



Duncan of Jordanstone  
College of Art & Design  
University of Dundee

# JOS RENDALL

---

Accessibility and Inclusion in the Art World:  
The Need for Representation of Disabled Artists

---

**May 2026**

Fine Art

---

[DOI 10.15132/30000125](https://doi.org/10.15132/30000125)

---



Except where otherwise noted, the text in this dissertation is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license.

All images, figures, and other third-party materials included in this dissertation are the copyright of their respective rights holders, unless otherwise stated. Reuse of these materials may require separate permission.

Accessibility and Inclusion in the Art World: The Need  
for Representation of Disabled Artists

Jos Rendall

Fine Art Level 4

Word Count: 7644

# Table of Contents:

List of Illustrations

Abstract

Introduction

Chapter 1: Representations of disability and the cultural impact

1.1 Social and media views on disability

1.2 Representations of disability in art

1.3 Marc Quinn and Alison Lapper

Chapter 2: Outsider artists: barriers of the art world

2.1 'Outsider art' as a problematic term

2.2 Judith Scott

Chapter 3: The importance of accessibility in the art world

3.1 Communication through art

3.2 The need for accessibility

3.3 The importance of creative expression for those with disabilities

Conclusion

Bibliography

Abstract

## List of illustrations

- Fig 1: *The Belvedere Torso* 6  
Available at: [The Belvedere Torso](#)
- Fig 2: *Venus de Milo* 7  
Available at: [Vénus de Milo - Louvre site des collections](#)
- Fig 3: Auguste Rodin *L'homme qui marche* (1907) 8  
Available at: [L'Homme qui marche | Musée Rodin](#)
- Fig 4: Marc Quinn *Alison Lapper pregnant* (2005) 9  
Available at: [Alison Lapper Pregnant by Dr. Janis Lomas – Women's History Network](#)
- Fig 5: Judith Scott *Untitled* (2004) 18  
Available at: [Untitled, 2004 by Judith Scott | Obelisk Art History](#)
- Fig 6: Christine Sun Kim *Degrees of deaf rage* (2018) 23  
Available at: [Christine Sun Kim on Breaking the Echo Chamber | Frieze](#)
- Fig 7: Finnegan Shannon *Do you want us here or not* (2018) 26  
Available at: [Do You Want Us Here or Not: Fighting for Accessibility in Art Spaces](#)

## Abstract

The incorporation of disabled people in the arts is as important as ever, through utilising art as a political tool, societal attitudes and constructs have been altered throughout history. The need for disabled artists to be better represented and catered to in the arts has been made clear as COVID-19 creates further barriers for disabled people and artists. Artists such as Judith Scott, Alison Lapper, Marc Quinn and Christine Sun Kim use art to communicate, represent stories of their and others disabilities and can be used to highlight the lived experiences of disabled people. Exploring how disabled artists have functioned in the arts and the difficult and exploited histories, it can be seen how important these artists are to the arts and culture and vice versa. Accessibility has been ignored throughout the development of the art world yet when it is considered, can create valuable opportunities and enrich the lives of disabled people as well as the arts sector. Through accessibility and fair representation in the art world, society can learn to value the opinions and participation of those with disabilities.

# Introduction

Art has long been used as a means to explore and question the human experience, social constructs and the sociopolitical landscape. Artists and art movements throughout history have worked to bring attention to humanitarian issues, utilising art as it transcends language and cultural barriers. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century there was an increased spotlight on the anthropological side of art, with many movements such as disability rights, utilising art, realising its beneficial uses in social movements (Barnes, 1992). Disabled artists in particular have since used their practice to challenge stereotypes and representations that marginalise those with mental health problems or physical or developmental disabilities. With historically, art production being controlled by the structure of capitalism, artists part of social movements are more often breaking free from this, instead pivoting to an autonomous way of making, using art as a political tool and a universal language, artists take the role of activists (Annet, 2025). However, the participation and presence of disabled artists in the art world have often been exploited or excluded either physically or symbolically. With disabled people being the largest minority group, disability studies or ‘crip theory’ (an approach in disability studies that affirms the experiences of disability and aims to resist able-bodied heteronormativity (Martino and Schormans, 2021, P. 34)) has a rising presence in the art world. As barriers faced by disabled people/artists, are being brought to the attention of large institutions, further accessibility and inclusion becomes more of a priority for them to expand and diversify their collections as well as audience. In this dissertation, I aim to explore the dynamics between the art world and disabled artists, the barriers they face, the lack of representation, and inclusion in collections, and accessibility in institutions. Exploring how disabled artists use their practices to highlight movements has become increasingly evident in

recent times due to the devastating effects of COVID-19, having majorly affected those with disabilities and health conditions. The importance of the work disabled artists and disability arts programmes have in connecting communities and offering critique on social infrastructure has been highlighted by this pandemic. With artists and disabled people particularly struggling with funding and social distancing, it is ever important to explore and ensure that sufficient support and opportunities are available for those with disabilities in the arts (Ginsburg et al., 2023, pp. 17-23).

Through the works of artists Christine Sun Kim, Judith Scott, Marc Quinn, and Alison Lapper, and their interaction with and affect on the public, I aim to explore the history of disability in the art world and how the future is being shaped by these artists and many others. Beginning with Marc Quinn's *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, the ethics of non-disabled artists exploring the topic and other famous representations of disability. This will establish a basis for how disabled people and artists are viewed and their role in society, specifically in art spaces, and how these impact each other. Next, Judith Scott's work and life story will assist in discussing barriers to the mainstream art world due to inadequate accessibility to arts education, and other art spaces, and the problematic, exclusionary term, 'outsider art'. Lastly, Christine Sun Kim's work on experiencing deafness and the use of a visual language explores how important art and creative expression are for those who function outside of normative standards and the industry as an alternative to conventional education or employment. This is an important subject due to the central role art plays in how we as a society understand and value human experience through the creation of culture. To include disabled people in this creation is to further the discourse on topics such as beauty or the capabilities and resilience of the human body of which disabled people have the most unique perspective on. Exposure to culture forms our beliefs and behaviour, what we see directly affects our thoughts on

certain groups, concepts and constructs (Coll, 2018, p. 332). The inclusion of disabled artists through accessibility and fair representation, therefore, directly impacts the production of a diverse culture. A culture which is influenced by all groups of society is vital to a democracy.

