufficient to provide the expected support, they are important, especially for amateur and emerging artists :

They buy our supplies. We don't have to pay for it. [...] we used to have to pay \$2 every time for crafts. But now they pay for everything... It's the most popular thing at the center: The Creative Expressions, it's called. OE1 – Kim

Unlike support from friends or the community, institutional support—and financial support in particular—can be difficult to obtain :

For films... for theatre, yes, I do get support from the Deaf community [...] Yes, I get the support from the Deaf community, yes. From the funding perspective, it's a whole different story. HE1 – Linda Campbell

Friends started helping me if I ask beforehand, I notice, they're happy to help. The government doesn't help at all! I applied for a grant, but I was denied. VE3 – A.J. Brown

But while institutions have striven to support and recognize the Deaf and disability arts, artists are not always aware of it or have reservations about the limited forms the support and recognition actually take :

If there were to be a renaissance of disability artists, I would probably join the movement, but for just now, I don't see it. [...] When the cultural policy was tabled [...] we tabled a dissertation that discussed how people elsewhere had been recognized and so on and so forth. There were a few lines here and there [...] [but] I myself didn't feel like anything particularly interesting really came out of that. ME1

There are indications of support and recognition from artists in general, through peer assessment in funding allocation processes: “I think to myself, peers must recognize me, if they tell me to keep it up,” QE4 – Laurence Brunelle-Côté. Others attribute peer recognition to other artists who are Deaf or disabled, and stress its importance for artistic development and self-affirmation :

At first [...] I wasn't confident, I didn't recognize the talent I had and all that. [Deaf artist] Pamela [Witcher] had a big impact on me and my self-confidence [...]. For example, the theatre I've taken part in in the last three years—a few Deaf people also cheered me on and supported me, who were proud of what I did. It makes me feel more confident. ME4 – Hodan Youssouf

Recognition raises issues related to identifying as a Deaf, disabled or mad person on the one hand, and as an artist in a professional capacity on the other. Thus, some participants opt for an assertion of identity, for example by presenting themselves as Deaf or disability artists and wish to be recognized in this sense, while others aspire to be recognized as artists among the general community of artists, two postures that lead to different recognition strategies.

For some, the recognition of an artist's Deafness or disability is experienced in a positive way, since it underlines the fact that the person has overcome obstacles that others have not had to face: "Sometimes, someone I know... when they see my stuff, they say, 'Oh, you're Deaf. Congratulations!' That's positive, it's a positive impact," says ME3 – Dada Leroux. Sometimes, a disability artist's identity helps with recognition :

I feel quite recognized, but that's also because I very explicitly put myself out there as an artist with disabilities. I self-identify as disabled very publicly. And again, I do that repeatedly in feeling a need to be a bridge and to be very out about my own relationship with that experience. ME8

However, being Deaf or disabled impacts recognition and makes it more difficult to obtain than it would be for an able-bodied person. For many, the pursuit of recognition comes with a permanent feeling of having to prove oneself, as noted by one musician: "Since I have a disability, well, there are going to be challenges, if I ever want to play in bars and cafés, I will undoubtedly be underestimated, I'm sure," says QE1 – **Jean-Audrey Chabot**.

In this context, some artists question the term "Deaf or disability artist" because it suggests that they are not fully fledged artists. For example, the pigeonholing of Deaf and disabled people's arts practices sometimes undermines their recognition as professional artists :

Like, in the media [laughs], I feel I am getting recognition when nobody deems it absolutely necessary to write 'disabled' next to my name [...] It sends a very strong message, like 'You can be an artist even if you have a disability,' whereas when it says 'disabled artist' all the time, I feel like [...] you can't go out into the larger pool of overall artists. [...] It is really hard to get recognition as a professional, specifically because people wonder if they actually did find all of us in long-term care homes [laughs] [...] when in fact we were trained for this, we've already taken an interest, we're involved in networks, we're creating things... we're working, you know! Not being recognized as a professional really is a huge hurdle, I think. ME6 – Maxime D.-Pomerleau

We, as disabled actors, have had to fight to be recognized, to be accepted, to be seen, and heard, as a real disabled actor, not somebody who pretends to play a disabled actor, but who is actually disabled. TFG2 – Ken Mackenzie

In this sense, one artist notes that there is no reason for there to be a separation between "autistic art" galleries and "real" galleries: "You go to this gallery to see the autistic art and then you go to the "real" art gallery to see the "real" art. I want to be like, 'I'm an autistic artist' and be in the real art gallery," ME7.

The feeling of being reduced to the status of "Deaf or disability artist" is experienced by some as a lack of recognition of the fact that they work as hard and are as talented as any other artist. Even so, a small number of artists do enjoy recognition after many years :

Yes, I am recognized. Because I built myself a career and people know who I am, people know what I've done. [...] It's recognition from more and more other actors [who] have recognized that I wasn't just a disabled

actor, that I had talent. ME2 – Alexandre Vallerand

There are also geographical differences, meaning that some of the artists enjoy international recognition, which is sometimes even more significant than that which they receive within Canada:

I think I am recognized in some ways... I have some folks from the States who recognize me as an artist. VE5 – Jessica Leung

It's pretty strange—I get support from Americans and Japanese people. [...] It's encouraging; you think to yourself, 'I'm going to send a project there.' But here? Not at all. I have never felt supported. ME1.

Beyond geographical boundaries, social networks and media are an important part of the experience of recognition and support:

A lot of the Deaf artists like the stuff I do. I get a lot of likes on the page. WE1 – Alice Crawford

People say, 'Oh! I know who you are—Hodan!' People know me. Facebook is a big help in terms of gaining recognition in the community. ME4 – Hodan Youssouf

In sum, participants identified the difficulties they experienced in obtaining the support and recognition they aspire to. However, a certain openness in the arts community and support from family, peers and communities do help to overcome certain obstacles and increase recognition for the practices of artists who are Deaf or disabled. The development of institutional forms of recognition and support is one of the promising avenues that will be discussed later in this report.

SUMMARY

6.7 Section summary

This section on Deaf and disability artists and their practices describes key elements relating to the career and professionalization of artists, the arts practices, aesthetics and cultural representation of Deaf and disabled people, their self-determination and their experiences with support and recognition.

The results of the study show that the career path of the artists we met with is shaped by experiences of oppression, in particular by the experiences of Deaf and disabled people, and that artists who are Deaf or disabled want better access to recognized education and training opportunities in order to further support their professionalization.

As far as their practices are concerned, Deaf and disability artists are present in all artistic fields and use a variety of mediums. Their artistic approaches can be studied from at least four different angles: whether or not they choose to identify publicly as Deaf or disabled in their work, whether or not they choose to explore themes around Deafness and disability, whether or not they choose to actively integrate atypical bodies or sign language as creative mediums, and artistic deconstruction from a Deaf or disability point of view. For most of the artists we interviewed, whether they identified as Deaf or disability artists or as artists first and foremost, the way they identified informed their creative processes.

Aesthetics were analyzed by presenting certain characteristics of arts practices based on the way people identified (people who are Deaf, people with disabilities, and people living with mental illness or

mental health issues, neuroatypical people or people who self-identified as mad). Generally speaking, the aesthetics of Deaf arts practices often mobilize sign languages and emphasize other modes of expression than the aesthetics of hearing artists, thus allowing audiences to understand art and the world differently. For their part, the arts practices of people with disabilities help to deconstruct negative perceptions about them and promote alternative understandings of disability and people with disabilities. As for the arts practices of people living with mental illness or mental health issues, neuroatypical people or people who self-identify as mad, while the autobiographical aspect plays an important role, they do share a diversity of experiences, particularly with regard to mental health or neuroatypical issues. Among the similarities between these different approaches, we noted that they often aim to promote arts practices and realities ignored by the dominant culture, but stand out particularly through the experiences they communicate and by the fact that there is not a disability culture in the same way as there is a Deaf culture, which is based in the existence of its own languages (sign languages). Lastly, though opinions on the existence of new arts practices may be divided, artistic deconstruction practices and the contribution of new technologies as a catalyst in the creation and dissemination of works are held up as examples.

The cultural representation of Deaf and disabled people is more often than not problematic and criticized. The participants denounced the pathologizing and miserabilistic representations of Deaf and disabled people, the lack of diversity in representation, cultural appropriation and usurpation of cultural identity. When they are present in the cultural space and not stereotyped, portrayals of Deaf and disabled people foster the development of conditions under which more inclusive and equitable social practices are possible. Artists insist on the importance of putting forth the abilities of Deaf and disabled people, of considering their perspectives, of a growing number of cultural institutions valuing their voices and positions regarding their situations and requiring their involvement in all actions that concern them. As art is an excellent way to promote little-known realities and to discover positive facets of often stigmatized identities, the arts practices of the people we met with contribute to shaping representations of Deafness and disability that deconstruct the medical paradigm by focussing on positive affirmation.

As a result, Deaf and disability artists' self-determination practices are necessary and transformative because they support the agency, self-assertion, advocacy, overcoming of barriers and empowerment of individuals in the spirit of cultural equity. Through political engagement within their arts practices and the power to act on media discourse and cultural representation, the practices counter problematic cultural representation and the lack of representation within cultural institutions and arenas. Many participants felt that self-determination practices should be better supported by cultural institutions.

Lastly, artists who are Deaf or disabled reported having difficulty in obtaining the support and recognition they aspire to. Fortunately, a certain openness in the arts community and the support of family, peers and communities contribute to overcoming certain hurdles and increasing recognition for the practices of Deaf and disability artists. The development of institutional forms of recognition and support is one of the promising avenues that will be discussed in sections 8 (Relationship with the broader arts community) and 9 (Funding) of this report.



AREAS OF PRACTICE AND COLLABO- RATIONS

The arts practices of Deaf and disabled people develop via various environments and collaborative networks. Following a brief presentation of the way these environments evolve, the organizational practices and the quality of the collaborations among them will be described, taking into account the issues that are common to all of them.



7.1 Evolution of environments

In recent years, the environments of Deaf and disability artists have evolved based on the work of pioneering artists who have been working to support them for a long time :

That's why I founded Les Muses—to provide training to people with talent who deserved to be able to explore it further. [...] I've been doing this for a long time—since 1991—I've adapted dance to various clientele. [...] I think the fact that professional companies and professional artists are starting to reach out to audience, and that there are funds available, from the Canada Council, for example... it helps. MFG4 – Cindy Schwartz

While some respondents noted that artists are getting more jobs and opportunities than before, there is still a long way to go. Accordingly, one Deaf producer suggested that we should draw inspiration from what is being done elsewhere: *“In the United States... we're seeing more and more Deaf actors in movies and on TV,”* says MFG9 – Sylvain Gélinas. The openness of cultural institutions regarding the dissemination of arts practices also encourages their development :

With my exhibition Le peuple de l'œil [at the Écomusée du fier monde], several Deaf artists' works were presented. People like seeing diversity. [...] I'd like to see more artists play with deconstruction, which would strengthen that trend. OE3 – Pamela Witcher

The development of cultural mediation practices also fosters collaborations :

Since [so-and-so who is Deaf] got involved at the Musée des beaux-arts, we've kind of realized that many of our vernissages, many of our soirées could be interpreted in LSQ/ASL. Many of them could be... and not only that—we could have projects with Deaf people at the Musée. MFG3 – Louise Giroux

Several participants noted that strategic equity practices and increased Canada Council for the Arts funding in support of the practices of Deaf and disability artists have certainly contributed to the evolution of the field. We will touch on this again in Section 9.



7.2 Arts organizations and collectives

7.2.1 Artist centres

Study participants identified several artist centres dedicated to Deaf and disability artists such as Workman Arts, Tangled Arts + Disability and the Deaf Culture Centre. While these three frequently cited resources are all located in Toronto, centres like these provide artists with various resources, including training, at little to no cost to their members—an important consideration, given the precarious situation in which many artists find themselves. These dedicated spaces also foster networking through communicational or cultural accessibility, which artists generally do not find in artist centres.

