

# Curating Access: Vital Cultural Aesthetics



Conference by Sean Lee & Kristina McMullin  
(Tangled Art + Disability)  
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**(Beginning of transcription)**

**Kristina McMullin**

Thank you so much for that wonderful introduction. I am Kristina. Sean and me will be presenting today our talk entitled *Curating Access: A Vital Cultural Aesthetic*.

For this talk, we are going to be starting by building a collective conscience. We'll be defining some words that we'll be using throughout the presentation, so we're all on the same page moving forward. This will also lead a little bit into what we believe, in our politics of our work at Tangled. Next, we'll go into an overview of the disability aesthetic in disability arts and the world history, as well as in Canada's history. We'll then be talking a

little bit about our programming in our gallery in Toronto.

Then I will be discussing disability-aesthetic-led accessible outreach and what we can learn from disability arts into community building, then some resources and quick wins for how we make our work more accessible, and we will follow with a Q&A.

## **Sean Lee**

Hey folks! I'm Sean. I'm the Director of Programming at Tangled Art + Disability. Here is a quick audio description of myself: I'm short, East-Asian, visibly disabled, and I'm wearing a white dress sweater with a red line that runs up and down the entire thing. It's a single red line, and it's very neat! Feel free to come up and touch it after. [Laughs with the audience]

I want to make sure, before we begin, that this space is okay for everyone. Feel free to get up. Washrooms are down the corner over there. Feel free to make noise, to get up and to do whatever you need, because this is a very relaxed space. The way that Kristina and I do our presentations is always really relaxed, so feel free to just be yourselves in this space.

I'm going to start by giving a description of the image that's on the screen above me. In big white letters on a navy blue background, is the word VIP, and there's an artist in the centre, whose name is Ebony Rose. They're clutching their hair and they've got on an intricate headpiece that resembles branches or deer antlers. They're taking this moment to pause in a model-esque pose.

I wanted to start off with this image because I think the word VIP is done really beautifully here. Ebony Rose is from the Blind and low-vision community or, as Ebony might say, they are a "VIP," a visually-impaired person. I think it was important that we start with this image because I wanted to centre how we think about disability, and how we think about disabled folks, especially BIPOC—Black, Indigenous, People of Colour—from within the community, by taking on a disability justice politic in what we're talking about. I think we can learn about how, when we're curating disability arts, we can put forward these really incredible concepts of curating access, as something that is generative, a way to invigorate our art sector as a whole.

This piece here was from a recent conference that we did, called *Crippling the Arts*. It was the second iteration of this conference, and I think it was really powerful. It wasn't the first, it wasn't just us trying to start from the beginning, but rather we approached disability with nuance, and we were able to bring about wonderful conversations from folks from throughout the nation, and internationally. The reason that I wanted to start with that image was because I think it's important that when we think about what ableism is, how it's seeped into our system, that we include a disability politic that centres BIPOC folks.

I'm going to give a couple of definitions, so that when we're talking here, we all have an understanding of the different words that have either been reclaimed or have been generated from within community.

The first one is a definition of ableism. It's a working definition that I've been privileged enough to glean from leaders like Talia "TL" Lewis and Dustin P. Gibson. It's a definition of ableism that folks might not be as familiar with. So I'm just going to read out what's on the screen. It says that ableism is:

"A system that places value on people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence, and productivity. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, colonialism, and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily re(produce), excel, and 'behave.' You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism."

I think this is really important, because it helps us locate disability within all the proximities of oppression. It allows us to think about how, as Mia Mingus would say—she is a disability scholar who I will talk about later—ableism is this idea of how we move in the world, to a mythical ideal of normalcy that is the body that is typically male, white, able-bodied, and heteronormative. And all these ways in which we navigate the world against this false ideal of normalcy bring us back to this definition of ableism. These ideas of neoliberal politics, of what we are worth, what we produce; that's deeply ingrained in how ableism dictates how we have to move in society. And so ableism here isn't just about proximity to disability, necessarily, but rather it allows us to invigorate our understandings of the constructs of the

world, constructs of society, and what is valued, what is understood as a kind of “normal.” This definition of ableism, I think, helps us to recognize the many moving complications that intersect within ableism and within this framework of disability.

