



Access Captions

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Bernadette McGoldrick

Stenocaptioner, RPR, CRC

0405 350 799

bernadette@accesscaptions.com.au

accesscaptions.com.au

Live Transcript

Essential Media

The Disability Dialogue

Art as resistance: Creativity and disabled storytelling

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LAURA PETTENUZZO: Hi, everyone. We're just waiting a few seconds for everyone to come in from the waiting room, and then we're gonna get started. So, hello! My name is Laura Pettenuzzo and I am delighted to be one of the hosts for today's Open Dialogue about Art as resistance: Creativity and disabled storytelling. Welcome to all of you and thank you so much for being with us.

I would like to begin this event by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we gather today. So, I am joining from the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. I'd like to pay my respects to their Elders past and present, and to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who might be in the meeting today, or who might be watching the recording. Sovereignty has never been ceded and a national treaty has not been signed. This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

If you feel comfortable, you can share the lands that you're joining from today in the chat, but there's absolutely no pressure to do that. And before I go on, I guess I'd just like to tell you a little bit about me and who I am, and why I am here hosting this Open Dialogue today. So, I am a writer, an editor and critic based on Wurundjeri Country in Naarm, in Melbourne. My pronouns are she and her.

I write about disability pride and mental health, and the power of self-acceptance. My work has been published in lots of different places, including the ABC and Griffith Review and The Age, and I'm also a co-editor and a contributor of a book called Crip Stories, and that is a collection of writing by over 30 disabled writers, which is very exciting. And just for a visual description of me, in case anyone is wondering what I look like, I am an Italian woman in my early 30s, I am wearing glasses and watermelon earrings. He's currently not in my lap right now, but I do have a black and white cat, and he might come and join us for a little bit in the event today because he likes to walk all over my laptop and sit in my lap. So, if you do see him, his name is Giles and he's a very friendly boy. And you might also see me doing Auslan signs, such as "applause" - waving the hands above my head. "Yes" - knocking my fist. And "thank you" - moving my hand away from my chin.

And just in case you were wondering, we do these visual descriptions, like what I just did, and they are to make sure, or to help people who are blind, or people who might have low vision, to help them know who is speaking and what they look like. These visual descriptions are part of how we try to make our meetings as inclusive and as accessible as we can for anyone and everyone who wants to attend.

And also on accessibility, today's event has live captioning and there's also Auslan interpreters available. Please feel free to turn on the multi-pin, which will make sure that you can always see the Auslan interpreter, even when we might be sharing the screen, which we will be doing a little bit during the event today.

And just in case you don't know much about The Disability Dialogue, The Disability

Dialogue is a project by disabled people, for disabled people. It's run between a couple of different organisations: Disability Advocacy Network Australia, or DANA, Inclusion Australia, Alliance20, and the Melbourne Disability Institute. So, The Disability Dialogue is funded by an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant - we also call that ILC - and we just want to thank the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing for making this event possible through that funding.

And like we talked about, about making today's event as accessible and inclusive as possible, one of the ways that we try to do that, and to create a safe space or a space that is as safe as we can make it for everyone, is that we don't allow AI or artificial intelligence assistants to join the event. We know that AI tools can be useful for people with disability, but we just want to protect everyone's privacy as much as we can in this space. We are going to have a transcript that you'll be able to read on our website shortly after the event is over, and we will also be sending you the transcript by email.

And today we only have 90 minutes together, so we're gonna make sure that we stick to time and make sure that we can hear from our guests, and the most important thing, I think for me, is to hear from all of you, our wonderful audience members. And just a reminder that you can have your camera on or off today - whatever works for you. There's no pressure to have the camera on. It's all about what makes you feel most comfortable.

And like I said about really wanting to hear from all of you as the audience, we'd absolutely love to know what you're thinking about the event. So, you can pop your comments or questions in the chat. And we might not have time to answer every question, but we'll do our best. You can put questions for each of our speakers, and we're gonna have time to answer those questions at different points throughout the event. And if today's event brings up any difficult feelings for you and you'd like some support, you can visit The Disability Dialogue website and you'll find some resources and places you can go to for support, and we will have that link in the chat for you.

And you've heard a lot from me, so now I'm going to hand over to my wonderful co-host, G Treloar.

G TRELOAR: Amazing. Thank you so much, Laura. So, like Laura said, my name is G. I use any/all pronouns and I'm joining today from Kaurana Country. I'm currently wearing a cream sweater and headphones with a microphone attached. And you also might see one of my three cats appear in the background at some point.

