

Arts & Disability Forum 2016

SHAPING PERSPECTIVES, ENABLING OPPORTUNITIES

CO-ORGANISED BY



NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL
SINGAPORE



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The Arts & Disability Forum 2016 was held from 29 to 31 March 2016. It was co-organised by the National Arts Council, British Council Singapore and the Singapore International Foundation, with the support of National Gallery Singapore.

The Forum brought together participants of over 20 nationalities to share insights and exchange perspectives, harnessing wisdom from diverse sectors to explore the transformative power of the arts for people with disabilities.

This post-Forum publication seeks to capture highlights of the discussions, as well as the spirit of inclusivity. We hope you will be inspired to act towards an inclusive society for all.

Foreword



Kathy Lai,
Chief Executive Officer (2013 - 2016),
National Arts Council

“ At the National Arts Council, we believe the arts is for everybody and we are particularly excited for persons with disabilities to not miss out on experiencing the power of the arts and to have the opportunities to develop as artists in their own right. My colleagues have been reaching out to various special education schools, and voluntary welfare organisations and they have also been encouraging artists to design and implement arts programmes together with these organisations for their students and for their clients.

Our perspective of what is possible will continue shifting and expectations will continue to be challenged in this field. We hope this Forum will be enlightening even to the most seasoned of practitioners and that it paves a way for many collaborations and partnerships to create arts programmes, arts spaces, and arts practices that are truly for all.

”

Katelijan Verstraete,
Director, Arts, East Asia, British Council



“ It's a great pleasure to partner with the National Arts Council and the Singapore International Foundation, and to set up the Arts & Disability Forum 2016 in Singapore. Our common ground to raise awareness on how the arts and culture can contribute to an inclusive society brought us together to organise this tri-partner event that aims to develop talents in the disability community and engage the disability community with the arts through inclusive programming and approaches.

Through this event, the British Council wants to share knowledge and experience from the United Kingdom (UK) and disability arts. We want to build up a long-term relationship between the UK disability art sector and partners, practitioners, artists, policy makers in Singapore, to raise the profile of disabled artists and related issues.

”



Anita Fam,
Governor (2010 - 2016)
Singapore International Foundation and
Chairman, Singapore's Third Enabling
Masterplan Steering Committee,
Ministry of Social and Family Development

“ The Singapore International Foundation (SIF) makes friends for a better world, and the work that we do reflects our aim in bringing world communities together to do good. That is why, together with National Arts Council and British Council Singapore, the SIF is proud to have enabled this meaningful collaboration that bridges the arts and disability sectors through cross-cultural exchanges between Singapore and the United Kingdom (UK).

In today's launch, we will similarly harness the power of the arts to shape an inclusive and compassionate society. We have arts practitioners from both Singapore and the UK to share their insights and explore the potential of the arts in the disability sector. Other multi-sectorial groups—from policy-makers to social welfare organisations—will also be sharing their professional views during the dialogue.

”

Suenee Megan Tan,
Director, Audience Development and Engagement,
National Gallery Singapore



“ As a public museum, one of the goals of National Gallery Singapore is to make art accessible to all. We recognise that for people with disabilities, the arts represent a world of resources and opportunities. It provides an outlet for creative expression, and unlimited possibilities for personal and professional success. By engaging in the arts, we believe that people with disabilities can greatly contribute to our workplaces and communities and help extinguish stereotypes regarding disability. This will ultimately create a global culture truly representative of all people.

For this reason, the Gallery is very honoured to be hosting the Arts & Disability Forum 2016 at our premises.”

”



Making Arts Truly for All

A visualisation of the welcome address and opening remarks by Tim Hamons.



Visualisation by Tim Hamons

Tim Hamons, founder of the Art of Awakening, utilised visual thinking to capture, connect and synthesise key conversations at the Arts & Disability Forum 2016.

His visualisations are also featured in this publication as a summary of the welcome address, opening remarks and keynote speeches.

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Think Pieces

Sharing of perspectives and insights on approaches to arts and disability in Singapore and the United Kingdom.



Jo Verrent (right) during the Q&A session after her keynote.

Keynote Address

Unlimited: Exploring Counter-narratives in Disability through the Arts

By Jo Verrent,
Diversity Consultant and
Senior Producer at Unlimited

I often say that I think difference is delicious rather than divergent. Difference for me is what makes the world more textured, the world be more colourful and makes the world have more bite to it.

I define myself as a disabled person and I have done so since I was 13 or 14 when I first gained my hearing impairment. However, I don't see it as a negative thing; I see it as an essential part of my identity. It has helped shape who I am and how I am in the world in which I exist.

“ I’m a person disabled by the society in which I live, not somebody simply defined by their medical condition. That’s at the heart of the social model of disability: it’s about everybody taking responsibility to ensure everyone has access. ”

I work in the United Kingdom (UK) as a Senior Producer for a programme called Unlimited, which is delivered by Shape Arts and Artsadmin. It is essentially a commissioning programme, the biggest in the world, for disabled artists. We exist to give funding to disabled artists to make exceptional work. Unlimited funds high-quality, professional-level work by disabled artists—it’s the core of what we do.

Why? We fund disabled artists to embed them within the cultural sector. We want to transform people’s perspectives on disability, to help people see disability in a new way, in a more positive way. The work we fund isn’t always about disability but it is always controlled by disabled artists, shaped by their own experiences as disabled people.

Disability is the result of social constructs, not medical conditions

I’m a person disabled by the society in which I live, not somebody simply defined by their medical condition. That is to say, it’s not our impairments, nor the medical conditions that have stopped us in any way. It’s in the way in which we constructed society. Unlimited is underpinned by what we call the social model of disability.

From a traditional model of a medical perspective, a disabled person is stopped from doing things because of their medical condition. You might say, because I have a hearing impairment, I can’t hear television programmes the same way my family can. I can’t access the television because I have a medical condition.

If we look at the social model perspective, we then look at what the television companies can do to give me access, such as captions.

But I can’t make captions suddenly appear—the responsibility has to be on the people who run the television stations to include captions so that everybody can enjoy their programmes. That’s at the heart of the social model of disability: it’s about everybody taking responsibility to ensure everyone has access. It’s an incredibly positive model because there’s something we can do. We talk about disabled persons in terms of their access requirements, rather than “what’s wrong with them”. It’s much more empowering.

Disabled artists have equally a lot to offer

Disabled artists have as much talent, ability and perspective towards work as any other artists. For me, such work is even better because quite often, it shows a perspective that we’ve not seen before. Because of our access requirements and the way we work, we usually do things new, we do things anew and we do things differently. This makes the whole art process better for everybody rather than the same. Everything becomes fresh, invigorating, and exciting.

Art is a vehicle for disabled artists to become visible

What is important is that disabled people get to participate in the arts. Not just physical access to art spaces but access to the art itself. How can disabled people access artworks? How can blind people appreciate paintings, deaf people experience music? Think beyond physical access of space and move on other “ramps”, such as audio description of visual arts, sign language interpretation, captioning and relaxed performances. If you want to be an artist, you do not arrive fully formed. You have to access the arts through participation, you have to discover that you have an aptitude and the skill.

Providing opportunities and access to the disabled is crucial. It is about opening up training and support routes so that all disabled people interested in the arts have a chance to access training and development.

Not everyone will become world-class artists but some people will and disabled people deserve to be in that group as much as everyone else.



Jo Verrent (standing) conducting a visioning exercise at a breakout session to encourage participants to visualise the future of arts and disability in Singapore.

I really want to work in a situation where we don't need programmes like Unlimited. Where work from disabled artists is just embedded within the cultural sector without needing a special focus or special funds that only support that kind of work.

We're here because of the situation that we have created. We're here because of the alienation and the discrimination that has been within the cultural sector in the past. That is all. It's about working to get rid of that so that disabled artists can operate on the same platform as everybody else.

“ Disability doesn't discriminate—any person can become a disabled person anytime in their lives. Majority of older people gain impairments—in the UK the figure is around 70% of 70-year-olds do; so disability is just going to become more and more part of everybody's life experience. ”

The role of the arts in promoting inclusiveness

What I want to leave you with is the concept that disabled people aren't aliens. We're not from another planet.

I would just encourage all of us to think about how we want our societies to be treated. Do we want to treat people as the “other”, different in a negative sense? Or do we want to create an environment where everybody can be represented and feel holistically included in every aspect of society? I think that if we do, then the arts is a really good way and good place to start. It's through the arts that we get a chance to reimagine the world, see the world afresh and experience things from another perspective. Disabled artists have something really incredible to contribute to that shift in perspective since they experience the world differently.

