

access  
anthology

REFLECTIONS ON DISABILITY ART AND CULTURE



# **table of contents**

foreword	5
summary	11
knowing access	15
the root of the word curator is care	23
considering the care clause	31
if you're lonely, i'll be lonely too	39
finding language	45
we want you here	53
honouring the witnesses	59
glossary	66
the people	72

what does  
it mean to  
centre crip  
ways of  
living and  
creating?

Over the past year, I've had the immense privilege of co-creating this Access Anthology reflecting on Tangled Art + Disability and affiliated artists' experiences working with access and Disability Arts. Working with Tangled on this project has given me the opportunity to witness Disability Arts and culture unfolding in real time, in the space of the gallery, and, most importantly, in the relationships between artists, curators, and arts administrators. In contrast to academic articles, which can often reduce our lived experience as Mad/Deaf/disabled people to theory, it is my hope that the works in this anthology will animate disability for the reader, giving disability a life beyond the pages in illustrating a vibrant disability culture with access practices and communities extending beyond the space of the written text or the gallery itself.

When so often we, as Mad/Deaf/disabled people and artists, are forgotten or left behind by institutions, systems, and wider communities, what does it mean to centre crip ways of living and creating? As you take up the offerings in this anthology, I invite you to consider what it means to live and work together, cultivating access in our communities, practices, and daily lives. How might our art, our work, and our communities centre Mad/Deaf/disabled lives and care, and in doing so, imagine a different world?

As opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach to access, a disability arts approach invites us to consider the ways that disability is entangled with our other identities as Indigenous, of colour, queer, poor, and/or working class artists and people. Beyond simple recognition, desiring disability invites us to name the ways that ableism is bound up with colonialism, racism, and other structures of power. Disability Arts intervene in these systems of power in embodied ways that invite us into interdependent relationships, make our lives more livable and our spaces more accessible.

The pieces in this anthology invite the reader to see access as rooted in our relationships, a process of learning and unlearning that asks us to get curious about our needs, our communities' needs, and how we might work with others to meet those needs. Contributions such as *If You're Lonely, I'll Be Lonely Too*, an Interview with Birdie Gerhl and *Knowing Access*, a roundtable between Sean Lee, Eliza Chandler, and Heidi Persaud take up the complexities surrounding the (non) disclosure of access needs and how we speak about our access needs are shaped by our relationships to power.

Several contributions explore disability and access as they are taken up in the arts through creative or curatorial practices and policy implementation in art spaces. In an interview between Gloria C Swain and Carmen Papalia, the artists-turned-curators discuss disability curation as an emerging practice in Disability Arts. Building on an understanding of curation as to "care for," a crippling of curatorial practices demands that curators centre Mad/Deaf/disabled artists as irreplaceable through caring curatorial practices.

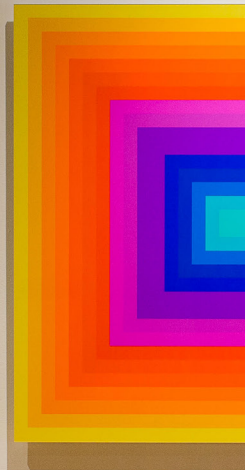
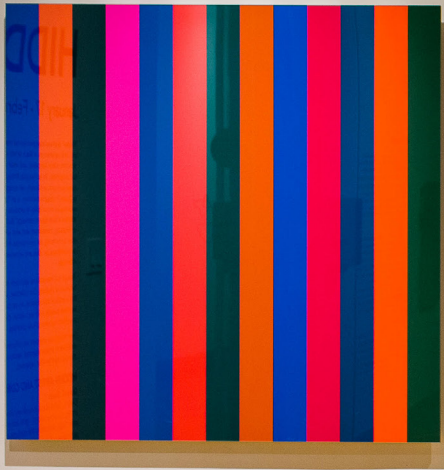
Conversations with Birdie Gerhl and Vanessa Dion Fletcher explore access as intrinsic to the arts and each artist's creative process. Beyond providing access, Disability Arts take up performance and visual art as a space for rewriting our relationships with the world around us as Mad/Deaf/disabled people. Describing her art as tracing around community-based care practices, Birdie emphasizes the importance of creating connections between access in our communities and lives. In a discussion of their performance piece *Finding Language* (2017), Vanessa Dion Fletcher speaks to their experience of being an English-speaking Lenapé person, exploring the ways disability, Indigeneity and colonial histories interweave through performance.

Disability Arts opens up interventions around access across both practice and protocol. Taking up a critical view of the arts that asks who we are making space for in our art spaces, in conversation with Jack Hawk, Tangled's Outreach Coordinator, Yolanda Bonnell discusses the ways they've incorporated Relaxed Performance (RP) as an access practice that invites mad/Deaf/disabled and neurodivergent people into the performance space. Through RP, Yolanda invites us to consider how we integrate our values into our art space and performances, arguing that access here is important for creating spaces of comfort and shared self-expression between performers and audience members.

In their reflection on the process of implementing access riders into staff contracts at Tangled, Cyn Rozeboom discusses the importance of creating policies and documents that centre caring for people over productivity in the workplace. Like in Gloria and Carmen's discussion of disability curation, access riders shift the importance off of productivity and onto accessibility—centring staff needs at the administrative level.

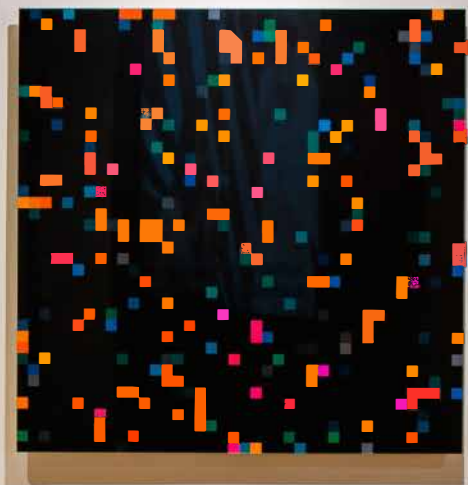
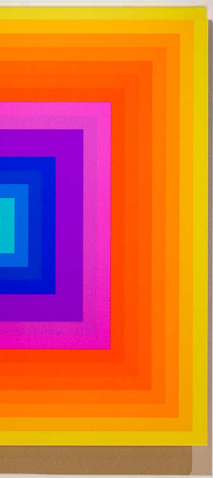
To me, the pieces in this anthology speak to access as a process of relationship building. Through our relationships, we can take care in process-oriented and contextual ways that honour the complexity of our lived experiences. I hope that in taking up this anthology, you will uncover new ways to find yourself in a relationship with access.

**LAUREN (L) MORRIS**



*From left to right: Stripe 1, Yellow Ring and Blackground by Peter Owusu-Ansah. Hidden curated by Gloria C. Swain, Tangled Art Gallery. Photo by Michelle Peek Photography and courtesy of Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology & Access to Life, Re•Vision: The Centre for Art & Social Justice at the University of Guelph.*





tldr:

TOO LONG, DIDN'T READ:

## knowing access

ELIZA CHANDLER, HEIDI PERSAUD, AND SEAN LEE

Past and present Tangled Art + Disability staff Heidi Persaud (Gallery Manager), Sean Lee (Director of Programming), and Eliza Chandler (Artistic Director 2014–16), discuss disability culture, belonging, and the translation of disability practices. With so much of access knowledge held in lived experience, how do we go about unlearning compliance-based methods of access to create communal cultures of access where risk-taking, failure, and other generative forms of access experimentation occur?

## the root of the word curator is care

CARMEN PAPALIA AND GLORIA C SWAIN  
(MODERATED BY SEAN LEE)

As artists-turned-curators involved in the final show at Tangled in 2019 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (*Hidden*) and first show launched since the gallery reopened in September, 2021 (*Undeliverable*), Gloria C Swain and Carmen Papalia speak to their prior involvement with access work and discuss what the experience of curating these shows at Tangled was like for the artists. What was the good and the bad, and how might this curatorial experience be different than in other gallery spaces?

## considering the care clause

CYN ROZEBOOM

Tangled Art + Disability's Executive Director Cyn Rozeboom reflects on the successes and limitations of the Care Clause which Tangled implemented in 2020. This clause is inserted into all staff agreements and puts into writing Tangled's commitment to prioritizing the well-being of the employee over any other performance measure.

## if you're lonely, i'll be lonely too:

BIRDIE GERHL INTERVIEWED BY LAUREN (L) MORRIS  
AND JET COGLAN

Birdie talks about her disability art practice as an attempt to tenderly trace around the real work of disability that exists in the complicated space in between bodies: the stuff of friendship, saying no, and the longing for a connection to all our struggles.

## finding language [reprinted from El Alto]

VANESSA DION FLETCHER

In this interview, Vanessa Dion Fletcher explores the multiple dimensions of her work and how access and disability take form through her artistic practice and the exhibition of her work. Dion Fletcher's interview, *Finding Language*, discusses the ways Fletcher has continued to explore access and disability in her work following her solo exhibition, *Own Your Cervix*, at Tangled Art Gallery in 2017.

## we want you here

FRANCIS TOMKINS, KAYLA BESSE, AND  
KRISTINA MCMULLIN

Present and former communications staff at Tangled discuss knowledge sharing around communications and access intimacy in the arts. Engaging in knowledge sharing from an experiential perspective, this piece invites other communications teams to take up accessible communications practices in reflexive ways.

## honouring the witnesses

YOLANDA BONNELL INTERVIEWED BY JACK HAWK

This interview between Jack Hawk, Tangled's Outreach Coordinator, and Yolanda Bonnell, an Indigenous theatre practitioner, approaches access in Yolanda's work, particularly around Relaxed Performance and Deaf Interpretation, which are woven deeply into their creative process.