TFG3 – Joanne Cripps describes the activities and services of the Deaf Culture Centre, where she works to support Deaf people through art and the celebration of Deaf culture and sign languages: *“Deaf Culture Centre’s current project is to establish Deaf arts training on a national scale and to increase arts eco-system to support Deaf visual and performing artists and arts professionals,”* she says.

Homeless for a time, TE1 – Rick Miller talks about how his life changed after discovering Workman Arts, a Toronto-based organization dedicated to supporting mad artists, getting financial support from the Canada Council and finding a community.

Mentoring, i.e., training with experienced peers, enables emerging mad artists to receive training in a safe space, as pointed out by artist Cara Spooner :

[At Workman] people know that they’re entering the studios surrounded by peers who may have different experiences, but there is something that is similar and there’s a level of understanding there, which I think is really important and more emerging artists seeing the other more established artists as role models and as people who have also been in similar maybe situations to where they have been I think is really valuable and important. TFG5 – Cara Spooner

Still, the mixed nature of artist centres could discourage more established artists from wanting to join, for fear of seeing their work devalued :

There are some artists who are very accomplished, who fear joining the organization because they feel that the spectrum of quality is too varied. They consider themselves at a certain level of excellence or quality and they don’t want to be lumped in with this organization and have other professional arts organizations say, ‘Well, we saw one of the artists from this group and they weren’t at the same level we were looking at.’ I know, and I fear that could be something that impedes some artists, particularly those who are self-established professionally, from joining up. WFG2 – Gerry Atwell

As significant spaces for innovation and outreach for the creations of Deaf, disabled and mad artists, artist centres contribute to their careers by offering residencies or by showcasing their work, e.g., through exhibitions. For example, Tangled Arts+Disability has been repeatedly cited for its avant-gardism, its innovative practices, its ability to showcase emerging Deaf and disability artists and the various types of services it offers, such as artist residencies.

Still, some described how their artistic work fails to fit or integrate into the political mandates of the artist centres with which they are supposed to be associated. One artist described how her artwork moves away from the definition of Deaf art proposed by some Deaf organizations and the effect this has on her sense of acceptance in the Deaf community: “They think Deaf art should be painting that is Deaf-themed, and I don’t think I need to paint a specific thing to be in a community. I should get to paint what my heart desires. So, I really don’t bring my artwork to them to display on the wall,” EE3. Experiences such as this one attest to the political tensions that can emerge within Deaf and disabled people’s organizations. The question then arises as to what kind of art organizations should support—art that focuses on Deaf and disability experiences or art produced by Deaf, disabled and mad artists.

Overall, the experiences of most study participants in artist centres dedicated to Deaf, disabled or mad people are positive. They are valuable resources in terms of support and recognition, the dissemination of practices and professionalization.

7.2.2 Artist-run collectives

Artist-run collectives provide artists with the opportunity to operate on their own terms and their members are their primary resource. Training and artistic development activities often rely on the commitment of the members themselves rather than on outside financial resources. However, this autonomy is not without its challenges, since involvement is voluntary, and these collectives often operate without funding.

Most participants in artist-run collectives appreciate being able to decide on their own working structure. These collectives also give groups the opportunity to promote and evolve according to the needs identified by their own community. One artist recounts the positive experience of being part of an autistic artists’ collective that does not label its members:

They don’t categorize people by functioning labels [...] you can’t really tell who’s who, which is perfect and it bothers some people when they come in [...] who’s autistic and who’s not? [...] we’re not going to tell you that, you have to just deal with it. And that’s great because it’s like telling everyone that you’re worth the same, and not everywhere is like that. ME7

Some participants, however, mentioned the exhaustion observed in less financially supported groups. For example, one artist described the difficulty of maintaining the activities of a cultural association :

Manitoba Cultural Society of the Deaf helps the Deaf mime troupe [...] it sort of lapsed for a few years—everyone was burnt out. So just taking a break, and then we sort of revived it. And we still don’t have chair board members. We unfortunately let it collapse, lapse, way back. WE1 – Alice Crawford

In short, being involved in artist-run collectives is an enriching experience for the artists, particularly in terms of self-determination. It does, however, come with its share of challenges, e.g., financial resources.

7.3 Collaboration among Deaf, disabled and mad artists

Overall, the artists noted that there is a lack of networking in Canada and expressed a desire for more collaborations between artists who are Deaf or disabled, despite physical distance. The importance of meetings and networking for Deaf and disability artists to share their work and to advance their techniques and aesthetics through discussion and exchange was repeatedly mentioned:

I would love to work with other Deaf individuals. Yeah, that'd be great. I'd love it. Yeah. Maybe if there was a gathering. I don't know if there would be any reaction, if a lot of people would not want to do it, if it'd be expensive to get together and based on geography. HE2 – Kathern Geldart

[It] would be great to be in a space where we had more access to each other, each other's work, and to each other's process, because I think we could be learning a lot from each other and I think those opportunities, at least for us in Alberta, are pretty minimal without sort of trying to go somewhere else. EE1 – Danielle Peers

One participant stressed the importance of being able to build one's practice by engaging with other artists, but mentioned geographical and funding barriers. The cost of travel outside of major centres was often mentioned as a barrier.

Another barrier to collaboration between Deaf and disability artists is the fact that Deaf artists do not identify as disabled and do not consider Deafness to be a disability: "As a Deaf artist and, well, and as Deaf people, we don't consider ourselves disabled," EE2. Another artist touched on shared experiences with accessibility and would like to see a rapprochement :

I did not have very much expose to disability arts work. I have tried being a part of it but I think it's a little unfortunate, because we do have overlapping experiences due to accessibility barriers, but the Deaf community sees themselves as a cultural practice, not as people with disabilities, so it seems like two different worlds, and they constantly collide. VE2 – Landon Krentz

When people with disabilities do not communicate using QSL or ASL, or when opportunities for collaboration do not take into account the need for interpretation, people who are Deaf face the same barriers as people who are hearing and able-bodied. In this sense, bringing the disabled and Deaf communities together is possible through concrete actions, including focusing on common issues such as equity and accessibility needs :

[A provincial accessibility arts organization] is doing a lot of things [but] the Deaf didn't really want to get involved with them, because it had the word disability in the name, and they don't consider themselves disabled. And so, when they changed the name from disability to accessibility, the board found it more acceptable to work with them. WE1 – Alice Crawford

This raises the issue of cultural barriers and opportunities within the arts communities. It was mentioned that collaboration must remain a space for fun and discussion. Addressing communications needs takes both time and funding: "Deaf and disability artists alike in Edmonton are all working other jobs. So, finding time for collaborations is hard. I also think, like, interpretation costs a lot of money," EE4. When the right conditions are in place to facilitate communication, successful collaborations can indeed take place. For example, one artist recounts a nurturing experience with Deaf, disability and mad organizations:

Working in exclusively Deaf, disability and mad organizations [...] in my experience, in just some of our work together, as the seven artists came together on this project with Tangled [Arts + Disability], it was so nurturing of the whole person and the experience of creating work, which acknowledged the kind of... it made room for suffering in the room. HFG1 – Laura Burke

As a cultural and linguistic minority, some Deaf people aspire to join other minorities besides those with disabilities. Some participants noted that Deaf arts practices could more easily be combined with Aboriginal practices, given their minority cultural status and their experiences of oppression by dominant cultures.

While there is no data speaks to collaboration between the Deaf and mad arts in this study, some artists with disabilities reported collaborating with artists who identified as mad. Participants recalled that the boundaries are not always clear among all identities, with many artists mentioning that they belong to different identity groups.

SUMMARY

7.4 Section summary

The practice environments frequented by Deaf, disabled and mad artists are growing and can be spaces for generally enriching and positive experiences. But there is still a long way to go before artists have access to jobs and professional opportunities.

In addition, artist centres dedicated to the Deaf and disability arts provide their members with employment opportunities and mentoring, making them significant resources in terms of support and recognition. Although there are some here and there, they are primarily located in Toronto and are therefore not accessible to all. Because the artistic approaches of individuals do not always coincide with the political mandates of the centres, some wonder what kind of art this type of organization can and aims to support. The participants also work within artist-run collectives, which provide artists with a great deal of freedom and autonomy in terms of identifying orientations and operating structures, but still pose challenges because of their under-funding and dependence on the voluntary involvement of members.

Lastly, there is a desire and a potential for increased collaboration between Deaf, disabled and mad artists, who mention the importance of encounters and networking for their artistic and professional development. To do so, artists and funding agencies must take into account cultural and geographic contexts, as well as transportation, interpretation, cultural adaptation and funding needs.

A woman in a white dress stands in a green field, with a white net overlaying the scene. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

RELATION- SHIP WITH THE BROADER ARTS COMMUNITY

This section discusses the evolving relationship between the Deaf and disability arts community and the arts in general, collaboration between Deaf and disability artists and the cultural organizations in their communities, the specific issues involved in disseminating works and accessibility, which is essential to gaining a better understanding of the issues at stake in the relationship.

8.1 Evolution of relations

Study participants noted a shift in the relationship with the broader arts community in recent years: there is reportedly greater awareness, interest and openness towards Deaf and disability artists and their arts practices. Although they are still largely underrepresented, these practices are increasingly being recognized and present in cultural circles, in a social context that is conducive to openness towards cultural diversity as a whole: *“Times are changing. I feel like there is more and more room for that conversation to be heard, disseminated, presented... like audiences are ready to hear from a different perspective,”* says MFG1 – **Catherine Bourgeois**.

However, opinions are divided as to the extent of the change and, by the same token, the progress resulting from the work carried out by artists who are Deaf or disabled to raise awareness. Some artists pointed out that the positive change was more noticeable for individuals and groups experiencing other forms of marginalization (trans, queer and racialized people), who have been concerned for some time with issues of equity, inclusion and accessibility, than for the majority population. It was pointed out that accessibility is about much more than simply adapting venues and providing live language interpretation services. According to participants who spoke to this issue, Deaf and disability artists should be consulted and involved, and we should be sensitive to various forms of oppression.

8.2 Collaborations

Although Deaf, disabled and mad people are often socially lumped into a homogeneous group (e.g., people with disabilities), there are actually many different communities of people. This means it is important to study collaboration within the broader arts community, looking specifically at three groups of artists with distinct identities.

8.2.1 Collaboration among Deaf arts communities and the broader arts community

Overall, participants felt that there had been an improvement in the relationship between Deaf artists and the arts sector in general. One Deaf person described how her career had grown over the past five years precisely because of increased opportunities for collaboration with mainstream arts organizations :

In the last 5 years, I've really kickstarted my theatre career, after being stagnant for a long period of time. I guess, for that period, I thought there were no opportunities, there was no sense of doing what I wanted to do, and no companies wanted to work with a Deaf actor. [...] Since then, my career has been slingshotting—I've been getting more and more busy and collaborating with more and more companies. So there's still a long way to go, but I feel very good about where I am now and what I'm doing now. EFG3 – **Chris Dodd**

Others recognized that some theatre companies in Canada have made working with Deaf communities a priority. One participant mentioned that a Toronto theatre company had created an accessible online tool to provide a model for the best working practices to be developed with Deaf artists :

Cahoots Theater in Toronto [...] have a whole website dedicated to like, if you're organizing a theater event, how to make it accessible to Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences [...] There's also engaging with Deaf and hard-of-hearing artists. HFG5 – **Sébastien Labelle**

A growing number of organizations are making real efforts to better understand the cultural particularities of the Deaf arts and are working in consultation with the community. One cultural worker described such an experience :

We worked with SPiLL PROpagation [...] who gave us a lot of advice [...] I had come up with a project based on a fairly classic or traditional residency project. I spoke to the director of SPiLL [...] and she gave me a bunch of ideas and suggestions for adapting the project. MFG5 – **Julie Tremble**

While there is a generally positive feeling for the future of the relationship between the Deaf arts and the arts in general, there are clearly challenges to be overcome to foster collaboration. Among other things, a majority of Deaf participants feel that the overvaluing of oral languages combined with issues related to interpretation services (high costs, lack of services, etc.) complicates collaboration possibilities.