# Chapter 1: Representations of disability and the cultural impact

## 1.1 Social and media views on disability

It is apparent within the art world that barriers faced by disabled people are due to institutional inaccessibility resulting from attitudes towards disability. Formed by years of abusive representations, the depiction of disability has been reflected in social views. Attitudes towards disability in recent history have been affected by many social movements and theories, such as the eugenics movement. In the Late 19th Century, the Eugenics movement had a significant influence on the public's perception of disabled people and their ability to contribute to society. People part of the movement believed heavily in notions of survival of the fittest, natural selection and viewed disabled people as weak. The members subscribing to this thought believe that disabled people should not be able to procreate and pushed for sterilisation and segregation as they thought them to be unproductive and detrimental to society. These beliefs culminating in 1939, with 30,000 Americans being sterilised (Law, 2019).

Although laws have been revised to reflect current attitudes towards human rights, general social attitudes have been altered by such movements, more recently, being affected by media depictions through TV, movies, and other art forms. Characters in cinematic media with

disabilities are often characterised by poverty and dependence, revealing the opinion that they cannot be independent, successful people. Other depictions are pitiable or pathetic while making the character solely their condition (Barnes, 1992). These depictions denote suffering and illness while focusing on the medical model of disability (the belief that disability is due to medical diagnosis and biological condition instead of the barriers and inaccessibility in society) (Kafer, 2013, P. 5). The characters are made to appear as the 'other', abnormal or sinister, and focusing on the freakshow trope, which stems from circuses using disabled people as a form of shock and being made to perform and exploit their disability for others' entertainment. The lack of representation or that which is offensive fosters an exclusionary mindset as it has often been argued that you internalise what you see in media (Barnes, 1992). Therefore, it's important that art depicts a diverse spread of people and in a positive and uplifting way. However, modern art and media depictions are becoming more favourable and inclusive towards those with disabilities, curating a cultural mindset of empathy and understanding by creating more authentic and inclusive narratives (Kashaka, 2024, pp. 17-18). The use of stereotypes and tropes in media and art directly reduces complex individuals to their condition and perpetuates viewing them through the lens of pity. Showing disabled people in regular situations or just more often in the public eye, framed as the everyday person, would create the attitude that they are only experiencing another aspect of human life.

## 1.2 Representations of disability in art

Throughout history, disability and its presence in art and even contemporary art has been sidelined, with representations being few and far between. One example that is well known

for its powerful connection to disability, beauty, and the aesthetics of the body is *The Belvedere Torso*.



Fig 1

The torso is an Italian fragmented sculpture which was unearthed in the 15th or 16th century, and its subject is unintelligible, although it is thought to be of the mythological characters Ajax or Hercules. The figure is without a head, arms, or lower legs, and according to art historian Johan Joachim Wincklemann, its beauty is due to it being so severely disfigured/mutilated. Another similar fragmentary sculpture discovered and hailed for its broken beauty is the *Venus de Milo*, a Greek representation of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, the sculpture was discovered missing her arms.



Fig 2

These subjects, in their fragmented state, are thought to be far more beautiful and captivating due to their incomplete state, being viewed as more interesting than the complete realistic marble sculptures of those times. Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo's interest in creating seemingly unfinished works has been attributed to his fascination with these sculptures, alluding to the historic tale of artists falling in love with broken bodies, as he was reportedly captivated by their unique aesthetics (Siebers, 2008, pp. 330-332). This focus on incomplete works created a shift in the aesthetic beauty of the time, seen when looking at *The Belvedere Torso* or *Venus de Milo* in awe and fascination rather than pity or revulsion. Yet the same cannot be said for authentic everyday people with visible disabilities; the work of the artist has long been important in shifting the norms of aesthetic beauty and what we view as worthy of becoming art.

French artist Auguste Rodin is an example of a well known artist who was influenced by the style of these works, leading to the creation of his sculpture *L'homme Qui Marche* (1907), also being affected by his own disability, having fractured his femurs due to his condition, Lysosomal Storage Disease of the bones (Ike, 2017, p. 1).



Fig 3

Rodin was severely affected by his disability and while not being able to participate in regular activities, he began making art. *L'homme qui Marche*, an important work in disabled representation, it was heavily inspired by the fragmentary sculptures of the past and was modelled on Saint John the Baptist. The artist believed the damage did not diminish the sculptures' beauty, saying: "Here is a hand... broken at the level of the wrist, it has no fingers, only a palm, and it is so real, he admired, that to contemplate it, to see it live, I need no fingers. Mutilated

as it is, it is nonetheless sufficient because it is true” (Siebers, 2008). These Greco-Roman style sculptures also influenced the work of Marc Quinn and his *Complete Marbles* series.

### 1.3 Marc Quinn and Alison Lapper

British artist Marc Quinn has created many works in an effort to bring attention to and explore themes of disability and ‘different’ bodies.

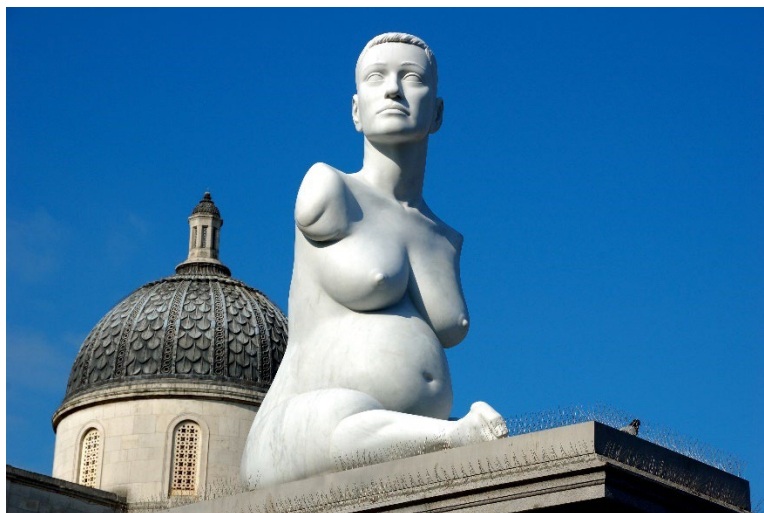


Fig 4

Most well-known for his 2005 work *Alison Lapper Pregnant*, a marble sculpture of artist Alison Lapper placed upon the 4th plinth in Trafalgar Square in London, it is responsible for a massive amount of discourse on disability representation for good or bad in the arts and in wider society. The work is part of his series of sculptures *Complete Marbles*, which displays other people with disabilities, such as artists Peter Hall and Catherine Long, and punk rock

