Disability And…Podcast Episode 10: Disability and…Curation part 2

Welcome to Graeae and Disability Arts Online's podcast "Disability And" bringing together thoughtful discussion and debate. This month features excerpts from the Disability Arts Online's contested spaces panel debate, held at The Foundry in London in January 2020. The discussion was chaired by curator and artist, Aidan Moesby. On the panel were curator and founder of The Jennifer Lauren Gallery, Jennifer Gilbert; senior curator of Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Elinor Morgan; and artist and writer Ashok Mistry.

[00:00:46] (music)

**Aidan Moesby:** I’m Aidan Moesby and thank you for coming to this panel conversation around how can we improve the representation of disabled curators and artists. This one is about how we, as disabled curators and artists, can take our rightful place in the mainstream or general art ecology. How we can improve representation to level the field? Systems and institutions are institutionally barriered and we know that. It's access, working hours, practices, structures within there. How can we be on the same bus without a schism between disability and mainstream art world? Where are the critics? Where are the reviewers? Why is there an absence and how can we remedy this? I hope today is part of the beginning in part of that remedying things about making solutions. About making practical actions; things which are realistic so that we can all become more of the carrot and less of the stick.

I just want to mention briefly a quote by Juno Diaz who said, "If you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves." I think that is really, really important. He was talking about immigrants, but I also think that it's equally relevant to disability arts. It's happened with performance and other art forms within the disability arts world. But where is that within the art world? I don't see that. And if we're not being reflected and our experiences are not being reflected, then what relevance does art have for us or to us? So provocation which I am one of three curators and artists were: how can disabled curators and artists become more involved in the arts ecology? We're going to start off with Jennifer Gilbert from The Jennifer Lauren Gallery. Thank you.

**Jennifer Gilbert:** Nearly three years ago I set up The Jennifer Lauren Gallery. My aim with this gallery is to champion and exhibit self-taught disabled and overlooked artists who create outside of the mainstream art world and our history. The vision of the gallery is to be seen and recognized as a space in the UK supporting, championing and showcasing artists; and a destination for finding out more about this field. I am also passionate about being a voice and a platform for under represented artists and to help break down the stigma that still exists around this field. I am also a freelance producer and curator, often working with and supporting disabled artists, organisations and galleries. As a support writer for funding applications for people with access needs. And finally, I am a trustee of Barrington Farm in Norfolk which supports learned and disabled artists to achieve more in their life.

Aidan and myself recently did a podcast for Disability Arts Online and Graeae looking at disability and curation. I have witnessed first hand how art critics have decided against viewing the work of disabled artists whilst I was working at a modern British art gallery. And as this talk is likely to discuss, it is frustrating that their work isn't really being reviewed, or is only being picked up by smaller publications. However, while doing some research into this, I found things online. For example, there was a show called "The Alternative Guide to the Universe" at the Hayward Gallery and it was described as "an extraordinary show which asked you to look at work by people on the edges of art." And in the same sentence he talks about their being "psychotic, autistic, criminally insane or merely untrained" and calls them "misfits and drop-outs.” Note the use of the word "misfits" here. In another art critic I read online, the actual headline of the review was "Meet the Misfits: The Criminal, The Mentally Ill, Spiritual, The Eccentric, The Alienated and the untutored" and the reviewer said it left him disturbed.

The opposite of this is over in America where you have people like Jerry Saltz and his wife Roberta Smith, who work for The New York Times, who champion this work. And people like Helen Potter, who also writes for The New York Times, talking about how places like MOMA, the big Modern Art Gallery in New York, how they don't need any more Rauschenberg’s or Twombly’s, but what they need is those people that exist on the outside to be represented within their collections.

For me, I would like to get critics into a room together to discuss their issues with writing about this work, or even just seeing it in the first place. When I spoke to an art critic recently, he said that people fear that they say the wrong thing or they might cause offence, so they chose not to write about it at all. But what do we need to do in order for them to feel that a) it is okay to ask if they are unclear on something or how they should describe something or the language they should use and b) to look at this work with a critical eye and not feel that the other person will take great offence if something negative is said.