We move on to defining the word “crip,” which is one of my favourite words. It’s a reclaimed word, and disability scholar Kelly Fritsch uses it as a verb. Those who are familiar with crip culture probably recognize this word, and the way that we use it is as a verb, is to “open with desire” for the different ways that disability disrupts. And this disruption is really what we embrace within disability arts and culture, and within the process of curatorial frameworks of disability arts.

Defining accessibility: Mia Mingus, who will come up throughout this talk, gives a really great definition, that “Accessibility is concrete resistance to the isolation of disabled people.” In this way, I think Mia Mingus is pointing out that this idea of creating community from disability is really still radical. Historically, disabled folks, whether from mad, Deaf, disability communities, were really isolated as something that was the phenomenon solely in the body, solely in the individual. And in this medical model, this idea of forming community through disability was not encouraged. The “solution” to disability was really to fix the person, rather than the factors that are disabling. Mia Mingus is noting here that accessibility is this way that we can resist and gesture to the different models of community building that might be located when we open to that disruption of disability.

And finally, disability justice, which I think is the underpinning framework to how we approach disability arts here at Tangled. Mia Mingus again gives a beautiful definition of disability justice, so I’m just going to roll with that. Mia Mingus says that disability justice is:

“A multi issue political understanding of disability and ableism, moving away from a rights based equality model and beyond just access, to a framework that centers justice and wholeness for all disabled people and communities.”

Disability justice really does centre queer and trans BIPOC folks, and was one that was created by four communities who have otherwise isolated from what was typically seen as a disability rights model that saw disability

as something of a silo, as something unfettered by the different influences of oppression and the different ways that these communities intersect.

Now we're getting into the artistic side of things, now that we have a bit of a basis. I'm going to start with this idea of a disability aesthetic. This is something that's been employed throughout history. On here, I have a definition by Tobin Siebers, who smartly articulates that:

“Disability aesthetics seeks to emphasize the presence of different bodies and minds in the tradition of aesthetic representation—that tradition most precisely concerned with the appearance of the beautiful.”

What I mean here, and what maybe helps for this concept is in the next slide: I have a photo of the Venus de Milo. The Venus, for folks who are unfamiliar, in this photo is a marble bust of Venus, who is a Roman goddess of some sort, and the statue that is the iconic Venus de Milo, is one that's depicted without arms. Scholars from our history have long debated whether or not the Venus, if the Venus de Milo had arms, would be this moment of iconography.

I think that what Tobin Siebers smartly does is recognize that the Venus de Milo's aesthetic, the disability aesthetic that's employed here, an aesthetic of beauty through imperfection, is one that's been recognized time immemorial. We can think of things like the leaning tower of Pisa: Imperfection here is a resource, almost, for an art history to employ. And yet, a disability aesthetic doesn't necessarily centre disabled artists, disabled folks, and so that, I think, is where we get into disability arts.

In this next slide I have, “What is disability art?” I want to give us all a definition that I love of disability arts by Yinka Shonibare, who is a Turner-Prize-nominated, blue-chip, incredible artist from the UK. He parallels the emergence of disability arts to feminist arts, black arts, queer arts. He notes that disability arts is “The last avant-garde” movement, situating the way that the emergence of those have really helped to upheave and rethink what it is that the arts sector can do in other ways that have stagnated. I really love to situate how disability arts can be within both the larger art history, but also something that's outside, something that is reinvigorating our sector with things like accessible curatorial practices, with things like artists who are really taking hold in ways that are new, ways that are

exciting.