musician Matt Fraser, and calls for revisions to art history and social ideals. Quinn's inspiration for creating this series came from a visit to the British Museum, when witnessing people's reactions to fragmented works of art, viewing them with awe, and thinking it would be a very different reaction to seeing a person with a disability. Catherine Long says, "people relate very differently to a broken statue than they do to a disabled person" (Siebers, 2010, p. 65). In the past, for Greek and Roman sculptures, marble was reserved for depicting heroes and gods in public monuments. By using Italian marble to sculpt Lapper's figure, Marc Quinn equates her to a new form of god or hero (Waddell, 2018). The other monuments in Trafalgar Square depict war heroes or heroes of patriarchal, colonial British history. By placing Lapper's sculpture alongside these 'heroes', he attempts to connote her and disability to a form of heroism and appreciate the strength in disabled bodies. Additionally, through the inevitable controversy of such an artwork, he keeps alive discourse fighting for the visibility and understanding of disabled lives (Millet, 2024, pp. 36-43). Quinn stated: "Instead of someone who conquers the world at the head of armies, I wanted to show someone who conquers adverse situations in their daily life, who lives a full life and represents the future by being shown as she is creating new life" (Waddell, 2018). The central display of this monument shows the importance of representing this topic and in large, well-known institutions, as it sparks widespread conversation.

The impact of Alison Lapper on the Plinth in the centre of a busy capital city was vast, with many feeling that it was an important work as it put disability, femininity, and motherhood on the map, inserting it into mainstream conversations on disability rights and feminism. Alison Lapper is a disabled British artist who was born without arms and foreshortened legs. She was sent to an institution as a child, where she suffered abuse and was dehumanised by her caregivers. Later in life, when she decided to have a child, she was subject to 3 investigations

by social services, putting into question her ability to properly care for her son. As disabled women are twice as likely to suffer verbal or physical abuse and have their reproductive rights violated, the depiction of Lapper is of extreme importance (Law, 2019). Her story brings to the forefront of disability discourse the women who have suffered all throughout history by cruel treatment and attitudes. Public opinion on this display varies, from some thinking it vulgar and inappropriate due to the nude aspect, while others praise it for bringing awareness to disabled people as sexual beings and not only the importance of depicting disabled or different bodies but the story of women's role as productive beings. Some people after viewing the work wrote things such as "It's disgusting that people like that should be allowed to get pregnant" (Jeffries, 2024). In mentioning this aspect of the work, it was a large area of discourse, especially as it concerns society's attitudes towards reproduction as a disabled person. Peoples outrage concerning her being pregnant and displaying it so publicly surrounds the fear of her producing another disabled child, and therefor speaks to the underlying fear and dislike of disability and disabled bodies in society (Millet, 2008).

Concerning the commercial side of art, the use of disabled people, possibly as a shock factor, there are concerns of exploitation of disabled people. As previously stated, disabled people and bodies in art and media have been used as a shock factor and as a way to stir up controversy or conversations centring their work. Some critics have raised the question: is it ethical for a non-disabled person to create work on the subject without personal experience? Even if these points carry no merit, their existence is necessary for a productive dialogue on topics, especially those concerning something as multifaceted and complex as disability.

However, Quinn's project works with disabled people and disabled artists who can inform him of their experience, with Alison Lapper herself saying she did not feel exploited (Millet, 2008). The question may be important in ensuring that artists are not perpetuating tropes or stereotypes although Quinn's work is obviously well-informed. He collaborates with these

disabled artists and purely aims to start conversations surrounding disabled bodies and their right to be seen in public spaces and mainstream institutions. The monument revealed how people view disabled bodies and disabled pregnant women as shocking and inappropriate for such spaces, as if it is unsuitable for art consumption. Some dislike being forced to see it, reinforcing how important visibility in this way is to change these attitudes and conversations. His work also forces us to rethink who can be heroes by inserting disabled people and their fight against adversity into the public eye (Millet, 2024).

## Chapter 2: Outsider artists: barriers of the art world

### 2.1 'Outsider artist' as a problematic term

An important aspect to consider when representing disabled artists, particularly in respect to artists who have intellectual disabilities or cognitive impairments, is the representation of their intent and motivations in making their work. Historically, people with disabilities are assumed to have lower levels of intelligence or abilities for comprehension. These beliefs are due to the eugenics movement and the subsequent belief that they cannot function as any other person might. With the assumption of intelligence and productive human function being tied to the ability to verbally communicate or to an IQ score historically, with Schormans (2005) stating: "intelligence is considered to be co-extensive with speech" (As quoted in Johannet, 2015, p. 14). These classifications not accounting for differences in cognitive functions and automatically assuming them to be 'dumb' or 'unknowledgeable'. These past thought processes lead to current subconscious perceptions of disabled people, and therefore, artists being unable to speak for themselves and their work.

This is a concern specifically regarding artists under the term 'outsider artists', which has predominantly been used to categorise disabled artists or those with mental health conditions. Originating from analysis of work by patients in psychiatric wards, 'outsider art' originating as 'art brut', a term coined by French artist Jean Dubuffet. The original interest in these artworks stemmed from insight into the patients mental state and over the years turned into a

unique market for collecting artworks (Johannet, 2015, pp. 24-26). The artist's Dubuffet collected works from adhered to strict guidelines, consisting of those who were self-taught, with no experience of or connection to the art world and those marginalised, which largely included those with intellectual disabilities or mental health conditions and histories of being institutionalised. Also known as 'naïve' or 'primitive' art, he aimed to curate works seemingly free from the influence of 'high-culture' (Prinz, 2017, p. 257). Despite being where the term began, being diagnosed with a mental health condition does not automatically make someone an 'outsider' as many famous artists have been institutionalised or diagnosed with various mental health conditions, with this not impairing the artists' creation. Prinz stating: "Mental illness was not just an incidental feature in these individuals' lives, but rather influenced their work" (Prinz, 2017, p. 263).