When disabled people see a reflection of themselves in the works presented, that is when art becomes a force for inclusion. Many disabled people feel on the edge of society. So incorporating and sharing elements of their experience in their art allows them to be heard, seen and acknowledged. Each country needs to work out what the right approach is for them and what their journey will be like. What may work in the UK may not necessarily work for Singapore and nothing is perfect.

“ The struggle for not being treated equally is still very current but I believe art is a vehicle through which you can make that change happen. ”

Thoughts on the Forum

By Jo Verrent

The Arts & Disability Forum 2016 was an important step in shaping a more inclusive society. Disabled people have as much right to be represented as any other group in our communities. By involving disabled people equally—as artists and audiences—we can all benefit from the sharing of our perspectives. Any cross-border exchange is also useful such as the exchange between the UK and Singapore at this forum. When we see how other societies work, we look even harder at ourselves.

While the UK is not a perfect example of inclusiveness, it has made advancements in areas such as arts and culture.

For example, every cultural building in the UK has to consider access to the disabled, and every cultural organisation has to show what it is doing to involve disabled people. We also have some dedicated funding through programmes like Unlimited.

The UK also adopts a multi-layered approach to the issue by working with young people, professional disabled artists, and audiences to build an ecology that connects the disabled with the community.

I believe that a similar trend is already emerging in Singapore. At the Arts & Disability Forum, I found people who were hungry to do more for equality but who wanted the government to show commitment as well. This was especially evident in my interactions with the country's young people. They have said that the disabled should not be seen as needing pity, but as people who are disadvantaged by the barriers put up by others, such as the lack of physical access as well as the lack of access to education, information and communication.

Extracted from article “Art that Binds”
The article was first published in SINGAPORE Magazine Issue 2/2016, a publication of the Singapore International Foundation.
singaporemagazine.sif.org.sg



Jo Verrent (second from left) participating in the launch of the Unlimited Commissions Programme in 2013. Photo: Rachel Cherry



Jo Verrent speaking at the launch of the Unlimited Commissions Programme in 2013. Photo: Rachel Cherry

Questions from the Audience

Q1: How did the UK manage to change public perception, such that artistic aspirations are now a reality for the disabled?

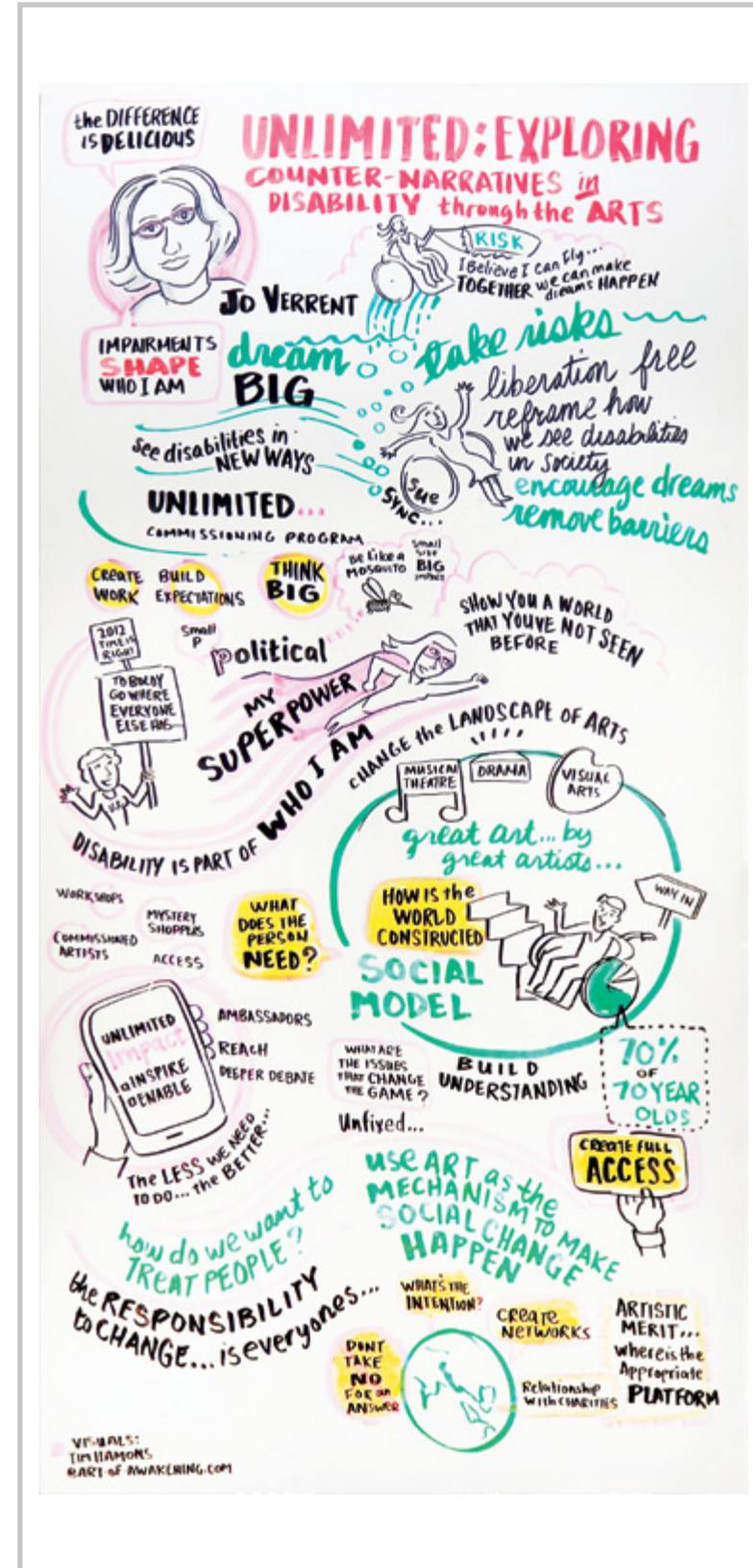
Jo: Don't take "no" for an answer. You have to keep pushing but everybody has to push. It's not enough to say that disabled people are the only ones to do the campaigning to force change; it's every single person's responsibility. It rests with society to change society.

Make links with other disabled artists, not just in Singapore but also in other countries, so you have the support network and so that you can discuss specific barriers. Don't try to do everything by yourself. Create networks and communities because together, you can make things happen much more effectively.

Q2: In Singapore, support for art by persons with disabilities are still viewed as charitable causes. How do we change the mind-set so people see the artistic excellence achieved by an artist with a disability?

Jo: Work out the appropriate platform for particular pieces of work. It's about artists understanding where their work sits and then gradually moving it up.

You have to be clear what you're selling. You have to be clear what the platform is and who is engaging on that platform. If you're showing people amateur-based work or community-based work and saying its professional work, then you are continuing the assumption that all artwork by disabled people is going to be poor quality. You have to break that mould.



Everybody's Responsibility

Jo Verrent's keynote address emphasises the social model of disability where society plays an important role in creating accessibility and inclusivity. She also illustrates how the arts gives voice to artists with disabilities and their stories, becoming a catalyst for the social model.



Claire Cunningham sharing her journey in crafting an artistic vocabulary that comes from her lived experience as a disabled artist.

Keynote Address Leaps & Bounds: A Journey in Dance & Disability

By Claire Cunningham,
Multi-disciplinary Performer
and Choreographer

“ I identify as a disabled person. I identify as an artist. I identify as a disabled artist. That doesn't mean that I feel as an artist, that I'm disabled. It just means I'm using “disabled” as a cultural identity, much like saying I'm a woman artist, or a Scottish artist, or other forms of identity that I may choose to own. ”

Disabled artists and untapped potential

How did I get here? How did I become a disabled artist?

I grew up not wanting to be disabled and wanting to get “fixed”. I went to mainstream schools and was the only child in school that had a visible impairment. I grew up with no role models; no disabled people to show me that it was okay to be disabled.

In 2005, I discovered dance. It was an accident. I didn't mean to. I always thought that dance was for (what I then called) the able-bodied—bodies that could move quickly, jump, had straight pointy arms and straight pointy legs. That's not for me. That's not my body.