In this slide, I have a photo of *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, by the artist Marc Quinn. This is a very controversial piece of art, because Marc Quinn is not a disabled artist. And yet, Alison Lapper is a disabled artist and activist from the UK, and chose to be a subject for Mark to create. And this piece is a hyper-visible marble bust that recalls some of the historical busts that were reserved for folks of “importance” throughout history. I think Alison Lapper is reclaiming this through the use of this platform that is Mark Quinn, and that is the Trafalgar Square, site-specific work over here.

And so, that’s the question: Is this disability art? I don’t think there is one, simple answer for whether or not this is disability art. But I think that it recognizes that there are many complicated nuances to how we can approach disability arts. That’s where the place of curation helps us to understand how folks from within community can use curatorial practice as a way to think about what is disability arts. And the reason that we need disability art is because, as Catherine Frazee would say, it’s a way to “come to pride.” On here, there’s a quote from Catherine Frazee, who’s a disability scholar, and just an incredible disability activist. And what she says is that:

“Before we can begin to push back against injustice and indignity, before we can rise up from the swirl of rage and despair, before we can speak back to a script that casts us as tragic victims and bitter villains, we must have pride... Good art is both the product and the sustenance of human imagination. And so Art brings us together in ways that invoke moral imagination, summoning us to justice, dignity and all of the great quests of human progress. It is perhaps only through art and its activation of imagination that we can both conceive of, and be moved resolutely toward visions of equality and justice. That is how we come to pride, together.”

I think the word “pride” here really captures a wonderful moment of how our different movements can come together. There’s so many parallels between disability justice and queer movements, and one thing that I think is noted here, is that these ideas about communities as being isolated, as being solely located in the body, are ones that are socially constructed, that we can come together through these social movements, and through these moments of finding each other in community. And so we need pride in order to really recognize who we are as a community. And pride is done through

things like art.

Before I move on, there's a really wonderful photo here from Tangled Art Gallery in 2019, when we had an exhibition called *Through a Tired Eye*.

*Through a Tired Eye* is an exhibition by an artist named Bruce Horak, who's from the blind and low-vision community. Bruce kept getting asked, "How do you see?" And that's a question, I think, that is not new to disabled folks. You know, the "How do you—blank?" What was interesting was that Bruce took this moment, and used it as a teachable moment to bring in a series, in which he invited folks, both from within and outside of the disability community, to contribute to this large, thousand-person series, in which folks would sit down with Bruce. And Bruce would draw the way he saw, and it's interesting, as he became more embroiled in aspects of disability justice, in aspects of access, he began to draw not what he thought folks looked like, but really what he saw. All the moments of auras, and flickers, and the different colours that blur together. He really began to do that. This charts an interesting evolution of not only the different people that were involved with this project, but actually, the evolution of Bruce's politics within disability. I thought this was a really great moment of demonstrating how, as you come to pride, to discover your own aesthetic, and the change in your own artistic practice can also become invigorated through pride and through these aspects of a disability, or a crip aesthetic, as you would.

And so, coming to pride means that we can really begin to desire disability differently. And this is a quote from Kelly Fritsch and Anne McGuire, in a Forthcoming issue around disability that they have. And what they say is that:

"Disability is here and it is in our futures. It is not something we have but something we participate in. In this way, we vitally need disability arts and culture, and disability pride, as much as we need access, healthcare, housing and employment, for these are the means by which we can live with disability. These are, in other words, the specific practices, sensibilities, and discourses that imbue disability, not only with possibility but with transformative meaning, value and desirability."

I think this is important, because disabled artists are agents of world-building and world-dismantling through our practices, through the creative

ways that we can navigate our society, through the creative ways that we can participate in the arts. And so, in order to really think about where we are as a society, we have to desire this disability that embraces the difference, that embraces the disruption. Because when we're curating disability arts, we can't just neatly fold in artists that might be able to participate in a normative framework, but rather we have to recognize that we're trying to embrace this disruption, and recognize the different ways that we can actually work together. I think desiring disability differently allows us to think about the different ways that disability can really be generative. It can really be something that allows us to recognize the world in a different capacity, and recognize the ableism that affects all of us.