# knowing access

ELIZA CHANDLER, HEIDI PERSAUD, AND SEAN LEE

*This contribution is a roundtable conversation between Sean Lee, Heidi Persaud, and Eliza Chandler. Sean is the Director of Programming at Tangled Art + Disability and has been with the organization since 2015. Heidi is the Gallery Manager and started as a volunteer five years ago. Eliza has been a board member since 2012 and Artistic Director from 2014 until 2016. She now teaches at Toronto Metropolitan University and remains involved with Tangled through projects like Bodies in Translation.*

**Sean Lee: How did we learn about access practices and disability culture?**

When I first encountered Tangled, I was really unsure of my place in crip culture. I wasn't particularly engaged in clubs or service spaces for people with disabilities because they didn't feel like spaces made for me or by people like me, but rather, spaces made for assimilation. I came into Tangled with a compliance-based mindset, expecting to learn about checklists and guidelines, but Tangled challenged these assumptions. My time here has allowed me to unlearn and relearn different cultural practices so that I can feel like less of an outsider to disability culture.

**Heidi Persaud:** My experience with disability prior to Tangled was having to navigate my own disability while doing a lot of care work for Mad-identified and crip parents. Very similar to Sean, I did not feel like I belonged in disability spaces, especially institutional spaces, such as galleries and schools. I noticed the difference when I first walked into Tangled, how a gallery can be transformed into something

a little bit different and more accommodating. There was a lot of unlearning and relearning and adapting and transforming and manifesting.

**Eliza Chandler:** I think it's so interesting, Sean, what you say about how you came into Tangled feeling like you didn't know about disability and accessibility, and that you were here to learn. I think that really demonstrates how, before we were introduced to disability or crip culture, we tended to understand doctors, rehab specialists, and physiotherapists as the people who "know" disability. It was never introduced to me that my lived experience was integral to knowing disability and knowing access as we're talking about here.

It's interesting to think I didn't feel like I knew disability, but I must have, and Sean, you must have too. Of course you did. But the way we lift up these "experts" causes us to be alienated from our own disability and access knowledge. And so to be welcomed into a space where we are invited to infuse those categories with our own meaning based on our own experience...

These places aren't telling us how we should identify with disability but offer up disability as an open category that the space invites us to think about.

**SL:** It's interesting: all three of us have had experiences of feeling like outsiders to our own community. Growing up, I had a friend with the same disability as me who showed me how to navigate the world by hacking it, such as getting extra time through the accommodations office when we took the SATs. This insider knowledge made me want more communal experiences with disabled individuals. At the same time, I still didn't have the same familiarity with disability as with other parts of my identity—my Chinese heritage or queerness. I've been taught culturally how to participate in Chinese culture, and there's a wealth of queer media, but disability has always felt uniquely isolated in how it shaped my

**it is important not to move away from rights altogether, but instead, to think about rights and justice as being in dynamic relationship.**

experiences navigating the world.

**HP:** I totally get it, Sean, I've been reflecting on my own heritage and how ritual and disability intersect. There are so many intersectionalities and it's kind of wild because I wouldn't have put those two things together. As I'm learning more about disability culture, I'm finding that rituals can be very much ingrained in disability culture and vice versa.

**SL: What is compliance-based access? What are some of the achievements and limitations of that approach to access? How do we unlearn compliance-based methods of access?**

**EC:** Canada is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which mandates that we need to have access to safe and affordable housing, transportation, healthcare, and so on. But living as a disabled person in Canada, I see so many



stories of how we don't have access to those kinds of things.

**SL:** We have to acknowledge that disabled people who are low-income or under-resourced, Indigenous, Black, or racialized have less access to the rights that Canada's legislation is meant to afford. And I think disability justice activists—especially disabled people who are also Indigenous, Black, people of colour, 2SLGBTQI+, low-income, or under-resourced—have rightly critiqued a legislative, rights-based framework as not equally affording disabled people access to the same kinds of things. In disability movements, we talk about rejecting the medical model and pathologization, and, in Mad movements particularly, rejecting institutionalization, and those are really important things to be rejecting.

**EC:** It's a reactive rather than a proactive legislation. It doesn't necessarily result in all permanent buildings becoming physically accessible, but it does allow you to take a landlord to court if they refuse to make their space accessible. Who has access to taking people to court

is obviously a huge question. But when we think about the limitations of compliance-based frameworks, recognizing that human rights alone will not lead to our freedom, it is important not to move away from rights altogether, but instead, to think about rights and justice as being in dynamic relationship. Access to voting is important, but it doesn't guarantee that you have candidates who reflect your values and cultural beliefs.

**SL:** Taking it into the gallery space, I think about Amanda Cachia's "creative access" and how, despite advocating for creative access, she acknowledges the importance of traditional access work. I've noticed some arts communities eagerly take on creative access without laying down the foundation of traditional access. I believe that creative access should be driven by the community, mobilized through the knowledge of Mad/Deaf/disabled people, and that you can't do creative access while simultaneously not providing traditional accommodations. I hesitate to critique creative access because access gets taken

up so little in the arts sector that you don't want to tear down folks who are beginning to excitedly take it on. But it's important to acknowledge the tension that exists between critiques of conventional access and the recognition that many people still need and don't have it.

**HP:** I was meditating on how we walk that tightrope in the gallery of conventional versus creative access. A lot of access is lived experience and relationship building, not a checklist. When I first came into this space, my mentality was "I'm going to create a checklist of my own. I'm going to create this conventional checklist so I can get things done on time." I had to unlearn what it meant to have that checklist to the point where it's like, I actually don't want that checklist. I want to actually build relationships with workers doing access, artists that are coming into the space, and actually create the creative access that we need for our events and our exhibitions. It was a very humbling experience.

**SL: What is access knowledge? How is it developed through lived experience? And how**

**is this embodied knowledge passed on?**

**EC:** Carmen Papalia talks about open access, which suggests that everyone has a body of knowledge that comes with their experience. Positioning Mad, Deaf, disabled, neurodiverse, chronically ill, k/crip, sick, and spoonie folks as access experts brings our discussion of access together, challenging who is positioned as experts regarding disability.

We need foundations of access, but these foundations can be built on what people bring into the room, things that they need that make the way they interact with what's going on possible, easier, and more comfortable. Access capacitates us to be our full selves. And given that the world isn't built with Mad, Deaf, disabled, neurodiverse, neuroqueer, chronically ill, k/crip, sick, and spoonie people in mind, access is always emergent and a process of negotiation.

And given that our access needs are multiple and, at times, conflicting, there will never be the sort of access utopia that we can slide in and out of, not when



our own access needs change day-by-day.

One of the things I love about this question is how much my own access knowledge is built up by my interactions with other people. When I see someone ask for something or see a new kind of access being provided, I might recognize my own experience in what is being capacitated, and that adds to my own self-knowledge of what I can ask for in the future.

**SL:** At Tangled, we were creating access riders for ourselves as a group for the first time, and

it was surprisingly challenging; we didn't always know what we needed to ask for.

We joked it probably made us bad disabled people. However, it was also generative because we realized our access needs could be articulated by our peers and friends through a network of access intimacy and interdependence. It made me think of how Carmen Papalia describes Open Access as an ever-present, organic negotiation when crip folks come together and develop access knowledge. Access knowledge, for me, is always changing, and that's why

there's so much critique of the checklist, because it tries to hide disability and we don't want to be hidden!

**HP:** I can speak a little bit to the second part of the question: What is the importance of

passing on this embodied knowledge and how do you work to pass this knowledge on?

We do it in practice, and the passing of knowledge is transferred to anyone working with us in our space. Our installs accommodate two weeks, which is a bit longer than a typical gallery. Rather than working with strict deadlines and adding pressure, we work with softer deadlines and create a more supportive environment. That includes knowledge being transferred to volunteers, staff, and contract workers through training and by having open-ended conversations.

**SL:** What were the roles of knowledge translation, skill sharing, mentorship or

**communities of practice in this learning?**

I always like to credit Eliza for making disability arts seem so vital to me, and that's what really drew me to disability culture and Tangled. In the ableist world I

grew up in, here was someone suddenly carving out a space to make disability desirable.

I'm also going to say that disability studies have played a key role in developing disability arts because they've given disability arts a political language, and I think we've been able to use that language to navigate an ableist art sector.

**EC:** This conversation has me thinking about the importance of talking about access and disability to increase our own self-knowledge and others' understanding of what might be helpful to ask for. And this has me wondering about the veil of secrecy that bureaucracy imparts on access. For example, at schools where students are taught to only share their access plans privately. When I'm

teaching a course and I open up access to be talked about in the classroom, people are very hesitant. And I'm wondering if there is a political motive behind teaching us to keep our access needs private. Not talking about the access strategies that work for us prevents revolution because we're not collectivizing.

**SL:** I think we've been taught to understand that to need access is a failure of the self, and that might contribute to why access doesn't get talked about. Because if you need access, then you're not competing in a capitalist world. But like you're saying, that's a tool of the oppressor. When we don't talk about our access needs, we struggle to understand one another's needs.

**HP:** I can speak a little bit about the lived experience of the secrecy or disclosure of access. Our environments can hinder those conversations, and having suppressive capitalist environments can be a reason for not wanting to disclose. I've experienced this unwillingness to disclose in my own life, and it's been because I haven't felt

comfortable in my environment. I think that it's a question of what kind of space we are carving out, whether in the art world or in these institutional spaces. How can we create an environment where we're able to disclose?

**SL:** This conversation was great. Why don't we conclude with some thoughts we've taken from this conversation today.

**EC:** That the transfer of intergenerational knowledge is not unidirectional; it flows all ways.

**SL:** I also think that the idea that we continue to learn and unlearn is so important.

**HP:** We're always constantly learning is my takeaway from the disability community, and we're always hacking and transforming and manifesting, which is a beautiful thought.