Just to finish, I think someone perhaps someone like Disability Arts Online, and sorry to pick you out since you are in the room, and I'm happy to work on this with you, should produce an online document that can also be circulated that a) looks at the use of terminology and b) looks at the myths around the volume of support disabled artists might need and questions that can be asked from the onset from these organisations to help determine support or structures that are needed to be put in place to work with more disabled artists.

**Elinor Morgan:** My name is Elinor and I have been senior curator at MIMA in Middlesbrough since 2015 and as an organisation we work to put art into action. Building a public museum that is relevant to its context and shaped by a range of people. So, three thoughts for artists, curators and writers.

Build communities. Use social media to build allies and friendships. Set up quick clubs, reading and listening groups. You need peers who can help you to identify opportunities, critique ideas, and applications; and give you feedback and also to just listen when you need to moan.

Develop your knowledge. Never assume that you know what people are interested in or what other people are looking at. You must know what is happening in your field and use what means you have: podcasts, audio books and other books, magazines.

Visit artists at home. Go to shows and find descriptions of them online. And do the things that sustain you in your practice because this is a long game. For me this includes reading fiction, swimming, plenty of chats with friends who live far from me and bringing a packed lunch everywhere I go.

And then just one bonus one. Apply for as much as you can manage because you never know who sees the application and what that might lead to. Think of it like a chain of things you can't imagine yet.

Then finally three notes for those working within institutions.

Number one: be aware of tokenism. Making institutions representative and porous and bending them is a long term endeavor that needs careful consideration and framing. And access doesn't have a point of completion, it's a process.

Number two: broaden your horizons. We know you're busy, but you must diversify your knowledge and experience different things because programs have to change.

Number three: don't make the person with the protected characteristic directly responsible for change. The change has to happen at all levels of the organisation.

Finally, everybody please remember there is not one model for success.

My name is **Ashokkumar Mistry,** also known as Ashok Mistry. We need to be careful in terms of the kind representation that we seek. We need disabled curators and artists to be able to do what they want to do and not to conform to the conventions of the sector. That's really more and more important to me; this whole idea of not having to fit in and not fitting the frame because we are, in a lot of situations, being pushed into a corner where if you want to be a part of something then you have to change yourself. And the change should be a two way street. We don't want disabled artists and curators to be interlopers, we want them to be equals.

We need to take a radical look at the relationship between disability and cultural progress. The association between disability and innovation is compelling. Most of the major figures who have progressed human culture have been what we now referred to as disabled. Look at people like Isaac Newton. I know these are all men, but we got to kind of think of the key figures from history and we need to uncover the female key figures from history so we can name check them as well. We've got people like Issac Newton, Leonardo Da Vinci, Einstein, and Andy Warhol down at the Tate at the moment. And yet we see disability as a degenerative trait. Even people like Van Gogh, how would he exist in the current sector?

One of the main flaws with the way that we pick artists is the use of competition. This culture of competition is eroding the way that we find people and the way that people access the sector. We put artists against each other in a Darwinian race and care little about those who simply can't compete in such races. Competition screens out disabled people; disabled artists and curators. Also, an increasing number of institutions don't accept unsolicited communications, so how do we talk to them? We need mechanisms that encourage and ensure equality and opportunity for all. We need to stop relying on the celebrity model of audience development. Instead, we should use relevance to attract audiences and develop exhibitions. We need to reassess what we see as excellence by relying less on neatness and perfection and explore the potential of excellence and in doing so, open to a risk of difference. Abandon mimicry and innovate.

[00:12:37] (music)

**Elinor Morgan:** I guess my initial response is a bit like Jennifer, it's not formed into a thought yet, but it's this question that you raised Aidan which connects to what Ashok said about changing the frame rather than squashing people into a way of doing things. Is a question about the conversation that you raised Aidan about disability arts and the mainstream as these separate lands. I would be interested actually to hear from more people in the room about what is useful about having the disability arts conversation because I would image that if we moved to your model Aidan where those things become part of the same thing, we would also lose things or miss things.

And I think that connects with what you raised Ashok because, yes, there is something about creating, developing better spaces where more people can show their work and talk about their work in ways that are more comfortable and more appropriate back to Jennifer's point. I'm interested in how to challenge those mainstream spaces, but I think there needs to be a conversation with them so that they change. And it has to be a negotiation and a dialogue. I can feel a tension already between these things.