Now, I'm really going to finally get into curation, and I'll talk a bit about this, but I'm happy to take more questions. There are a couple of exhibitions from this year that I really wanted to highlight. At Tangled Art Gallery, we launched in 2016 and what was really interesting is that we began as a platform for artists. I think there's always been a bit of a stickiness in thinking about curatorial "excellence" if you will, and its relationship to disability arts, because of historic curators, like Jean Dubuffet, who would come into institutions and steal disabled artists' works and put them up, and bar them from participating in their own exhibitions, in receiving payment for their art, in really even participating as artists. And this was because there was this desire for an "outsider" artist, and for "outsider art" in which the "value" of the work wasn't recognized until a curator came in with their critical eye and picked up this work, and gave an assigned value to it. And so, disability arts, I think, has always had a bit of resistance to this idea that a curator should come in and tell us what is our art.

But as the years have gone on and Tangled has learned and established new accessible curatorial practices and has really begun to experience a flourishing of disability arts, we've recognized that the need is there and the artists are there, but the space that can curate this art is really lacking. There's a bit of a narrative that I'll touch on as we go on.

Here in this exhibition called *Body Farm* by Valentin Brown—Valentin is an artist who is both trans and Autistic, and talks about how his work is trauma-informed—his work was so incredibly thoughtful, the way that he created works was with access in mind. On this image here is one of a multitude of two-dimensional paintings and 2D drawings. They're all sort of organic

creatures and monsters, tentacles, body parts, that loosely reference an experience of the monster.

What Valentin did was, instead of creating an audio description for each piece—because Tangled creates audio descriptions for all of our exhibitions—Valentin recognized that creating an audio description of over a hundred pieces and a thousand sculptures really wouldn't serve its purpose. Instead, he wove together a narrative of his experience—this exhibition marking the beginning of a year-long period of medical transition for him—and he created a narrative that was called his *Captain's Logs*. Through these *Captain's Logs* he painted a picture of what the works were meant to embody, and he created touchable pieces, sculptures and soft pieces filled with all sorts of complex parts that created this idea of the complexity of the Body Farm, if you would. I thought this was a wonderful way that we can make space for artists to think about accessible curation without being too didactic. This is an artist who was already interested in curating the works, and only needed some guidance around how to best curate their work and bring it into a space.

Aislinn Thomas was part of an exhibition, a series called *Flourishing*. I think one of our artists from *Flourishing* is actually here. Celima, are you still here?

—Yep!

—All right, great! Welcome! [Laughs]

Aislinn really wanted to play off of this idea of audio description. I think what was really neat about Aislinn's piece was that Aislinn wanted to create an invitation to softness.

There's a photo here of a locker room in which there's a single projection on the screen, and in the projection is this window. It's a very humble piece that's just a window blowing slightly in the breeze, and Aislinn wanted to think about the different ways that we value production.

She created this, and then she thought, "How do I want to create an audio description for this piece?" What she did was, she invited three other disabled artists and poets to come offer an audio description, but not just any audio description, one that matched the length of each shot of the windows. And then she cycled them. So there would be the video playing,

and then just audio description. She wanted to think about the poetics of audio description in this way.

And what was interesting was how many folks would come in and tell us, “The piece is not working,” that this was a piece that they thought didn’t have the video, and so it was broken. It was a nice moment of intervention for us, to allow folks to rethink what is “visual arts.” Aislinn was drawing off of the knowledge and the expertise of other artists to create these audio descriptions, and really generating crip community through this piece.

And finally, this is an exhibition that I curated with Emily Cooke, another disabled artist, at the Critical Distance Centre for Curators. The exhibition’s called *Access is Love & Love is Complicated*. It plays off of this idea that access is love, which is really something that was created by Alice Wong, Sandy Ho, and Mia Mingus, centering this idea of access being just another word for love.

But then, if we wanted to recognize that access is love, we’re also taking a pop culture understanding that love is complicated, because we’ve been told that disability is not something to create community through, that when we’re radically generating community through access and through being able to bring others into a space together, there will be frictions, and I think that friction is a beautiful one, that we can embrace it, use it to invigorate our artistic sector.