*Page 19: Justin Many Fingers and Brian Solomon during a performance of "What's Left of Us". Photo: Michelle Peek Photography courtesy of Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology & Access to Life, Re•Vision: The Centre for Art & Social Justice at the University of Guelph.*

# the root of the word curator is care

CARMEN PAPALIA AND GLORIA C SWAIN

*A conversation between Gloria C Swain and Carmen Papalia, disability artists and curators, and moderated by Sean Lee, the Director of Programming at Tangled Art + Disability. Gloria curated Hidden, Tangled's last exhibition before closure due to COVID-19, and Carmen curated Undeliverable, the first exhibition after reopening in 2021. Exploring disability politics and accessibility through these shows, the two Disability Arts practitioners discuss their experiences curating at Tangled.*

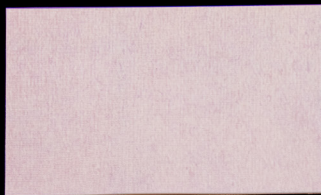
**Sean Lee:** We've brought together disability artists/curators Gloria C Swain and Carmen Papalia to discuss their experiences curating at Tangled, the evolution of disability politics and accessibility in their shows. Gloria curated *Hidden*, Tangled's last exhibition before closure due to COVID-19, and Carmen curated *Undeliverable*, the first exhibition after the gallery's reopening in 2021. Gloria and Carmen, what were the experiences of curating these shows at Tangled like? The good and the bad. And how might this curatorial experience differ from that in other gallery spaces?

**Carmen Papalia:** *Undeliverable* was a partnership with the Robert McLaughlin Gallery (RMG) and their curator, Leila Timmins. It included artists Aislinn Thomas, jes sachse, Jessica Karuhanga, Vanessa Dion Fletcher, and Chandra Melting Tallow. It was a long development process that was very collaborative, including with Leila and you, Sean. There were a lot of connections in the group through friendship and collaboration, and my sense

was that we had this significant opportunity to take up space in two galleries, Tangled and the RMG.

I wanted to start by asking each artist about the work they did not have the opportunity to make in the past, the work they felt they could make in a more disability-informed and supportive environment. So, each artist dreamt up projects or revisited proposals for projects that they hadn't been able to realize previously.

Originally, we planned on opening in 2020, but the process got stretched out, allowing us to meet up online and dream together. It was challenging at times because the timeline kept shifting, as it had to. Still, I never felt like it was impossible to get this show up and complete, because we were all honouring the crip time in the moment of this massive disruption [COVID-19 lockdowns]. That was something that we were holding collectively—to honour the rhythms of our bodies and minds and the rhythms of the wider disability community. Much of the work came from a group process, and it was a collaborative effort



## the feeling of being disabled,

with a lot of mentoring by Sean and Leila and guidance from the other artists.

**Gloria C Swain:** I intended to bring together something you normally don't see: a group of Black artists with disabilities. And I wanted to have different media there to attract different people. Peter Owusu-Ansah did amazing abstract work, Tamyka Bullen did a spoken word setup in ASL, and Kyisha Williams brought in a spiritual component, which was important because we are very spiritual in the

Black community. And my work was there too. As a Mad artist who speaks through my work, I wanted to highlight these artists. It wasn't about one artist; it was about a group. I wanted to show our community—a Black Mad community, an invisible disability community—which a lot of spaces don't acknowledge.

In many of these spaces, you can't walk in and say you're a Mad artist. You have to say, "I'm an artist." Often when I'm in these spaces, I have to create accessibility because it's not



already there. Because the show was before the shutdowns and there was talk of COVID-19, I didn't have as much of an opportunity to sit down face-to-face with artists, which I think impacted the show itself and the relationships with the artists. A lot of rearranging had to be done, but in the end, it was a very positive learning experience. It was well received by people in the disability community and the arts community at large. I felt fortunate to work with these artists. I wanted to create that space for people that don't typically get space.

**SL: Gloria, there was something in your exhibition statement that really hit home for me. You said that we navigate through unwelcome spaces that create exclusion and anxiety, and you made a point to recognize how ableism, according to folks like Dustin Gibson and Talila "TL" Lewis's definition of ableism, is an anti-Black system that assigns value based on how we produce and profit. Can you speak more to that and the curatorial decision you made in your show for "Holding Space"?**

**GS:** Artists, especially those with invisible disabilities, often get so easily replaced in the mainstream art world. I know what it feels like to be excluded, replaced, or not welcome in some spaces, so when a situation came up that an artist couldn't participate anymore, I didn't want this artist to feel like their work, their disability, was not important or honoured. I took that space where I was initially planning to put them, kept it empty, and talked about what it meant to me to hold space for someone who wasn't able to be there. I thought that was a crucial message to send—not just to the mainstream community but to all communities. We have to take into account what someone is going through and their history. We can't forget about people. That was important to me: for this artist to feel like they weren't forgotten, that they were loved, that they were valid.

**SL: I really love a line in your "Holding Space" text: "Holding space is about allowing someone to take all the time they need to heal. And it's about assuring them they're loved, valued, and irreplaceable." That's just so impactful! I think it also informed some of Tangled's processes**

**leading up to *Undeliverable*, and I'm wondering, Carmen, if you can speak to some of those decisions.**

**CP:** I think it helped us land on a flexible soft-open concept, where we talked about the show's title and jes suggested *Undeliverable*. It came out of a conversation where we were talking about how we're always asked for "deliverables" by institutions or "outcomes" from funders. And we were resisting that with the show. A lot of our work was large-scale installation. It wasn't only not an easily deliverable object, but we also wanted to challenge the idea of a "complete" exhibition. And that was largely inspired by the collective politics of the group, but also by the practice of care at Tangled through things like the Care Clause in your contracts, and as a gallery that honours crip time and the various time signatures of our bodies and minds.

We ended up having a soft opening where the show opened in stages, and we just held space for works still to come with a label that said "Undeliverable". I think just committing to the

idea that a show can still change after opening was powerful and empowering. It took off some pressure for folks and was a form of an access need for some people. It would've felt like a compromise to their work otherwise. For me, it was a way for us to centre care, and it also showed something about the way that we work and the expectations that are on us as Disabled artists.

**SL: Speaking of working in more Crip-focused spaces where things like access were central, I'm wondering if the two of you could speak to the experience of working with a space like Tangled versus your other experiences in non-disability galleries.**

**GS:** I look at my experience with other spaces as an opportunity to educate; I always make sure we have access—thinking of mobility or tactility in a show. During the pandemic, people became more aware of accessibility, which opened up a lot of doors and conversations about how galleries can be accessible. That was something Tangled had always thought of, so I like taking

what I've learned at Tangled to other galleries.

**CP:** I think having the backing of Tangled, as a disability-informed space that centres access, helped negotiate with partners like the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, which is not necessarily disability-led. For instance, we developed the idea of monopod tours that were very DIY and relatively inexpensive, and it opened up access for our communities. I Zoomed into a couple of them and felt hosted in the space. It was pretty good quality

and dynamic and gave us an unexpected form of access which doesn't happen in most museum tours. It really highlights the way that Tangled and RMG host.

**SL:** We've really learned so much from the pandemic! What are some kinds of dreams that you'd want to be able to implement in a future show? What barriers have you experienced from institutions that you'd like to push against?

**GS:** My dream would be to have this huge space for artists



who normally aren't invited into mainstream galleries to come in and create. During the pandemic, I had no income, I didn't have money for supplies, and there wasn't a lot of support in the community. I had a few small projects with small budgets, but being a person who talks about mental health, there was no place for me.

**CP:** I would want more of us to be in decision-making positions within mainstream institutions. I think that would shift the culture at these places and allow us to lead in the ways we feel we need to: by holding space, providing or centring care, and providing all necessary access needs. And

sometimes, this might be addressing people's housing and basic needs so they can spend the time to

develop the work. I would like to give all the artists a career-advancing opportunity where we are taking up space and the whole development period of the show accounts for cost of living

**there's a reason why we want to have access to a disability culture – because it is a better way to live.**

and how an artist could then viably take on an opportunity because they know they would be making enough money and covering their bills.

I want folks to experience disability culture and realize that there's a reason why we want to be in it. There's a reason why we want to have access to a disability culture—because it's a better way to live.

**GS:** Sometimes it can feel like you don't belong in certain spaces. When I talked about my mental health at a large organization, they directed me to Tangled. Rather than see me as an artist, they see me

as someone who doesn't belong. I'm still an artist. When I have good days, I paint. When I have bad days, I paint. So many

spaces put a label on you and make you feel like you can't show there because of who you are. As someone outspoken about mental health, I may not get many spaces, but I will continue to talk about it.

## **SL: Do you feel the role of a curator changes when you're in a disability arts space?**

**CP:** As a disabled curator, I feel like I have to do all the jobs, from advocating and promoting artists to filling the gaps that exist in institutions because we're not represented there. There's no full-time disabled curator or access program that can do all the work that needs to be done. We bring context with us because it doesn't exist there, and those spaces can be very unsupportive. While some of the larger institutions have a benefit for artists because it means having access to a larger platform to present their work, it could be harmful to the artists to work in an unsupportive context. I don't feel resourced enough to be invited by mainstream institutions to guest curate a show without addressing a million different gaps they have.

Presenting work is not always enough of a benefit, and compromises are made to interface with institutions that haven't made space for disabled artists. Institutions are trying to retrofit accessibility and make new commitments, but most

can only do one-offs. We need spaces where disabled artists can present their work, return, know it's a space for them too, and know that it's a space where Disability Culture will be honoured, not constrained.

**GS:** I have not heard anyone call themselves a disability curator. I think this is a term that we need to lift up. Disability curator: someone who's aware of the Disabled art community.

**CP:** That's like the tradition of the curator; the root of the word curator is care. And I think that's what is missing. I think we, as disabled curators, can revitalize that role and revitalize its purpose, which is that of care, and not just for objects but for people and relationships.

*Page 24: Installation view: Carmen Papalia & Heather Kai Smith, Open Access: Claiming Visibility (2019), Undeliverable (2021).*

*Page 27: Installation view, Hidden, Curated by Gloria C Swain (2020). Photos: Michelle Peek Photography for Tangled Art Gallery and courtesy of Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology & Access to Life, Re•Vision: The Centre for Art & Social Justice at the University of Guelph.*

the most  
important  
thing to  
protect is  
our people.

# considering the care clause

CYN ROZEBOOM

*At the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, Tangled Art + Disability began to include a Care Clause in our personnel contracts. On the surface, it's a simple idea: a statement that our organization values the health of the people working for it more than the things they do or create. Yet, despite its simplicity, it presents a radical challenge to the traditional idea of management.*

## THE CARE CLAUSE:

In agreeing to work together, Tangled Art + Disability and the Employee recognize that the well-being of any individual associated with the duties detailed in this agreement is more important than any associated deliverable, and thus, all parties agree to take care of themselves and each other to the best of their ability.