**Aidan Moesby:** It's about perceptions about what people with disabilities are able to do and that not everybody … that we have to question those norms: there’s digital poverty, there’s the inability to go to openings, or to approach people and those anxieties. I know you're not unaware of those, but I think it just raises those kinds of issues for me. I guess drawing the things from you Ashok, was thinking about whose rules, whose agenda, whose agency and it all comes down to power and gate keepers and who has that agency. And I think quite often, as disabled artists or disabled curators, it's like we're just thankful for the gate code. That's the perception, but in all actuality, I'm not going to do that.

Looking back at my kind of career, I wish I'd said no more often, but it's that fear that we'll never ever work again or that you're viewed as difficult or you're too difficult to work with or you're too demanding or you too many other needs and your access and all of that. That way the power always retains with the institutions and so some of it is about where we show and some of it is about funding models.

**Elinor Morgan:** I think the conversation about art critics is a big one, I'm sure we'll return to that again, but I guess the point I was making in the intro about peers is that they're your first critics. However, you can build that relationship or group, that may be one person, it might be hundreds, I think having safe relationships with people who can give genuine feedback on your work. Whether it's an application that someone else is going to see; at the minute I'm reading a book that an artist has just written, it's their first book, and I'm one of the first readers and it's amazing to be in that position. Or somebody who you can go, you know I've got this idea and it's very, very nascent. But I think before we talk about art critics and The New York Times and those good models, we each need close critics before something leaves and becomes public.

**Ashokkumar Mistry:** I think as a sector we really need to take a good look at ourselves and look at this whole idea of professionality and how we actually gauge that professionality. I talked to a curator recently and it was quite a course conversation. This person was working in a really high level in a public institution and there was me kind of questioning them on how they talk to artists and how artists can access their organisation and so on. And it was almost as if they were saying that the prejudices that they keep, the way that they filter people out, is to do with their professionalism, it’s to do with the way they can keep control or a handle on things, to stop things from getting out of control. And it was really worrying to see that this person working at such a high level had these views that they couldn't actually see that thinking differently, or that someone who needed a little bit of curatorial support, was maybe someone worth talking to because it was someone who that you can actually develop something with rather than just kind of taking something off the shelf with all the bells and whistles already intact. I guess we need to rethink how we see excellence and how we see quality as well.

**Jennifer Gilbert:** Can I just start by something that someone on the floor said to me to do with the first point of art critics? They said could we unpack criticism and critics and what is the purpose of it? I quickly Googled the term "criticism" and it means "the analysis and judgment of merits and faults of an artistic piece of work" in this context. For me, it's important, because as I mentioned there is a lack of it that happens. But also, when it does seem to happen as in these big publications like The Guardian and The Telegraph that I quoted, this use of language and this use of the term misfits and people being seen as this ‘other thing’ and it's about how to change that.

But also for me what's important, and I think this was cemented to me through the group called Mind the Gap. They did this small performance a few years ago in Manchester at a conference. They did a small performance on the stage and then they were acting out as though they were handing out questionnaires to the audience to fill out. You were like a fly on the wall in this situation. You were hearing the people who went to go see this show sort of saying oh you know it's good for a disabled person. But they had a list of questions and it was do you think was good. And he was like yes because you know they're disabled so I guess I'll just say yes. What would you give this act out of ten? Well, I'll give them a ten because I want to boost their morale. But when they were talking between themselves, he was like actually that was pretty crap and you maybe they could have done this, this and this. But he wasn't putting any of that into the feedback for them. And that was how it was acted out.

And then somebody from Mind the Gap came over and they redid the situation and I happened to hear that you weren't really satisfied with that and maybe could you put that into the feedback form because although we've got a learning disability, we too are people and we too want to grow. And we want to achieve more in life and if people are always just telling us it's good when actually they think it's crap, how are we meant to go on that journey? Their advice to everyone that was sitting there was be truthful on these forms. We can take it. For a while it might make us feel a bit shitty and we might feel quite sad, but when we come back together as a group and we reflect on it, actually it's going to make us a better group and make us put on a more powerful performances that might achieve more reviews and things in the future. That small snippet they did in the conference really stuck with me about the importance of people being truthful on questionnaires and things like that for the benefit of the group and not just to be lying to themselves.