In this exhibition we had a number of different, accessible pieces that did create these ideas of friction. There was an artist named Andy Slater, who is a Blind artist who creates a lot of sound work. We wanted to create a beautiful, poetic audio descriptive piece, a really nice, designed book that went with his audio piece. And then he recognized that by making the aesthetic of this piece so integral to the sound work, he suddenly had made the piece inaccessible to his own community through this book. So then he thought, “Okay, I’m going to create a Braille version of this book, and a simplified audio description of what the book is.” Then he thought, “Do I need ASL for this now?”

And there’s that cycle of: If access becomes part of the aesthetic, then where does it stop? When does it stop serving the audience, and when does it just become a sort of think piece on access? It was a really

wonderful moment of “Ah-ha!” And we brought Andy together with artists from neurodivergent communities and with learning disabilities, with cognitive disabilities, that I think haven’t been necessarily centered within the disability arts movement, because they are often times working with a collaborator. So the question of authorship, and “independence” in authorship, becomes something that is thrown into question, and complicates our understanding of disability arts. So we really wanted to bring in artists with different cognitive disabilities.

Vanessa Dion-Fletcher, who’s an indigenous artist, noted that this idea of disability is really a colonial construct, that in a lot of indigenous societies, disabled folks have their place, have their different moments in the community. They’re knowledge keepers, they’re storytellers. And so, disability arts may not fit within an indigenous lexicon, necessarily.

We wanted to bring Vanessa in to complicate these ideas of how we identify proudly with disability, while still recognizing the different ways that disability is problematic, is a colonial construct, can be from things like environmental racism, and can skew mental health, can skew more heavily in racialized communities.

So these complicated ways that we wanted to think about access and disability community were brought into this exhibition. I’ll be happy to talk more about it, but I’ve got to bring it over to Kristina now.

### **Kristina McMullin**

Amazing. Thank you, Sean.

With such a brilliant director of programming and curator of disability arts, and my boss, Sean Lee, my job at Tangled in communications is to match what he does in the gallery space, with a curator space. I’m reaching out to audiences that will be interested, invested in the work that we’re doing, while also providing a safe space for our community and our audiences to have conversation both about artwork, but also not about artwork, that we can have a reciprocal relationship with, that we are constantly pushing forward the notion of what is accessible, what is disability arts, not only from a top-down curator organization to community, but also bottom-up, from community and listening to us.

On the screen here, I have a photograph of all of the Tangled staff blurry in the background, with one of our artists that we work with currently, Peter Owusu-Ansah—this one of our favourite photos, I'd just like to add—and Peter being a Black, Deaf artist in Toronto, and constantly needing to navigate the world... For us, having a gallery like Tangled to be a place where Peter can showcase his work, be supported, is really a value to us, and really serves the community with aligning the curatorial direction that we have.

Also, a lot of what I do in my work breaks down into what is outreach, what is community building, and that can be broken down into the language of my external-facing community communication, the aesthetics of it, the design of it, and then just the actual mechanism—how do we reach new people?

For my job, I work a lot with all of our artists that Sean has so brilliantly curated, to find ways to promote their shows, and then curating a voice that our public and our community will be comfortable with and that will be inviting to them coming in. And so I do this, through language.

So, what is accessible language? That refers back to the definition that Sean offered, Mia Mingus's definition of "accessible," accessibility being the concrete resistance of the discrimination of disabled folks. So, what does that mean, accessible language? That can mean plain language, which should be prioritizing a logical, active, and short, common way of communicating our highest mean.

Often times, in arts and curatorial spaces, we want to add all the artistic jargon, we want to flex how well we did at art school, but that language can be very discriminatory to a lot of various, different folks. For many years, disabled bodies have been excluded from conversations about art and culture through semantics alone. So as cultural creators, as curators, using language as an indicator that we are accessible to a community, whether they are English as a second language or French as a second language, whether they are ASL or LSQ users, or in some, have a cognitive disability. By taking that impetus on ourselves as curators and creators to refine our language, we're taking that one step forward that our new audiences are welcome and safe, and invited and desired into our spaces.