The term has since evolved from Dubuffet's initial intent, with 'outsider' temperament covering many well-known artists within the art world and now largely concerning those marginalised or untrained. This brings into question how do we classify art and artists, how do we value the art and what makes an artist worthy of being an 'insider'? 'Outsiders' with no classical training or education in the arts are still capable of creating work just as captivating as a trained artist. However, art dealers, collectors and other 'insiders' benefit hugely from perpetuating this label, to keep them 'outsiders' and taking advantage of those with less experience or knowledge of the landscape. Those who are unfamiliar with these dynamics may rely on any 'insiders' who are intent on categorising them this way.

Connecting with these insiders and getting in the correct spaces provides opportunity as the art world relies on connections, communication and mobility, it's a capitalistic world which creates competition. 'Insiders' have financial incentive to curate unique works and artists,

which can lead to exploitation (Gielen, 2013, pp. 20-23). In his essay *Institutionality as Enlightenment*, Blake Stimson states:

“like any regime, it has its rulers and its ruled, its structure of power and its domination, exploitation and exclusion. It is a system of organisation driven by the pursuit of its own perpetuity and it is its ‘dry compartmentalisation’ – into periods and isms, into media and movements, into artists’ names and their influences and legacies, into good and bad, into our taste and theirs – that empowers it. Taste ... is a top down organising system dictated by collectors and curators, critics and scholars, and institutions like museums, universities, libraries, archives, galleries and private collections” (Stimson, 2013, p. 144)

With insiders intent on keeping this terminology, they aim to enforce the barriers of the art world and in maintaining exclusivity. By using the term to elevate their position in the hierarchy of the art world, they stand to make huge profits from the interest that has been taken in ‘outsider art’. This classification is exclusionary and has been criticised for its exploitation of disabled artists and how it assesses them on different aspects than other artists. If insiders continue to brand these disabled artists as ‘other’ through this umbrella term, viewing the work as exotic or interesting purely because of their personal history, they directly perpetuate notions of the ‘freakshow’ and commodify them as curiosities rather than respected as professional artists. The director of Inside Out (a charity which provides a platform for artists who face significant barriers) Marc Steene stated: “It seems that there is a value in selling and promoting art that is produced by artists seemingly removed from ‘normal’ society. Perhaps this creation of an exotic species of ‘others’ provides a fetishistic pleasure” (Steene, 2023, p. 10). It has been found that in 2021 only 28% of arts venues and festivals regularly display work by disabled artists with 28% of them only showing 1 a year (Time to act, 2021,

p. 9). The amount of disabled artists being shown in the mainstream is very little and previously even less. With lots of these artists having been categorised as 'outsider', the representation is severely lacking and unimpressive. Viewing artists who face various barriers in this way begs the question of how does an artist under this umbrella enter the mainstream and become an 'insider'?

## 2.2 Judith Scott

A well known 'outsider artist' is Judith Scott (1943 - 2005), a deaf, non-verbal artist with down-syndrome, she is widely acclaimed for her found object and fibre sculptures. Judith Scott is not only known as an 'outsider artist' as when she was first discovered but an impressive fine artist with her work being held in many collections and galleries. Part of the intense interest taken in Scott and her work is due to her life story and the many theories of connecting her history to her creations. Judith and her twin sister Joyce were separated when they were 7 years old, due to their parents deciding to send Judith to an institution because of her conditions. While not an unusual decision at that time concerning a child with an intellectual disability, this separation is thought to have severely affected the two, particularly Judith as she was put in an unfamiliar environment, alone and unable to hear. As a child, Judith was misdiagnosed and her deafness went undetected, instead, it was believed that she was just a difficult child who was stubborn and incapable of being taught. This misunderstanding led to her never being taught sign language and left her without a way of communicating for most of her life. She stayed in the institution for 36 years until her twin sister gained legal guardianship and leading to Judith joining Creative Growth Art Centre

where she grew to be a renowned fibre artist (Johannet, 2015. pp. 30-31). After 2 years into her time at the art centre, it was when fibre artist Sylvia Seventy lead a class, Judith first began wrapping wood in yarn and fibres. Ever since this first exploration, she has not explored anything else in creating art, her works only becoming more complex with her growing collections of found objects and materials being encompassed within the yarn (Que tienes debajo del sombrero, 2006).



Fig 5

Scott's work, utilising the yarn, wraps over and over collections of objects she has found in her environment, turning them into cocoons which appear protective and secretive. Some of her artworks take the form of a human figure and others more abstract, some revealing more of the objects that make them up and others hiding them completely. Considered an 'outsider

artist' as she is untrained and her work seems to be purely instinctual and without outside influence, nobody else truly knows what inspires her work. There has been lots of discourse on understanding her intentions, as she is non-verbal, there is no communication directly from herself as to why she makes these forms. This brings into question how we know anything about her work? Majority of the understanding of her practice comes from her twin sister Joyce and Tom di Maria (who was the executive director of creative growth at the time) particularly from the documentary *Que tienes debajo del sombrero* (2006), which provides a close look into Judith's artistic practice as well as others at Creative Growth. The people closest to her and her practice witness the way she creates, Tom saying: "she makes compulsively, obsessively, non-stop ... it raises all kinds of questions. Is she making objects? Is she making art? Is she communicating? Or is she merely unravelling all of her stories and everything that has been in her head?" (*Que tienes debajo del sombrero*, 2006, 23:20-23:54). The interest in her life and the mystery surrounding her methods and motivations are inevitably fascinating, however, as with many outsider artists, it is good to question whether making assumptions about her work and relying on this mystery to sell the art is exploitative and continues to play on the exoticness of disability.

Another aspect concerning 'outsider artists' in relation to their intent in creating work and taking advantage of their practice is whether they intend to sell and be featured in collections and exhibitions. In the case of Judith Scott, the way that collectors have gained access to her work is through the director providing them a way of looking through her collection and choosing pieces to display. Scott, when she creates a sculpture, hands it to Tom di Maria, seemingly having no interest in taking it back or any care for what happens to it afterwards. In the documentary, it is said that her works sell for \$5,000 - \$15,000, it isn't made clear how much of this payment Scott receives, however, the organisation states: "As a non-profit gallery,

all artwork sales directly support the artists and Creative Growth, which uses the proceeds to purchase materials and keep the program running” (Creative Growth, 2025). Such organisations appear to be wholly supportive of their artists and their professional development, however, for ‘outsiders’ who are not part of any such organisation and without anyone championing for them, it is much riskier of a branding. As people with intellectual disabilities have historically been misunderstood, it must be addressed how collectors and galleries engage with these artists and the language they use. This is important as to not ignore their wishes or misinterpret their intentions, to ensure that moving forward we do not engage with ableism and exploitation of these artists. So, is the way Judith Scott’s work is sold and brought into collections a problem as she has not specifically stated she would like this to happen? Or instead, is it acceptable considering she has never shown interest in taking her work back and it is seemingly made clear through such organisations what happens to the work and how it is sold?