Until COVID-19, our staffing agreements were based on a document created years ago, studded with faux legalese and heavily biased toward protecting the organization. But disabled individuals, often set up to fail in typical work settings, can often shoulder undeserved shame for past work situations where their needs were not accommodated. So, each time we signed on a new person, we would implore them not to let the contract language scare them, that we were there to help them succeed, and that, over time, we would revise expectations of their role to suit them, not the other way around.

But why were we not committing to this in writing? Why did we have one thing written in our agreements and another spoken aloud? Before 2020, when I had considered a written commitment to staff wellness over productivity, I was besieged with doubts, worried that if employees were given too much power, some might abuse it. As senior management, I felt the pressures of a deeply ingrained sense of professionalism and an organizational protectiveness.

But in the soul-searching early hours of the pandemic lockdown, it became clear that the most important thing to protect was our people. The ethos and energy of our organization exists within them, more than any piece of art. Care is our standard.



The Care Clause is an official declaration of values. However, it only expresses intention. Without implementation and follow-through, it is meaningless.

The hands-on implementation of care can sometimes be difficult and uncomfortable for both management and personnel, especially when they find themselves sandwiched between conflicting factors. Consider: the Care Clause is not invoked when people are feeling good but rather when people are hurt and unhappy. Its impact, ironically, is to make points of discomfort apparent.

Since including the clause in Tangled's agreements some two-and-a-half years ago, its effectiveness has been questioned twice. In both cases, the questioners seemed nervous about bringing their concerns up: "I don't know if this Care Clause is working". At first, their hesitancy surprised me, but on reflection, I suspect this was the result of two factors:

**1)** The top-down power structure is so embedded in our culture that even a care-centred organization like Tangled is susceptible to internalized ableism. Traditional expectations of productivity and professionalism create adversarial relationships, where employees are afraid to express any personal discomfort to management out of fear of repercussions.

**2)** The Care Clause remained theoretical until it was tested. None of us at Tangled could predict how (or if) it would work. There was some disappointment that our best intentions didn't anticipate the specifics to ward off unpleasant interactions.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the uncomfortable interactions hinted at above, I believe they demonstrate the Care Clause serving its purpose. The clause provided a route into discussing emotionally vulnerable situations that may otherwise have been avoided. By placing the responsibility for care equally between employee and employer, the stage was set for collaborative follow-through, which allowed for both healing and the initiation of protocols to avoid similar situations in the future.

We occasionally get enquiries about our Care Clause from other non-profit leaders, often followed by questions like, “Do you have to sacrifice quality?” To which I answer yes, and no, depending on how you define quality. If quality is measured by productivity, speed, and uniformity, then yes: you may indeed need to miss a deadline, drop a project, or change an idea. But if your definition includes healthy staff and any changes in timeline or project completion go toward keeping your people rested and engaged, any loss in one area is more than made up for in another.

Which leads me to my final thoughts: a recommendation and a reminder (both as much for myself as anyone else).

The recommendation: If one wishes to adopt a Care Clause, as a manager, you should be willing to shoulder the weight of responsibility when things do not work as anticipated and to listen with compassion when harm has occurred. It is extremely likely that issues will arise during times of duress, when you yourself may be struggling. If you find yourself feeling defensive, remind yourself that it takes strength and trust for an employee to speak up, so your

discomfort is an indication that the clause is working. This is not to say that managers should not treat themselves with care, but that in taking on a managerial role, one is accepting extra responsibility for others as well as oneself. Our job is to bear the weight that we are able to bear. This will be different for everyone, and no one can truly assess your strength except yourself.

The reminder: This experiment is ongoing. So far, the Care Clause is working because our staff, volunteers, and artists are invested in our mandate and are not just working for a paycheque. It might not work for another group, or even for us at another time. The clause does not simplify the complexities of navigating access. And as of yet, our clause has not been tested by someone trying to rapaciously work the system. Such a circumstance might be a colossal disaster, at which point, we will need to consider how to adjust the clause to protect against exploitation without losing its spirit of generosity.

For now, the Tangled Care Clause is helping us redefine and measure quality at work. By elevating the importance of staff well-being, a sense of belonging provides the impetus for productivity. When a cooperative, creative environment is fostered, then individual performance becomes too entangled for measurement. Success is determined holistically as the well-being of the entire organization.

Our Care Clause equates the health of our people with the health of Tangled itself and asserts that both these things are worth protecting.



*Comfy Office: Digital Coordinator Jet Coghlan at work in the Tangled Arts office. Self care is encouraged as part of a healthy work environment. Photo: Rob Colgate.*



if you're  
lonely,  
i'll be  
lonely too

AN INTERVIEW WITH BIRDIE GERHL,  
L MORRIS, AND JET COGHLAN

*L Morris and Jet Coghlan interview Birdie Gerh about her disability art practice as an attempt to tenderly trace around the real work of disability that exists in the complicated space in between bodies: the stuff of friendship, saying no, and the longing for a connection to all our struggles.*

**L Morris:** Can you tell us a bit about your experience and perspective working with Tangled and how working with Tangled has continued to impact your artistic practice after your exhibition?

**Birdie Gerhl:** I exhibited my first solo show, *Body Farm*, at Tangled in 2019. The story I always share when I speak about my work is the story of my friendship with Sean Lee, the Programming Director at Tangled. During an early site visit, Sean told me, “All I really need from you is for you to make a tactile element, as well as an audio description so people have something to listen to. If you need support with any of that stuff, we can help you with that.” He didn’t send me any guides, protocols or practices. That was the container for the beginning of my disability art practice—the container being a relationship rather than a text or a document.

**LM:** It sounds like access in art spaces is related to experiences of care and disability outside of art spaces. For you, what does that look like or mean in your practice?

**BG:** When I give and receive care, that is the real work. Artmaking is like tracing around that work, trying to make a record of it, trying to search for it, trying to find the people who have always done this work. Everyday people who aren’t necessarily in radical art scenes are experts in care work, whether or not they claim disability as an identity.

**LM:** How are multisensory access features important in your exhibitions?

**BG:** My work is centred around audio description and tactile sculpture. Before I started working in those two ways, I wasn’t a textile artist or a poet. Those are important aspects of my work now. Still, it wasn’t until I started writing audio descriptions and until I started making tactile sculptures that my artistic practice developed in that way, just because poetry is a useful tool in audio description and textile work makes good tactile sculptures because they’re not fragile.

**LM:** Could you talk a bit about your work with artist-run centres throughout your career and how different organizations' access supports may have affected your work and practice?

**BG:** I think that my work at Hamilton Artists Inc. and other artist-run centres has taught me that disability exists in that in-between space between you and another person—where your edges meet, where there are boundaries.

**LM:** Drawing on your experience with artist-run centres in the past and your experiences of access, if you were talking to other artist-run centres, what would you say are some of your access needs as an artist? Do you have an access rider?

**BG:** I need the people I work with to be able to say no to me, which is a big ask. We're not taught how to say no or receive

each other's nos. Something that I am thinking about with curator Abedar Kamgari for our show this fall is access riders. Specifically, how can we present access needs so that the people we're working with can look at this access rider and say, "Okay, this we can do," or, "This we don't have the capacity for," to give them that choice and that chance to say no. And also to give them that chance to be like, "Actually, we already do this other thing that's

not even on your list."

It's like trying to build that ownership, trying to ask for that no. So then when you

get that yes, it's a real one. [*nods and smiles*]

**JC:** Do you have any other access needs?

**BG:** Yes, but these are things that I ask within the container of a relationship, not necessarily on the page of a publication. It's not that naming those things isn't revolutionary; it's just also trying

**everyday people who aren't necessarily in radical art scenes are experts in care work, whether or not they claim disability as an identity.**



MAY 06 2018

IT'S LONELY  
TO BE MYSTERIOUS



to balance the power of naming those things while being able to keep some privacy and some agency for myself. That act of disclosure has different stakes for different kinds of people.

**LM:** How does access challenge the established ways art has been exhibited? And has this impacted your artistic or exhibiting practices?

**BG:** I sometimes say that image descriptions may cause friendships because Executive Director Derek Jenkins and I became friends at Hamilton

Artists Inc. when we started talking about image descriptions as part of my consultant work. I think access work being so relational creates the kind of friendships that can be the containers for envisioning a different kind of world. Just like, when you buy groceries for your friend, that's envisioning a different world. When you have somebody stay over for the night so they're safe, that's envisioning a different world. And when we do this care work in the gallery, it's connected to all that.



**LM:** Birdie, one of the ways you describe yourself is as a “practitioner of longing.” Can you speak to what it means to be a practitioner of longing?

**BG:** So, my friend Eugenia Zuroski calls me a practitioner of longing. I think about how Mia Mingus says that all of our struggles are somehow connected to ableism. And I think that’s part of why disability is so powerful: it connects our struggles. When I think about what Mia Mingus says, I think about how one of the greatest struggles of disability is that

we are so isolated. It’s like our disability connects our struggles, but Disabled people are cut off from each other. It’s important to those in power that we don’t know about each other. I think that Disabled people are all practitioners of longing. Because part of our struggle is trying to make connections.

Because when we’re connected, we’re powerful.

*Page 41, 42, & 43: Birdie Gherl, Body Farm, Tangled Art + Disability. Photo: Michelle Peek Photography and courtesy of Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology & Access to Life, Re•Vision: The Centre for Art & Social Justice at the University of Guelph.*





# finding language

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
VANESSA DION FLETCHER

**Sean Lee:** Could you tell us more about your practice and how it's developed since your solo exhibition, *Own Your Cervix*, at Tangled Art Gallery in 2017?

**Vanessa Dion Fletcher:** My practice follows a lot of different mediums, themes and ideas – I sometimes have a hard time summarizing it because I cast a pretty wide net. With that caveat, I can say that I work a lot in performance, video and textiles. In the exhibition, *Own Your Cervix*, I was using porcupine quills but I hadn't yet learned the embroidery techniques. So I was using them as whole objects on sculptures. Since then, I've learned the embroidery techniques and my practice has somewhat focused on that over the past few years.