8.2.2 Collaboration among disability arts communities and the broader arts community

Several participants noted significant progress in the disability arts in Canada and their increased recognition by mainstream arts organizations. One participant explained how more artists with disabilities are being included in larger general arts festivals compared to the growing number of arts events dedicated to people with disabilities :

We put on shows that include atypical people who have various disabilities [...] most of the time—I might even say 80% of our contracts, our presentations—are done in spaces that have nothing to do with disability. We are integrating theatre programming that has often never included shows with disabled people. MFG7 – Menka Nagrani

While for some participants, increased networking with general arts organizations has significantly increased employment opportunities, tensions and frustrations persist, particularly with regard to the scarcity of opportunities for disability artists to play the roles of disabled characters. Some participants noted an underrepresentation of artists with disabilities in the arts in general, and in theatre in particular: *“In theatre, there’s a real lack of representation of disabilities, or of people who have experienced disability,” TFG1 – Dan Watson.* To counter this underrepresentation, one artist suggested that the Union des artistes’ directory should allow for advance search features that would show *“the usefulness of sorting by disability—people who need a disabled person can find you,”* says ME2 – **Alexandre Vallerand.**

When collaboration and representation occur, the way disability is integrated is central. Indeed, most participants described a lack of understanding of disability by mainstream arts organizations. Some spoke of unrealistic expectations such as working at the same pace, with the same abilities and in a style similar to able-bodied artists: *“The gallery was willing to take me on, but you have to be really productive [...] I mean, I can’t physically produce that much work, and I’m not interested in doing that anyway. I’m not a machine,” ME1.* Art galleries that demand a certain number of paintings per year can de facto induce artists to withdraw, depriving them of an opportunity for collaboration, dissemination and renown.

The comments from the disabled people we met with indicate that there is a need for arts organisations in general to develop a better understanding of and greater sensitivity to the notion of crip time, among other things.

8.2.3 Collaboration among mad arts communities and the broader arts community

The mad artists we met with said they work with other independent artists based on their fields of creation, but they did not elaborate on collaboration with the broader arts community. Those who did consider that collaboration leads to skills and knowledge sharing.

8.3 Specific issues around the dissemination of practices and works

The dissemination of practices and works in the general arts community is not easy. Many mentioned that they do not know many places to disseminate their work: *“Besides Tangled [Arts + Disability] again... I’m sure there’s other spaces, I just don’t know them yet,”* VE4. Others are disappointed that their arts practices are disseminated in reductive perspectives, such as those focussed solely on inclusion: *“I hate that we’re always stuck in this mode of clamouring for inclusivity. What should be centralized is our casting influence on art as a whole, and not just [that],”* VFG.

Some of the artists shared the kinds of thoughts they have before starting a project—will there be a production team and an audience if they have the time and energy to make their project a reality? *“I often play with the idea of writing something, a Web series, but I’m not even sure if there’d be an audience for it... a platform... would there be enough people to carry out the project?”* asks ME2 – **Alexandre Vallerand**.

For visual arts, galleries that do not have a mandate dedicated to Deaf and disability artists seldom agree to present them because they think that they would not generate enough interest among their clients. And so, attracting audiences is a journey filled with pitfalls. In addition to the accessibility of venues, the dissemination of works raises issues around awareness of the arts practices of Deaf and disabled people among presenters.

ME6 – **Maxime D.-Pomerleau** pointed out that, although certain artists living with a cognitive disability are disseminated and certain theatre or dance companies work specifically with such artists, there is not necessarily a continuation of their career after a first appearance. Thus, the career progression of artists who are Deaf or disabled is not the same as that of artists without cognitive disabilities, for whom a leading role in a film would likely lead to another role in the foreseeable future. This leads to issues around the possibility of making a living from one’s art: *“I struggle to sell my pictures and I think other artists are also struggling to make money,”* states OE2 – **Simone**.

Reaching different audiences in different areas is also a major issue for Deaf and disability artists: *“My God, now that’s a problem [...] the circulation of works of art in Quebec. There’s nothing. [...] We’d love to go to rural areas, but unless you’re a stand-up comic, there isn’t any way to do contemporary art in rural areas,”* says QE4 – **Laurence Brunelle-Côté**.

Dissemination funding varies according to the type of arts or the artists involved. For example, the promotion of artistic work often relies on the involvement of the people concerned or requires that competent resources apply for funding: *“Even here at Les Muses, we promote the students we train. But I don’t have a budget for that. We do it because we see the need for it. [...] networking, integrating these circles, sending out applications, raising awareness,”* says MFG4 – **Cindy Schwartz**.

Where they exist, fair, accessible and inclusive dissemination practices are held up as examples by artists. Events, cultural spaces and festivals in the broader arts community that present the practices and works of people who are Deaf or disabled are supportive of artists who wish to promote their work and serve as a token of recognition.



8.4 Accessibility

Whether artists identify as Deaf or disabled, accessibility is central and currently sorely lacking: *“There is lack of accessibility for Deaf and disability artists,”* EE3. The inaccessibility of stages, dressing rooms, artists’ residences and training and networking spaces are examples of barriers these artists face. When they do make spaces accessible, institutions most often focus on audience accessibility rather than artists’ accessibility: *“Everybody says they’re accessible, but I think the audience side of things is a lot more developed than the artist side,”* MFG2 – **Claudia Parent**.

From the outset, it is interesting to note that some participants would like to see accessibility considered from a universal design perspective and not just as an add-on or perk, especially when working with able-bodied and hearing people. Others would urge us to start looking beyond the concept of accessibility as an accommodation and start considering it in terms of new design aesthetics. For example, there are forms of contemporary dance that are radically liberated from ableist norms: the devices used (e.g., wheelchairs, ramps, etc.) are not included only as part of accessibility goals, but also in the creative approach.

For some, accessibility is more than just a question of participating in an event or a production. Indeed, obtaining financial resources to promote accessibility does not guarantee the quality or continuity of the services (interpreters, visual descriptions, etc.) or equipment provided. Even when accessibility is ensured, some participants wonder about how to ensure that an event or performance does not become the site of traumatic experiences—because they are ableist or audist, for example.

The following identifies the key issues around accessibility based on a broad definition of accessibility. It is not limited to the technical or human means of making a work, a practice, an environment or a collaboration accessible, but is seen as a political lever for transforming artistic perceptions, conversations and practices.

Four categories of issues are examined: communicational accessibility and Deaf cultures, architectural accessibility, professional accessibility and accessibility and diversity. Accessibility issues specific to funding will be discussed in Section 9.



8.4.1 Communicational accessibility and Deaf cultures

The communicational inaccessibility of cultural venues (e.g., lack of interpreters, lack of information about opportunities in LSQ and ASL, lack of subtitles and picture-in-picture interpretation boxes in videos, etc.) is a major barrier for Deaf artists who communicate in LSQ or ASL :

Deaf people tend to be the last ones to be aware of something, or they tend to end up being forgotten by the majority who's moving forward so fast and then realize that, oops, they forgot them. We're very marginalized because of communication barriers. WFG4 – Cheryle Broszeit

The majority of the Deaf participants criticized the lack of knowledge of Deaf culture among hearing people: *“From a cultural point of view here [...] people know next to nothing about Deaf people; we don't have any representation in theatre, concerts, etc.,”* says ME4 – **Hodan Youssouf**.

This ignorance is based on a power imbalance that is particularly problematic when one considers the extent to which Deaf communities are constantly culturally excluded and subject to implicit and explicit audist discrimination from hearing people. Many Deaf artists experience exclusion in cultural and artistic circles because of audist norms and the absence of interpreters.

Some participants reported experiencing a lack of awareness among people working in the cultural sector, preventing them from accessing services :

I contacted my Equity Union about the director. I talked with someone there, and an interpreter was there as well. I asked that hearing union representative if they had worked with Deaf people before, and he never did. [...] That union representative looked at me and said: “Why did it take you so long to contact us?” Well, yes! Because I couldn't phone you! He was so embarrassed. That's something that needs to be improved—how do we educate the Equity Union? TE2 – Catherine Mackinnon

I contacted [an] arts council. It was my very first experience connecting with them and I was invited to present [a contribution] at an [event] in [this country], so I applied for funding and support and contacted them and that person was very discriminatory and said you need to contact me through the phone. And I said, 'I'm Deaf, I don't speak on the phone.' [...] They took a lot of time getting back to me and connecting with me again. I felt very discriminated [...] And then they sent me my application back and said, 'You were denied.' I felt completely disregarded. [...] EE2

Cultural institutions must implement actions to develop the accessibility of their service offering: *“They don't think about accessibility. Accessibility is an afterthought—or not a thought,”* EE3



8.4.2 Architectural accessibility

Architectural inaccessibility is a major obstacle for people with disabilities. Many artists with disabilities and directors of organizations have been very vocal about the physical inaccessibility of venues in Canada today: *“Physical accessibility [...] we’re really talking basics. Just accessing the stage, the rehearsal studio, the washrooms,”* says MFG2 – **Claudia Parent**. In terms of creativity, artists are at a disadvantage and have difficulty participating in the arts community because they often cannot enter the building where a meeting or workshop is held, since there is no ramp, for example. In addition, the physical inaccessibility of theatre stages prevents artists with disabilities from collaborating with certain companies because the workplace is quite simply out of reach.

The lack of access to venues (e.g., stages, dressing rooms, galleries and residencies) is a hurdle to the recognition of people with disabilities as artists: *“My participation is very limited. Because I am not recognized as a disability artist—not enough, anyway, to be provided with accessible spaces,”* ME1. Given the limited support from governments, many artists feel that architectural accessibility is a huge problem in Canada.

8.4.3 Professional accessibility

Although it is mainly the result of a lack of communicational and architectural accessibility, professional inaccessibility is mentioned as a major obstacle by artists, who see many obstacles to both their professionalization and their careers.

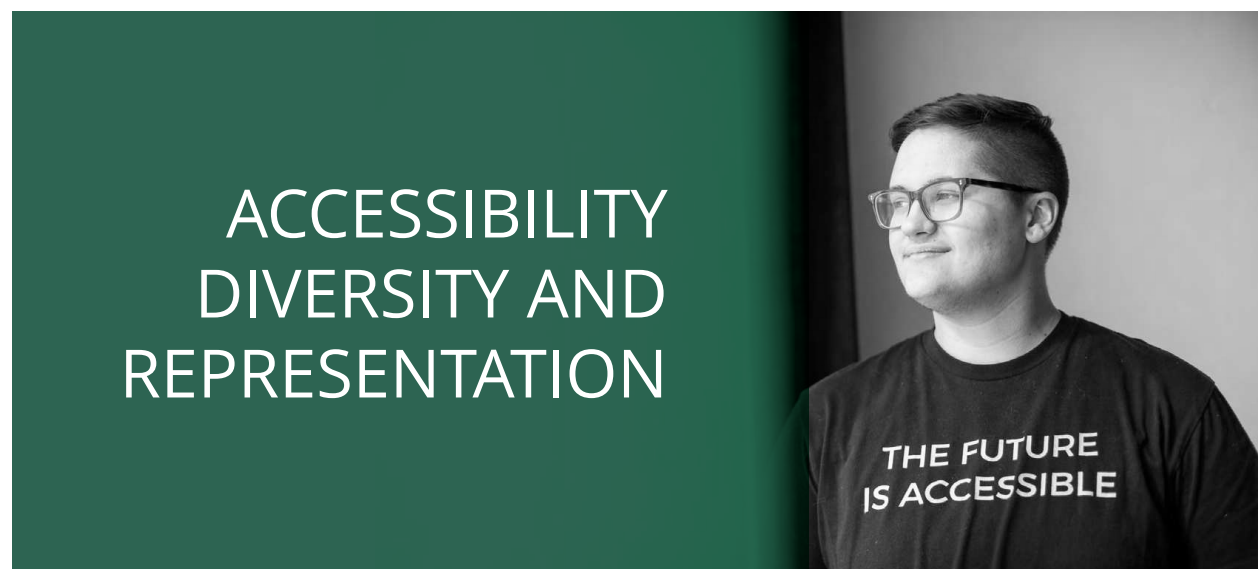
The inaccessibility of professional training or continuing education (e.g., inaccessible venues, lack of interpreters, accessibility-related expenses not being covered) is a frequent problem for Deaf and disability artists: *“I want to go to that theatre class. I don’t want to go to a class for disabled people,”* says ME2 – **Alexandre Vallerand**.