Yep, so my experience with this is I do stage management for live production and technical theatre, and just kind of backstage roles. I guess we'll just get started into it. So, disabled people have always used art to tell our stories, express who we are, and connect with each other. We can use art for activism and to speak up about our rights. Before this

event, we asked you guys a survey, with everyone who registered, to ask what your thoughts are on disability art. We're going to share some of those things that you told us now on the screen.

So, the first thing that we asked was, "How does getting involved in art make you feel?" We had some really great responses come through. A couple of those were, "Happy!! It is a fabulous way to quieten down my brain and process thoughts and emotions in a healthy way." Another person said, "I feel happy and relaxed when I do any form of art, because I am able to express my emotions through art."

LAURA PETTENUZZO: I super-duper love that. As an artist and a writer myself, yeah, I feel really happy when I get to write and when I get to be creative. So, yeah, these answers really resonate with me, and super-duper love them! We also asked you, "What do you think stops people from being included in making art?" And in answer to that question, we had 33% of people saying that art groups are not accessible. Yeah, very true, unfortunately. And 66.7% of people said that it costs too much money. And it's super interesting because this question was a multiple-choice question, but people only chose one of those two options. So, sounds like those two barriers are, like, you know, some of the biggest barriers. And I know in my experience, particularly the first one about a lack of accessibility, can be a really big one.

And some people told us more about their responses. So, one person said, "I think many people with disabilities are very talented and creative, but they are not given the opportunity to participate in art activities due to inaccessibility. For instance, I know some blind friends who wanted to join in theatre or drama clubs, but the organisers didn't accommodate them because they said they didn't know how to interact with blind participants." Eugh, that's gross.

G TRELOAR: So, the next question we asked was, "Why do you think it is important for people with disability to get involved in art?" One person said, "Art is such a great tool for expression, self-regulation, and representation." Someone else said, "Hidden talent - within for some people, great way to express their views of the world." And finally, someone said, "I think it is important for people with disabilities to be involved in art because it can be a great way to express their emotions, creativity and stories. Art can also be a way to challenge ableism and introduce disability culture to the community."

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Laura speaking. I love that so much. Art really can be a great way to challenge ableism and a really important expression of disability culture. Love all of these insights. Thank you so much to everyone who took the time to share their thoughts and

complete our survey.

G TRELOAR: G speaking. We're going to meet our first guest. Dylan McBurney is a young disabled transgender advocate and producer and stage manager who has worked across Australia and Europe. They currently work as a peer research assistant at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and is studying a Bachelor of Psychological Science at Swinburne University. Dylan also founded youth-led production company Pilot Comedy and wrote and performed a solo show about their disability at the Melbourne Fringe Festival. Thank you so much, Dylan, for being with us, and I will hand over to you to give a brief visual description.

DYLAN MCBURNEY: Dylan speaking. Hello, yes, my name is Dylan. Visual description of me: I am a young adult, I am white, masculine-presenting. I have short, very unkempt hair and a beard, and I'm wearing a very frilly white shirt and a dangly earring.

G TRELOAR: Amazing. Thank you so much, Dylan. I guess we'll get started with our first question, which is, "How would you describe yourself as an artist?"

DYLAN MCBURNEY: Dylan speaking. Yeah, when I was preparing for this event, I kind of accidentally didn't answer this question, and I think that kind of actually says something about who I am as an artist. For me, art is so much about the impact that it can have on other people. I want other people to be able to tell their stories and I want to support people to create the best version of whatever art they want to create, which is a big part of being a producer, a big part of being a stage manager. And there were three people in my stage management class in Adelaide, one of which was G, so it's nice to both be back, and I actually think that so many stage managers are disabled, and I think it's because we grow up having to care for the people around us and having to be really detail-oriented and thorough in our work, be very considerate of things like safety. So, I think it's not a coincidence, but, yeah.

G TRELOAR: Yeah, thank you so much, Dylan. Yeah, always good to have a bit of a reunion here, isn't it? So, next question is, you have been involved with putting together a program called Pilot at Melbourne Comedy Festival. Could you tell us a bit more about that?

DYLAN MCBURNEY: I will wait for the Auslan interpreter to be spotlighted. Amazing. So, and I will try not to speak too quickly because I get very excited about this, but Pilot is a

program that I run at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival. I came up with the idea when I was working on a comedy show with a couple of friends of mine. It was a double bill. They were both doing half an hour each, and it occurred to me that there are so many things that you need to be able to put on a show like that. You need potentially a friend to do the show with, you need connections with a venue to perform your show, you need a support network of friends and family to come and see the show and buy tickets, and you also need the kind of support and creative development to write, you know, half an hour or an hour of material.