**SL:** At the 2019 *Crippling the Arts* symposium in Toronto you performed *Finding Language*. Could you speak to aspects of performance in your work?

**VDF:** *Finding Language* comes from my experience of language and disability. When I was small, pretty much as soon as I started

school, the education system diagnosed or categorized me as disabled. For a long time, I thought about my experiences of disability as being mostly situated at school, but that's evolving.

I started thinking about English; English is the only language I speak. The Lenapé language and the community that my family comes from have very few speakers. There's actually no first speakers, so there's really just a handful of people who still speak it fluently. Speaking in English, writing in English, and trying to communicate in a world that values and prioritizes the written language, was the focus of the work.

Originally, this piece was conceptualized as a kind of workshop activity and I was thinking about how it's really fun to look at the way that written language appears in our everyday life. I wanted to go and look at different examples and investigate them as this performance/ scavenger hunt by traveling around the room and discovering different things. Whenever I found a word, I would look it up in my Lenapé dictionary.

The dictionary I use was written by John O'Meara. He writes, "This writing system is based on the linguistic transcription system used in Goddard (1979). It substitutes English-based characters or sequences of characters for several symbols commonly used in phonetic transcription systems". What I understand from this is that the system is utilitarian or made up — created because of the focus on written text over oral communication. When you open the dictionary, it's full of words, for example [and I am reading from the dictionary] K-U, K-W-U-L-U-P. At the time I was such a beginner, I had little to no idea how to pronounce the words. The dictionary has a pronunciation key, but it's complicated and you have to read it. How silly! Reading how to pronounce something.

In the performance, I was trying to find the word in the dictionary and then sounding it out and trying a couple different ways that it might be pronounced. It was an audible struggle but aspirational and was drawing attention to the materiality of language. The way that words physically appear in our

space; and then through this pronunciation trying to draw attention to the way that those sounds are formed in our mouth and move out from our breath to the world.

**SL: Eliza Chandler (Assistant Professor, Disability Studies at Ryerson University) once mentioned how that piece very clearly demonstrated some of the ways ableism and colonization have connections. It's really interesting because there's an oral tradition in Lenapé — it's ephemeral. t's not until an outsider comes and creates this dictionary that for you there's a disabling factor. Had you had access to the oral traditions perhaps you wouldn't have had that disabling experience in learning it. Your piece is really identifying an important intersection of disability and colonization, which is a theme in a lot of your works. On that note, could you expand a bit more about your exhibition, *Own Your Cervix*?**

**VDF:** *Own Your Cervix* is the result of a long period of interest and investigation so I could talk about it in a few

different ways. One is from the personal experience of feeling shame and discomfort around my menstruating body. I am also very aware of gendered violence in general, particularly in Indigenous communities or perpetrated against Indigenous communities. I was thinking about reproductive justice and bodily autonomy in different contexts. I think about a body —my body — that can produce children in this colonial world that I live in; the different effects that it has personally within my own family and then with my community. I wanted to speak from my own experience, but to not limit other people's engagement or understanding because there's a lot of connections to be made across communities through these experiences.

The exhibition was quite multifaceted; there was a lot of physical, two dimensional, and three dimensional work in this space. There was also a performance aspect; I extended invitations to the Tangled audience to do a self exam that could or could not include looking at one's own cervix.

Within the gallery space, as part of the installation, I had all of the materials necessary to do a cervical self exam: a speculum, hand sanitizer, lubricant, a mirror and a flashlight. It's a pretty simple setup, but a few of the tools, specifically the speculum can be difficult to obtain individually. I made a bench for people to sit on while participating in the self exam. The bench is 18 inches in height with removable legs, upholstered in leather, and one side has a plastic covering with a beaded patch that looks like blood. It was important to me that I tried to frame this as a kind of process of self-reflection that was open to people of all genders with any kind of anatomy and not assume how anyone with or without a cervix might want to participate.

I really wanted to make sure to use language that was open to all people. There are always improvements or adjustments that can be made. Tangled gave me feedback from visitors to the gallery using wheelchairs who found the setup of the room a little difficult to get in and around.





Outside the self-exam area, I had a little Victorian-style settee, which is a little two-seater couch, and a couple of chairs. I wanted to use furniture to think about the way that menstrual blood

**it's really fun to look at the way that written language appears in our everyday life.**

has the potential to talk about a relationship to the body and people's fears or experiences of staining furniture or sitting on furniture that has been stained. The furniture became sculptures, but I was also thinking about it from a very performative place; thinking about the influence of European and Victorian themes of morality on our current understanding of menstruation, the performance or politics of it, and how these influenced furniture too.

I read that the Victorian era was sometimes called the era of "colonial comfort" because of how technology enabled advances for curved wood and springs to make furniture and homes more comfortable. As I was reading, I realized furniture was comfortable for some people while being incredibly violent

and uncomfortable for others. Also, the building of railroads (through immigrant labour) across North America, a colonial historical moment, was also important because that allowed the furniture to be distributed

quickly across the continent. All these colonial moments were tied to the Victorian-era furniture I used. I had them upholstered in white fabric and a floral pattern and then poured my menstrual blood decoratively onto the pattern. And this is where I use the porcupine quills to look like they're growing out of the furniture with the fabric around the menstrual blood.

**SL: The way you amplify the pieces with your menstrual blood was this really interesting way of engaging with a disability arts audience. On the one hand, you created these invitational seating spaces because folks who have that access need could sit on one of the chairs, but you also employed porcupine quills in the larger settee.**

For the Tangled gallery staff, it was a moment of contemplation on how folks will interact with that couch in a way that it's intended to but also create access. In the end, we made the decision to inform every guest who came in that the porcupine quills were there, but it was up to them to decide how much they wanted to interact with the settee or if they wanted any help navigating the piece.

In a disability arts gallery setting that's really provocative because in this case, access is not necessarily comfort and safety all the time; instead, access is about creating entry points into the works.

**VDF:** I think it's really interesting because I showed the *Own Your Cervix* work at my graduate thesis exhibition at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. To keep the audience safe, they asked that I put the settee on a plinth so that people knew that it was art and not to touch it. I think I like that approach of having somebody there to tell each person "There are quills there and if you want to touch some, you can", or "Here's how you stay safe". I provide access,

but in this case, it's more true to the work. I wanted it to be on the floor, so it'd be part of the room and not separated by a pedestal.

**SL:** The context of a disability arts space versus one that doesn't have access in its mandate is really interesting, as it seems that this intersection helps to create and illuminate the original intentions of the piece. Whereas the idea of putting your work on a plinth is almost antithetical to your original piece, because it's about enacting some of the aesthetics of a colonial art world onto your art piece in itself.

**VDF:** Yes, to go back to the self exam, I was trying to create a situation where people have their own agency to decide how they're going to participate, or touch, or be in the space.

Page 44 & 45: Vanessa Dion Fletcher, "Colonial Comfort." Detail. *Own Your Cervix*, Tangled Art Gallery, 2016.  
Photo: Jonathan Balazs.

Page 49: Vanessa Dion Fletcher, "Finding Language." Photo: Michelle Peek Photography and courtesy of *Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology & Access to Life, Re•Vision: The Centre for Art & Social Justice at the University of Guelph.*

# we want you here

FRANCIS TOMKINS, KAYLA BESSE, AND KRISTINA MCMULLIN

*This contribution is a roundtable conversation between Francis Tomkins, Kayla Besse, and Kristina McMullin about the shared labour of Communications at Tangled. Francis is the Communications Coordinator at Tangled Art + Disability and has been with the organization since 2020. Kayla is the former Public Education Coordinator at Tangled; she left in 2022 to become the Accessibility Coordinator for the Stratford Festival. Kristina McMullin was Tangled's Communications Coordinator from 2016 until 2021; she is the current Communications Manager at Akimbo and part of Crippling Masculinity, which recently exhibited at Tangled. Kayla and Kristina co-host Crip Times, Tangled's podcast.*

**Francis Tomkins:** The original purpose of this conversation was to share a bit about our working relationships at Tangled, what we learned from each other, and what it's like working at an organization where everyone is disabled and works in a disabled way.

We worked collaboratively for two years. I learned a lot about access intimacy, flexibility, and boundaries. Earlier, Kayla and I were talking right-to-disconnect laws—your boss can't message you after five for example, which is great from a certain labour perspective. But if your body-mind is not one that is going to consistently do what you need it to do for work between the hours of nine and five, that adds more nuance to the conversation. That nuance was something that we were able to really fluidly figure out without too much strife because we had that sense of intimacy already from our friendships. Sometimes one or the other of us would take on more or less labour, for example, or we would message each other outside of work hours to navigate how the work would get done while also getting all of our needs met.

**Kristina McMullin:** I think with the nature of work at Tangled, being in service not only to an audience but to our community, it's not like you can just leave at the end of the day and not think about it, because these are relationships that are being maintained outside of the gallery space and the workplace. A colleague shared how one of their Indigenous professors taught them that you can't start doing community research if you don't want to have lifelong relationships. And I think there's something valuable in that. You can't work in Disability Arts and in these public-facing disability roles in an organization like Tangled unless you're willing to do the work maintaining these lifelong relationships.

**Kayla Besse:** One of the main reasons I'm grateful to still be connected to all of you and Tangled is because I left Tangled to go to an organization where I was the first access coordinator ever. I was trying to find the other disabled people because, to my knowledge, not many people are out as disabled at work because it's never safe to do that. There's also something that's lost

when you're the only disabled person at work, or one of few. You're just having Disability 101

conversations

every day.

You can't show up to a marketing meeting and be like, "It's really eugenicist

that we dropped our mask mandate." It makes it hypocritical for me to do my job, which includes bringing disability community to the theatre when we're not making it safe for those people to even show up.