Given the lack of accessibility, participants miss many professional events (e.g., open houses, career development workshops, vernissages, etc.). The networking necessary to develop a career in the arts sector can also be a source of fatigue, or even be impossible at times, whereas it may seem self-evident for hearing or able-bodied artists :

In Halifax, there is a very active artistic community. It is very active. What is missing here is the bridge, the access. If I go to an art opening, I could attend an art opening, but, uh! Where are the interpreters? I don't want to start asking for interpreters. I don't want to ask because of money. HE1 – Linda Campbell

Furthermore, the lack of wheelchair-accessible residences in Quebec causes some people who use wheelchairs to work abroad: *“There aren't any [accessible artist residencies]. [...] when a law is passed requiring that you have one accessible room in a space that has X number of rooms, then we'll get what we need, but right now? No. So I'm working in the United States [laughs],” ME1.*

Accessibility practices enabling artists to gain access to workshops, training, residencies, dissemination spaces and places to network with people from the arts community are necessary to support and recognize artists professionally and must be developed.



8.4.4 Accessibility, diversity and representation

By lumping Deaf and disabled people together into one broad category, some so-called universal accessibility measures for people with disabilities (with whom Deaf people are amalgamated) are in fact not accessible to all :

They'll just write this venue is accessible, but for me I can't just go to a venue that says it's accessible because what does accessible look like for someone who's able-bodied? [...] I might be able to go, but I might not be able to watch a show because there's no chairs or I might not be able to go to the washroom. [...] they have no idea. WFG3 – Megan Linton

There are programs for disability artists, but they're more focused on developmental and intellectual disabilities, and Deaf people don't associate themselves as that. EE3

Addressing a necessary political and organizational lever, some participants would like to see more people representing them in public and cultural institutions, particularly in various positions of power, whether in universities, funding agencies, the media, boards of directors or leadership positions. This would contribute to necessary social and cultural transformation.

SUMMARY

8.5 Section summary

This section provides a brief overview of the relationships that Deaf and disability artists have with the broader arts community.

Study participants noted a shift in the relationship with the broader arts community in recent years: there is reportedly greater awareness, interest and openness towards Deaf and disability artists and their arts practices.

The study identified factors that promote the development and maintenance of healthy and beneficial relationships for these artists. Supporting spaces dedicated to the mad arts, fighting the presumption that mad artists are there to be “helped,” the hearing giving awards to Deaf artists, or including artists with disabilities in the artistic mandates of mainstream arts organizations are three examples of practices that participants felt are conducive to relationships with the mainstream arts. The participants acknowledged that progress was being made and that suggestions to strengthen it were also being made. The analysis of the various testimonials also makes it possible to identify obstacles that could slow down—if not compromise—the development of relationships that have generally improved in recent years.

Efforts to raise awareness among the various players in the arts world (artists, funding agencies, distribution institutions and the public) about Deaf and disability artists and their work play a central role. For many participants, the growing presence in these spaces of Deaf and disability art and its creators is made possible and even encouraged through increased awareness, as Deaf and disabled creators gain support and recognition there. Increased awareness also appears to be an essential condition for the development of meaningful, lasting collaborations that aim less to meet the objectives of inclusion than to complete acceptance of these artists and their work as an integral part of the arts world, a world that they are likely to influence in the same way that able-bodied and hearing artists do. The effects of these awareness-raising efforts are certainly being felt, but in different ways, depending on the context of practice—those related to dissemination remain particularly difficult to raise awareness about and transform. In addition, awareness-raising efforts are particularly successful with individuals and communities experiencing other forms of marginalization or oppression.

Sensitivity to the particularities of the artists of each group, their practices and their works remains a significant concern. As participants pointed out, the nature of collaboration with the mainstream arts community and the challenges they pose vary based on the way one identifies—struggles in recruiting for the theatre, often unrealistic expectations from galleries in the visual arts, and a lack of interpreters, for example. An amalgamation under the term “disabled people” or “disability arts” and the resulting homogenization are obstacles to the establishment of satisfactory relations with the broader arts community, namely because they prevent us from fully appreciating the specific accessibility issues faced by Deaf, disability and mad artists.

Accessibility clearly emerges as the key issue, which, although widely experienced, is by no means universal. Depending on one’s identity, it concerns communication as well as architecture, and affects professional development and representation in decision-making bodies. Accessibility certainly implies that human initiatives and particular technical means be created. But in all cases, as participants stressed, it is as a political agent of change that accessibility is of the utmost importance.



FUNDING

This section discusses perceptions and experiences around the evolution of funding practices at the Council and the level of awareness of public funding among study participants. Related issues are discussed as well, first with respect to artists and then with respect to organizations.

9.1 Evolution of funding practices at the Canada Council for the Arts

There is a general impression among the artists and cultural workers interviewed that there have been significant changes in the evolution of funding practices for the Deaf and disability arts in Canada over the past decade, including the development of equity policies at the Canada Council for the Arts, which others have emulated: *“I think robust equity mandates for all of the arts organizations have helped support implementing funding,”* says EFG4 – **Lindsay Eales**.

The fact that the Council is increasingly supporting the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled is particularly well-received: *“As far as the Canada Council goes, I think that they’re taking a step in the right direction recently,”* says WE3 – **Angela Chalmers**. Participants identified some areas for improvement, but were positive that the Council is a leader: *“Funds like those from the Canada Council, they help. Training-wise, mind you, there are still some shortcomings. Still, we’re further along now than we were... when I was starting out 26 years ago,”* says MFG4 – **Cindy Schwartz**. Among those aware of the Council’s recent practice of funding accessibility-related expenses,³⁸ the overall impression is that this is a very positive development, as it enables artists who are Deaf or disabled to avoid using their creative funds for accessibility-related expenses. Assistance for completing applications³⁹ is also welcomed.

In 2016, the Council also created a new field of arts practice, *“Deaf and Disability Arts Practices,”* in addition to the support it provided for artists who are Deaf or disabled through equity measures (e.g., funding for accessibility-related expenses, assistance with writing applications). However, in terms of putting Deaf and disability artists in the same category, some Deaf artists argue that the two should be separate, given the difference between disability and the culture of Deaf signers.

9.2 Knowledge and perception of public funding

The artists and cultural workers interviewed were generally aware of the various funding options available to them. Overall, participants with connections to arts organizations were most familiar with them. Independent artists were most familiar with funding agencies such as the Canada Council for the Arts. They were less aware of regional or local funding opportunities. It was noted that provincial funding agencies had considerably less established procedures for ensuring accessibility to funding application processes and that this could be improved upon.

In terms of perceptions around funding opportunities and allocations, artists and cultural workers often mentioned the feeling that communities other than their own were receiving more funding. For example, some participants felt that the disability arts were better funded than the Deaf arts: *“I know that Deaf people form a very small minority, which means when they submit their grant applications, it gets declined all the time, while other disability artists get lots of grants,”* says WFG4 – **Cheryle Broszeit**.

Lastly, some participants expressed concerns about whether artists who are Deaf or disabled receive the same amounts of funding, proportionally speaking, as those who are hearing and able-bodied, and whether funding for artists who are Deaf and disabled is equitable in light of the funds that are available in other funding programs.

38 Canada Council for the Arts. “Access Support.” <https://canadacouncil.ca/funding/strategic-funds/access-support>.

39 Canada Council for the Arts. “Application Assistance.” <https://canadacouncil.ca/commitments/equity/application-assistance>.

9.3 Funding issues

Overall, all respondents raised issues around the funding of artists and organizations, which are presented here in two separate sections. The issues encountered by artists relate to time, financial insecurity and living expenses, the inaccessibility of processes, funding application devices, language and the level of language, the link between artistic funding and funding to cover living expenses, accessibility-related expenses, the funding disparity from one province to the next, the types of arts practices developed and funded, jury members and assessment procedures, self-confidence in relation to internalized oppression, and the self-identification and professionalization of artists. For organizations, issues include core funding, funding for communications strategies, the availability of access funds and the quality of materials.

9.3.1 Artist funding issues

9.3.1.1 Time

The specific relationship Deaf, disability and mad artistic creation has with time (“crip time”) emerged as a significant funding issue. For various reasons such as energy levels, interpretation needs, technological or accessibility conditions or joint creative processes, things take more time for Deaf, disabled and mad artists than they do for the majority. This is a problem insofar as crip time is not recognized or adequately funded.

Another problem is the lack of funding for preliminary meetings. For example, there are no specific funding programs that cover essential, preliminary meetings with interpreters that must take place before the funding application is even written. This impasse has been highlighted as a major obstacle to collaboration, particularly between the Deaf and hearing arts communities.

And time is required not only before, but also after a project :

It's happened to me [...] with the Canada Council equity department [...] the questions were very focussed [...] 'Do you need a ramp?' Uh no [...] we just need time [...] 'Yeah, OK, but that's not in the budget!' 'OK, but what you don't understand is what [would normally take] 120 hours to make might take me 160 to 180 hours. QFG2 – Jean-François F. Lessard

9.3.1.2 Artists' financial insecurity and living expenses

Deaf, disabled and mad artists are significantly affected by poverty. They face many obstacles in their search for financial stability. Funding barriers must be approached from a holistic perspective that takes into account all of the barriers that these artists face :

We struggle to find the money we need just to survive week to week, let alone to create our work as well. And we struggle against stigma, we struggle against people who will look down at us because you might be in a wheelchair or use a cane, they look down at us because they don't understand your Deaf accent, they look down at you because you're asking for accommodations, because you need help just to get through your day to day. And there's the continued struggle to fight for a spot on the wall to show our work, fight for an exhibition space to put our play on. And we're trying to introduce a new art form, an emerging art form. Tthe funders don't think there are audiences for. TE1 – Rick Miller

Many independent artists live just above the poverty line. Many must work in other fields: “*We get small grants, but we don't have anything to support us 100% as artists, so I have to keep working,*” says ME4 – **Hodan Youssouf**. Low pay and insufficient offers contribute to their insecurity. One participant noted, for example, that visual art exhibitions do not pay artists, who are only paid through the sale of their works of art.

For people in the mad arts, there are many financial barriers, including the cost of training and materials, as well as the lack of income and the cycle of poverty that this can lead to. Mental illness has an impact on people's energy levels and ability to work and create, especially when insufficient funding leads to poverty outcomes. Coupled with mental health issues, financial stress affects people's ability to work and create.

Poverty impacts which materials artists can buy and what kind of access they have to the resources they need to promote their work and carry out large-scale projects. It impacts their overall work and, consequently, the possibility of applying for exhibitions or residencies, which would help advance their career. *TE4 – Wendy Belcourt* notes that the equipment required for stage performance, such as costumes, props, etc., can be expensive.

Financial insecurity also translates into a lack of access to resources to document one's work. Not having quality pictures to submit for grant applications is a significant barrier.

9.3.1.3 Inaccessibility of funding application processes, devices and language

The issue of the inaccessibility of grant applications was raised by artists from all disciplines, regardless of status (professional, semi-professional, independent or community-based).

The information given about the funding application process seems confusing and uses language that is too complex. This is a significant barrier for many people and results in some people not applying at all. The skills required to apply for grants call on knowledge that is not necessarily available to artists who are Deaf or disabled, who are at an overall disadvantage in terms of access to knowledge. This is especially the case for people living with cognitive disabilities: *"We're structurally excluded from post-secondary education [...] especially those with intellectual disabilities aren't given opportunities [...] to establish the skill-sets that the applications require,"* says *EE1 – Danielle Peers*.

An important issue raised by the artists was writing grant applications and, more specifically, the tone and level of language expected for arts grants applications.