How does an artists such as Judith Scott who has been deemed an ‘outsider’ and without any prior arts education or experience, break into the inside? Many artists who have been marginalised are supported by arts organisations such as Creative Growth or Inside Out, who help provide these artists with support, connections and opportunities.

“Creative Growth is a non-profit organization based in Oakland, California that advances the inclusion of artists with developmental disabilities in contemporary art and strengthens community by providing a supportive studio environment and gallery representation.” (Creative Growth, 2025)

Scott’s enrolment in Creative Growth began her career and brought her work in front of art collectors and involving her in the mainstream art world. Judith obviously showed interest in making art as after she began sculpting, she would work ‘obsessively’ and continued to make

work up until her death in 2005. For artists that are interested in being recognised and are looking for ways into the art world, these institutions create valuable opportunities, although, when an artists motivations are unclear, is it fair to sell off their work and create a spectacle of the life story and disability that is paired to it? Although these opportunities are extremely important and have been needed for a long time, it appears inevitable that these artists are still only seen as 'outsider artists'. Even with this exclusionary terminology surrounding these collections of marginalised artists, it also has created opportunity for these works to be seen where they wouldn't have before. However important interest in 'outsider art' has been in making disabled artists known widely, it is time to move on from such exclusionary terms. Disabled artists, with the inclusion of such organisations and adequate accessibility in institutions are capable of having careers equal to 'insider' artists.

## Chapter 3 – The importance of accessibility in the art world

### 3.1 Communication through art

Having delved into how disabled artists are viewed and categorised in the outsider art movement, it is important to now question what other factors play a role in the exclusion of disabled people in the art world. There are many barriers that disabled artists have faced and still face when attempting to enter arts spaces and in becoming a known artist. Some of the problematic areas of Judith Scott's career pave the way well for discussing other issues concerning disabilities and accessibility needs in the arts. As previously mentioned, communication and networking is paramount to success as an artist. For Judith Scott and other outsider artists, previously, it almost didn't matter if they could communicate as the collectors and 'insiders' were more interested in that fact and the story of their disabilities or mental state. Over time language has evolved and has been described as something that sets humans apart from the animal world, a way to share ideas and interact with each other or a "system of conventional, spoken or written symbols" (Uduak and Akpan, 2020, pp. 30-31). Especially within disabled communities and in modern times with the assistance of technologies, as well as various language, different forms of communication are more prevalent in today's society. For people who do not communicate through spoken language, visual language is therefore an important alternative. Visual art and language are intertwined as it is used to display thoughts, convey stories or concepts, despite cultural or language

barriers. “This paper sees no compelling reason for not regarding the arts as languages, less adequate than spoken language for some purposes of communication but more adequate for others.” (Uduak and Akpan, 2020, p. 34). For artists such as Judith Scott, art is a vital form of communication, as many people theorised how Judith was communicating through her work, what her exact intentions were is unknown, but nonetheless, she was communicating something.

An artist worth mentioning in relation to this idea is deaf installation and sound artist Christine Sun Kim. She uses art as another form of communication, exploring themes of disability within her work and how she navigates a world that caters to hearing individuals. Her work is a powerful representation of her experience with deafness and using sign language, she depicts the power and ability in this form of communication. Her work surpasses the need for normative spoken language by using drawings and installations to convey the inadequacy in the language of modern society. In her exhibition *All Day All Night*, Kim explores themes surrounding American Sign Language and creates an experience which caters to all disabled people. In his review of this exhibition, Pasquale Toscano (2025) says that the experience provided the audience with the frustrations and feelings of alienation that comes with deafness. Where he could see each visitor analysing their position on communication methods and accessibility and realising the difficulties in living with a disability. One work that features in this exhibition is *Degrees of Deaf Rage*, which people with different disabilities feel a connection to.

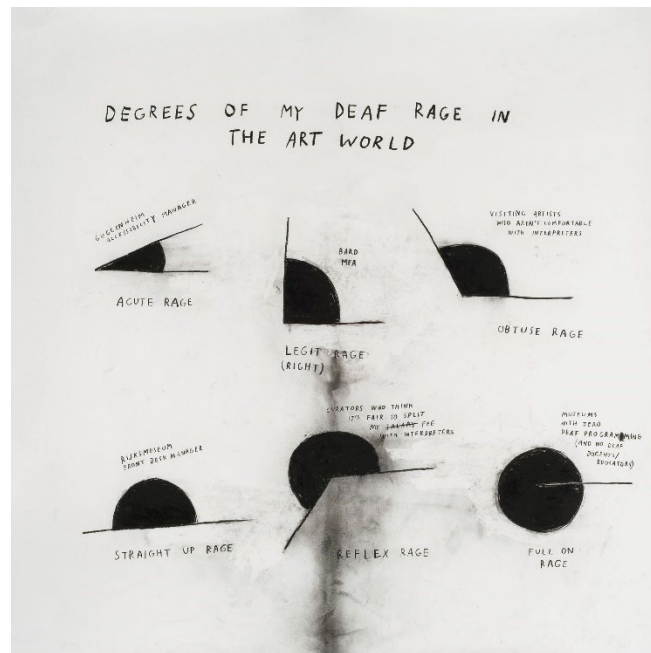


Fig 6

The depiction of frustration in daily interactions, seen in simple black and white drawings, allows for viewers to impart their frustration with disability in an able bodied society and for other to recognise their part in microaggressions and ableism. The work is a personal account of her thoughts and experiences yet it allows many others to relate and feel seen. Additionally as mentioned in the review, the work reveals to others their unconscious biases, they are able to see society from a new perspective and become more considerate in return (Toscano, 2025).