It's also making sure that we're not using ableist tropes. Ableism lives in our society in behavioural ideas, as well as linguistic ideas, as well as attitudinal behaviours. On the screen right now, I have a few examples of what have been community-led language changes that are breaking down, again, that definition of a resistance under discrimination. So, non-ableist language being driven by disabled bodies, by disabled minds in a community identification.

Some of these are saying: (Capital D) "Deaf and Hard of Hearing" as opposed to "Hearing Impaired." A lot of Deaf communities see it as a community driven, and not a removal of hearing.

As well as: "Wheelchair user," and not "Wheelchair-bound," the word "bound" has many negative connotations, whereas there is actually no negativity about being a wheelchair user.

And then we have: "Blind and Low Vision," and not "Visually Impaired." Sean mentioned Ebony's desire to call themselves a Visually Impaired Person, which is why there's an asterisk there. Because in that community, identifying, as the self, as a Visually Impaired Person is a self-identification. However, for sighted folks, that isn't our term to use. There's still a lot of conversation within the community of whether or not a word like "crip" can be used by non-members of the community.

"Disabled or Disability Identified," and not "Handicapped." Again, "handicapped" comes back to this negative connotation that we really want to move forward and move into that idea of desiring disability.

"Has," as opposed to things like "victim of," or "suffers from." Again, going back to language as a way of communicating that there is this concrete resistance to language as a way that has been discriminatory to disabled bodies.

Also on the screen: "Non-Ableist language is ever evolving and community led, and if you aren't sure what words to use," or not use, to ensure that you ask members of that said community.

Often, people are willing to tell you what they feel most comfortable with,

and I think it's always great to take that one step forward. If you're talking about a community that you're not involved in, that's also that one step, as a culture worker, as a cultural creator, of building a more accessible future. And then we have accessible design. So, we've gone through what we are saying to describe this brilliant curatorial programming we have, how are we visually displaying that?

On the screen, I have an icon that says "Size Matters" and "Typographic Elements". This just a kind of math—which all artists love—and how to make sure that our words on a piece of paper are large enough, or our words on a wall mount are large enough. So, some math on here: The distance of your viewer divided by 2.5 is the height in inches that your letters should be if you want folks to read them.

This is just those small things that we can do to start dismantling ableism. We want you, and folks from the Blind and low-vision community, into our spaces. Doing things like having large enough text allows them to feel desired, to feel like they are wanted, in a space.

There's also ways that we can use graphic design as a tool for pushing accessible visual aesthetics. On the screen right now, I have a screen shot of a brochure that we designed at Tangled for our season exhibition *Flourishing*. This was a conversation in the office on how we can use something like plain language, to push forward a disability aesthetic, and what that can be, as a desired, vital, cultural aesthetic.

And so we played with what plain language can offer. So, as opposed to using some vague idea of what our season was, what our series was, we had, in white text on a dark green background, "This is the brochure for Flourishing." It was a very intentional use of plain language for helping folks to know what they were looking at. Then that was broken up, and on the bottom half, in black lettering and pink lettering, we have, "An exhibition series by Tangled Art Gallery." So, using that visual indication that there are two separate things that we want you to know, and ensuring that you know exactly what it is.

We also decided to include our logo as a graphic element on the front of the book. Because we still had Tangled Art Gallery on the front, folks who aren't familiar with our organization would see it as an aesthetically-pleasing

tangled line, but folks who are familiar with us would immediately have a visual indication of whose season brochure this was.

This has been really fun for us, because it was one of our most highly received brochures, and there was a lot of conversation about why we made those choices. It's kind of what we aim to do at Tangled, always pushing for what can access give to our community.

So often, it's seen as an add-on, or: "Oh, I have to make something accessible," but I think that having this example of what we use, with plain language and graphic design, really gave to our community, and gave also a lot of opportunities for folks interested in accessible graphic design to work around.