Luckily, I met Jess Curtis, a choreographer, who wasn't obsessed with the notion of having a perfect body as necessary for dance. What he saw, and what he was able to make me see, was that the way my body had developed and evolved as a result of using crutches meant it had a great deal of strength. It meant that I had grown certain skills and knowledge, understood unconsciously how crutches were designed; how my weight was positioned on them, how to manipulate it skillfully, how to play with it. How to balance, how to lift, how to suspend my body using the strength of my arms. I was also able to leap and drop back to the floor in a weightless way that a cat might land, because my shoulders have learnt how to absorb the weight

in a way that the knees of a non-disabled person might. I became fascinated by this potential. I most definitely did not want to be “fixed” anymore.

The importance of people and funding

My journey to this day has definitely been one of mentors, of connecting with important people in my life, of having time; of having funding to have time with people. It was also particularly important living in a country, specifically Scotland, which not only developed equalities and equal rights legislation but also has an arts council called Creative Scotland. Creative Scotland chose to go beyond the bare minimum required to really address the lack of provision for disabled artists and audiences, and also to put effort and money into making disabled artists a real part of the artistic landscape of Scotland.

A lot of change, especially in dance, happened as a result of Jo Verrent's recommendations on the state of Dance and Disability in Scotland. Creative Scotland arts council then put the recommendations Jo made into action. One of the recommendations was to create role models, which is partly, and largely why I'm here.

After meeting Jess Curtis, I became interested in how I might dance on crutches. I then discovered Bill Shannon, another American artist, this time a disabled artist who specifically dances

on crutches. He was doing workshops near my house in Scotland. I applied for funding from Creative Scotland, although I never expected to get it. I got the grant and it changed my life.

I trained for six weeks with Bill, one-to-one. It was intense, terrifying, but undoubtedly essential in showing me what was possible. Bill, because he himself used crutches, could see possibilities that a non-disabled choreographer couldn't. He understood when to push me. He taught me how to recognise that failure is an essential part of learning, and that it's never really failure. How to create and recognise my own specific movements, to own my way of moving, and to recognise that as a discipline and to work at it.

As part of the same grant, I was able to hire a studio back in Scotland for some time on my own. After time with Jess and Bill, I needed time alone, a safe space where no one could see me. That time was vital.

These three strands have been essential for my development. Firstly, time with a non-disabled choreographer, Jess Curtis, who had the power of knowledge from access to traditional dance training. Secondly, time with a disabled artist, Bill Shannon, who understood the specifics of my way of moving, having the experience of living as a disabled person. Third, time on my own; time to truly explore my individual skills and to find my own artistic voice.

Nothing changes without risk

I need to point out that I am partly the product of other people's faith in me. That initial funding from Creative Scotland led to other commissions and invitations and to where I am today. A lot of money and time has been given to me.

But all this requires, especially early on in my career, people taking a risk on me. Changing people's expectations around disability, creating equality, changing anything requires people to take a risk. People have to be willing to take decisions that go against the status quo.

“ For anything to change, those in power need to start taking risks. This includes people who are decision-makers, grant givers, people who have knowledge and skills. They have to be persuaded to open up. ”

The lived experience of disability is part of identity

Contemplate what your experience of living is: as a man, as a woman, of being from Singapore, of being tall or short, whatever you choose. Contemplate whether these labels or others fit you. Your lived experience affects what you notice in the world physically, psychologically and emotionally. I've become fascinated by the subtlety of that experience, and how my disability shapes my perception of the world.

My dance movements are largely generated through my interaction with crutches. There's a sense of risk and testing which means that my performances are made with a sense of carefulness, precision, attention and awareness.

As part of my lived experience as a person on crutches, I am also consistently making an examination of the ground, with a very high awareness of hazards, and paying attention to the qualities of different surfaces. I always looked where I walked. So when I dance, this

same quality also appears. The connection of the head and eyes to where I place my feet and my crutches creates a very specific type of movement, and requires a very specific type of attention. This also creates attention for an audience to watch.

For example, the concept of my relationship to the ground appears in my work in a lot of ways. In *Guide Gods*, we created a space that required a need to watch the floor, a space that's difficult to traverse quickly by placing china tea cups across the space. The negotiation of this space is made possible by the awareness I have. The coordination and precision required for moving four points of contact: two feet, two crutches, through and around these objects without damage, created a unique environment by navigating across these upturned cups.

When I watch disabled artists perform, I see people who have a relationship with their body that is intense and lived—for whom the decision to be observed is known and considered.

“ People who have often from birth, had to develop extraordinary levels of body awareness, of understanding how their body works, of developing spatial awareness, of problem-solving. That is the lived experience of disability—they bring their world on to the stage with them. ”

Why would we want to see just the narrow band of people on stage or in our films or on television? Why would we want to see art created always based on the same lived experience?

The creative potential of disabled artists to be tapped is so rich. Creating works that exclude disabled bodies and lives has deprived society and audiences of potentially seeing some incredible art. Perhaps, I might add, even more interesting and powerful art.

Thoughts on the Forum

By Claire Cunningham

At the Arts & Disability Forum 2016, I observed a strong sense of people's interest and desire for change, but understandably a sense of not quite knowing how to or where to effect change. I felt from the conversations I had that the most effective way of creating change in the performing arts would be to engage with the live art, performance art and/or visual arts scene in Singapore. These were artists that had greater understanding and connection to notions of the politics of the body, ideas of exclusion and difference. They would thus be perhaps more open to working with individuals with different lived experiences such as disability.

If you are a disabled person starting out your artistic practice, I would say look for artists that interest you and go talk to them. Think about what it is in their work that interests you and draws you to it. This does not mean you want to recreate it, but it can help you understand what is important to you and what might be the underlying principles of your practice. I am drawn to artists who examine the concept of

performance itself, whose work has a sense of incredible liveness, where you feel anything might happen—but also demonstrates real skill and experience. I like to see real rigour of thought and process in the work. For example, I love the work of Forced Entertainment, Wendy Houston, Jess Curtis, Bill Shannon, Jo Bannon and Robbie Sygne.

For me, being a disabled artist and featuring disability in my work offers a richness of vocabulary to explore and offer a perspective on the world. As an artist, this feels like a gift.

Overall, to take disability arts to the mainstream, partnership with non-disabled people, particularly those who are gatekeepers—venues, producers, agencies, funders are essential. These people need to become allies, in order for disabled people to get through the door and for people to see the work. Then hopefully the quality of the work starts to speak for itself allowing these artists access to audiences.

Claire Cunningham in email interview with the co-organisers



Jess Curtis (left) and Claire Cunningham (right) in "The Way You Look (at me) Tonight" (Sep 2016). Photo: Sven Hagolani



Claire Cunningham navigates china tea cups in a demonstration of the precision and coordination in her performance of "Guide Gods" (Sep 2014). Photo: Brian Hartley



Claire Cunningham (in blue) performing with collaborator and mentor, Jess Curtis (in grey) in "The Way You Look (at me) Tonight" (Sep 2016). Photo: Sven Hagolani

Questions from the Audience

Q: We are a group of deaf and hearing dancers. Whenever we perform, especially to hearing audiences, we have the opportunity to create awareness and advocacy for the deaf. However, we also want the audience to see us purely as performers and not see us as objects of pity, yet knowing we are deaf performers adds another level of appreciation for the performance. How do you balance both perspectives?

Claire: I understand that there is a choice of whether you want to take the label for yourself or not. It's a choice. You can put on the hat sometimes and you can take it off again. For me, it's very important to be in both the mainstream and the disability arts context because I will be able to have access to difference audiences.

If I'm in an environment where the disability angle is put out, maybe disabled people would come and see the work more than they might in other more mainstream context where it's not mentioned. You can't control how people will think all the time—you can however, try to contextualise it, pre-empt and control the language used to describe your work. You need to decide whether you want to identify in one environment as a company of deaf dancers, and perhaps in others you don't.



Art from a Lived Experience

Claire Cunningham's keynote traces her journey as a dancer and choreographer, about factors that contributed to her success and the rich vocabulary that the lived experience of disability brings.



Felicia Low at Inclusively Yours (2011) at ION Gallery, an exhibition commissioned by The Necessary Stage for the M1 Fringe Festival. The exhibition documented the journey as well as writings and drawings by 10 adults with Down Syndrome after their learning journey at ION Orchard where staff shared about fashion, food and design. Photo: Felicia Low

Reflections from the Forum

An Artist is An Artist: Disabled or Not!

By Felicia Low,
Keynote Moderator and Founding Director of Community Cultural Development

As moderator for the Q&A sessions that followed the respective keynote addresses, Felicia led in discussions between the speakers and audience. The discussions brought to the fore the Singapore perspectives that drew parallels as well as comparisons with the practices and approaches in the United Kingdom.