In the last few years, we've seen arts councils offer programs dedicated to Deaf and disability artists. Fine if you're in a wheelchair and you can sit at a computer, but if you have an intellectual disability, the forms... the programs aren't accessible at all. It's basically a two-tiered system. They're actually for you, but you can't access them. That's a huge hurdle, regardless of what's been done in principle. *MFG1 – Catherine Bourgeois*

The lack of accessible information and mentorship in grant application writing is a major barrier, especially for artists who are Deaf, neuroatypical or cognitively impaired. Some people are simply not able to write an application for linguistic or cognitive reasons, even if they know exactly what kind of project they want to do. Language requirements, terminology, sentence structure and formatting grant applications are a significant barrier to submitting successful applications for many artists and cultural workers who are Deaf.

Deaf artists are at a disadvantage in terms of funding availability because information about funding from arts councils or other arts funding agencies is generally not available in LSQ or ASL. This is particularly the case if they are required to submit applications that involve a significant amount of writing. For example, *TE2 – Catherine Mackinnon* notes that the final reports required by funders must be submitted in writing. She feels that there is not enough information or templates on how to write final reports, especially for Deaf signers. Some interviewees have had very stressful experiences of applying for funding due to the amount of written work and the lengthy application process, which has resulted in some of them resolving to submit a new application.

In order to make it easier for Deaf artists to apply for grants, application assistance measures such as those offered by the Canada Council for the Arts cover the translation of grant applications from signed languages to written ones. However, some artists complain that the interpreters working on the translation of grant applications (from ASL or LSQ into English or French) do not have the required expertise. For example, an interpreter who is unfamiliar with the arts practice of a Deaf person might present the application in a less convincing manner, even if equity measures have been implemented.

Although there is funding available to cover support for the grant application process, some participants noted that they did not know of any qualified resources to act as application assistants. These could be professional artists or grant writers who have already gone through this process and who could help ensure that the quality of the submitted work is similar to that of the other artists in the competition. When artists have the support of professional artists, their applications are much more likely to be successful.

A significant number of interviewees felt that they had wasted time preparing unsuccessful grant applications. Since then, they have not considered re-applying or have been too intimidated by the selection process to try again. In light of the obstacles encountered and the significant amount of time required to successfully apply for grants, some mentioned that they would rather focus on their practices: *“Here’s the thing... as an artist... you either make work or you write grants,” ME7.*

9.3.1.4 Aligning arts funding with funding to cover living expenses

One of the major concerns is the tax implications and the impact funding for arts practices has on access to other forms of funding for people who are Deaf or disabled. This issue is particularly important since artists must be able to use their arts grants to fund their projects, not to support themselves.

For example, artists expressed uncertainty about whether their disability pensions and subsistence income—from programs such as Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH), in Alberta, or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), in Ontario—would be reduced as a result of receiving an arts grant. This is an important factor for artists to consider before identifying as professional artists. Artists have expressed the hope that funding for their arts practices will not result in undue financial concern about possible funding cuts from income support programs such as the ODSP or AISH, which are sometimes their primary source of income. There does not appear to be sufficient information on the alignment of disability benefits with funding for arts practices. Yet this can change people’s lives by drastically reducing their income and increasing their financial insecurity.

The observations and experiences shared by the participants show that there is still a long way to go to ensuring that arts funding granted to people who are Deaf or disabled does not have negative implications on their finances and therefore on their living conditions.

9.3.1.5 Accessibility-related expenses

Separating accessibility-related expenses from creative funds remains a funding issue, as integrating them forces artists and organizations to use a portion of their creative funding for accessibility purposes. As *WE3 – Angela Chalmers notes, “You shouldn’t have to choose whether to pay your actors or to pay your interpreters.”* Separating accessibility funding from project funding is necessary to make those responsible for assessing applications aware of the accessibility costs incurred by artists and to avoid bias and judgment:

The person [in granting streams] doesn’t understand why you need twice as much to fly as anyone else [for attendant costs], so I think there’s a lot of conscious or unconscious bias that goes into judging us, asking different numbers than other people would ask. EE1 – Danielle Peers

Other artists expressed a desire for financial support to hire attendants or interpreters to accompany them to conferences, international events and creative residencies, also covering additional costs such as accommodation for resource people.

Some participants expressed their disappointment that funds to cover accessibility-related expenses are allocated per capita based on Deaf and disability artists rather than per organization. In this regard, the discrepancy between funding allocation periods and the recruitment of artists is considered problematic, since producers do not yet necessarily know which Deaf or disabled people will be involved in their production or what the needs are in terms of hours of interpretation. EE4 mentioned the unforeseen events that can occur in the life of any given artist, such as illness or fluctuations in the availability of artists, which can mean that the casting is likely to change. For example, when a Deaf artist is late in joining the cast of a show, funds for submitting an application are no longer available, even though that is when it would be appropriate to apply.

The issue of taxing accessibility funds, such as interpretation budgets, is a major concern and barrier. Many participants expressed frustration that when they receive funding for ASL interpretation, it is taxable. But the funding is dedicated to accessibility—it is not income.

Some interviewees mentioned that while venues are made accessible for the disabled spectators, backstage areas are still generally not accessible for disability artists: *“There’s a bit of a gap between, you know, in these big presentation houses, that making the audience experience accessible versus making the stage accessible, a real gap between those things,”* says TFG1 – **Dan Watson**. The lack of funding for accessible cultural spaces compromises artists’ access to their workplaces. In addition, the lack of accessibility means that touring or festival presentations will be very limited as long as the accessibility of the overall arts community is not adequately funded. Accessibility funding for tours, festivals or events organized by people from the broader arts community was raised several times: *“If we want a tour... we couldn’t just call up a mainstream tour company... for the most part, people don’t take us...”* says EE1 – **Danielle Peers**

9.3.1.6 Funding discrepancies among provinces

One of the major barriers to funding is the availability of funds and the types of funding available at the provincial and municipal levels. The discrepancy in funding opportunities among provinces and the lack of financial assistance for networking, i.e., to pay for transportation and travel costs, are criticized. Some participants lamented the inequity created by these discrepancies. Others were confused about the local funding available and voiced a strong desire for clearer information and for funding harmonization with a view to ensuring equity across the provinces and territories.

One of the major barriers to funding is the availability of funds and the types of funding available at the provincial and municipal levels. The disparity of funding opportunities between provinces and the lack of financial assistance for networking, i.e., to pay for transportation and travel costs, are criticized.

Some organizations located in provinces or cities where there is less financial support cannot provide spaces for creation and dissemination that are accessible to artists. For example, in Quebec and Nova Scotia, this translates into a lack of accessible performance spaces and art galleries: *“We looked for an accessible venue to exhibit [...] either we didn’t find anything, or we did find something but at a price that didn’t make any sense,”* ME1.

9.3.1.7 Types of arts practices that are developed and funded

The funding criteria and the types of arts practices that are funded inform the practices developed by certain artists. **To receive funding, one participant explained that she had to change her practice and identify as a Deaf artist :**

I don't always identify myself as a Deaf artist; I think of myself as an artist first. So when I apply to galleries, usually I don't say anything. But usually because of the grant, the grant for Deaf artists, it's a requirement that I have to make art that relates to Deafness, so that was a new [...] I found that, if I identify myself as a Deaf artist, I'm more likely to get noticed. VFG1 – Laurie Landry

Moreover, whether or not an artist can earn an income or fully live off their art influences productivity. For example, ME1 noted that artists would have to sell a lot of artwork to make a living from it. Some artists said that they felt compelled to produce a type of art that they know will sell more, thus limiting experimentation and the development of new art genres.

In addition, artists note that the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled sometimes require innovative technology, but that funding for this is insufficient. **This is the case with media technology used to create accessible and inclusive works :**

I think one of the issues [...] is that funding material or funding for technology around creating art is very limited... Deaf and disability arts is just, say, if you think about media arts and the technology around digital production and digital art and media, the costs are much, much, much greater than typically, than if you're writing or if you're working with paint or something like that. So, that's a general problem in terms of supporting media arts. [...] the costs of transforming a space, for instance, into something that's inclusive or immersive. TGF4 – David Bobier

In this regard, some artists would like to see more grants to support artistic experimentation rather than just creation and exhibition grants.

9.3.1.8 Make-up of juries and assessment procedures

Member selection for committees that award grants was discussed in terms of expertise, specifically in terms of knowledge of the aesthetics and the contributions of Deaf and disability arts to the arts in general. Participants who touched on this topic believe that assessment committee members need to be aware of current trends in the Deaf and disability arts and the different ways in which they can be expressed. If those responsible for assessments lack awareness, some practices may be undervalued or underfunded because of a lack of understanding on the part of jury members. This can sometimes be the case when people who are Deaf or disabled are members of juries but are not competent to judge the art being assessed: *"I found myself submitting an artistic dance project [...] and this person [member of a jury] has nothing to do with dance [...] He was asked to sit on the jury because he has a disability,"* says MFG7 – Menka Nagrani. This shows that juries need to be well-informed: *"To be able to assess a project properly [...] you have to have the tools to understand the needs, the tools to understand the practice,"* MFG5 – Julie Tremble.

Interviewees believe that the granting agencies generally use traditional frameworks for comparing applicants. However, the atypical backgrounds of certain people with disabilities and the uniqueness of their art may disqualify them outright from the assessment process.



9.3.1.9 Confidence, the internalization of oppression and identity

As mentioned earlier, a number of artists who are not affiliated with professional companies, associations or artist-run centres feel that they would be unsuccessful applicants for grants. This lack of confidence in the idea of being successful in obtaining funding is a barrier in itself. There are a number of reasons for this, such as the complexity of information and the requirements of scholarship systems, but the sense of uncertainty about the self-identification process required to obtain strategic funding for Deaf and disability artists is also a factor. *ME1 explains the feeling of despondency and subsequent abandonment of the idea of applying for a Canada Council grant:*

I don't know, I didn't think they'd be saying yes to me. Maybe I was starting out in a negative way [...] being identified again as a disability artist, I mean, that's what I am, but [...] embarking on that journey with that label [...] I don't know... I wasn't feeling it. ME1

Moreover, internalized oppression impacts some artists' ability to move forward :

People with disability and Deafness aren't applying for grants, because they're wondering if they're good enough. So it's not just external, it's internal. And I see a lot of grants applications come in my inbox and I think, 'No, I'm not good enough,' too. EE3

The issue of self-identification was raised by artists who were unsure whether disclosing their identity as a Deaf or disabled person would support their application and felt that it might preclude a positive outcome to their application. Because of the stigma experienced in many aspects of their lives by people who are Deaf or disabled, some artists expressed concern that the funding process would put them through that again.

In addition, certain racialized or Indigenous participants do not know which box to tick in terms of minority identity when applying for scholarships, due to them identifying with more than one. Artist *EE1 – Danielle Peers* notes, however, that funding for practices is now less compartmentalized at the Canada Council for the Arts, which allows for the development of more collaboration between people from different social minority groups.



9.3.1.10 Professionalization of artists

While applauding the Canada Council for the Arts's leadership in terms of funding the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled, participants felt that the lack of funding at the local and provincial levels hinders the professionalization of Deaf and disability artists, since they are not always eligible for Council funding. One artist and cultural worker noted that while artists are generally supported by the Canada Council for the Arts via its strategic funding intended to support the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled, an artist's journey should normally begin with a career that receives support at the municipal and provincial levels :

A typical career trajectory for like a visual artist would be to start at the TAC [Toronto Arts Council], which is, you know, the smaller, more local and then go into Ontario Arts Council and then go to Canada Council for the Arts. But Toronto Arts Council, I don't even think they're going to have a Deaf and disability arts fund come up soon [...]. And the Ontario Art Council's was fairly recent. [...] Most folks were starting right at the top at Canada Council for funding. TFG6 – Sean Lee

The lack of accessible training in ASL or LSQ was raised by a large number of interviewees. Participants wanted arts training to be funded not solely so that they would be provided with interpreters, but also so that there might be opportunities for training to be offered by Deaf artists to Deaf and hearing artists.

With respect to emerging and community-based Deaf artists, most have a hard time promoting their work due to a lack of self-confidence, communication barriers and a lack of information about funding.

9.3.2 Funding issues for organizations

Organizations working in the area of Deaf and disability arts practices face barriers related to the lack of core funding, communications strategies and accessibility-related expenses and the quality of materials used.