I think this is why I talk about the importance about critique and things being in national press because firstly, if the national press seem to value things than other people seem to value things. But it's just the fact that often people aren't going to these things because they don't know they exist. And if the national press picked up on them more and advertised these things more, even in things like The Guardian Guide there could be a small thing that someone would read in there, then more people would be going to see this work. It would be on more people's radars and ultimately that is for the benefit of everybody involved.

**Ashokkumar Mistry:** When we talk about criticism as well, are we talking about power? Or are we talking about the power of equals? If you don't see someone as your equal then how are you able to lay into them and kind of give them the criticism that they deserve. There is a lot in terms of the psychology of that process of criticism and what people actually think of people in the first place that we really need to start taking into account. I kind of understand what you're saying about exposure as well. There is another step it feels that we're missing when we're talking about criticism. It's not just that it's not on people's radars, it feels like there is a genuine reluctance towards even approaching something when the “D” word is there. That people back off because it's almost like they don't want to shake that hornets nest because they might actually come a cropper; they might actually end up in a really bad place.

**Elinor Morgan:** I just wanted to add to your point, Jennifer, about defining the terms because I think I've experienced the phrase critically engaged being used as a kind of shorthand in contemporary art for something that connects with mainstream discourse or theory or with a contemporary art scene at the moment. You talk quite a lot about coded language, Aidan, and I think that's a term that would be worth having a whole event around. What is critically engaged? And by saying that, what are you excluding from that category and therefore diminishing.

[00:23:59] (music)

**Aidan Moesby:** That's a good a point to open it up to the floor.

**Mike Layward** from DASH.

Couple of things. I was interested, Jennifer, you talk about critics having taking offence, being scared of causing offence. I would think most critics don't give a shit because they're running down people all the time. I just wanted to make a point of Lyn Gardner who now doesn't work for The Guardian, but is a theatre critic. She did the hard work about writing about live art and the disabled artists working in live art. She did that hard work to try and understand where the work was coming from because otherwise she could have just said that's crap. And I don't know how many other critics would put that leg work in, but it clearly needs to be a two sided process there.

I want to expand on carrots and sticks. I'm not a donkey and I think sticks do have a bit of relevance myself because even though they say DDA and Equality Act have no real teeth but at least they have some teeth and that is a stick.

And the other thing I'm going to pick up was about the private art world, which I feel is such a huge hidden anthem behind the visual art world and they shape so much of what happens, but it's never out there in the open. I mean around class and privilege I think they have a huge impact on the set and value of the art. The private galleries, the private collectors, the agents the art fairs, that's all going on and as disabled artists, how much do we have to with them? But they are effecting us.

**Jennifer Gilbert:** In what way do you think they're affecting you?

**Mike Layward:** Because they are affecting the visual arts world. They have an enormous amount of power within them and obviously that power is influence. You probably know much more about the private art world than I do, Jennifer. You do move in and out of it through the art fairs. And within DASH we've only had one artist who had an agent. I find it disgusting how they use us and they use the Perfect Gallery in Coventry for their own commercial ends. And I just thought we're just like lambs to the slaughter because to them this is just a commercial opportunity. And they use the private view to sell the artwork. It may be great for the artist but I've not been conditioned to understand how that commercial world works and I realise how powerful it is.

**Jennifer Gilbert:** Obviously I do art fairs and I represent disabled artists so everything I do is kind of to the best interest of the artist. What's interesting with the private art world; and when I do these art fairs and I'm showcasing the work by disabled artists for example, an artist I work with who is autistic and non verbal, his artwork is now collected by very famous people around the world. It's just taken one person to photograph that, who has a massive following, and that's boosted that disabled person's reputation, it's put them in front of a whole audience they've never been put in front of before whose not looking at the backstory of the artist, but looking at their artwork as a piece of artwork in itself and appreciating the skill and the time has gone into it. Then they're buying it on the basis of the aesthetic quality of the work and not on… oh isn't it a shame he's autistic I better give him a bit of money.

The private art world is a very important art world, but it's getting it put in the right way in front of these people that stays true to the artist and stays true to their beliefs and true to them as a person. But putting it out there for people to see in the right manner and I think a lot of agents that deal with these artist don't do that and I see that first hand how a lot of agents take advantage of these artists, but I completely see your point there as well.