In this article, Felicia highlights how Jo Verrent and Claire Cunningham have illustrated the social model of disability in their work. She also observes ways Singapore has adopted the approach for our unique context as well as ways we can enhance inclusivity in Singapore.

“ It is necessary to involve disabled artists in mainstream platforms that emphasise the quality of aesthetics, rather than their ‘disabled’ collective identity—which continues to be heavily associated with charity. ”

Structural Shifts towards Inclusiveness

In the recent years, Singapore has made greater commitments towards the construction of a more inclusive society. In July 2016, the Building and Construction Authority (BCA)¹ held the third Singapore Universal Design week with a focus on promoting ‘Universal Design’ in public spaces.

Universal design refers to designing products or the built environment in a manner that makes it usable by the greatest number of individuals, regardless of their ability, age or status. SG Enable², a not-for-profit agency in Singapore, provides all individuals with disability, regardless of age, with a range of supportive programmes and employment opportunities.

These examples of re-visioning social structures to encourage greater autonomy among persons with disabilities are inspiring and have the potential of transforming Singapore into a truly inclusive society.

With reference to the keynote speech by Jo Verrent, these national initiatives demonstrate the collective responsibility exercised by social institutions to shift approaches towards disability from one of dependency to independence.

For and By Disabled Artists

While these initiatives may address the hardware issues of accessibility, Singapore still lags behind in terms of addressing ‘software’ issues of mainstream social awareness and understanding of disability.

Jo Verrent’s work with Unlimited, which highlights the ability of artists such as Claire Cunningham, places emphasis on the artistic talent and value of artists who are disabled. Indeed, the work of Cunningham demonstrates a poetics and an aesthetics that can only be achieved by her as an artist, whose mobility and dance is enhanced by the use of crutches.

¹ The Building and Construction Authority (BCA) is an agency under the Ministry of National Development, championing the development of an excellent built environment for Singapore. Website: www.bca.gov.sg

² SG Enable is an agency dedicated to enabling persons with disabilities. Website: www.sgenable.sg



A member of the audience fielding a question in response to the keynote address.

Unlimited itself is supported by and supports artists with disability, providing the visibility and activism of a proactive collective that pursues opportunities for equal access to everyday ways of life, including the opportunity to engage in professional artistic practice.

Singapore's artistic sector has encouraged access to the arts for all individuals, regardless of ability, through initiatives by the National Arts Council's community art programmes.

These programmes are mostly run by non-disabled artists, for disabled communities. Most of these programmes are also funded and run within charitable frameworks, supported within social welfare agendas.

Re-defining Disability at its Heart

While the intent and outcomes of such programmes are positive, there is a need to expand beyond sympathetic initiatives through a conscientious effort that aims to re-define the 'disabled' as able in our local arts scene.

It is necessary to involve disabled artists in mainstream platforms that emphasise the quality of aesthetics, rather than their 'disabled' collective identity—which continues to be heavily associated with charity.

This would mean creating opportunities and supporting those who are talented to have access to quality arts training, and subsequently to establish links for these individuals to mainstream funding opportunities other than the community arts.

For example, mainstream arts initiatives for budding artists, such as Noise, could be more intentionally promoted to participants of community arts programmes, or members of SG Enable, to encourage individuals with disabilities to participate with non-disabled individuals as equally talented artists.

Support could also be given for disabled artists to conduct master classes with non-disabled art students, teaching mainstream individuals about the unique aesthetics and art forms which were enabled because of their qualities of 'disability'.

With more concerted and discerning effort, Singapore can expand its margins to include the marginalised as part of its expanded norm. The national arts scene could very well take the lead in creating concrete opportunities and presenting visible exemplars of what a more inclusive society can be.

Felicia Low (left) moderating the Q&A session with keynote speaker Jo Verrent (right).





Collaborative Learning

Exchanging best practices and experiences among arts and disability practitioners in Singapore.



Breakout Sessions Arts and Disability Case Studies in Singapore

Moderated by Justin Lee,
Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies, and
Jane Goh,
Head of Creative Services,
Singapore Association for Mental Health



Justin and Jane moderated panel sharings,
followed by open discussions on what makes
a successful arts & disability programme
and overcoming challenges for inclusive
art-making respectively.

Participants (left) had the opportunity to be in
conversation with artists and representatives
from organisations engaged in arts and
disability programmes.



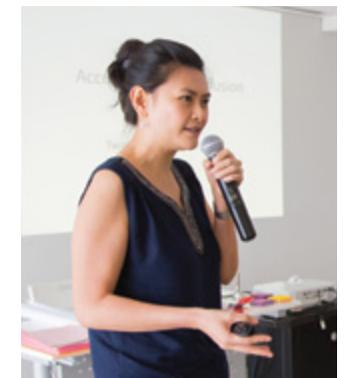
Participants discussed, among other issues, the various funding sources available, and the challenges in demonstrating social impact and concrete output that funders look out for.

Panel Speakers | Day 1



(from left) Panel speakers, Jean Qingwen Loo, Linda Prebhash and Ranae Lee-Nasir, highlighted the importance of support and input from caregivers as well as skilled teachers and trainers needed for a successful arts and disability programme.

Panel Speakers | Day 2



(from left) Panel speaker Michael Cheng shared on building social skills and creating identity through drama, while Quek Ling Kiong spoke about his journey in discovering the power of music in inculcating resilience and communication skills. Twardzik Ching Chor Leng provided insights into her practice and its focus on engaging the public as co-creator.

Considerations for Inclusive Programming

The panel sharing and open discussions brought to the fore some key ideas for creating inclusive art programmes. Here are six key pointers to put the conversations in a nutshell:



Collaboration

- ✓ What other disciplines and sectors can partner the arts?
- ✓ What platforms and opportunities are needed to spark collaborations?
- ✓ How do we effectively match needs and resources?



Professional Artist Development

- ✓ What kind of knowledge/exposure is helpful?
- ✓ What are the methods for inclusive engagement?
- ✓ What skills facilitate work with persons with disability?



Accountability

- ✓ What is success to you?
- ✓ How is success measured qualitatively and quantitatively?
- ✓ Who is responsible for it?



Cascading Awareness

- What information, platform and format can create understanding,
- ✓ within my community?
 - ✓ outside my community?
 - ✓ between communities?



Shifting Mind-sets

- ✓ What physical infrastructure changes are needed?
- ✓ What soft infrastructure changes are needed?
- ✓ How to create changes that extend beyond the community?



Inclusion

- ✓ Whose job is it – creator, funder, presenter or venue?
- ✓ What language encourages inclusivity?
- ✓ How do we show the value of persons with disability?

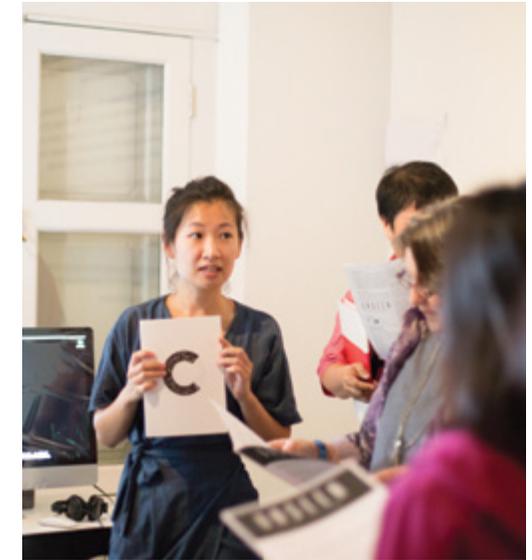
Artist-led Tour

Visit to Unseen: Constellations Showcase

By Alecia Neo, Artist and SIF Alumna

Alecia Neo (top right, facing) led participants on a tour of her Unseen: Constellations showcase at Objectifs. Her project provided a platform for seven youths living with visual-impairment (VI) to explore self-identity and their dreams through a creative process led by the artist and her collaborators.

The project culminated in this multi-sensory installation comprising seven distinctive tents. Each tent houses their creative journeys and their dreams. Art becomes an agent for social change and the project seeks to act as a bridge between sighted people and people living with VI, a merging of both worlds.



Neo Kah Wee (above), one of seven students from Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School, sharing with visitors about his artwork entitled, "A Journey through Army Life", with visitors to the exhibition.