So, me and the comedian in that show, we started Pilot, and we basically wanted to create a stepping stone for young people between, you know, going to open mics, doing 5-minute or 10-minute sets, and producing and performing their own solo show, which is really where, in the kind of festival circuit, where you go as an artist.

So, that stepping stone means that young people get to perform half an hour of comedy, and in the five months leading up to the festival, we provide full creative support. We provide kind of a group of peers that all support each other to write these stories. And, hopefully, a package of all the other things they might need for their career - so, this includes photography and videography, mentorship with professional comedians and more, more networks within the community. And myself and my co-producer Ethan also acknowledged that we have a lot of privilege in this space. We both live at home and have disposable income, and that's how we put our show on. So, it's using what we have to create more comedy from people who don't have what you need to do that, because we can't write comedy fast enough to put on all the comedy we want. We love it. So, since we came up with that idea, I cooked it up, we've produced 17 solo shows from young people across many states in Australia. So, it's for 16- to 25-year-olds. It's completely free to be a part. You don't take on any financial risk, which is another huge barrier. And I will mention it a bit more at the end, but applications are open now... (LAUGHS) But that is what Pilot is!

G TRELOAR: Thank you. Honestly, that is such an incredible thing. As someone who has been that friend helping their friends try to put on shows, and it is such a barrier, and something like this is just not something we've really seen before. So, absolutely incredible to see. Next question is, why do you think it's important for audiences to be going to see comedy shows that star people with disability? What impact do you think it has on them?

DYLAN MCBURNEY: So, art is so important because it gives you a window into someone's lived experience, and I think you don't get that same kind of insight from a fact sheet or from a website, you know? It's in the specificity of someone's experience that you understand the broader impact and experience of that disability or their other kind of lived experiences. I

also think something I love about disability and comedy is that it really thrives on innovation, on surprise, and I think because disabled people have been excluded from comedy, it means when the opportunities are there, that it's something that audiences haven't seen. It's, kind of, bringing something new to the comedy scene, to the performance scene, and I think that that is so incredibly valuable and has so much potential, and why I love to work with people who don't see themselves on the stage. Because so many times I'm just like, "That's brilliant! No-one in that audience is going to have thought of this, and for that reason it's gonna kill, it's gonna be so funny." I guess "kill" in the comedy world means you've done a good job! (LAUGHS) So, yeah.

G TRELOAR: I absolutely could not agree more with that. Yeah, kind of like we said before, it's just such a thing that has been missing, and so great to see that there are more shows like this coming out and happening. So, what do you see are some of the main challenges for people with disability getting into performing and/or doing comedy shows?

DYLAN MCBURNEY: I'm gonna talk about something, 'cause I know we've had those great insights from what the broader community thinks about, "What are those barriers to access? It" I think there's something that was so vital that was missing from that, and that is that there's only room for creativity and for art once your basic needs have been met. You know, you look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, for example - this is the psychology student in me coming out - where you have to have food, water and shelter. You have to have a support network, a social network, and before you have all those things, I'm sure that many of us know what it's like to get home after a day of work exhausted, and you wish you could go and write or paint, but all you can do is... Well, for me, it's sitting and watching YouTube! Just so tired.

And I think that, for disabled people, I am someone who's not on the NDIS, and for me, I have my work and my study, and then I have the full-time job of managing my chronic illness. And so there's so little room for creativity in there, and, you know, there is one way around that, which is to make art and make theatre your work, but theatre, live performance, is so incredibly inaccessible to people with disability, and why I am now at uni, looking to pursue something a bit more at my desk, 9:00 to 5:00. But I think, until we can be provided the basic needs that we need, and our human rights, every single disabled person, across diagnosis and across experience, we won't have that equity in the arts space.

G TRELOAR: Yeah, thank you so much for sharing those insights. And you've already spoken on this next question a little bit, but why is art, through comedy and performances, so important to you and for the community?

DYLAN MCBURNEY: Yes, so I think that disabled art is beautiful because it can be so beneficial to an audience, but it's so transformative and important to disabled people themselves. And I think a big reason about that is that we don't get to tell our own stories. We get that privilege taken away from us by, you know, media conglomerates, by clinicians and medical providers. Historically, that is what the conversation around disability has been. And so writing theatre and comedy is a way of bringing that control back.

I have endometriosis, and, you know, I joke in my show that endometriosis has really bad PR, public relations, because it's quite under-understood, it's quite unknown. And if you can remember, one of the major appearances of endometriosis in the media recently was Marty Sheargold saying, oh, he doesn't think it exists. And that was a joke, but that's the only joke that people heard about endometriosis. They didn't get to hear about it from the people that do have the condition. And I think that disabled people getting to take their own stories back is incredibly empowering and is what we need to shift the public, kind of, view on disability as a community and as an experience.