To make art about these ‘minor’ infuriating interactions alerts a need for change and awareness surrounding disability. This is to say that artists who create work about being disabled are severely important in building awareness and realisation of disability rights. The importance of Kims work surrounding communication is shown as she says: “if an ableist idea or societal norm is established in the hearing world, it often stays that way, repeating and ingraining

problematic patterns and rhetoric” which highlights the need to bridge the gap between hearing and non hearing communities (McDermott, 2022). This need also concerns the wider disabled community in passing on issues to institutions and other arts spaces. Artworks like Christine Sun Kims illuminate these inconveniences and the inaccessibility seen everywhere in society. Disabled artists, as previously mentioned, can work as activists while using art as a universal language, as long as the work is seen included in mainstream art institutions.

### 3.2 The need for accessibility

From including disabled artists in exhibitions and collections, to building experiences for a disabled audience, inclusion, accessibility and fair representation is paramount for proper inclusion of disabled people in art. Engaging with disabled artists is an extremely important part of opening up the art world to those with disabilities. In a survey exploring how new work by disabled artists are found, including venues, festivals, artists and culture professionals in 2020 discovered 31% of them do not look for any. The reasons as to why these institutions do not look for disabled art is unknown, however, it can be speculated that it is due to lack of knowledge of any disabled artists or a lack of disabled artists themselves in the art world (Time to Act, 2021, p. 43). Representing disabled artists is not the only important factor, including people with disabilities in positions within these institutions ensures proper access. It has been found through research that institutions that employ disabled people ensure higher levels of confidence in their accessibility measures (Time to Act, 2021, p. 50). There is a severe lack of disabled representation in art institutions and as artists and in England only 3.2% of artists working in the subsidised art sector are disabled

(Panagiatara et al., 2019, p. 4). Research studies that explore disabled inclusion in the arts have been crucial in finding what needs improved in these spaces. It is important that this interest is taken in improving aspects, yet, it is even more important that these changes are actually introduced.

Many institutions have implemented access measurements in recent history, yet, largely, only due to regulations which force them to create the most basic of accessibility (Lazard, 2019). It is vital to creating true access for disabled people that the institutions are working towards it because they understand why it is needed, to see the struggles and want to help their visitors and artists. This makes it more apparent why exhibiting disabled artists such as Christine Sun Kim can help bring attention to the need for change. Uk charity Access is Everything found that 82% of disabled audience members experienced problems booking access to cultural events (Panagiotara et al., 2019, p. 6). Some things that would improve the experience for disabled visitors particularly surround communication, to make information clear, easily accessible, translating and catering to the different forms. How we appreciate and experience art is a large part of inaccessibility, viewing the artworks from a distance and behind glass or barriers, severely impedes disabled peoples experience. With some artists wishes not being met due to differing views on looking versus feeling artworks. Artist Jenifer Justice saying: “As a legally blind artist, I want blind audience members to be able to experience my work on equal terms with sighted individuals” (Justice, 2023, p.61). These conventions of how we must display and interact, or not, with art, blocks forms of accessibility. For blind visitors, touch tours and tactile interaction with artworks as well as audio descriptions aid their experience, allowing them to experience visual art. This is not always seen as possible due to the fragile, expensive and valuable nature of art, however, there are ways of creating this

experience that don't endanger the artworks. Replicas, reliefs, props and audio descriptions are possibilities to help blind visitors (Lazard, 2019).

Physical accessibility is an area that has been much more catered to, with most venues including ramps, automatic doors and proper seating. An exhibition by artist Finnegan Shannon features benches from their series *Do you want us here or not*.



Fig 7

The benches feature slogans such as 'it was hard to get here sit if you agree' and 'this exhibition asked me to stand for too long sit if you agree'. This form of statement acknowledging the hardships that face disabled visitors in galleries highlights the ableism that appears when mobility is assumed. "As Shannon learned through conversations with curators, many museums have seating in storage but decline to use it as a curatorial choice" (Harrington, no date). The idea that galleries choose to prioritise aesthetics over the comfort and ease for visitors is disappointing when seating can easily be built in to the curatorial flow and aesthetics, as seen with these benches.

Accessibility often appears to be an afterthought or not viewed as important a consideration. This is apparent through the account of artist Annie Lachhman who was born with cerebral palsy and uses a manual wheelchair. She states that certain places don't understand what her accessibility needs are and finds that information is unclear or untrue in some cases, which creates anxiety when trying to experience art. Other instances where she must take a mini bus to access another area or entering through a different entrance to everyone else (Lachhman-Persad and Lachhman, 2022). It takes a lot of planning for disabled people to visit museums and galleries, so when websites information is incorrect or non existent is additionally frustrating and adds to the alienation of disabled viewers.

Other implementation include web accessibility, content warnings, sensory spaces, live streaming events, transportation and accessible restrooms (Lazard, 2019). However, for some smaller institutions and organisations, implementing access measures may be more of a challenge. Some have faced issues with space, cost and access implementation in buildings which are older. So, many organisations use alternative spaces not purpose built for art activities, especially those built in the last 30 years as they typically are already accessible (Whittle, 2024, p. 14-16). There are lots of options for creating accessibility, as long as those implementing change are knowledgeable on the needs of certain disabilities and are interested in making meaningful differences.

### 3.3 The importance of creative expression for people with disabilities

Creating access for disabled artists is not only important to create a fair and equal landscape but especially because creative expression has always been important in relation to the mind and the body. In addition to art being used to highlight social movements, artistic expression and communication works in a more personal sense. The process of creating art, the use of imagination and escapism, it can be used as an exploration of the self or for emotional regulation, all of which are utilised in art therapy. In our society, it is often that people feel unable to express their thoughts and feelings, having been conditioned to keep them to themselves and to appear strong. Yet art allows for this communication non verbally, becoming a more accessible avenue for expression (Moon, 2008, p. 102-103). Art works as an emotional tool, especially for those frequently in hospital with conditions or disabilities. Charities such as the Teapot Trust in the UK bring art therapy to children's hospitals, creating an outlet for the children and families experiencing pain or distress and anxiety surrounding appointments or diagnosis. Evaluations of the Teapot Trusts work in children's hospitals has found to have reduced children's anxiety by almost 50% (Teapot Trust, 2018). It is important in addressing any issues emotionally when diagnosed with a condition as emotional distress can worsen mental and physical health (Farrugia et al, 2019, pp. 1). To further explain the usefulness of art therapy techniques, some patients who live within a hospital setting state that getting involved in artistic activities allowed them to escape from the reality of their conditions. Multiple people involved in hospital art programmes felt that the process provided feelings of joy and security. The aims of these programmes is to enhance the quality of life for people with conditions. By providing them with distraction, an emotional expressive outlet and a channel for discussion, they add vibrancy to the intense clinical spaces within hospital life (Art in Hospital, 2006). Within art therapy there are many approaches from analysing the artwork produced, the psychological meaning of the images,

the narratives created and the relationship with the work to the dynamics and subconscious motivations that can inform of the patients mental state (Moon, 2008, pp. 22-31). However, these clinical and psychoanalytical view points on the benefits of art focus majorly on the medical model of disability and ignore the social benefits to artistic creation for people with disabilities.