Justin Lee (centre) is a research fellow with the Institute of Policy Studies with interest in social sector trends and developments in Singapore. He has moderated for various forms including the Social Service Research Network 2016 (above). Photo: Institute of Public Policy

Reflections on the Forum Arts and Disability in Singapore

By Justin Lee,
Panel Discussion Moderator and Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies

Justin Lee was the moderator for one of the Forum breakout sessions that included a panel discussion with arts and disability practitioners as well as a peer sharing segment where participants were invited to brainstorm, discuss and map out what they consider a successful arts and disability programme.

In this article, Justin reflects on the varying value of the arts and explores the differing perspectives of success in an arts and disability programme. He also examines the challenges as an artist in the field and suggests the need for intermediary to bring together the arts and social sectors.

“ Art is an important tool for reflection that helps raise critical questions about the appropriate meanings of disability. It can even be a powerful tool for research and advocacy, and even demonstrate how to achieve meaningful and authentic participation for the social inclusion of people with disabilities. ”

Singapore’s achievements in the recent Paralympics have brought much attention to the role of sports in empowering people with disabilities.

Not only has it provided an occasion for the community to admire and celebrate their abilities, but also an opportunity for Singaporeans to consider the significance of social inclusion.

Similarly, the arts is also an avenue for people with disabilities, not just to express themselves but to excel and achieve success.

Beyond the Instrumental Value of Arts for Disability

A dinosaur-print pouch designed by a student with autism made international headlines when Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s wife, Madam Ho Ching, carried it to the White House on a recent state visit. The pouch sold out in hours. This clearly showed how artistic creations by people with disabilities can have commercial value.

The arts have also been utilised to help people with disabilities on a daily basis.

For instance, various modes of creative expression are utilised as part of psychotherapy and this is

used to help people with learning disabilities.

These instrumental uses of art are easier to understand and convey to funders and stakeholders, who see art as an “intervention”, useful for therapy or communal bonding. It is harder for them to appreciate the expressive value of art.

In reality, this means that funders may prefer to channel funds to alternative social services or programmes which can demonstrate better outcomes.

A few months ago, I spoke to one of the youths behind Project Inky³, an initiative where volunteers conduct

poetry classes for people with special needs.

Despite the joy they created through the process and the genuine connections made, it was clear that if they wanted continual support, they would be under some pressure to demonstrate some linguistic or developmental gains for their participants.

³ Project Inky or P.Inky is a project by the volunteer group of APSN to create a safe space for those with learning disabilities to explore poetry. They have been working with the APSN Centre For Adults (CFA) to explore poetry writing, with persons with mild intellectual disabilities and launched their first workshop in June 2016. Website: www.projectinky.com



Open dialogue sessions drawing forth ideas and experiences among fellow arts and disability practitioners on creating inclusive programmes.

American author Kurt Vonnegut once tasked high school students to write a poem, then tore it all up and threw it away without letting anyone read it.

His rationale: “You will find that you have already been gloriously rewarded for your poem. You have experienced becoming, learned a lot more about what’s inside you, and you have made your soul grow.”

Vonnegut’s statement is an important message about the expressive value of art that is often dismissed precisely because it is intangible. Art should not only be regarded as if it were a “service” provided to the disability community. Doing that would be similar to saying that the Paralympics are good for helping people with disabilities get fit.

Art is an important tool for reflection that helps raise critical questions about the appropriate meanings of disability.

It can even be a powerful tool for research and advocacy, and even demonstrate how to achieve meaningful and authentic participation for the social inclusion of people with disabilities. One such case is visual artist Alecia Neo’s work with visually-impaired students from Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School called *Unseen: Constellations*⁴.

These students were asked to choose the art form they wanted to practice and the kind of project they want to embark on.

Artistic mentors with the relevant skills and experience were then identified to support them. Some wrote songs, others produced and acted in a play or made short films.

Were they any good? That is a legitimate question. The key takeaways were: your views matter, and because we are interested in what you have to say, we want you to express them in ways that you think is suitable.

It is therefore important to allow the artists their artistic process. A single-minded pursuit of the client outcomes can denigrate important social, artistic and creative processes that should also be valued, and perhaps be considered as ends in them.



Creating Art with People with Disabilities

Artists who work with people with disabilities often find themselves conscientiously navigating many social and ethical challenges.

First, they have to learn how to understand, communicate and interact with marginalised and potentially vulnerable groups. Then, they struggle with questions about whether their project serves the needs of people with disabilities or aesthetic goals important to themselves as artists.

⁴ *Unseen: Constellations* is a long-term art project by artist Alecia Neo, that provides a platform for seven youths living with visual-impairment (VI) to explore self-identity and their dreams through a creative process led by the artist and her collaborators. The project culminated in a large-scale multi-sensory installation at Objectifs. Website: www.alecia-neo.squarespace.com

Another issue that artists have to be sensitive to is how the artistic product represents disability.

Throughout history, the disabled body has been a site of public spectacle—take for instance circus sideshows from the mid-19th Century to the 1970s. Arts and culture often frames disability as the result of individual tragedy that warrants medical treatment.

This detracts attention from the social roots of the problem—that people are disabled not because of functional impairments, but due to the lack of social accommodations that create access, opportunities and respect diversity.

Although not all artists with disabilities focus on disability as a theme, when they do, they can enrich the world with disability experience. When education academic Linda Ware used disability arts to teach disability issues, she found that when viewers look more closely, “they find disability is not depicted as a life sentence, nor is it conveyed as an unending tragedy reduced to a label inscribed upon a body... as in our own lives, much turns on the details, on the nuances, and away from the

Justin Lee (in blue checkered shirt) observing presentations by the various participants on their discussions and learnings.

normative.” This, she argues, goes against the tragedy and medical model of disability that much of special education and mainstream society uses, which “equates human difference with limited capacity and individual pathology as it aims to ‘cure’ or ‘fix’ the child in diligent pursuit of ‘normalcy’.”

As in other aspects of life, artists with disabilities are not accorded the same opportunities or respect.

Sometimes, the art of people with disabilities are not fully considered art, and has been instead defined as “outsider art”, compared to professional art or

even considered as a kind of therapy.

Audiences may also be unable to read the art work beyond its disability frame, even if artists with disabilities do not always focus on disability as a theme for their art.

As producers of art, people with disabilities have opportunities to challenge such status quo views of disability.

As a movement, disability arts has emphasised its potential as a progressive, emancipatory force that seeks to empower and politicise disabled people.

Galvanising the Arts for Disabilities

The Arts & Disability Forum 2016 held earlier this year, sought to raise awareness for the arts and its potential for the disability sector in Singapore, so as to learn how to best harness the arts and culture to shape a more inclusive society.

One challenge to overcome is the existing mind-set of voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) that serve people with disabilities. They tend to regard the arts as a “good-to-have” that can complement the work done by social workers and therapists.



Justin Lee (right) facilitating an open dialogue session among practitioners to identify challenges and the possible ways forward for arts and disability.



Reflections by participants on the panel sharings.

As artists often have to go through social service agencies to gain access to their clients with disabilities, VWOs need to be convinced of client outcomes for any partnership to happen.

Therefore, arts-based programmes typically meet with difficulties in securing access and financial support. If VWOs constantly expand their horizons to be open to the many other community assets, they will be able to recognise the value and tap into a wide base of skill sets relevant to their causes.

The National Council of Social Services and disabled people organisations themselves can cultivate such institutional relationships with the artists.

This raises the important role of intermediaries that will connect the community artists to the social service agencies. There is currently no association or even registry of community

artists. Without a network or membership organisation, it would be more difficult for artists to find one another, get connected to resources, and improve the capabilities of the artists in working with the community.

Such an association can also bring in more professional artists to do this work, one that NAC and SIF are already starting to do.

While many professional artists value art for art's sake, socially conscious art brings art back from its focus on what is beautiful, and puts aesthetics in service of a larger social purpose. I would argue that disability arts and socially engaged arts are strengthened because of, and not in spite of its social purpose or moral agenda.

Such art should motivate and energise the audience to reflect upon and support a cause, not to recoil from complex moral problems.



Creating Access

Assessing inclusivity in infrastructure and programming for arts and culture.



Zoe Partington (third from left) highlighting various access considerations on the Access Audit Trail, such as how colour and tone contrasts between floor and wall surfaces help persons with visual impairment to distinct between the two.