**Ashokkumar Mistry:** I think when we look at the public and private sides of the art world we need to actually understand what the point of the public end of the art world was actually for … to do the things that you can't do in a commercial world. But now, increasingly, with changing politics, what you have is a situation where it feels as if more and more public art galleries are working kind of in cahoots with or to the agenda of the private sector. What I mean by that is that in terms of value of an artist's work it's boosted by being represented. What happens is if you are picked up by a gallery, that makes you much much more likeable, not just to other collectors or buyers or whatever, but then it develops some kind of kudos for you within the public sector as well. And I think that we need to re-look at that and the dangers of that. Is there a way we can develop people within the public sector without the influence of the private sector? Is that something that we can actually do? So that we're picking up people that we would otherwise miss.

**Elinor Morgan:** These worlds aren't separate. There's all sorts of commingling and cohabitation and there are actually so many different art worlds, and we know that within this room. We're all part of different conversations.

One thing that I've found really sad to observe in the last few years is the amount of smaller galleries who genuinely support artists and work in really exciting ways with a range of artists closing because of the economy and the bigger galleries getting bigger. And encroaching more and more into the roles and spaces of the public institutions. And essentially kind of masquerading as public spaces and I think it's part of our roles as curators, those of us who are, to think about who and what we're being influenced by because it's very easy for institutions with smaller program budgets, and decreasing program budgets, to be wooed by commercial galleries who will pay for the shipping or the framing or the publication or whatever and for that to form then a very important part of the program budget for a public institution which means there is a huge amount of influence.

On the other hand, as you identified Jennifer, the big commercial galleries are the ones taking out adverts. When you take out adverts, you're more likely to get reviews. It's kind of like a big network of influence and it's part of my job to be very tuned into that and aware of that and to make decisions with that knowledge in mind. That's not about curating in a nutshell, but it is a part of the kind of knowledge and analysis that we have to employ as curators.

[00:32:12] (music)

Hello, I'm **Sonia Boue**. I wanted to just pick up on Ashok's point from the very beginning, I think you were talking about not doing things in conventional ways and how important that is. For me, that idea and that concept has woven itself in and out of the rest of the discussion and I'm really interested in my own work in finding different ways of working and thinking about different templates.

Just on the question of criticism; how important it is obviously to get reviewed and to get your work in front of audiences, but how before that you need to have a group of people around you who can encourage you and I think that's absolutely right. But it's really important to me as an autistic person for those voices to be voices that are not telling me that what I'm doing and the way that I do things are not the right way because I think we have to be more open now to all the different ways in which it's possible to be an artist; to be a creative person.

Actually what concerns me a little bit about the discussion is that are we thinking about disability; disabled artists and curators trying to fit into a mould and thereby gaining success or are we thinking about wanting to change the ecology and do something more radical. I'm sort of in that camp of thinking that actually it's really important to just do things differently and just experiment. And one of the ways that I've been able to do that is by getting Arts Council funding and by self-leading projects and that has enabled me to circumvent a lot of the issues that have been discussed but we all know that that funding is very scarce and very difficult to come by and you need a certain amount of expertise to be able to secure it.

**Aidan Moesby:** I would like to come to you Elinor as somebody from an institution and you were saying that equity, diversity and access is at a high level and happening in a way that you've never seen it happening before. How can curators level the ecology of the playing field? We've talked a lot about the artists, but I'd like to bring it back to curators.

**Elinor Morgan:** What I said is that equity, diversity and access are being discussed at a high level. I didn't say they were being acted on or that things were happening. But that is important to know, so I have been at events with all of the directors from all of the Plus Tate organisations from across the UK, which was a whole day looking at the word "equity". Too many angles in one day. Too many things to discuss. But everybody was there because there's an urgency around that conversation that's being felt by those people who are leading those organisations. It felt exciting to me that there was so many people, decision makers, spending their time talking about that. What I said after that is that things are happening too slowly.