In addition to art as a political tool, art therapy and psychoanalytical analysis, the flexibility and adaptivity of an artistic practice allows for a more accessible avenue of education or work. Those with disabilities getting involved in community arts groups or programmes such as Judith Scott enrolling in Creative Growth, provides a space for expression, structure and community. Groups and collectives for combatting loneliness are extremely important as those with disabilities or health conditions in Scotland are:

“two times more likely to report severe loneliness than the general population. Following Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis, this worsened. In 2023, 15.1% of disabled people in the UK reported feeling lonely “often or always”, compared to just 3.6% of non-disabled people” (Whittle, 2024, p. 7)

This fact is a large reason for people joining creative arts programmes as well as building skills and knowledge. Sochor (2014, p. 37) states: “It is obvious that the existence of health impairment represents a certain risk of disadvantage in relation to other members of the society, which, as a consequence, may indicate a high risk of social exclusion”, this makes clear the need for an alternative to those with health conditions, physical and mental, to be able to live a life as rich and informed as any other person might. Education through art and providing an arts education can be particularly beneficial as it provides socialisation, while also cultivating intellectual, cultural and social development of a student (Sochor, 2014, pp. 33-36). However, an artistic practice can be more tailored to a persons individual needs, with specialist tools,

assistants and as previously stated, as a more accommodating form of language or communication for those who are non-verbal or those with an intellectual disability. Ultimately, creating art and being involved in an artistic practice through institutions, community groups and programmes, or charities and collectives creates incredibly valuable opportunities for expression, growth and socialisation. Art provides an alternative to the rigid structure of social norms and inaccessibility in society while allowing a disabled artist to build their own access and create change for others.

## Conclusion

Through various artists such as Marc Quinn, Alison Lapper, Judith Scott and Christine Sun Kim, investigating how they explore others disabilities, their own disability and societies interactions with it has helped uncover how disability functions in the art world and how it can be better incorporated. From collaborating with disabled artists to create art, it can uncover societies biases and cruel attitudes towards disabled people. The importance of disabled art and expressing frustrations and failures as well as successes and power, must be appreciated. Artists such as Marc Quinn, while not being disabled, use their platform and acclaim to amplify the voices of disabled people and artists. This is not to say that these disabled artists cannot speak for themselves or become a renowned artist capable of voicing change. However, as history has spoken to the exclusion of disabled artists, it is important that when representing disability it can be platformed, seen by a wide audience and is informed by real lived experiences. Even more important is the voice of a disabled artist such as Judith Scott being heard, through whatever communication style is possible, the inclusion of accessibility in physical spaces, opportunities and attitudes. These directly affect the representation of such artists and the wider themes of disability in society. The art world must catch up with modern attitude changes and knowledge of the abilities of disabled people to be the voice of change and to champion for themselves. It is possible at the same time for disabled artists to be capable of creation and that which necessary to become an art world insider or mainstream artist while requiring institutions and arts spaces to help them through access measurements and assistance. Seen through the exhibitions of disability such as *All Day All Night* by Christine Sun Kim, art can be made which depicts the struggles of having a

disability in modern society in a mainstream gallery like the Whitney Museum of American Art. These requirements of access do not minimise a disabled artists voice, power or their abilities, it is necessary for these institutions to realise the part they play in access into the art world. Instituting accessibility such as ramps, lifts, seating or touch tours are reliant on institutions finally centring accessibility and taking into account disabled artists and art consumers. To conclude, the incorporation of accessibility which allows disabled people to participate in the mainstream art world, directs change for the wider society while enriching the lives of disabled people. This is vital to progress as a society where every person has the right to enjoy and create culture and community as well as for the benefit of a fair and equal art world, one which moves past exclusivity and exploitation.

## Bibliography

Barrera, L and Penafiel I, (2006). *Que tienes debajo del sombrero?* [Documentary]. Available at: [https://youtu.be/3F\\_gqM2WDac?si=x8VAhgd5GWotd1SD](https://youtu.be/3F_gqM2WDac?si=x8VAhgd5GWotd1SD)

Barnes, C. (1992). *DISABLING IMAGERY AND THE MEDIA*. [online] Ryburn Publishing , pp.5–23. Available at: [disabling imagery.PDF](#)

Cherney, S. (2017). Is the Art World Enforcing Ableism? *Made In Bed*. [online] Available at: <https://www.madeinbed.co.uk/agents-of-change/draft>.

Creativegrowth.org. (2024). *About | Creative Growth Art Center*. [online] Available at: <https://www.creativegrowth.org/about>.

Farrugia, E., Leith, K., Davidson, J. and Walsh, J. (2019). *Edinburgh and Glasgow Art Therapy and Paediatric Rheumatology Service Review* . [online] Teapot Trust. Available at: <https://www.teapot-trust.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=320d37de-af35-4e67-bc69-3397691f7ebf>.

Floch, Y. (2021). *Time To Act How lack of knowledge in the cultural sector creates barriers for disabled artists and audiences*. [online] On The Move. Available at: [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/time\\_to\\_act\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/time_to_act_full_report.pdf).

Garcia Coll, C., Garcia Miranda, A., Buzzetta Torres, I. and Noguerras Bermúdez, J. (2018). On Becoming Cultural Beings: A Focus on Race, Gender, and Language. *Research in Human Development*, 15(3-4), pp.332–344. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15427609.2018.1491217>

Harrington, D. (n.d.). Do You Want Us Here or Not: Fighting for Accessibility in Art Spaces. *ART DUSSELDORF*. [online] Available at: <https://art-dus.de/delia-harrington-diversity-art-essay/>.