The lack of core funding, which enables arts organizations to devote more time and resources to securing complementary funding, is a significant barrier. Often, the only financial resources come from project funding and are primarily allocated to salaries. Organizations find themselves in reactive mode rather than in proactive mode. In the absence of a regular financial base to ensure the sustainability of their activities, organizations are forced to be on a constant search for grants, putting a strain on the type of art they can support and create.

Most organizations recognize the need to develop different communications strategies with a view to sharing information about calls for tenders and funding for artists, including ASL and LSQ videos. They lament the lack of funding for such videos. Additionally, accessibility-related expenses such as LSQ and ASL interpretation for Deaf and hearing collaborators are a major financial barrier and often represent the largest portion of a project's accessibility budget. If this type of funding is not applied for early on, it is difficult to obtain after the fact. In such a case, the organization will not be able to afford to pay for training, creation and dissemination.

In the visual or performing arts, the lack of adequate financial resources can lead to purchasing inferior equipment, which can in turn lead to the idea that the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled are unprofessional. The lack of adequate financial resources can affect an organization's development, artists' career development and future grant funding.

9.4 Section summary

The artists and cultural workers interviewed generally acknowledged that there had been significant changes in the evolution of funding practices for the Deaf and disability arts in Canada over the past decade. This has been made possible in part by the development of equity policies at the Canada Council for the Arts and certain other provincial councils. Individuals are generally aware of the funding measures and programs available to them, although the programs are most familiar to those with connections to arts organizations.

Funding challenges are numerous and complex. The issues faced by artists have to do with time, financial insecurity and living expenses, the inaccessibility of funding application processes, devices, language and level of language, the alignment of artistic funding with funding to cover living expenses, accessibility-related expenses, funding discrepancies from one province to the next, the types of arts practices developed and funded, the make-up of juries and assessment procedures, self-confidence in relation to the internalization of oppression and the self-identification and professionalization of artists.

Issues of particular concern to organizations include core funding, funding for communications strategies, the availability of funding for accessibility-related expenses and the quality of materials. In short, in the absence of a regular financial base to ensure the sustainability of their activities, organizations are forced to actively seek grants, putting a strain on the type of art they can support and create. They encounter difficulties in sharing information about calls for tenders and funding for artists, as well as in securing accessibility-related expenses for creation and dissemination. In addition, in the visual arts and the performing arts, a decrease in financial resources is likely to have an impact on an organization's development, on the evolution of artists' careers and on obtaining future grants.

BEST PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL COURSES OF ACTION

Based on the experiences, points of view and needs expressed by the artists and cultural workers interviewed, as well as the examples of best practices cited by study participants, 82 potential courses of action are proposed—broken down into themes—to support and recognize the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled and to contribute to deconstructing systemic ableism and audism. Some solutions are complemented with best practices.



10.1 Funding

1. **Fund the arts practices of people who are deaf or disabled by strategically prioritizing them.** Identify artists who are Deaf or disabled as a priority group in the strategic planning of cultural institutions, as these artists live disproportionately in precarious conditions and poverty and experience exclusion.

BEST PRACTICE

The Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario, Toronto and Montréal arts councils have identified artists who are Deaf or disabled as a priority minority group. They offer funding programs for the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled and dedicated organizations.

2. **Cover accessibility-related expenses on an ongoing basis, through funds that are separate from funding for creation, dissemination, travel or the core operations of organizations.** This ensures that artists who are Deaf or disabled do not have to pay often expensive accessibility-related expenses (LSQ and ASL interpreters, attendants, etc.) out of pocket. Funding for access equity measures (e.g., interpretation) expressed after a grant is awarded would also support artists entering the artistic process belatedly.

BEST PRACTICE

The Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario, Toronto, Winnipeg and Montréal arts councils, as well as the Conseil des arts et lettres du Québec, have programs that provide additional support or assistance for accessing services, and Arts Nova Scotia offers a specific program, Arts Equity Funding Initiative.⁴⁰

3. **Support Deaf and disability arts practices at the provincial and municipal levels.** Following the Canada Council for the Arts' lead would encourage equity measures at the provincial and municipal levels. In particular, it would ensure better support for emerging artists.
4. **Fund the professional development of artists in training in order to support artists, particularly emerging artists.**
5. **Fund artists' travel across Canada, regardless of their status (professional or emerging).** This would contribute to interprovincial, inter-community and inter-organizational collaborations, as well as to the professionalization of Deaf and disability artists. Emerging artists taking part in significant artistic events contributes to their professionalization.

BEST PRACTICE

The Canada Council for the Arts offers funding opportunities for early career artists.⁴¹

6. **Make funding application processes and websites accessible.** Improve accessibility and simplify grant application processes through the use of a variety of media (e.g., videos in sign languages, accessible documents for screen decoders, simplified language instructions, etc.). There are Web accessibility guidelines that apply to architecture, media and plain language.

40 Arts Nova Scotia. "Arts Equity Funding Initiative." <https://artsns.ca/programs/arts-equity-funding-initiative>.

41 Canada Council for the Arts. "Opening the Door to New and Early Career Artists." 2019. <https://canadacouncil.ca/spotlight/2019/02/necap>.

7. **Offer an application-writing coaching service, provided by qualified personnel** in the area of arts practice funding applications, or a list of relevant resources.

 **BEST PRACTICE**

The Canada Council for the Arts and the Manitoba, Ontario and Toronto arts councils have application support programs that provide Deaf and disability artists with resources for writing grant applications (e.g., translation of applications from ASL or LSQ into English or French, transcription assistance, etc.).

8. **Make funding categories more flexible so that artists and organizations that provide training**, in addition to the production and promotion of artists, can receive funding.
9. **Inform artists about funding aggregation and how grants from cultural institutions and disability pensions mix.** Provide the necessary information for stacking government grants, in order to support people who fear losing their income support (e.g., social assistance) by receiving funding for their arts practice.
10. **Find ways to avoid taxing creative funds and project accessibility funds on artists' personal tax returns.**
11. **Update disability pension funding policies to eliminate tax fees and financial penalties** by excluding arts grants from income and assets for people who receive social assistance.

 **BEST PRACTICE**

The Ontario government has updated its policies and is ensuring that obtaining arts funding does not reduce the amounts provided by the Ontario Disability Support Program.

12. **Fund the cultural, architectural and communicational accessibility** of the arts and culture communities, particularly training organizations (so that their offering is accessible to all) and presenters (e.g., the adoption of a Carte accessibilité loisir ⁴² [companion leisure card] by all institutions, guided tours for target audiences, relaxed performances, etc.). Accompany cultural institutions in their funding efforts to develop the architectural accessibility of their venues. Develop a funding program aimed at supporting the communicational accessibility of the cultural offering (e.g., subtitling, video description and interpretation in LSQ and ASL).
13. **Prepare funding measures for accessibility-related expenses.** Organizations (creation, training, dissemination) that provide for the funding and logistics of equity and accessibility measures make it possible to avoid that burden being placed on individuals' shoulders, thus relieving participants who are Deaf or disabled of some of the mental burden. Moreover, designing accessible spaces and situations encourages Deaf or disabled people to participate.
14. **Fund arts organizations for their mentorship work in order to recognize the coaching work** that is often done on a volunteer basis by employees, ensuring that knowledge is passed on within artist communities.
15. **Increase budgets for interpretation services.** There is a need for increased funding to pay for interpretation services, which are expensive.
16. **Increase income support.** Many artists who are Deaf or disabled are asking for an increase in income support as part of the grants they receive, given that many of them live below the poverty line and face barriers in accessing the labour market.
17. **Allow Deaf artists to submit their final reports in sign languages.** One Deaf artist suggested that the final reports could be filed in ASL or LSQ, certain that this would greatly help artists.

⁴² Association québécoise pour le loisir des personnes handicapées. "La Carte accompagnement loisir." <https://www.aqlph.qc.ca/carte-accompagnement-loisir/>.

18. **Provide all arts councils with an equity and inclusion clause.** In order to receive funding, organizations should be required to demonstrate that they are implementing the necessary means to ensure diversity and inclusion, which means including people who are Deaf or disabled.
19. **Develop medical insurance for artists who must incur medical expenses related to their disability.**

10.2 Preparing grant applications and planning projects

20. **Provide opportunities for mentoring and administrative support in the development of grant applications.** This would let artists and organizations managed by people who are Deaf or disabled benefit from professional expertise in preparing grant applications, become familiar with the codes of the cultural and artistic milieus and develop the skills to obtain funding for their practices.

BEST PRACTICE

Working with an arts organization helped many participants to be more successful in their grant applications, as they were able to take advantage of their expertise in applying for funding. Examples include Workman Arts, which provides peer mentoring for artists with mental health or addiction experiences, and SPiLL PROpagation and its mentorship program for Deaf artists.

10.3 Assessing grant applications

21. **Assess artistic merit fairly.** Promote equity measures for the assessment of artistic merit, given that it is difficult for Deaf and disability artists to amass practice time or to access normative forms of peer recognition, due to the barriers they face.
22. **Diversify the make-up of juries by involving a diversity of people who are Deaf or disabled.** This would make it possible to assess files by taking into account a wide range of backgrounds and, in so doing, to support Deaf and disability practices, including the practices of people with a cognitive disability or people who are neurodiverse.

10.4 Equity, diversity and inclusion in cultural, arts and media circles

23. **Raise awareness and educate people working** in cultural institutions on issues of equity, diversity and inclusion, particularly with respect to people who are Deaf or disabled, as well as on the notions of empowerment and audism. Develop awareness-raising materials and training on equity, diversity and inclusion in the arts and culture.
24. **Hire Deaf or disabled program officers in cultural institutions,** particularly in all arts councils. This would help establish ties with the communities and provide artists with adequate support in their efforts to obtain funding.
25. **Encourage leadership from different Deaf and disability artists** in order to celebrate the diversity of the Deaf and disability communities.
26. **Invite Deaf and disabled people to sit on working groups,** boards of directors, advisory committees, etc.
27. **Fill decision-making positions with Deaf and disabled people.** Visibility and access to decision making for Deaf and disabled people provides inspiring role models and positive changes in social perceptions and realities and encourages artists to join the communities.

28. **Consult with Deaf and disabled people with respect to the development of policies and action plans in every institution**, city, province and territory. Some issues are common to all of them, but priorities for action may differ; there are geographic disparities in terms of progress and delays in equity, diversity and inclusion.
29. **Recognize the privileges of directors, officers and employees** of cultural institutions, which implies that organizations be open and give themselves the time and space to recognize the power relations that are in place within their institutions.
30. **Establish inclusive practices, a must for making Deaf**, disabled and mad artists feel more welcome and comfortable discussing their own experiences in the organizations where they work, with whom they collaborate or with whom they apply for funding.

 **BEST PRACTICE**

Provide creative materials. Artist-run centres and community arts initiatives that provide materials enable artists to lighten their financial burden and foster inclusivity.

31. **Develop tools to make it easier to recruit and hire artists who are Deaf or disabled.** For example, the Union des artistes' directory should make it possible to conduct a specific search based on identity (e.g., Deaf person, disabled person).

10.5 Raising awareness

32. **Make people working in cultural organizations and artistic educational** or training institutions aware of ableism and audism, equip them with the necessary tools and promote equity and equity measures.
33. **Raise awareness and educate society about the issues faced** by people who are Deaf or disabled, in order to help combat stigmatization.
34. **Raise awareness and educate the hearing community** about the persistent issues faced by Deaf people, so that the majority population has basic knowledge of the Deaf cultural and linguistic minority.

10.6 Cultural accessibility and resources

35. **Make hosts responsible for accessibility.** In the interest of fairness, Deaf and disabled people attending events should not be the ones in charge of organizing accessibility measures.

 **BEST PRACTICE**

Certain organizations already have protocols and materials in place, relieving artists of the mental burden associated with planning and organizing accessibility measures.