G TRELOAR: Thank you. G speaking. Can you tell us about your upcoming show, Flickr?

DYLAN MCBURNEY: Yes. So, I have one... I've tried to swear off of theatre for a bit and focus on my health, but I do have a play coming up in the Melbourne Fringe. This play is called Flickr. I went over and worked the Edinburgh Fringe - very inaccessible, wouldn't recommend - and there was a beautiful play in my venue called Flickr. It was about a young woman's experience with OCD and how she couldn't identify which of her thoughts were intrusive and which weren't, particularly in regard to her queer identity. So, it was this beautiful exploration of an intersection that you really don't hear a lot from. And part of, kind of, getting a positive experience out of my travels, I wanted to take that show and put it on in Melbourne. And so last year, I did a reading at the Malthouse - a reading is when people sit behind a table and read out the lines, so you get an idea of what the play is but you don't have to rehearse and remember all the lines. And part of this project is that everyone that's going to be a part of our team will have OCD, will have lived experience of OCD.

And the important thing about this show, for me, is looking at art as a transformative process for creatives, for the people working on the show. I want people to come and see this show and understand OCD more. It was written in consultation with OCD UK, an organisation over in the UK. But when I staged our reading and we spent two days in my apartment learning the show and speaking about it, and then we had a night at the Malthouse Theatre, and even just that, and having that room of creatives with OCD had this really profound effect on people's acceptance of themselves, their acceptance of their OCD

as part of them, and being able to share that experience with young people around them was really meaningful.

And that... I don't have OCD myself, so I can't really speak to how meaningful that was for me, but like I said, art is so powerful because it can create those spaces where people feel understood. And, you know, as an artist and as a producer, I want to create those spaces, and so being able to create that is incredibly meaningful to me as a disabled person. And, similarly, we had a comment from someone in the audience that said, "Just to sit in the room and laugh about OCD, we're not laughing at OCD, like a lot of portrayals are, we are just in a room, experiencing it together, feeling seen, and that was, like, a once-in-a-lifetime, or first-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

And so for those of you who are in Melbourne and in Victoria, that's another thing that we will be recruiting for really soon - the Pilot Comedy website has our, kind of, information, and our socials. But, yeah, really, really prioritising bringing that lived experience into the space. Because there are so many disabled young people out in the world, holed up in their rooms, doing amazing things and creating amazing art, and Pilot Comedy - my company - kind of exists to bring those isolated young people together.

G TRELOAR: Yeah, as someone with OCD, I think I might need to fly over to Melbourne to come see that, 'cause it sounds absolutely incredible.

DYLAN MCBURNEY: Well, I can't pay for your flights but I'll get you a ticket! (LAUGHS)

G TRELOAR: Love it. Thank you. So, my last question for you, then, is how can people get involved?

DYLAN MCBURNEY: So, Pilot Comedy is the name of my company. We have a website, that I've put together with my limited website skills. And that has the application for our comedy program, Pilot. That is open to 16- to 25-year-olds across Australia, and we provide flights and accommodation, so it really is free to participate in. And if you follow us on socials, Instagram is mostly where we most, @pilotcomedy, and that's where you'll get the most frequent updates, and that's where we will be sharing Melbourne Fringe applications for Flickr.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Thank you so much for that wonderful conversation. I feel like I wanted to just, like, fill my journal with, like, so many things that you were saying. I'm gonna just be, like, basking in the joy of hearing about, you know, what art can be and how we can... You know, you've given us an example, Dylan, of how we can transform a particular

art form to make it more accessible and inclusive, and that just fills me with so much hope. Thank you to both you and G for an excellent conversation, and I'm sure the audience has enjoyed it as much as I did.

We also have some questions from the audience coming through in the chat, but before we go to those, I just want to do a quick shout-out to the Minda watch party. So, Minda, thank you so much, everyone there attending your watch party. We know that you host those watch parties every month and it is very cool to see you here and have your support. Love it.

So, the first question that we have in the chat is, "What advice would you give to someone with disability wanting to get into the arts for the first time?"