Ike, J. (2017). Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec: Disability and Art in Fin-de-Siècle Paris . *The Journal of Humanities in Rehabilitation*, pp.1–6. Available at: [Ike Toulouse-Lautrec JHR Spring2017.1-2.pdf](#)

Jeffries, S. (2024). ‘Statues are of dead blokes. This is a living woman kicking arse’: how we made the fourth plinth’s Alison Lapper Pregnant. *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2024/feb/05/statues-are-of-dead-blokes-this-is-a-living-woman-kicking-arse-how-we-made-the-fourth-plinths-alison-lapper-pregnant?>.

Johannet, C. ed., (2015). *Moving Beyond the Disability Memoir: A Critical Study of Judith Scott’s Fiber Art*. [online] pp.19–45. Available at: [https://icls.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2023/09/Johannet\\_thesis1.pdf](https://icls.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2023/09/Johannet_thesis1.pdf).

Justice, J. (2023). Disabled Artists, Audience and the Museum as the Place of Those Who Have No Part. In: A. Cachia, ed., *Curating Access disability art activism and creative accommodation*. Routledge, pp.61–66.

Kakembo Aisha Annet (2025). Art and Activism: The Role of Artists in Social Justice Movements. *Deleted Journal*, 12(1), pp.16–21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59298/IAAJAH/2025/1211621>

Lacchman, A. and Lacchman-Persad, L. (2022). *Access to Inspiration*. [online] *THE MET*. Available at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/lakshmee-and-annie>.

Law, K. (2019). Alison Lapper Pregnant by Dr. Janis Lomas. *WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK*. Available at: <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/alison-lapper-pregnant-by-dr-janis-lomas/>.

Lazard, C. (2019). *Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice*. [online] [promiseandpractice.art](https://promiseandpractice.art). Available at: <https://promiseandpractice.art/>.

Martino, A. and Schormans, A. (2021). Theoretical developments: Queer theory meets crip theory . In: R. Shuttleworth and L. Mona, eds., *THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF DISABILITY AND SEXUALITY*. Routledge, pp.53–67.

McDermot, E. (2022). Christine Sun Kim on Breaking the Echo Chamber. *Frieze*. [online] Available at: <https://www.frieze.com/article/christine-sun-kim-profile-2022>.

Millett-Gallant, A. (2008). Zola Award Honorable Mention: Sculpting Body Ideals: Alison Lapper Pregnant and the Public Display of Disability. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, [online] 28(3). doi:<https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v28i3.122>.

Millett-Gallant, A (2015). *Disabled body in contemporary art*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp.15–58.

Moon, B.L. (2017). *Introduction to art therapy : faith in the product*. Springfield, Illinois, U.S.A.: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, Ltd.

Outside In. (2025). *Outside In*. [online] Available at: <https://outsidein.org.uk/>.

Panagiotara, B., Evens, B. and Pawlak, F. (2019). *Disabled Artists in the Mainstream: a new cultural agenda for europe*. [online] europe beyond access. Available at: [https://www.britishcouncil.de/sites/default/files/report\\_a-new-cultural-agenda-for-europe-final-050320-compressed.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.de/sites/default/files/report_a-new-cultural-agenda-for-europe-final-050320-compressed.pdf).

Pascal Gielen, Cupers, K., Bemont, J. and Al, E. (2013). *Institutional attitudes : instituting art in a flat world*. Amsterdam: Valiz.

Prinz, J. (2017). Against Outsider Art. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 48(3), pp.250–272.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/josp.12190>.

quinn, marc (2019). *Marc Quinn*. [online] Marcquinn.com. Available at:

<http://marcquinn.com/>.

Rae, P. ed., (2006). 'I'll be doing this sky in my dreams tonight'. Art in Hospital.

Samuel, K. and III, U. (2024). Exploring Disability Representation in Art and Media.

[online] 9(3), pp.16–20.

Sheldon, A. (2001). *Disabled People and Communication Systems in the Twenty First*

*Century*. pp.15–22. Available at: [DX221458\\_1\\_001.tif](#)

Siebers, T. (2008). Disability aesthetics and the body beautiful: Signposts in the history of art. *ALTER, European Journal of Disability Research* 2, 2(4), pp.329–326. DOI:

doi:10.1016/j.alter.2008.08.002

Smith, E. (2019). *On Exhibit: Marc Quinn and Alexa Wright: The Aesthetics of Disability,*

*From Antiquity to the Modern Age*. [online] pp.1–7. Available at:

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-artslaw/historyofart/map/issue3/oe-smith-pdf.pdf>.

Sochor, P. (2014). *Disability and Art Creation*. pp.29–40. Available at: [sochor\\_final.pdf](#)

Steene, M. (2023). *Outside In Marc Steene Exploring the margins of art*. Lund Humphries.

Stimson, B. (n.d.). Institutionalism as Enlightenment. In: *Institutional Attitudes Instituting Art in a Flat World*. Valiz, Amsterdam, pp.141–145.

Teapot Trust. (2018). *Teapot Trust*. [online] Available at: <https://www.teapot-trust.org/>.

Toscano, P. (2025). *An Echoing Embrace: On Christine Sun Kim's All Day All Night*.

Available at: <https://hopkinsreview.com/features/christine-sun-kim-pasquale-toscano>.

Uduak, P. and Akpan, R. (2020). AN OVERVIEW OF THE ARTS AS A LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION, EXPRESSION AND EXPERIENCE: A DISCOURSE . *Serbian Research Journal of Education, Humanities and Developmental Studies*, 10(1), pp.30–35.

Available at: [an-overview-of-the-arts-as-a-language-of-cUDUAKPETER \(2\).pdf](#)

Waddell, E. (2018). *The (In)complete Marbles? Displaying the Disabled Body – The Historian*. [online] Available at:

<https://projects.history.qmul.ac.uk/thehistorian/2018/06/28/displaying-the-disabled-body/>.

Whittle, L. (2024). *Creativity, Accessibility and Inclusion A Report on the Benefits and*

*Challenges for Creative Community Groups in Dundee*. [online] Creative Lives. Available at:

<https://www.creative-lives.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=4331101e-bc02-4e63-b3af-45e0183d3b86>.