36. **Improve accessibility to training, creation, production and dissemination venues for Deaf and disability artists:** workshops, residencies, studios, rehearsal rooms, performance halls and stages, festivals, dressing rooms, galleries, etc.
37. **Improve cultural offering accessibility and make information on the (in)accessibility of cultural offerings mandatory.** All programming should indicate how it is or is not accessible. Deaf and disabled people waste a lot of time trying to find out about the (in)accessibility of cultural activities.
38. **Raise awareness about accessibility issues**, including transportation, within the general arts sector so that arts organizations and collaborators take barriers into account and encourage best practices in terms of accessibility.

39. **Ensure representation in government** in order to implement a cross-cutting policy of cultural accessibility by making institutions at all levels accountable.
40. **Provide for accessibility from the outset of any project**, in particular by allocating the necessary budget and choosing accessible infrastructure for holding any cultural activity.
41. **Design accessibility measures by taking into account the different requirements** of various audiences with diverse needs (physical, ability-based, linguistic and neurodiverse). Designing artistic spaces and performances with disabilities in mind is part of a new ethos of inclusivity. Offering various adaptations for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing (e.g., interpreters, FM, infra-red and magnetic systems, seats with maximum reception, closed captioning, etc.), visually impaired (e.g., theatre and video description) and neurodiverse (e.g., relaxed performances).
42. **Hire deaf and disabled people to develop new audiences**, for example by hiring Deaf guides in museums and cultural mediators—Deaf or disabled—in various cultural organizations.
43. **Make captions and described video mandatory for all audiovisual productions.**
44. **Provide funding to cultural organizations that want to make their programming accessible.**
45. **Introduce free admission so that cultural activities, such as museums,** are accessible to all, taking into consideration that many artists have low incomes.
46. **Grant free admission to any accompanying person at all times,** for any artistic activity and in any cultural institution.
47. **Hire accessibility coordinators at the beginning of each collaboration or create permanent positions to take on these roles;** this would go a long way to recognizing that accessibility is at the heart of collaboration and should not be the financial responsibility of artists with disabilities.
48. **Develop and disseminate a list of resources and best practices.** Provide a list of resources listing interpretation and accessibility consulting services in each city, province and territory, as well as a detailed list of best practices (e.g., approaches to developing relaxed performances, visual accessibility icons for the arts community, etc.). Support the creation and ongoing maintenance of free and accessible resources, which help make the arts accessible. For reasons of accessibility, online tools are particularly relevant.



10.7 Information and communications technology and social media

49. **Use communications technology**, which offers promising possibilities in terms of accessibility, be it to provide various types of access (subtitles, computers with screen reader software, etc.) or to enable certain people to take part in activities (via Skype or Zoom) that would otherwise be inaccessible to them.

 **BEST PRACTICE**

Some organizations allow participation in activities (e.g., training) at a distance and broadcast their events online (e.g., on Facebook Live).

50. **Develop communications technology** to address some of the gaps in accessibility and support the development of innovative arts practices.

 **BEST PRACTICE**

Cultural institutions such as the Canadian Museum for Human Rights are using communications technology in innovative ways, and the videos shown are based on attractive design and accessibility principles.

51. **Use social media to disseminate practices**, providing a showcase for Deaf and disability artists and publicizing their practices.

 **BEST PRACTICE**

The Ontario Arts Council has created and disseminated a video series entitled, “Boundless: Deaf Artists, Artists with Disabilities and OAC.”



10.8 Training

52. **Organize training and mentoring in ASL, LSQ, and ISL led by Deaf artists.**
53. **Offer accessible training or training intended for Deaf and disability artists.**
54. **Have the flexibility to accommodate transportation and home care schedules** that may delay people and force them to leave rehearsals or activities early.
55. **Fund mentorship within Deaf arts organizations.** Mentoring from Deaf arts administrators was highlighted as a practice that should be developed and funded, since Deaf people generally do not have access to information in English and French.
56. **Encourage intergenerational dialogue and stimulate Deaf youth interest** in the Deaf arts in particular, but not exclusively. Encouraging young people to become involved in arts organizations is an opportunity for the community to evolve and grow, encouraging new aesthetics and perspectives to develop.

10.9 Dissemination

57. **Disseminate the arts practices of Deaf and disabled people** within the general cultural and artistic community. Include the works of Deaf and disability artists on dissemination platforms, e.g., at festivals and exhibitions in the arts community at large.
58. **Avoid stigmatizing or pigeonholing the art of Deaf and disabled people.** Many artists make art that does not necessarily express a relationship to their Deafness or disability.
59. **Organize annual events for the dissemination of Deaf and disability arts.** Artists hope that annual events that enable Deaf artists to meet, network and access the cultural productions of their peers can be created.
60. **Develop platforms for the dissemination of Deaf and disability arts.** While artists do mention the existence of certain platforms (Bluenose Ability Arts & Film Festival, Ability Festival or SOUND OFF: A Deaf Theatre Festival, for example), they also consider that there are not enough dissemination spaces. Some artists aspire to a greater abundance of opportunities to disseminate their work.
61. **Support the mobilization of artists and the establishment of organizations dedicated** to the Deaf, disability and mad arts. This would make it possible to have dissemination channels for artistic works, to help certain artists break out of isolation and, at the same time, to take a weight off the shoulders of the current—very few—leaders.



10.10 Recognition of artistic merit

62. **Give awards to Deaf and disability artists**, thereby increasing recognition among the wider public.

💡 BEST PRACTICE

The Canada Council for the Arts presented the Michael J. Fox Award to France Geoffroy, a pioneer of integrated dance in Quebec.

The ACTRA (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists) presented the Woman of the Year Award to Deaf artist Catherine Mackinnon in 2016.

63. **Fight the assumption that mad art is a therapeutic practice**, thereby highlighting the professional, semi-professional or emergent nature of the arts practices of people living with mental illness or mental health issues, neuroatypical people and people who identify as mad.

💡 BEST PRACTICE

Artist-run centres such as Workman Arts, in Toronto, are fighting prejudice by providing a creative space where it is possible to engage in arts practices that have purposes other than therapeutic ones.



10.11 Networking

64. **Create a pan-Canadian communications network between organizations** and associations of Deaf and disability artists through which they can share information, network and counter isolation.
65. **Create and support spaces for dialogue**, networking and collaboration that bring together artists from different geographical areas to present and discuss their arts practices and foster new collaborations, whether through conferences, seminars, screenings, festivals, etc.

BEST PRACTICE

SPiLL PROpagation's pan-Canadian forums for Deaf artists (Gatineau 2014, and Saint-Jean-Port-Joli 2017) and the Crippling the Arts (Toronto 2016 and 2019) and Vibes (Montreal 2017 and 2018) disability arts symposia were notable networking opportunities.

66. **Ensure the accessibility of networking spaces**, particularly through the presence of LSQ and ASL interpreters. While ASL is too often considered a priority over LSQ, their joint presence, when appropriate, ensures inclusion for many Deaf artists.



10.12 Cultural representation

67. **Develop cultural representation ethics.** Promote ethical cultural representation practices, including Deaf and disabled people in scriptwriting positions so that scripts reflect their realities as accurately as possible.
68. **Diversify cultural representation.** Promote the inclusion of racialized and Indigenous Deaf and disabled people in the arts and the media.
69. **Counter stereotypical cultural representation,** cultural appropriation and the usurpation of cultural identity by developing policies against cultural appropriation. Offer Deaf and disabled people roles that are not stereotyped and/or focus solely on disability. For example, auditioning a Deaf or disabled person for the role of a school principal, without the role being written in terms of disability. In addition, many artists want the roles of Deaf and disabled people to be performed by artists concerned with these realities and not by hearing or able-bodied people.

10.13 Media coverage

70. **Prohibit sensationalist and stereotypical practices** related to an artist's Deafness or disability. For example, focus on a person's arts practice rather than their physical condition and present the person as an artist first and foremost.
71. **Check with artists ahead of time on the angle of a report or an article and the vocabulary used.** Do not make assumptions about a person's diagnosis, condition or the terms they use to identify themselves.

10.14 Communication

72. Include a diversity of sign languages and accessible formats in cultural and artistic activities, ensuring that a diversity of people, including people who are Deaf, hard of hearing or deaf-blind and people living with Usher syndrome, are taken into consideration.

BEST PRACTICE

Certain events (e.g., the consultation tour for **Bill C-81 on accessibility**) offer interpretation in LSQ and ASL in addition to tactile interpretation and the transcription of audio content in French and English, which is broadcast using a projector.

73. Develop inclusive communications strategies that include accessible information in LSQ, ASL and Native Sign Language, audio description and simplified information.

74. Hire Deaf people to sign LSQ and ASL videos, making it easier for Deaf people to adhere to proposed initiatives.

75. Write calls for contributions in an accessible, simplified and easy-to-understand script. If necessary, use simplified writing services.

76. Promote events through videos in ASL and LSQ. In order to communicate information about a cultural event, producing videos in sign languages means reaching and mobilizing the participation of Deaf people, who otherwise may not even have been aware of the events that are accessible to them.

BEST PRACTICE

The “**Événements accessibles en LSQ ou ASL**” Facebook page disseminates information, mostly in Quebec.

77. Comply with accessibility standards for documents, websites and images.


78. Develop a network of information relays to disseminate calls for contributions to organizations for people who are Deaf or disabled and to make funding opportunities known to emerging artists. Some organizations have newsletters for their members.

79. Diversify methods of communication by using conventional mail, making it possible to inform people who do not have access to or do not use new 2.0 communications methods.

80. Communicate detailed event accessibility information and invite people to contact you with any specific needs.

81. Support the training of interpreters in LSQ and ASL, since there is currently a shortage of interpreters.

82. Develop training in interpretation specific to the cultural field, so that interpreters develop skills in translating from sign languages into oral languages (e.g., tone and voice specific to theatre).



KEY POINTS AND CONCLUSION

This study on the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled in Canada identified a diversity of practices, discourses and experiences, raised key issues around support and recognition and presented a set of best practices and potential solutions proposed by the artists and cultural workers we met with.

The study of statistical data shows that artists who are Deaf or disabled live in more precarious situations than artists in general. The discrepancy between the number of Deaf and disability artists and the overall funding provided to these artists has led the Canada Council for the Arts to strategically increase funding to Deaf and disability artists. Between 2011–2012 and 2017–2018, Council funding to support Deaf and disability organizations and artists more than quadrupled, increasing from \$1.1 million to \$4.7 million. While the Council is a leader in supporting and recognizing Deaf and disability artists, these artists receive insufficient support from public funding institutions, and most provincial and municipal arts councils did not have established support structures or strategic prioritization targeting this minority group at the time of data collection in 2018.



A review of the scientific literature yields very little published information about the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled in Canada, and yet they are becoming a topic of interest in many colleges and universities. In addition, the literature review highlighted specific literature on the theatre arts. A census of data from media coverage and the websites of organizations reveals a diversity of practitioners and a presence in all fields of practice, as classified by the Canada Council for the Arts. The collection of documentary data highlights the link between support for artists who are Deaf or disabled and their autonomy, the latter being intrinsically linked to their self-determination and the way they identify.

Collecting primary data resulted in a significant amount of information from 85 participants in eight cities and five provinces across Canada. The artists and cultural workers interviewed emphasized the systemic oppression they experienced (such as ableism and audism) and the many obstacles they encountered in their careers and in their practice, as professional, semi-professional or emerging artists. They also shared many examples of best practices and possible solutions. The study shows how important the contribution of Deaf and disability artists is to society—but also how insufficiently supported, recognized and funded they are as artists. There was general agreement that there are slow but progressive changes in the support and recognition of the arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled in Canada.

Multiple courses of action emerged from the study, as presented in the previous section. The changes needed to better support and recognize artists who are Deaf or disabled are dependent on broader social changes. In addition, generally improved access to services (transportation, architectural accessibility, communicational accessibility), raising awareness, training and the proactive engagement of various social and cultural players are necessary to bring about the desired transformations in the cultural and artistic milieus and to contribute to ensuring full cultural citizenship for people who are Deaf or disabled.