To go to your point Sonia and to your questions, I think there's a real difference between programming and structure of the organisation. And why I feel really excited about the project that we're working on together with DASH and Weising Art Center and Midlands Art Centre in Birmingham, is because it's about changing who the curators are within the institution. I thought it was really interesting the point you made about how many disabled people will be working within institutions who don't say that or don't feel confident or comfortable to speak about that. But we also have to change the work force really much more quickly and more radically than we've been prepared to so far. That's why this program, which is about routes to working as curators in institutions excites me so much because if you have a curator who is making decisions and bringing their expertise and their networks and their knowledge, things will change so fast. I guess I've seen a lot of organisations programming things slightly differently and that's great, that's good, but we also need the people within the organisations to change for really long term structural change to happen.

What's happening in MIMA around that?

**Elinor Morgan:** One answer is that DASH initiated, two or three years ago, a national partnership which they applied for money for from the Arts Council to make a four year program with these three organisations to have a curator work with us for a year within the organisation and the outcomes of that project are not defined. Aidan's going to start with us next week and we don't know what he will curate within the organisation but there will be some public outcome. And each organisation has a very different remit, different connection to the place that it's in, different audiences, different art forms, so there have been these three different opportunities for curators with different practices. But of course, that's a very small amount of opportunities within a national scene. But we've already seen that lots of art organisations want to be a part of this, so they're jealous and they're interested in. That's fantastic because it just demonstrates a model and I know there will be a lot of other exciting models out there, but this is one I feel close to and passionate about which is about a fast shift and lots of learning from lots of different people together. And a different approach to recruitment and a different approach to knowledge-sharing and a program which is all about support and development. Development of a practice. So it feels quite tangible to me, which I like.

**Aidan Moesby:** Thank you. What do curators want to hear from artists and how best can artists make contact?

**Elinor Morgan:** Curators feel overworked. Sad but true. I think that's really important to remember when you get in touch with people though. It might take three or four emails before someone replies. But I don't think it's bad to be persistent. That thing I said about building your knowledge about the field you want to be in, make an appropriate connection. Try to think about a space or a program or a set of research that is relevant to your work so that you can say why it's relevant really clearly and make that connection really obvious to the person you're getting in touch with. Don't just do a scatter gambit, be kind of careful and thoughtful about who you get in touch with. A lot of places won't accept an unsolicited proposal and actually I don't think that's a very good way to contact people.

I really think the best way of contacting someone is normally an email because it is the easiest thing for the person to digest normally in their own time and in their schedule, is to try to make a point of contact and start a conversation rather than going in with a boom, this is my thing and this is why you should be interested in it because there are all sorts of reasons why that might not work for the person. A) they feel like they're being told what to do B) they've got a whole program laid out in front of them and they're like "Well, we haven't got a slot for your exhibition. Sorry. Laters." It's a very quick way of saying no. But to try to build a rapport by showing that you're interested in something they’re interested in or you read something or you saw something to make that point of connection.

**Aidan Moesby:** Is there a difference if say you want to propose an event? Or something public facing which doesn't involve an exhibition?

**Elinor Morgan:** That's why I would start with a conversation because actually I would say to most artists that it's very unlikely that you'll be given an exhibition without having built a dialogue and a rapport with an organisation over quite a long period of time. And a good way of doing that is to do something that might feel smaller first. That might be an event, it might be developing a piece of interpretation for a collection with an organisation, it might even be reviewing one of their shows. I mean just to build a kind of understanding between you and that curator and to remember that the organisation is made up of people. I think that's just really key because that helps with how you approach something.

**Aidan Moesby:** I think that one of the things that I benefited most from was mentoring and you can make an Arts Council application and put mentoring as part of that or just solely as that; and also an Arts Council application you can find somebody to fill in your Arts Council application form and they'll pay for that as an access need. I'm somebody who has an incredible difficulty with forms and get that assistance. And so that mentoring and asking perhaps to look at your body of work and being able to talk about it in an artistic context and that codified language which may be curators or gallerists want to hear so that you're not just "well I've got these paintings and I think they're all right can you show them?" It's kind of using the system, but also acknowledging that that system can support you, not all the time, but that level of support is there for that particular thing.