Access Workshop & Audit Trail

Assess Access

Report on workshop and access audit trail led by Barbara Lisicki and Zoe Partington, Trainers, Shape Arts

Improving access is one of the first steps towards inclusivity in an organisation. During the Forum, Shape Arts trainers Barbara Lisicki and Zoe Partington led participants on an access audit trail of the National Gallery Singapore, as well as various workshops to highlight steps that make arts and cultural institutions more inclusive. Through the trail and workshops, participants learn to maximise access of common facilities and simple adaptations that make a venue welcoming for various persons with disabilities.

Becoming Accessible

Getting Started

There are several ways to get started on becoming a more accessible organisation. On a practical level:

- ✓ **Always ask** - when dealing with external parties, always ask if they have any access requirements (level access, sign language interpreters, large print, dietary requirements for example) as a standard procedure to ensure all visitors feel welcome.
- ✓ **Provide information in advance** - put up access information on your website or printed communications indicating the type of facilities and services available (or unavailable).
- ✓ **Language matters** - talk to disabled people and find out the appropriate language to use. Encourage correction. Clarify definition, as “access” may mean different things across different cultures.
- ✓ **Disability is not always visible** - not all disability is visible, such as hearing impairments, mental or learning disabilities. Never make assumptions.

Thinking about Physical Accessibility

On a physical level of accessibility, it is important to review access to your site first. Have a checklist, talk to disabled people to get their feedback, and provide opportunities for people to be able to state their access requirements. Be prepared to provide and vary access provision to suit individual needs.

Some points of physical accessibility to examine include:

- ✓ **Physical spaces** - how well can the public access your premises? Are there ramps for wheelchair access? Are there adequately-sized signage? Does your space have disabled parking spaces?
- ✓ **Publicity / Marketing** - how does the public initially interact with information about your organisation? How well can disabled people read the print on your brochures? Do you have marketing materials in Braille? What kind of alternative formats do you have to access information?
- ✓ **Staff** - do you have staff on hand who specialise in accessibility matters, and can become the first point of contact for disabled people? Are all the staff trained in dealing with questions related to access? How well can your staff communicate with disabled people or fellow employees?

Additional accessibility services to consider:

- ✓ Do you have facilities that accommodate guide dogs?
- ✓ Are guide dogs allowed into your premises?
- ✓ Can the heights of your tables, counters, easily accommodate wheelchair users? Do you have accessible toilets?
- ✓ Do you provide arrangements for deaf interpreters?



Participants exploring the venue and its access facilities.

Thinking about Programming Accessibility

Accessibility does not end at getting to the venue. Thinking about how disabled people can experience the arts in a diverse range of ways creates an inclusive art experience and provides new perspectives of viewing arts for everyone.

Some points of programming accessibility to think about include:

- ✓ **Access and interpretation** - do you have options such as audio description, touch tours captions and palantypists or sign language interpreters?
- ✓ **Artistic considerations** - do artists showcasing in your space offer adaptations of their work to cater to disabled people e.g. incorporating narration in a theatre production? Alternatively, are works that cannot be accessible to everyone identified such that box office staff can advise disabled persons appropriately?
- ✓ **Relaxed performances** - have you considered changing light and sound effects for certain production showings to allow for persons on the autism spectrum, learning disabilities or Tourettes syndrome to experience the arts at no added cost?



(from top) Sign-language interpretation during the Forum, performance by Lily Goh, performer and Founder, Extraordinary Horizons, audiences giving Lily a round of applause and participants exploring multi-disciplinary and multi-sensory exhibition Unseen: Constellations.

Reflections by National Gallery Singapore

Making Art Accessible for All

National Gallery Singapore was the venue supporter for the Arts & Disability Forum 2016. The Gallery believes that its rich collection of art offers vast resources for learning and personal growth, and is committed to making these accessible to visitors from all walks of life.

Meeting Conservation Challenges

Situated in the heart of Singapore's Civic District, the Gallery is housed in two national monuments—City Hall and the former Supreme Court—which were restored and transformed into a museum.

To cohere with the conservation guidelines set in place by the Preservation of Sites and Monuments authority, old structures had to be adapted to new functions. For example, elevator shafts were created in the openings of old windows, instead of cutting through walls to build them.

The Power of the Arts

Art has tremendous potential to inspire and connect people. The Gallery recognises its unique capacity to foster a culture of respect for diversity, in which all members of a community—including people with disabilities—are able to flourish.

Through its exhibitions and programmes, the Gallery encourages visitors to express themselves creatively and participate in cultural conversations, to forge meaningful connections with others.



Shape Arts Trainer Barbara Lisicki (foreground) taking the lead as participants cross a link-way that has been built out of a window of the heritage building to provide access while preserving the historical structure of the museum.

Accessibility Programmes

The Gallery is continually working to ensure that its spaces and staff are able to accommodate visitors with a wide range of needs. These include providing free aids such as manual wheelchairs and magnifying glasses to visitors who require them.

Special tours have also been designed to support visitors who experience the museum in different ways. For example,

Gallery Signs

Led by a Gallery docent and a sign language interpreter from the Singapore Association for the Deaf (SADeaf), this tour enables deaf participants to experience the Gallery's collection.

It marks SADeaf's first collaboration with an art institution in Singapore, and the first time a local museum has conducted sign language programmes.

The Dementia Prevention Programme

This programme was organised in partnership with the National University Health System, as part of a ten-year research study on the role that activities such as art, music, mindfulness therapy and taiji can play in reducing the risk of dementia. It involved trained docents facilitating conversations with elderly participants around artworks in the DBS Singapore Gallery, over a period of nine months.

Observations from the Access Audit Trail

During the Arts & Disability Forum 2016, Gallery representatives attended a walkabout with trainers Barbara Lisicki and Zoe Partington from Shape Arts. The trainers highlighted positive design elements within the Gallery—including lighted escalators and tactile flooring—while pointing out aspects that might pose difficulties to certain visitors, such as the height of ticketing counters and

lack of subtitles in a few videos screened in the same area.

The session was both enjoyable and insightful, inviting participants to look at their surroundings with fresh eyes and benefit from Shape Arts' wealth of expertise on inclusive practice in the arts sector.



Visioning Arts & Disability

Visioning the future of arts and disability in Singapore through an inaugural national-level multi-sectorial roundtable.



Jo Verrent (left) with Chairman of the roundtable Anita Fam (right).

Multi-sectorial Roundtable Visioning Arts & Disability in Singapore: Policy, Access & Awareness

Chaired by Anita Fam, Governor (2010 - 2016) Singapore International Foundation (SIF) and Chairman of Singapore's Third Enabling Masterplan, Ministry of Social and Family Development

An inaugural multi-sectorial roundtable was held at the Arts & Disability Forum 2016. Themed, Visioning Arts and Disability in Singapore: Policy, Access and Awareness, the session sought to bring out the various perspectives on arts and disability among various stakeholders from the people, public and private sectors.

The roundtable was moderated by SIF Governor Anita Fam who was appointed Chairman of the Third Enabling Masterplan Steering Committee. She also chairs and serves on the board of various social sector organisations. She is also on the management committee of the St. Andrew's Autism Centre and School which have an expressive arts programme.



(from left) Carole McFadden, Tan Li Li, Victor Tan in conversation.



(from left) Chng Seok Tin, Allan Lim, Alecia Neo and Esther Kwan.



A commemorative group photo of the inaugural multi-sectorial roundtable that brought together representatives from people, public and private sectors to discuss the vision for arts and disability in Singapore in 2016.

(back row from left)
Esther Kwan,
Aesthetics Head, Grace Orchard School
Suenne Megan Tan,
Director, Audience Development and Engagement,
National Gallery Singapore
Anjan Kumar Ghosh,
Director, Service Planning and Development,
National Council for Social Services
Carole McFadden,
Programme Manager, Middle East and
North Africa, East Asia and China,
British Council
Jane Goh,
Head of Creative Services,
Singapore Association for Mental Health
Victor Tan,
Sculptor
Allan Lim,
Co-founder, The Living! Project
Katelijan Verstraete,
Director, Arts, East Asia, British Council
Alecia Neo,
Visual artist

(front row from left)
Annie Yeo,
Head, Corporate Responsibility Asia,
Deutsche Bank
Jean Tan,
Executive Director,
Singapore International Foundation
Chua Ai Liang,
Director, Arts & Communities, NAC
Anita Fam,
Governor (2010 - 2016),
Singapore International Foundation
Jo Verrent,
Writer, producer and diversity consultant
Tan Li Li,
Executive Director,
Singapore Association for Mental Health
Soh Lai Yee,
Head, Cultural Exchange,
Singapore International Foundation
Claire Cunningham,
Multi-disciplinary Performer and Choreographer
Chng Seok Tin,
Visual artist



SIF Governor Anita Fam is also Vice-President of the National Council of Social Service, the national coordinating body for voluntary welfare organisations in Singapore, and chairman of the Steering Committee for the Third Enabling Masterplan.