Further research could explore themes such as the intersectionality of cultural diversity and accessibility issues in order to develop global perspectives on equity and inclusion. In fact, some participants stressed the extent to which practices that value cultural diversity promote a diversity of abilities that are often absent for people who are Deaf or disabled, while those that value the accessibility or arts practices of people who are Deaf or disabled denote predominantly white cultural representation. In addition, the terminology used could be the subject of research and consultation in order to be as representative as possible. Just as expressions like “sexual and gender diversity” and “cultural diversity” speak to plural identities, the expression “body, cognitive, linguistic and neurological diversity” that we are proposing could be the subject of discussions with the people concerned. Indeed, the expression “Deaf or disabled people” used in this study, although accompanied by a note on the diversity of people included, is not sufficiently representative.

APPENDICES

12.1 Participating organizations

- Advancing Accessible Arts in Manitoba
- Ahuri Theatre
- Arts Junktion
- Atlantic Filmmakers Cooperative
- BEING - studio for artists with developmental disabilities
- Bus Stop Theatre
- CARFAC BC
- Cinéall Productions des Sourds
- Code Universel
- Comité d'aide aux femmes sourdes de Québec
- Contemporary Art Gallery
- Corpuscule Danse
- Creative Manitoba
- CRIPSiE
- Deaf Culture Centre
- Entr'Actes
- Gang de Roue
- Graffiti Art Programming
- Groupe Intervention Vidéo
- Joe Jack et John
- Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture
- Laboratoire des Nouvelles Technologies de l'Image, du Son et de la Scène (LANTISS)
- Les Muses
- Les productions des pieds des mains
- MAI Montréal, arts interculturels
- Manitoba Cultural Society for the Deaf
- MoMo Dance Theatre Company
- Musée de la civilisation de Québec
- Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal
- Propeller Dance
- RAPHO
- Realwheels Theatre
- Seeing Voices Montréal
- SOUND OFF: A Deaf Theatre Festival
- Spectrum Productions
- Tangled Art + Disability
- VibraFusionLab
- Vidéographe
- Ville de Québec – Division des arts et des bibliothèques
- Workman Arts
- Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia

12.2 List of organizations to which research participants are affiliated

British Columbia

- All Bodies Dance
- Artists Helping Artists
- Cool Arts
- Gallery Gachet
- Kickstart – Disability Arts and Culture
- Skydive – Realwheels Theatre
- Start with Art
- The Dis/ability Arts, Culture and Public Pedagogy Cluster
- Theatre Terrific

Alberta

- MoMo Multi-Ability Movement Arts Society of Calgary
- Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts
- Rising Sun Theatre Society
- Stage Left Productions
- Association of the Inside Out Integrated Theatre Project
- Indefinite Arts Centre
- Collaborative Radically Integrated Performer Society

Saskatchewan

- Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Council
- Saskatchewan Artists of Ability Festival

Manitoba

- Arts AccessAbility Network Manitoba
- ArtBeat Studio

Ontario

- Accessible Media Inc. (AMI-tv and AMI-audio)
- Abilities Arts Festival
- Aiding Dramatic Change in Development
- Artists Without Barriers
- Creative Spirit Art Centre
- cp salon/Good Hair Day Productions
- Deaf Culture Centre
- Famous PEOPLE Players
- Glenvale Players Theatre Group
- H'art Centre
- National Arts Centre
- Creative Users Projects
- Picasso PRO
- Propeller Dance
- Ryerson University School of Disability Studies
- Tangled Art + Disability
- The Spirit Movers – L'Arche Daybreak
- The Common Criminal Theatre Project
- Workman Arts

Quebec

- AMI-Télé
- Cineall Productions des Sourds
- Segal Centre (offers performances in ASL)
- Corpuscule Danse
- Entr'actes
- Exeko
- Joe Jack et John Theatre
- Gang de Roues
- La société culturelle québécoise des Sourds
- Les Muses: Centre des arts de la scène
- Les Productions des pieds et des mains
- Art Hives
- Montréal Arts Interculturel
- Seing Voices Montréal
- Spectrum Productions
- SpillPROpagation
- Teva (Caserne 18-30)
- Théâtre Aphasique
- TraduSigne
- Vidéographe
- Vision sur l'art Québec

New Brunswick

- Creative Connections
- Mindscapes New Brunswick

Nova Scotia

- Art of Disability Festival
- Art Gallery of Nova Scotia
- Support4Culture
- Nova Scotia Advocate

Prince Edward Island

- PEI Council of People with Disabilities
- Confederation Centre of the Arts

Nunavut

- The nunavummi Disabilities Society
- Department of Culture and Heritage

Northwest Territories

- NWT Disabilities Council

12.3 Note on the bibliography and glossary

In addition to the report, a bibliography and a glossary are available at <https://canadacouncil.ca/research/research-library/2018/05/deaf-and-disability-arts>

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover page: © Les Muses: centre des arts de la scène and Sandra Lynn-Bélanger, 2017. The neuro(a) typical artists, Gabrielle Marion-Rivard and Olivier Rousseau, performing in the show *Fêtes, petites écorchures et effets presque spéciaux*, presented at the Cabaret des Muses, in Montreal.

Page 3: © Christine Bourcier, 2015. Actor Laurence Brunelle-Côté, with Julie Cloutier-Delorme and Simon Elmaleh in the background, performing in the play *La Jeune-Fille et la mort* presented at Espace Libre in Montreal.

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Page 37: © National Arts Centre, 2017. Artist Barak Adé Soleil and in the foreground, ASL interpreter, Jordan Goldman, at the event *The 2016-17 Cycle: Deaf, disability, Mad arts and inclusion*.

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Page 40: © Michelle Peek Photography and Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology & Access to Life, ReVision: The Centre for Art & Social Justice at the University of Guelph, 2019. Tarik Elmoutawakil from the collective *Brownston Abbey* performing at the event *Crippling the Arts*, Harbourfront Centre, Toronto.

Page 42: © Studio 303. Seeley Quest, trans and disabled artist, in the Fear Drag workshop at the Queer Performance Camp 2017 of Studio 303, with Emilie Paul-Zolezzi and Jordan Arseneault.

Page 44: © Entr'actes and Nicola-Frank Vachon, 2019. Artist, Xavier Tessier-Bouchard, in the scene *Les belles-bêtes* of *PARC*, annual show of *dance* and theatre training workshops offered to people with physical and intellectual limitations.

Page 45: © Christine Bourcier, 2014. Comedian, Laurence Brunelle-Côté, with Jasmin Cloutier, in the play *Les oiseaux mécaniques*, presented at Espace Libre, in Montreal.

Page 48: © Aude Vuillemin and Maxime D.-Pomerleau, 2018. Dance video *Je marche* by Aude Vuillemin, 7 minutes 18 seconds. Image from video, available online: <https://vimeo.com/groups/artvideofilm/videos/267458884>.

Page 50: © Natalie Dobbin / CBC, 2019. Anna Quon alongside an illustration of her poem *Cliff*, from her collection *Mad Woman: a memoir of madness in poetry*.

Page 51: © Entr'actes and Nicola-Frank Vachon, 2019. Maria Laura Chobadindegui, Lydie Côté, Laura Doyle-Péan, Olivier de la Durantaye, Justin Houle, Gabriel Lemieux, Dale Perron and Noémie Rivest-Hénault in *PARC*, annual show of dance and theatre training workshops offered to people with physical and intellectual limitations.

Page 52: © Sue Austin. Artist, Sue Austin, in one of her underwater scuba diving performances in a wheelchair. Image from her TED conference, available online: https://www.ted.com/talks/sue_austin_deep_sea_diving_in_a_wheelchair.

Page 53: © Henry Chan, 2016. Artist, Tamyka Bullen, Deaf person of color, signing a poem in ASL at the *Theatre Centre* of Toronto.

Page 56: © The Signs of the Maritimes Deaf Theatre, 2019. Discussion between members of the theatre troupes *The Signs of the Maritimes* (Halifax, Nova Scotia) and *Deaf Crow Collective* (Regina, Saskatchewan) after the play *Apple Time* presented at the SOUND OFF Deaf Theatre Festival in Edmonton, Alberta.

Page 57: © Jaene Francy Castrillon, 2016. Mixed race (Hong Kong Chinese/Indigenous Colombian) 2Spirit, trans, queer, mad, disabled multi-disciplinary artist Jaene Francy Castrillon behind their camera, at the *Artscape Gibraltar Point's Site and Cycle Film's* artists residency, in Toronto.

Page 62: © Sandra-Lynn Bélanger et Les Muses: Performing Arts Centre, 2017. Neuro(a)typical artists, Jean-François Hupé et Marie-Anik Deschamps, in the show *Fêtes, petites écorchures et effets presque spéciaux* presented at the Cabaret des Muses in Montreal.

Page 63: © Heather Zinge, 2016. Carmen Papalia's *Blind Field Shuttle* leads participants through public spaces and sound installations in Toronto.

Page 64: © Good Host Programme, 2019. *Trajectories in Access* session gathering municipal, provincial and federal government representatives from art councils, and key leaders from the arts and cultural sector, as part of a discussion on the best practices for accessibility and inclusion at the Crippling the Arts event in Harbourfront Center, Toronto.

Page 68: © Microfestival, 2018. Hodan Youssouf and Sylvio Arriola in the piece *Présences, nos corps racontent*, presented at ZH Festival in Montreal.

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Page 73: © Jason Thériault, 2019. Deaf artist Pamela Witcher, signs «A perfect representation of our Deaf village is sign language». Image from the video *My heart is a village* available online: https://youtu.be/_uzZiLB2zIY

Page 74: © Les Productions des pieds des mains, 2018. As part of an inclusive dance workshop, Menka Nagrani, choreographer and teacher, works with artist Carl Hennebert Faulkner, and the accompanist musician, Alexis Chartrand, in the background.

Page 75: © Lindsay Duncan / Broken Pencil, 2018. Portrait of Carlisle Robinson, Deaf and genderqueer illustrations artist, in an article by Lindsay Gibb published in the *Broken Pencil* revue.

Page 77: © Marianne Duval. 2014. Deaf artists, Tiphaine Girault, Peter Owusu-Ansah and Ali Saeedi, in A Glimpse of *Me/Une parcelle de moi*, a multilingual play offered in French and in French, American and Iranian sign language.

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Page 92: © The Signs of the Maritimes Deaf Theatre, 2019. Alan Williams and Jim McDermott, actors from the theatre troupe *The Signs of the Maritimes* during the SOUND OFF Deaf Theatre Festival in Edmonton, Alberta.

Page 93: © Peter J. Thompson / National Post, 2016. Sean Lee, visibly disabled East-Asian artist, in front of the exhibition *Constructed Identities* by Persimmon Blackbridge, at the Tangled Art + Disability gallery.

Page 95: © Les Productions des pieds des mains, 2018. Artists, Marilyn Perreault, Gabrielle Marion Rivard and Olivier Rousseau in the play *Cendres* by Menka Nagrani presented at Théâtre Prospero, in Montreal.

Page 96: © Michelle Peek Photography and Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology & Access to Life, ReVision: The Center for Art & Social Justice at the University of Guelph, 2019. The public of *Through A Tired Eye* by Bruce Horak at the Tangled Art + Disability in Toronto.

Page 97: © Dahlia Katz, 2019. Deaf actors Natasha «Courage» Bacchus, Corinna Den Dekker, Dawn Jani Birley, Daniel Durant, Yan Liu in the musical comedy *The Black Drum*, produced by the Deaf Culture Centre and presented in Toronto by the Soupepper Theatre Company, in collaboration with the Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf.

Page 99: © Laurie M. Landry, 2018. Self-portrait of artist, Laurie M. Landry, signing «Hearing». Oil on canvas.

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Page 101: © Simone Edwards-Forde, 2018. *Red bridge in fall at Perth*, photography.

Page 104: © Rick Miller and Geneviève Thibault, 2018. Photography of Rick Miller in the York river in Gaspé, Québec, from the *Ancestral Mindscapes*, an autobiography documentary project examining madness, indigeneity, colonialism and the healing power of nature.

Page 108: © Olivia Dreisinger, 2017. Olivia Dreisinger beside the 3D Avatar, River Tam, in her animation studio in Victoria, BC.



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