**Elinor Morgan:** Well, how do you approach galleries and museums to make shows with them?

**Jennifer Gilbert:** It is very difficult to approach museums and galleries and to get them to listen to you and to get them to take what you do seriously. I do formulate plans, but the way i work with different organisations is that I don't want it to be something where I go in, I'm ticking their box of working with disabled people and then that's their yearly quota met and then we go away and nothing ever happens again. When I work with people, I want it to be for a long term project. I want them to really get on board with the artists, the artists ethos everything about that artist and to respect them as an artist. If someone just literally wants me to one thing and go away again, I've actually turned down the opportunity because I don't think it's beneficial for the artist and for their career and what I stand for as someone that's trying to support these people. It doesn't feel right that we should just go in and be that yearly quota of disabled people. I want to work with people long term and have a legacy with them.

**Ashokkumar Mistry:** Does that have anything to do with the way people's art is written about? Moving away from disabilities as a whole in the interpretation and being something that is the exotic factor in the reason for them allowing that into their gallery? And the disability just being a matter of fact on the artists' terms?

**Jennifer Gilbert:** When I approach a gallery and the way I write about it to a gallery is I only write what the artist wants me to write. I won't ever write anything about them if they don't feel comfortable with me writing it. I was working with a big mainstream organisation while I was in another role; when I was in that role this organisation was about to put out their booklet about an exhibition I was doing and they'd taken out some of the words that the artist had written to describe themselves because they didn't want to mention that they were disabled and they didn't want to mention these other terminologies.

So I showed it to the artist very briefly that I was working with and quickly wrote back to them before they sent it to print. And I was like actually why have you taken the word disabled out of it? And why have you taken their description of their work out of it because actually it's their voice and if that was a really famous artist, would you have done that? Or are you only doing it because it is a disabled artist? And actually what right do you have to change that person's writing without checking with me first? You've literally sent it to me 10 minutes before it's going to print saying is this okay, when no it's not, I want you to put that wording back in. And then they delayed the print because then we had to have a very long conversation about the importance of not changing someone's language without their permission and actually just not changing it in the first place because you wouldn't do it with someone like Peter Blake, so why would you do it with a disabled artist?

[00:46:35] music

**Aidan Moesby:** I'm going to come to the panelists now for just a closing statement or reflection. Should we start with you Ashok.

**Ashokkumar Mistry:** I think one of the things that is really compelling for me is when we stand together, the strength that we actually have. We can make change, but we have to work together. We can make real lasting change, but we need to shout together. I was working on my own about a year and half ago, maybe two years ago, I contacted Mike and Mike put me in contact with Colin and it was then that I got an email straight back saying yeah we need to publish this. And that was the first time that happened to me and ever since then, it's been a roller coaster. Meeting people. Meeting new people; new terminologies; understanding things like neurodivergence; putting the puzzle together. We can't do it by ourselves and we're not alone. We can work together.

**Elinor Morgan:** I would say something which is remember how many different art spaces there are. Whether that's, as you pointed out Aidan, not everything needs to be an exhibition, I'm a massive advocate for that. Or thinking about the space of a book or a website, but also remember that there is a fantastic ecology of artist-led and kind of more grassroots or smaller organisations which often pay better than bigger organisations and offer more time and support, more flexibility. It's not all about being part of a bigger organisation and going in for that massive exhibition. So just remember that that word ecology is a really useful descriptive one for different scales, different tones, different time scales which suit different practices.

**Jennifer Gilbert:** I want to end with something that George Vasey, who is a curator from the Wellcome Collection, ended your last talk with Aidan at the MAC, and I wrote down something that I really wanted to say today. How do you define success? Is it having your work in the Tate? Or is it your work having an impact on people? And that stayed with me since he said it last time. Good point.

**Aidan Moesby:** It is important. I think one of the other words he used was compassion and I think there is a complete lack of compassion pervasive particularly in the country and it's like being compassionate to ourselves and with each other is really, really important.

In conclusion of today, I feel remarkably I feel a little more optimistic about things. I think that it's good to hear that things are slowly changing and that institutions are beginning to take note and realise that they've got a long way to go. They are starting to make that journey. So thank you to Disability Arts Online … and I'm saying that because this is my final event. And thank you very much for everyone's contribution. If we can all say thank you to Askok Mistry, Elinor Morgan and Jennifer Gilbert. Thank you

[00:50:28] applause

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