How does a society foster greater inclusiveness of those who are disabled? Anita Fam weighs in on the issue.

“Taking place on Aug 9 every year, Singapore’s National Day Parade is always a spectacle to behold.

This year’s event featured a segment where more than 150 special needs participants hand-signed two of the country’s favourite songs—Home and Count On Me, Singapore—as well as the Singapore Pledge. It sent out a beautiful message that these individuals, given the same opportunities as everyone else, have much to contribute. It is time to recognise their talents.

The idea of inclusiveness is behind the push to include individuals with special needs in

our society. It is one of the main objectives that the Third Enabling Masterplan Steering Committee, of which I am chairperson, is focusing on. Another objective is providing caregivers with support by helping them, for instance, with care-planning for their disabled loved ones.

The Enabling Masterplan is a five-year roadmap that charts the development of policies, programmes, services and other forms of support for people with disabilities in Singapore. It helps the government prioritise its resources to support the sector, such as by building disability and education infrastructure, and initiating partnerships with the private sector. The third masterplan, to be presented to the Singapore government later this year, will guide the development of programmes and services in the disability sector from 2017 to 2021.

“ The arts is a useful platform for raising public awareness about disability. It has the potential to change mindsets and expectations.” ”

Another way in which we hope to foster inclusiveness of the disabled is through dialogue. One example is the Arts & Disability Forum 2016 held in March as part of the Singapore International Foundation’s Arts For Good initiative. During the Forum, I moderated a roundtable themed, “Visioning Arts and Disability in Singapore: Policy, Access and Awareness”.

The arts is a useful platform for raising public awareness about disability. It has the potential to change mindsets and expectations. This roundtable allowed us to start thinking about how we can leverage the arts to foster inclusiveness.

I came away feeling enriched and excited by the collaborations between the two sectors in other countries. It made me realise there is still much to be done in Singapore, and I plan to speak to Singapore International Festival of Arts (SIFA) director Ong Keng Sen to see if such collaborations and performances can be incorporated into future SIFA programming, to provide the disabled with more representation in our arts and culture scene.

We already have one great example in Singapore of the arts and disability sectors merging. The Purple Symphony, established in 2015, is an inclusive orchestra made up of musicians with and without special needs, a perfect representation of arts for good.

Changing mindsets

Another important thing I feel Singaporeans can do to build a more inclusive society is to be open-minded and not pigeonhole people. We can start, for example, by employing people with disabilities. They are loyal and

serious workers who will work hard and not job-hop. Singapore’s National Library Board, which manages the public libraries and the National Archives, is already employing individuals with autism at its Digital Services Centre.

Today, we are in a better place than before as a society. Parents used to hide their disabled children away from curious eyes, but now, they have assistance and no longer feel ashamed of their children.

Many are very supportive and refuse to allow their children to be handicapped by their disability.

This is a mindset that we need to adopt when interacting with individuals with special needs. We can see their many admirable attributes, such as grit and toughness of character. Society can afford to draw more inspiration from them.

One such inspiration is Singapore navy serviceman Jason Chee, who has emerged victorious—literally—from his ordeal of losing both legs and his left arm in a ship accident in 2012. He was part of the men’s table tennis team that won a gold medal at the ASEAN Para Games 2015. If he can achieve so much, we able-bodied people have no excuse not to live well.”

This article was first published in SINGAPORE Magazine Issue 2/2016, a publication of the Singapore International Foundation. singaporemagazine.sif.org.sg

Photo: The Straits Times © Singapore Press Holdings Limited. Reprinted with permission



Profiles

The Forum featured international and local speakers who play diverse roles in the arts and disability ecosystem.



Jo Verrent | Speaker

Jo Verrent is the Senior Producer for Unlimited, the world's largest commissioning programme for disabled artists based in the UK.

Working with Sarah Pickthall, she created SHORT CIRCUIT—fusing disabled artistry and digital acumen; PUSH ME—a series of shorts; and SYNC, examining the interplay between disability and leadership.

She is also a practicing theatre artist whose works have toured internationally.



Claire Cunningham | Speaker

Claire Cunningham is a performer and creator of multi-disciplinary performance, based in Scotland. Her work is often rooted in the study of the potentials of her disability and specific physicality while consciously rejecting traditional dance techniques, or the attempt to attempt to move with the pretence of a body or aesthetic not her own.

A self-identifying disabled artist, Cunningham's work combines multiple art forms and ranges.



Felicia Low | Moderator

Felicia Low is a visual artist and a visual arts educator with an interest in how art can be more relevant to the lives of the community, specifically in the areas of New Genre Public Art and Community Cultural Development. She has conducted art workshops in collaboration with various sectors of the local community.

She is also the founding director of not-for-profit organisation, Community Cultural Development (Singapore).



Justin Lee | Moderator

Justin Lee is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies.

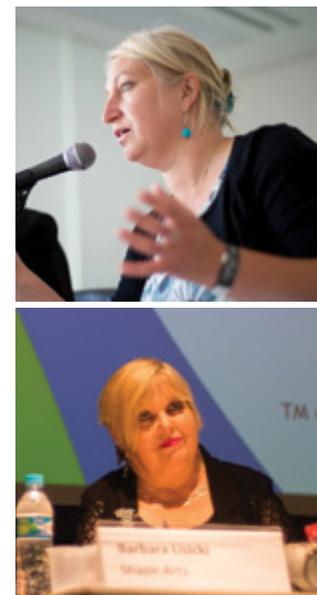
He has researched on the social inclusion of people with disabilities, proper end-of-life planning for vulnerable seniors, and the re-integration of ex-offenders. He is also Chairman of ArtsWok Collaborative, a non-profit organisation that harnesses the power of the arts to create dialogue, invite social participation and build bridges across difference.



Jane Goh | Moderator

Jane Goh is a mental health practitioner and clinician trained in the field of Art Therapy and Psychiatric Rehabilitation. She is the Head of Creative Services at the Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) where she founded the Creative Hub@Goodman Arts Centre and Creative Mindset@Jurong that uses the arts in prevention and wellness programmes.

Jane's passion is in creating awareness towards mental health and reducing stigma towards person suffering from mental illness.



Shape Arts | Accessibility Trainers

Zoe Partington (top) and Barbara Lisicki (bottom) are accessibility trainers from Shape Arts. They are a disability-led arts organisation, with a 37-year history in the UK.

It is founded on the principle that all disabled people should have the opportunity to participate fully in arts and culture and envisions an inspiring and inclusive arts sector that is accessible to all.

Shape Arts achieves this by developing opportunities for disabled artists at all stages of their career, training cultural institutions to be more open to disabled people, and running participatory arts and development programmes.

Alecia Neo | Panel Speaker



Alecia Neo has initiated a series of projects titled Unseen in Taipei, Singapore and Malaysia which explore art and disability as a paradigm shift. Singapore International Foundation also supported Unseen: Shift LAB KL (above), where she collaborated with artists Christopher Ling and Ng Chor Guan, to run a series of workshops in sound, performance, movement, narratives, and photography with Dialogue In the Dark, Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, December 2015.

Alecia Neo co-founded Brack, which is a platform for socially engaged artists and their work that gathers projects, people, and ideas that feed a progressive philosophy of life.

A large part of Alecia's artistic practice is about exploring the relationship between people, their contexts and their living spaces; reflecting on how our identities are shaped by our social and physical environments. Working primarily with photography, video, installation, relational and experiential processes, she produces projects involving a variety of individuals, overlooked communities and their spaces. Her art works have been exhibited in various international festivals and galleries such as Singapore Art Museum (Singapore) and Cittadellarte (Italy). She has also received commissions by local institutions and festivals. Alecia was also the recipient of the Young Artist Award in 2016.



"I am most interested in understanding how an artist can potentially contribute in generating shifts or transformation in society through negotiating difference."

Alecia Neo,

The Straits Times, 4 October 2016

Take Action!

Join a workshop by Alecia:

www.alecia-neo.squarespace.com/classes

Visit the artist's website:

www.alecia-neo.squarespace.com

Jean Loo | Panel Speaker



The pilot class of Superhero Me was conducted in 2014 and featured the experiences of a group of children-at-risk in Lengkok Bahru as they discover their inner strengths and 'superhero powers'. Photo of student Maryangelly (above), six years old, who envisions herself as superhero, The Lady Rain.