And then, we're all here because we're in the arts. Visual art is not always accessible.

On the screen, I have a piece of Peter Owusu-Ansah's work, he is a community member that was photographed a few slides back. When we had his show, or his group show, we had a lot of conversations about how we were going to do audio descriptions for his work. As a Deaf artist, he uses colours to evoke emotions. And so, what language were we going to use to describe this image for Blind and low-vision folks? We really had to have this conversation of what it would offer. And I will offer what we came up with, which was:

"A large square image made up of multiple mini squares that make a pixelated look to this piece. The colours range, half of them around light greys and dark greys, and half of them in bright reds, pinks and yellows. When you interact with this piece in real life, as you walk toward it and away from it, the contrasts of the colours give a movement of a feel. When Peter Owusu-Ansah was making this piece, he saw it as sun hitting an iceberg, and he saw it as the world, and he saw it as a place of creating emotions for folks to feel."

That was the audio description that we offered our community, and I always choose this piece in this section of the presentation because this was the most commented-on piece in that show, as everyone seemed to have an emotional reaction to it when they engaged with it, or they engaged with the

audio description.

It was also a piece that we had a lot of conversations in the gallery. While everyone that works in our gallery is a sighted individual, we all see things differently and we all interpret things differently. And it came back to this conversation of: What are we actually telling our audience about what they are looking at and what the piece is, when the art in general is supposed to evoke an emotion.

And so, how does that build community? We talked a lot about spaces and community building, and digital spaces in community building. Both of those can be outreach by untargeted outreach and targeted outreach.

Untargeted outreach is outreach that reaches an existing community. They already engage with your organization and your events, and they aren't individuals who necessarily need to be informed on upcoming events, but they want updates on access policies and event locations, as possible. This is good to keep in mind, as it is very different from targeted outreach. This is potentially reaching communities that are not engaging with your organization. They need to be educated on what your organization does as well as upcoming events, and they need to be informed on access policies, event locations, to be comfortable to attend an event for the first time. Again, by adding this information we are making spaces accessible, we are breaking down those barriers of discrimination by giving information; and there may need to be some level of incentivization or specific reasons to get involved. Some examples of untargeted outreach would be our website: People already know our URL, they know our newsletter, they've already asked to be involved; invites that we send folks; as well as the social media. And then, our targeted outreach, where we do targeted, paid-for advertising, which we know are going to be reaching a specific community, as well as specific event postings, often times with target organizations, and then we also have the social media.

I put these on the slide together to show that at the end of the day, via the power of the Internet, almost all of our untargeted outreach and targeted outreach intersect.

By knowing that, it's important that when we are creating outreach to include all those access features, to give incentives for folks to get involved,

to give information about your organization, so we are inviting people at all times, and using our Facebook page or Twitter page or website as those sites of desiring new audiences, like informing them of our access components, informing them of our event locations.

And then, how do we do that on social media? In our very first definition of what is ableism, we talked about it being a capitalist construct. Unfortunately, social media is run by the large conglomerates in capitalism. What we're seeing today is there is this counter-resistance of ableism on social media, and a lot of the large ones—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram—are working to make their spaces more accessible, which is a brilliant thing to do. But it's also important for us as cultural workers, cultural creators, to know the best practices.

I'm going to walk through a list of best practices. Instagram, in early 2019, finally rolled out the ability to add an image description. This is a really brilliant thing to have, as Facebook has had them for quite a lot longer and Instagram took quite a while longer to roll them out.

So there are ways to add them. It's very difficult to find, which is infuriating. When you go to post the picture, at the very bottom of the section, in small lettering that's very difficult to read, it says "Advanced Settings." And only there can you add an Alt text. Then you can go and it brings up the window that allows you to add all this Alt text.

Once you've entered that Alt text, and you look at your phone, if you are a sighted individual, it looks exactly like any other Instagram post. However, for Blind and low-vision audiences, as well as folks who engage with audio as opposed to visual content, your phone will read out your description, and then your caption.