Kristina, I loved your point about how you can't do this work if you're not willing to invest in a lifelong relationship. One positive thing about that is how the disability community is in general. But Disability Twitter, in particular, has allowed me to find and hire access workers and get them paid and make access in the real world. So that feels really good—the ability to have something that begins as a working relationship, and then you stay in touch, and one day, you're able to offer them a job opportunity.

**the thing that really creates a safe space for disabled people is feeling truly welcome when you come through the door.**

Another thing is, as a single disabled person living alone and working full time, I feel incredibly

time poor

because everything takes me longer.

There are so many care tasks that I don't

have support with. So, the ability to take twenty minutes of this meeting and make food while we're in this meeting means that now that's twenty minutes I just gained back. Which is huge, and to some it looks unprofessional.

**FT:** Yeah. Because to them it looks like your full attention isn't on the task at hand. Whereas really, it says, "I trust you enough to be able to actually get my needs met while I'm in this working relationship." In Tangled meetings, people sometimes take meetings from bed or from outside if they need to go for a walk. Because sometimes the options are that I take the meeting from bed or I'm unable to be in the meeting at all. I think that's part of crip time too—so many of us have so little usable

time in a day, so we have a sense of respect for that.

**KM:** There's a lot of power in that vulnerability that I don't think is there in a lot of the other workplaces. Much like Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha says in her essay "*How Disabled Mutual Aid is Different Than Aabled Mutual Aid*," disabled vulnerability is similarly different.

**FT:** Yeah. And I'm thinking of something Cyn Rozeboom, Tangled's executive director, said, which was, "If you feel like you have too much work, it's because you've been given too much work, not because you can't keep up." And the power of an executive director saying that to staff... It lets you readjust those expectations around thinking you're the problem.

**KM:** Even just being able to answer the question "How are you?" and be like, "Oh, life sucks," is cripp work politics. When abled friends, bosses, or colleagues ask, "How are you? How was your weekend?" I'm like, "Good. Oh, it was great, I watched a movie and baked muffins."

**FT:** When you languished all weekend. [*laughs*]

**KM:** Yeah—you cried in your bed all weekend, but no, must be professional. "Oh yes. I had a fried egg on Sunday and it was lovely." When, really, you're crying over the frying pan. [*laughs*]

**KB:** I also think it's worth naming the experience of when you're on a team and the work of access isn't getting done because you might have only one person assigned to write alternative text, for example. So you have people saying, "That's not my responsibility. Someone else is doing captioning, or someone else is thinking about physical access, or whatever. So, I don't have to." But that just puts the burden on, probably, the person with lived experience. And so, I think a crip working-relationship is one where we share the labour of access.

That's how Tangled runs.

We don't have an access coordinator because it's everybody's business. I think that's different because a lot of non-cripp organizations will say,



“Well, I attended this seminar, and then I outsourced this labour once, and we’re AODA compliant. So what else do you want from me?”

**KM:** Because I’m the only one who worked in comms at Tangled prior to the pandemic, one other thing that was always important to me was the relationships inside the physical space. Kayla and Francis, you had both maintained a higher activity level on social media and those types of public communications. I didn’t. And that was because I was focusing on the maintenance of the relationships with people inside the gallery. The people who were going to come were

going to come regardless of how many Instagram posts I put up. And the artists were always my main priority.

Kayla and I talked about this a little bit in *The Renee Dumaresque Episode of Crip Times*. They hosted Crip Rave. Crip Rave showed that, on top of all the access elements and inviting all these people, the thing that really creates a safe space for disabled people is feeling truly welcome when you come through the door. I think that communications at Tangled shifted drastically with the pandemic because even to open the doors for disabled people during a pandemic, there was going to be a lot of nuance.



And I think, for both of you, it did require a lot more digital and virtual outreach to create those feelings of inclusion, safety, and desire for disabled bodies.

**KB:** That's a great point. During COVID, we started to offer virtual tours that replicated a little bit of that relationship building. They allowed us to have those intimate conversations with people regardless of where they were in the world, whether they were on their couch or in their bed. That allowed us to bring the gallery to them, which is so crip.

**FT:** And with the rollback now of digital events, I think people are really surprised when they come in and see we're still doing virtual tours and hybrid events. But why not? We learned how to do it at the beginning of the pandemic, and it's still serving our community, so we'll just keep doing it.

**KM:** A lot of the labour of Tangled is maintaining relationships. Early on, I was talking to Cyn and saying, "I talked to an older gentleman on the phone for an hour today about his daughter who's autistic

and thirteen years old and wants to show her art at Tangled," and towards the end of the day, Cyn said, "You should go home," and I said, "Well, I didn't get everything done. I talked to a guy for an hour on the phone." And she said, "Yeah, you were working for an hour."

**FT:** It asks questions, too, about what people consider work. Because that's work, and it's recognized as work at Tangled, but it's work no matter where you are.

So, if anything, I kind of think that this conversation is about asking people the questions, "What kinds of labour are going on at your place of work, and how are those forms of labour being recognized (or not) as labour among employees but also by whoever's running that organization?"

*Page 56: #Crip Ritual, Curated by Critical Design Lab, Tangled Art Gallery. Photo: Michelle Peek Photography and courtesy of Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology & Access to Life, Re•Vision: The Centre for Art & Social Justice at the University of Guelph.*



*Yolanda Bonnell performing bug. Directed: Cole Alvis.  
Scenography: Jay Havens. Photo: Dahlia Katz, 2020*

A photograph of a person in a red shirt performing a massage on a client's back. The scene is illuminated with a strong red light, creating a dramatic and focused atmosphere. The person's hands are visible, resting on the client's back. The background is dark, making the red light and the subjects stand out.

# honouring the witnesses:

A CONVERSATION ON RELAXED  
PRACTICE AND CEREMONY

*In February, 2015, artist and activist Jess Thom spoke at a keynote in London, England, about her experience of being made unwelcome in theatre spaces and of a practice she saw growing in the U.K. called Relaxed Performances. The movement spread to Canada, and in October, 2015, the British Council partnered with Tangled Art + Disability and Include Arts to deliver Relaxed Performance training to artists across Canada. Since then, Relaxed Performance has evolved and grown, the authority shifting from the hands of non-disabled service providers and into the hands of the community.*

*Jack Hawk, who has become a Relaxed Performance Consultant through his work at Tangled Art + Disability, interviews Yolanda Bonnell, a leader in shaping what the future of Relaxed Performance might look like for adult theatre.*

**Jack Hawk: Relaxed Performance is in an era of transformation. It's moving into adult theatre, queer theatre, Indigenous theatre with new intentions and audiences. What is your approach to Relaxed Performance?**

**Yolanda Bonnell:** We need each other to tell stories. When I'm thinking about the witnesses [audience members], I want people to be as comfortable as possible. As a larger person, it's hard for me to physically fit into seats. I was mutilating my body to fit. That didn't feel right. I have a lot of social anxiety, and the anxiety of feeling like you can't move or fidget. You had

to be precious. It was like we were seeing the queen. It felt like unnecessary anxiety around how to behave when witnessing theatre.

So much of theatre is rooted in ableism and preciousness around the story. You can still tell a great story and have it be done in a safe way, where you are caring for all the people involved. Check-ins, check-outs, wellness tables, body autonomy. Giving people the space and ability to experience the show in comfort.

I also learned to speak with consultants and bring other people in. There are certain accessibility measures I don't need, certain things that I don't understand or know about.

**JH:** When I consulted on your show *My Sister's Rage*, one of the characters, Wanda, guided the Relaxed Performance as a natural part of your storytelling. Have you found that accessibility and Indigenous Knowledge have gone hand-in-hand in other ways in your practice?

**YB:** Absolutely. Often, in traditional stories, we have a narrator: a storyteller character, a trickster archetype. I love that a lot of my stories have a narrator that can traverse the worlds and see the witnesses in a way that the characters can't. That is part of our ways of knowing.

Living in the Seven Grandfather Teachings, the seven values, we have those anytime I'm working in a space: humility, truth, courage, love, respect, wisdom, and honesty. Having those values integrated into how we run the space is a massive part of accessibility. If we're working from a place of love, people are less likely to be harmed. It becomes a framework that people can use when things get too hard or if there's something they want to articulate but can't. It's easy to point to the value

system and say, "This is what I'm lacking in the space."

There is a sense of caring for the people in your community that you know need help and putting their needs before your own. These are traditionally people like our Elders. We will do whatever we need to do to make sure they're safe, like if they need to be pulled on a sled. I made a joke in one of my plays: it was back when they were still portaging, and there are these Elders saying, "Better being in the canoe than pulling it!"

Making the space comfortable or easy enough to access without needing anything extra is integral.

**JH:** How has working with consultants and disability-centred venues changed your practice?

**YB:** When we toured *bug* at Luminato, we already had a healer set up. We did protocol speeches at the beginning. We were still learning; it was crunchy at times. I didn't know about Relaxed Performance consultants for a long time. Then when we did *bug* at Theatre Passe Muraille, they were big

on accessibility and Relaxed Performance. It excited me to know that this was a possibility. I was wondering, "Why are there only specific nights? And why is it only four nights?" I remember at one Relaxed Performance we had this young person with a mobility device that came in and was colouring throughout. As a neurodivergent, I knew! I understood what was happening.

At the end of the performance, they gave me what they were colouring. They had been drawing with lines from the show and images that they were seeing. It was just one of the most beautiful things that had ever been gifted to me after a show. I really took that to heart. This is why we need more of these shows, because that person felt like they could express themselves as well.

Having the Relaxed Performance consultants come in, having conversations and letting go of the preciousness so we can have these engagements with more people opens up so much. Whenever I enter a space, I know we need to bring in a consultant: Who is making these decisions? Why are we calling this a Relaxed

Performance when there are strobe lights? Because of consultants, I've learned enough that now, when I'm in spaces, I have the ability to advocate. It's given me more of a voice, and it's how I've been able to open my work up to more people.

For *My Sister's Rage*, we made every performance a Relaxed Performance. I want to keep leaning into that. I don't want to be continually making theatre just for able-bodied or neurotypical people.