Jean Loo is a content creator keen on collaborating with organisations that share ideals as advocates for a social cause, and in working directly with participants through her art. As lead facilitator, Jean founded Superhero Me, a ground-up arts movement to empower kids from at-risk and special-needs communities. Some of her notable works also include *And so They Say* (2015), a short film series celebrating the wisdom of seniors, *First Homes* (2014), a digital collection of stories on Singaporeans' first homes, and her collaborations with Silver Arts Festival 2013 and 2015. Jean has also been a NOISE mentor since 2013.

She is also director of Logue, a content creation studio that builds social dialogue through community art, documentary film and photography.



"We want children to believe in the potential of their imagination. You don't have to fit into a stereotype. It is possible to be whoever you want to be and work towards it."

Jean Loo,

in interview with Our Better World

Take Action!

Download the SUPERHERO ME tool kit here:

www.superherome.sg/2014/

Learn about the SUPERHERO ME story on 'Our Better World':

www.ourbetterworld.org/story/awesome-superheroes-give-you-power

Michael Cheng | Panel Speaker



Michael Cheng (far right) in a Tapestry Playback Theatre performance titled "Clocks and Cockroaches" (May 2016) that engages communities, by spontaneously enacting on stage, moments and stories shared by the audience.

Michael Cheng is the Artistic Director of Tapestry Playback Theatre in Singapore, which uses playback theatre as a transformational tool in community, to empower, create social change and for personal development. He has worked across a wide spectrum of vulnerable communities, including young children, people with special needs, people with HIV. Michael has also worked as an artist-educator at Grace Orchard School, under the NAC Artist-SPED School Partnership Scheme, where he used drama to build social skills in students, designed curriculum, and trained teachers to use drama in the classroom.

He has also collaborated with students from Metta School, Rainbow Centre and AWWA School.



"Playback is a tool to bring issues out into the open, as a coping mechanism, or to build a community."

Michael Cheng,
in interview with The A List Magazine,
Singapore, 9 May 2016

Take Action!

Join a Playback Theatre Event:

www.facebook.com/TapestryPlaybackTheatre/events

Learn about Playback Theatre in The A List Magazine:

www.a-list.sg/profile-tapestry-playback-theatre

Quek Ling Kiong | Panel Speaker



Quek Ling Kiong (far right) conducting The Purple Symphony Inaugural Concert on 17 July 2016.
Photo: Singapore Chinese Orchestra

Quek Ling Kiong is the Resident Conductor of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra and Music Director of the Singapore Youth Chinese Orchestra. As a believer in the power of music for communities, Ling Kiong has initiated music programmes for special needs children, youths and senior citizens.

He is currently an adjunct teacher at the Singapore School of the Arts and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, and the Artistic Director of The Purple Symphony Orchestra, Singapore's first inclusive orchestra.



"We want to include people with special needs and showcase their musical talents through The Purple Symphony. By coming together to make music as one, we learn how to share and care for others, and that different people have different needs."

Quek Ling Kiong,

Source: GIC Press Release on launch of
The Purple Symphony: Training Award
Programme (2016)

Take Action!

Join The Purple Symphony:

[www.cdc.org.sg/
CentralSingaporeProgrammes/
Special_Needs/The_Purple_Symphony](http://www.cdc.org.sg/CentralSingaporeProgrammes/Special_Needs/The_Purple_Symphony)

Get updates on The Purple Symphony:

www.facebook.com/thepurplesymphony



Twardzik Ching Chor Leng's artwork entitled Voyage, at the National Gallery's Keppel Centre for Art Education – Art Corridor. The work allows viewers to take on the role of the artist as they arrange and rearrange, transforming the formal qualities in the artwork each time an object is moved.

Photo: National Gallery Singapore

Twardzik Ching Chor Leng is an artist-educator, currently lecturing at the Visual and Performing Arts department at the National Institute of Education, Singapore. As an artist, Twardzik Ching's works involve viewers in unique interaction, underscoring the theory that art can exist anywhere.

She investigates the dynamics of art and public space, and these artworks become on-site studies of social behaviour and of possibilities for positive interactions among community members. Twardzik-Ching was the recipient of the President's Young Talent Award in 2009.



“Instead of focusing on our disabilities, the key is to keep an open mind as to what art is and what diverse abilities we all have as individuals to experience art in different ways.”

Twardzik Ching Chor Leng,
in interview with the co-organisers

Take Action!

Visit the artist's work at National Gallery Singapore:
www.nationalgallery.sg/learn/keppel-centre-for-art-education/art-corridor

Visit the artist's website:
www.twardzikching.com



VSA Speech and Drama classes 2016. Photo: Very Special Arts Singapore

Very Special Arts Singapore Ltd (VSA) is a registered charity organisation, with Institution of Public Character (IPC) status, dedicated in empowering and providing persons with disabilities the opportunities to access arts for rehabilitation, education, social integration and possibility of livelihood. VSA offers access for persons with disabilities in Singapore, regardless of disability, and in all forms of arts namely visual, performing and literary arts. VSA runs art classes, holiday programmes, workshops at their venues as well as external venues which caters to persons with disabilities. To support and showcase disabled artists with talents and for their livelihood, events, competitions and art exhibitions are held annually.

VSA was represented by Ranae Lee-Nasir, arts educator, Very Special Arts at the Arts & Disability Forum 2016.



“Art touches individuals in many ways, beyond imagination. It develops confidence, determination and wholesomeness in individuals. Art interaction blurs differences and pulls communities together.”

Ranae Lee-Nasir,
in interview with the co-organisers

Take Action!

Volunteer with Very Special Arts Singapore:
www.vsa.org.sg

Organisers & Supporter

Organisers:



National Arts Council

The National Arts Council champions the arts in Singapore. By nurturing creative excellence and supporting broad audience engagement, we want to develop a distinctive global city for the arts. With a nod to tradition and an eye to the future, we cultivate accomplished artists and vibrant companies. Our support for the arts is comprehensive—from grants and partnerships to industry facilitation and arts housing. The Council welcomes greater private and corporate giving to and through the arts so that together we can make the arts an integral part of everyone's lives.

www.nac.gov.sg



British Council Singapore

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries. Using the UK's cultural resources we make a positive contribution to the countries we work with—changing lives by creating opportunities, building connections and engendering trust. Inclusion, diversity and equality are at the core of the British Council's cultural relations aims and part of building trust, respect and understanding between the UK and Singapore.

We work with over 100 countries across the world in the fields of arts and culture, English language, education and civil society. Each year we reach over 20 million people face-to-face and more than 500 million people online, via broadcasts and publications.

Founded in 1934, we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. The majority of our income is raised delivering a range of projects and contracts in English teaching and examinations, education and development contracts and from partnerships with public and private organisations. Eighteen per cent of our funding is received from the UK government.

www.britishcouncil.sg



Singapore International Foundation

The Singapore International Foundation makes friends for a better world. We build enduring relationships between Singaporeans and world communities, and harness these friendships to enrich lives and effect positive change. Our work is anchored in the belief that cross-cultural interactions provide insights that strengthen understanding. These exchanges inspire action and enable collaborations for good. Our programmes bring people together to share ideas, skills and experiences in areas such as healthcare, education, the environment, arts and culture, as well as livelihood and business. We do this because we believe we all can, and should, do our part to build a better world, one we envision as peaceful, inclusive and offering opportunities for all.

www.sif.org.sg

Supporter:



National Gallery Singapore

National Gallery Singapore is a visual arts institution which oversees the largest public collection of modern art in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Situated in the heart of the Civic District, the Gallery is housed in two national monuments—City Hall and former Supreme Court—that have been beautifully restored and transformed into this exciting venue.

Reflecting Singapore's unique heritage and geographical location, the Gallery features Singapore and Southeast Asian art from Singapore's National Collection in its long-term and special exhibitions. The Gallery also works with international museums to jointly present Southeast Asian art in the global context, positioning Singapore as a regional and international hub for the visual arts.

www.nationalgallery.sg

All photos are courtesy of the organisers of the Arts & Disability Forum 2016 unless otherwise stated.

In accompaniment to the Arts & Disability Forum 2016
29 to 31 March 2016
National Gallery Singapore

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You can contact us at: nac_feedback@nac.gov.sg, contact@britishcouncil.org.sg, artsforgood@sif.org.sg

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