So you're prioritizing both of your sighted and non-sighted audiences, as well as folks who may be doing multiple other tasks while also scrolling through Instagram, like we all do.

Twitter: Also, equally as infuriating, in that you have to go into your advanced settings, and turn on a component to allow you to write Alt text. It doesn't automatically come on any Twitter account. Why that is, I do not know.

Once you add a photo onto your Twitter, it has a little icon on the bottom right-hand side that will say, "Add description." When you click on this, again pops up the window. One thing to keep in mind for Twitter is, image descriptions have to be a maximum of 420 characters, so it limits how much information you are allowed to give your audience. But much like Instagram, once you post it, for a sighted viewer, it looks the exact same as a Twitter post without an integrated caption.

I also will note that Twitter uses more hashtags than most. When you are tweeting, it's really important to use title-character cases when doing hashtags. If you have all lower-case or all upper-case letters, screen reader technology will read that letter by letter by letter, rendering it completely inaccessible. However, Twitter has back-end design that if you have a capital letter as the first letter of each word in your hashtag, it will read it out, "Hashtag A Tangled Affair," which is the example on the screen.

And lastly, Facebook: Very similar to the other institutions. You add an image, and then it has settings. The one issue with Facebook at this current moment in time, is they are currently rolling out AI to write descriptions for their images. While I applaud this attempt, they are factually incorrect almost 100% of the time. So with Facebook it is almost imperative that we write these descriptions ourselves, and we overwrite what the Facebook AI is trying to do. Not only does this better serve our audience, but it also better serves Facebook, because then they are getting data of what is a good description, which will continue to serve their AI.

Here, I have a photo of our *Crippling the Arts* Symposium that Sean mentioned earlier. On the screen are five different speakers sitting in chairs with a microphone, and we see one of our interpreters on stage. In the foreground of the photo there's the backs of the audience's heads. On the screen, it says, "Top Three Disability Arts Criticism Pet Peeves."

I put this on because *Crippling the Arts* was one of our larger undertakings as an organization, being that it was three full days of programming, two nights of performance, and we were welcoming about 150 people into our space at any one given time. Given that we are an access-centered organization, it was imperative that we made all of the events that we were providing to our community fully accessible.

A few of the things that we did to make our event fully accessible is hosting it in barrier-free spaces that are close to public transportation. Just doing this, right away enforces a notion that folks who rely upon public transportation or use any sort of mobility device are desired and wanted.

We also offer free and community-reduced tickets for community members. For our events at Tangled, they're always free, and when we do cost-reduced tickets for community members, we ensure that those are ingrained as an "honesty is the best policy" member on any ticketing website. By just having it as an "honesty is best policy" part of the website, it doesn't require folks to give any sort of vulnerable information about their income, about their safety, there is just an understanding that folks who need to use the tickets can access them.

Hiring ASL interpreters when possible, as well as care attendants when possible; live captioning when possible for videos; and when providing food, ensuring that there's allergy-respectable food.

And then lastly: Communicating access components to your community. As well, if not more importantly, communicate any barriers to access. Often times, when we are creating accessible events, access-forward events, we want to screen from the rooftops what we've done to make an event accessible. The problem is, we often don't want to talk about what we are unable to provide.

But by ensuring that we communicate any potential barrier to access, it becomes a radical act of respect to our community, in that we have envisioned bodies that aren't ours, minds that aren't ours, entering spaces. And by communicating any barriers to access, it allows folks to have agency over decision-making processes of whether or not they want to enter that space safely. As opposed to saying, "Hey, we will have ASL interpreters," and then assuming that there will also be a barrier-free venue. So, somebody in a wheelchair arrives assuming that it's accessible, and it's not.

And so, as cultural creators, it's important that we are always willing to listen to our community, but also ensure that we vocalise, if at any time, they aren't able to attend our events, with the understanding that one day, they

will.

**(End of transcription)**

Transcription: Marie Lauzon, C. Tran. (Canada)

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