**JH: When a venue is approaching you to platform your show, what do you say to them regarding your access needs and the accessibility your show requires?**

**YB:** Typically, I come with a counteroffer. I call it a "relationship agreement" because that is what we are entering: a relationship. It's my way of holding sovereignty over my own work. It's how I hold my own self-governance. I'm an Indigenous business. I'm Indigenous owned. *[laugh]*

I describe myself as an Ojibwe citizen of the Anishinaabe

Nation, and I really take that to heart. My role as an Anishinaabe person, as a storyteller, and as a healer is how I maintain sovereignty over my work. That way, I'm not beholden to people or institutions.

I am coming in as a sovereign being.

Often, a venue will say something about what's legal under the province of Ontario. If it affects the performers in any way, I will strike that. I don't recognize the laws of Ontario. Those laws have never protected me or my people; in fact, quite the opposite. They don't have no place in a contract with an Indigenous body. When they give you a contract, it's to protect them. A lot of it is coded language. If you're neurodivergent or have barriers reading contracts, that language is going to be difficult to break down. When I'm coaching other young artists, I tell them to learn how to read contracts or to get somebody to help them.

So, this is my relationship agreement: It'll have the seven

**if we're working from a place of love, people are less likely to be harmed.**

values in it; that I'm working as a community; that no one in the room, including myself, will be mined for personal trauma. It will lay down the foundations of care in the space and what

the institution needs to provide: money for healers or funding for medicine. The specific cultural aspects that

come with accessibility and care—they need to provide those things because that's what I come with.

I learned from Shaista Latif that it's very important to have your non-negotiables. I have the immense privilege at this point in my career to be able to say, "If you don't want this, then I walk." I recognize not everybody can do that. For me, if you don't want to do this in a safe, accessible way for everybody involved, then I'll take my work elsewhere. I'm not doing it for the institution. I'm not doing it for their sorry white patrons. I'm doing it for my community. I'm doing it for the people who want to experience theatre in a way that isn't harmful.

**JH: To me, your work exemplifies great success, in that all members of your team seem invested in accessibility. What kinds of conversations do you have with your team?**

**YB:** On *My Sister's Rage*, it was my first foray into directing. I've had experiences in theatre that have been incredibly unsafe. It's happened numerous times, where I trusted people and it didn't go well. Those experiences make me want to be true to my word and to take accountability for the things I'm not doing good or right. A month before we started rehearsals, I made a list of questions. I called every single performer and I asked them what they needed. I wanted to know what they needed in a space to feel comfortable and grounded, especially in a pandemic. "What can I do to make the space somewhere you feel comfortable coming to and that you want to come to every day?"

People had trouble asking for what they needed because they had been so traumatized and conditioned not to do that. They were frustrated because they could see that I was trying to make this space, but it was hard

because they were not used to it. It took time. But everybody wants to make the room work, and it's a beautiful thing because this is how we do ceremony together.

Not everybody is on board with this way of doing theatre. It's hard. It takes shifting and stepping outside of yourself. What's beautiful is that people are willing to try. Everybody on the team in *Rage* were all amazing. They navigated it beautifully. I've heard this from both *Rage* and *White Girls in Moccasins*, that these were the only experiences where the team left untraumatized. That means more to me than anything else in the world.

**JH: You're in the manidoons collective with Cole Alvis, another leader of Indigenous Disability Justice. You invent and lead the models in which you are working. How has being in this collective helped you pursue your ideas?**

**YB:** Cole's done work in Disability Justice for a long time. She's a part of the AD HOC Assembly. When we started working together, we didn't know we



were doing the thing. We started our days just talking. We started doing check-ins without realizing we were doing check-ins. Then we integrated them as a practice. Together, we had her knowledge and the knowledge that I was gaining working with Dr. Lindsay Lachance, who taught me about the wellness tables that were brought into Kamloopa. Cole and I were able to bounce ideas off each other, and we learned as we went.

It was about what felt right at the time. I remember seeing Indigenous theatre and being like, "Some of this stuff is really traumatizing. Where are the people who can talk to you?" When we toured bug in Victoria, Cole got in touch with an addiction centre. They have incredible healers, and they gave me a cedar brushing and were there for the witnesses. There was something profound about that. The Elders said we absolutely need healers at every single show.

We grew together. We were learning from the outside and bringing things to the inside. Cole's so good at articulating what I want to say. I talk out

of passion. I talk out of anger sometimes. Cole's the one that will say, "Let's take a breath. Let's reframe this." As a performer, manidoons collective has given me a space to perform the way that I need to. I can't perform if theatre is doing what it's always been doing. My body, the way it is now, I can't. I'm getting older. I've got a back injury. My knees have changed since I had surgery. My body is changing, and that's okay. But if I want to keep performing, and if this industry wants me to keep performing, it's gonna need to change some things.

When we were doing *White Girls in Moccasins*, we catered the rehearsals to whatever my body needed, or whatever we all needed. At this point, I can only perform if my collective is producing it. I know there are other people doing this work, but I don't know for sure, because I have yet to be in a room that is safe enough, like the way it was doing *White Girls in Moccasins*. Cole and I are trying hard to continue that effort and show how Disabled artists still work and tell stories just as much as anybody else.

# glossary

*This glossary includes words and ideas that you will encounter in this publication. Some definitions are adapted from El Alto, a previous publication with the British Council. It also includes words from the Crippling the Arts Access Guide (2019), which was developed by Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology and Access to Life.*

## A

### **ableism:**

The intentional or unintentional prejudice against disabled people. Ableism refers to discrimination against people with disabilities by a society that values “normative capacity” over disability.

### **access:**

The quality of removing physical, social, and systemic barriers that prevent disabled people from fully participating in society. Access can be diverse and systemic and is a tool for dismantling ableism to create spaces for Mad, Deaf, and disabled people. Ultimately, access and accessibility aim to create a more just and equitable society in which all individuals can participate fully and equally.

### **access friction:**

Occurs when two or more people have access needs that are in opposition to or contradict one another. For example, if one person needs music playing to focus while another needs silence. Access friction can pose challenges to implementing access and demonstrates there is no “one size fits all” approach to addressing access.

### **access intimacy:**

Describes the experience of when someone “just gets” your access needs. Mia Mingus writes about access intimacy on her blog, Leaving Evidence, describing it as the experience of your body relaxing when all your access needs have been met. Access intimacy can occur within the crip community but also between people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and access needs.

### **audism:**

Refers to discrimination against d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing people.

## **B**

### **BIPOC:**

An acronym for “Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.” These terms are mostly used in Canada and the USA (See Disability Justice).

## **C**

### **creative access:**

Coined by Amanda Cachia, creative access turns the field of access into a site of generative art meaning-making by integrating it directly into the experience of the artwork itself, often with the artist and curator collaborating together on its implementation. This simultaneously creates a richer field of access, pushing beyond check-list methods while also aligning access within the curatorial and artistic roles of an exhibition. While creative access is an exciting field, it should not water down the significance of providing conventional access; rather, it should highlight how accessibility can be practical and creative at once.

## C

### **crip:**

A reclaimed word and form of self-identification used by some disabled people. Disability scholar Kelly Fritsch says that when we crip, we “open up with desire for the ways that disability disrupts.” Like the use of queer in the 2SLGBTQI+ community, crip can be taken up as a politicized disabled identity.

### **curate:**

Taken from the Latin root “to care,” curation refers to either the process of conceiving, designing, and organizing exhibitions or the process of selecting, managing, and taking care of items in a collection.

## D

### **d/Deaf:**

With a capital D, Deaf refers to Deaf identity and culture. With a lowercase d, deaf refers to the experience of not hearing or being hard of hearing.

### **decolonization:**

Working towards restoring the freedom and self-determination of Indigenous peoples. It means respecting Indigenous people and their lived experiences and moving away from ways of thinking that give white settlers unjust rights and privileges over Indigenous peoples and People of Colour.

### **Disability Arts:**

While there is no single definition of Disability Arts, it typically refers to artwork, performances, and other forms of artistic expression created by Mad/Deaf/disabled people. Disability Arts does not necessarily address disability directly. Works of disability art can be

diverse, nuanced, and complex and are often grounded in artists' lived experiences. Disability Arts also aims to challenge and disrupt ableist assumptions and stereotypes in society by creating space for disabled artists to tell their own stories and experiences.

### **Disability Justice:**

A form of activism led by and for disabled queer and trans BIPOC. This form of activism focuses on experiences of disability and ableism from an intersectional perspective, which takes race, gender, sexuality, and class into account.

### **disabled:**

A way of describing people with capacities that deviate from what is normatively expected of an able-bodied person. The Social Model of Disability and the Medical Model of Disability are two frameworks through which disability is understood.

**Social Model of Disability:** A framework of thinking that argues that society has been built in ableist ways that exclude disabled people from full participation. Following the Social Model of Disability, society is viewed as creating barriers to access, and people are disabled by society. Some people who self-identify as disabled subscribe to a Social Model of Disability.

**Medical Model of Disability:** The dominant framework of thinking about disability, which understands disability as a problem that is experienced by/belongs to the disabled individual, rather than being rooted in larger social barriers, inequalities, and injustices—disabling conditions that contribute to peoples' experiences of disability.

## I

### **Indigenous:**

As a common noun, the word indigenous refers to people, animals, plants, cultural practices, and other things that originate in a geographical place or context. When using Indigenous in the context of people in so-called Canada, we are referring to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis People.: the First Peoples of Turtle Island.

### **interdependence:**

Two or more people or things that meet one another's care needs in respectful and reciprocal ways. On her blog, Leaving Evidence, Mia Mingus describes interdependence as challenging the ableist myth that we can and should be able to do things on our own. Interdependence invites us to see our care needs and lives as interconnected.

### **intersectionality:**

This concept was created by Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe overlapping systems of oppression. It means that not everyone experiences disability or marginalization the same way. For example, our experiences of disability are impacted by our experience of race, gender, and sexuality.

## M

### **Mad:**

A reclaimed word and form of self-identification used by some people who experience mental illness, are Neurodivergent, interact with the mental health system, have experiences with psychiatrization, and/or have histories of diagnoses.

## N

### **neurodivergent:**

A self-identification used by some people labeled as having sensory, cognitive, or behavioural capacities or differences outside what is considered neurotypical. Neurodivergent is often preferred by neurodivergent communities over neurodiverse to emphasize the ways neurodivergent people have been labeled as “different,” “divergent,” or “abnormal” within mainstream ableist and neurotypical society.

## R

### **Relaxed Performance (RP):**

A type of theatre performance that is modified to be accessible for people with sensitivity to lights, sounds, and unexpected events. RPs are also accessible to people who wish to move around or make sound during a performance or who wish to leave and come back. RPs sometimes include a “chill out” space, a visual story, and introductions to the cast at the beginning or end of the performance.

## S

### **sanism:**

Refers to discrimination against people who are perceived or labeled as mentally ill, including Mad or Neurodivergent people and people with lived experience in mental healthcare systems or psychiatric institutions. Sanism contributes to the continued stigmatization and marginalization of Mad people as different, abnormal, deviant, or dangerous and can contribute to barriers Mad people experience in their daily lives.

# the people:

## **Lauren “L Morris (they/them)**

### **PROJECT COORDINATOR & CO-EDITOR**

Lauren “L” Morris is an interdisciplinary artist-scholar and arts educator currently completing their MA in Communication and Culture at Toronto Metropolitan University. Their MA thesis project uses art- and community-based research to explore care in queer and Mad/Disabled communities in Toronto. Lately, they find themselves fascinated in speculative futures and worldbuilding, particularly drawing on art, technology, and embodied practices to imagine alternate worlds.

## **Sean Lee (he/they)**

### **DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMING**

Sean Lee is an artist and curator exploring the notion of disability art as the last avant-garde. Orienting toward a “crip horizon,” he is interested in the transformative possibilities of crip community-building and accessible curatorial practices that desire the ways disability can disrupt. Sean is currently the Director of Programming at Tangled Art + Disability.



## **Eliza Chandler (she/her)**

### **BOARD MEMBER (2012-2013) & FORMER ARTISTIC DIRECTOR (2014-16)**

An Associate Professor in the School of Disability Studies at Toronto Metropolitan University, Eliza Chandler leads a research program that centres Disability Arts. This research interest came into focus when, from 2014–16, she was the Artistic Director of Tangled Art + Disability, an organization in Toronto dedicated to showcasing Disability Arts and advancing accessible curatorial practice.

Chandler directs and co-directs research projects, including Bodies in Translation: Activist Art, Technology, and Access to Life and Accessing the Arts: Centring Disability Politics in Accessibility Initiatives.

## **Heidi Persaud (she/her)**

### **GALLERY MANAGER**

Heidi is a multidisciplinary artist and administrator. Her passions include training and mentoring the next generation of arts administrators; learning and collaborating with Mad, Deaf, and Disabled communities; relationship building with access workers; and finding ways to improve the user experience in the gallery. When she is not hyper focused on the arts, she is learning restorative gardening practices and herbalism and trying to develop meaningful ways to co-exist in nature.

## **Carmen Papalia (he/him)**

### **ARTIST**

Born in Vancouver, unceded Coast Salish Territory in 1981, Carmen Papalia is a social practice artist and non-visual learner who makes participatory projects on the topic of access as it relates to public space, the art institution and visual culture.

His work has been featured as part of exhibitions and engagements at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the CUE Art Foundation, New York; Grand

Central Art Center, Santa Ana; The 8th Floor Gallery, New York; and the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, among others. Papalia is the recipient of the 2014 Adam Reynolds Memorial Bursary and the 2013 Wynn Newhouse Award. He holds a Bachelor of Arts from Simon Fraser University, Vancouver and a Master of Fine Arts from Portland State University. His current work includes a movement building campaign for Open Access and Let's Keep in Touch—a collaboration with curator Whitney Mashburn that aims to set a precedent for haptic criticism to become a viable practice within contemporary art.

### **Gloria C Swain (she/her)**

#### **ARTIST, CURATOR & WRITER**

Gloria C Swain is a Toronto-based multidisciplinary artist, curator, and writer whose art practice includes abstract paintings, performance, social justice, and photography. Her work advocates for better mental health and against anti-Black racism, violence against Black women and Trans people,, and ageism. She was Tangled Art + Disability's 2016 Artist in Residence. She has received various art grants, including from Toronto Arts Council, Ontario Arts Council, Art Gallery of Ontario, and Canada Council for the Arts.

She holds a Community Arts Practice certificate and a degree in Environmental Studies. Her work has shown in Toronto, Ontario, Manitoba, Montreal, Quebec, New York, Kitchener, Ontario, and Kingston, Ontario. Her writings have been published in the Canadian Journal of Disability Studies.

### **Cyn Rozeboom (she/they)**

#### **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Cyn Rozeboom has acted as Executive Director of Tangled Art + Disability since 2017. She has over 30 years of experience in the non-profit arts sector as a fundraiser, artist, and administrator. Her obsessions include accessible arts policy, storytelling, the shifting dynamics of societal power, joy as resistance, and swimming.

## **Birdie Gerhl (she/her)**

### **MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST**

Birdie Gerhl is a practitioner of longing. As a multidisciplinary artist, Birdie searches for care and intimacy through multisensory, site-specific installations that envision disability and difference as transformative cultures rather than things that are isolated in the body. Birdie's fourth solo exhibition will be opening at Hamilton Artists Inc. in September, 2023, and curated by Abedar Kamgari.

## **Jet Coghlan (they/them)**

### **DIGITAL COORDINATOR**

Jet is a Latinex researcher and multidisciplinary artist who is committed to the development and application of emergent technologies to enhance the quality of life of Disabled, Mad, Queer, Indigenous, and Working Class people. They are actively learning from Indigenous perspectives and restoring their relationships to land and community. Jet continues to educate and immerse themselves through art, technology, and research with people and places that are undergoing the process of self-decolonization.

## **Vanessa Dion Fletcher (she/her)**

### **ARTIST**

Vanessa Dion Fletcher is a Lenape and Potawatomi neurodiverse Artist; her family is from Eelūnaapèewii Lahkèewiitt (displaced from Lenapehoking) and European settlers. She uses porcupine quills, Wampum belts, and menstrual blood to reveal the complexities of what defines a body physically and culturally. Reflecting on an Indigenous and gendered body with a neurodiverse mind, Dion Fletcher primarily works in performance, textiles and video.

She graduated from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2016 with an MFA in performance and a BFA from York University in 2009. She has exhibited at Art Mur Montreal, Eastern Edge Gallery Newfoundland, The Queer Arts Festival Vancouver and Satellite Art in Miami. Her work is in the Indigenous Art Centre, Joan Flasch Artist Book Collection, Vtape, Seneca College, Global Affairs Canada and the Archives of American Art.

## **Francis Tomkins (they/them)**

### **COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR**

Francis Tomkins is an accessible communications professional and accessibility consultant based in Toronto. Their professional practice is based in the belief that art is for everyone, and their work aims to break down barriers to participation in the arts and culture sector. Francis came to accessibility work through their background of community arts education.

## **Kayla Besse (she/her)**

### **ACCESSIBILITY COORDINATOR**

Kayla Besse is currently sharing the gospel of disability arts as the Accessibility Coordinator at the Stratford Festival. Previously, she worked as the Public Education Coordinator at Tangled Arts, where she got to make memes and podcasts about creative and critical access. Her educational background is in English & Theatre Studies. Access is love.

## **Kristina McMullin (she/her)**

### **ARTS ADMINISTRATOR, PRODUCER & RESEARCHER**

Kristina McMullin is a Toronto-based multi-hyphenate creative with a drive to build spaces and experiences that make her community feel seen, desired, and valued. Currently, she holds a research position at Crippling Masculinity, alongside other arts administration, communication, design, and consulting roles. Previously, she managed Communications at Tangled Art + Disability.

Kristina's intentions are to be ruthless with systems while being generous to humans; to tell the truth in a way that is generative; to prioritize the humanity of cultural spaces; to hold space for imperfect processes; and to build a practice of love.

## Jack Hawk (he/him)

### OUTREACH COORDINATOR

Jack Hawk resides in Tkaronto and practices as an Outreach Coordinator, Disability Arts worker, and astrologer. Since being displaced to Canada in 2013, he has focused his passions on community work, disability justice, decolonial justice, queer activism, spiritual peer support, museum accessibility, and arts services. He currently calls Tangled Art + Disability home, where he has an outreach and projects role and is one of few autistic Relaxed Performance consultants within Canada. Having worked with a multitude of cross-border museums, galleries, and grassroots organizations, Jack operates within the realm of intimacy and community consultation to advance the arts for the marginalized.

## Ylonda Bonnell (she/they)

### STORYTELLER

Yolanda Bonnell is a Bi/Queer 2 Spirit Anishinaabe-Ojibwe, South Asian mixed storyteller from Fort William First Nation, Ontario. Her play *bug* was nominated for four Dora Mavor Moore Awards, while the published version was short-listed for a Governor General's Literary Award. Yolanda was the first Indigenous artist recipient of the JAYU Arts for Human Rights Award and won the Playwrights Guild of Canada's Tom Hendry Drama Award for *My Sister's Rage*. Yolanda has taught/facilitated at schools like York University and Sheridan College and proudly bases her practice in land-based creation, drawing on energy and inspiration from the earth and her ancestors.

Access Anthology  
Reflections on Disability Art and Culture  
All rights reserved.

Copyright Tangled Art + Disability © 2023  
Commissioned by Gallery TPW with generous support from the  
Ontario Arts Council.

Gallery TPW is a leading artist-run centre dedicated to exhibiting  
underrepresented artistic and curatorial practices that push the  
boundaries of lens-based work

Book design by Kristina McMullin  
Front and Back cover design by Kristina McMullin

Visby Round CF by Connary Fagen Type Design (headings)  
Nunito ExtraLight by Vernon Adams (sub headings)  
Avenir by Adrian Frutiger (body text)

Visit the Tangled Art + Disability website: [www.tangledarts.com](http://www.tangledarts.com)

First edition, July 2023, Toronto, ON, Canada



**Gallery TPW**



ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO  
an Ontario government agency  
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