DYLAN MCBURNEY: That's a great question. It's something that I love about comedy, and I guess comedy covers a huge range of things. It's basically if you're on stage performing for an hour, you could call it something in the realm of comedy. But something really beautiful about it and something that I did when I was developing my solo show is that you can create whatever you want, you can make it accessible - there's no kind of limitations to what your show can be. And innovation is what makes it really exciting. So, for my show, I had a list of all of the things I talk about in the show up on the back wall, and if my brain fog got in the way, I would look back and do it. And I framed that as a set piece. It was like my to-do list and I was talking about disability and burnout. So, you know, that was an accessibility tool for me, but it was also part of the narrative of the show. Similarly, I sat on the floor for quite a bit of my show, you know, where physically making the show - making the show physically accessible was... I mean, I am in creative control of my work and so I can do what I like, and I think that is what's really powerful about writing your own shows, is that you have creative control. And not only is, like, creating accessible work better for you, but it's better for the community, it makes more interesting work, and that's really exciting.

G TRELOAR: Thank you so much for sharing that. We've had someone else in the comments ask, "I'm curious about opportunities, if any, for those 25-plus with Pilot?"

DYLAN MCBURNEY: This is a great question, and a conversation that we had at Children and Young People with Disability Australia, where I met Laura and where I worked with G as well, disability can come to people in different parts of their life. And when we talk about making opportunities for young people with disability, you know, someone might be newly diagnosed and looking for that community with other newly diagnosed people, and why, and where do we draw the line with youth programs? The reason that Pilot is up to 25 years' old is because some of the more unique barriers to young people - such as studying and not

having, like, disposable income, not having as much career experience - those can be things that anyone, at any age, experiences, but a big part of Pilot was we want to create a space that doesn't feel like teacher and student, we want to create a peer-led space where people do feel like they can create whatever they want to create.

And I guess I'm 23 now, I'm about to turn 24, and I'm gonna basically kick myself out of my own program soon and upskill other young people to run it! So, sadly, there aren't any opportunities for people over 25. But I... I imagine in the future, I'm hoping to do so much more, and it's so tough to find opportunities, but I hope that, in the near future, there are so many more opportunities for disabled people of all ages to be a part of the comedy scene and the theatre scene.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: As someone who is over the ripe old age of 30, totally relate to, I guess, that idea of almost crip time. You know, the way that time and milestones are different for those of us who are disabled. And, yeah, really appreciate you unpacking that there, Dylan. And the next question that we have is from Megan, and Megan wants to know, "What is your favourite joke about endometriosis?" Because endometriosis runs in Megan's family.

DYLAN MCBURNEY: I feel like I don't have, like, set-up punchline jokes about endometriosis, but I do talk about, in my show, how when I go...when I went to the Women's Hospital to get an ultrasound when I was in the process of being diagnosed, I was a bit scared, but it actually was fine because they were just really excited to see a guy there. I feel like what probably happened is they'd gotten the inclusivity training and they were finally able to implement it, and it was like I was the special little guy, and they were like, "There's some diversity in today!" (LAUGHS) So, I thought that was quite a funny experience. Yeah.

G TRELOAR: Yeah, thank you so much again, Dylan. And to everyone in the audience, if we didn't get to one of your questions, do not worry, because we will go over some questions later on in the session as well.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Thank you so much for that, Dylan, and thank you, G. I found that story that you just told, Dylan, very funny. I had a little chuckle. And now it's time for me to introduce our next guest, Deb! So, Deb is an artist.

DEB: Hi! A big hi to everyone!

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Thanks, Deb! Hi! We're so excited to have you here.

DEB: I'm so excited to be here.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Yay! I'm gonna tell everyone a bit about you and then we're gonna have a bit of a chat. So, Deb is an artist. Her journey with art started in a small Queensland art co-op, and it's grown into a lifelong passion. Living with disability has made Deb a more determined and resilient artist. Deb loves using her artwork to communicate with others and inspire them to find their own meaning in what she creates. Deb finds inspiration for her artwork from her entire family - I love that. So, Deb, the first question that I wanted to ask you is, when did you start doing art?

DEB: In 1998.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Wow! That's a long time ago. That is very cool.

DEB: And I've learnt so much since.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Amazing!

DEB: Yeah.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: And I also wanted to... During the many years that you have been doing art, you've made so many different art pieces, which I think are very awesome. And so we're going to show some of your art on the screen so that people can see it. I am going to describe the images that we have on the screen. And then maybe once I do that, can you tell us a little bit about each painting and what they're all of?

So, the first piece - sorry, Deb - the first piece is a painting of lots of different colours. It's got blue, yellow, pink and green. The colours are layered on top of each other, and the paint is thickly applied so you can kind of see it, like, coming off the canvas almost. Each colour blends brightly into the other colours. So, Deb, what's this painting of, and about, for you?

DEB: It represents my mum.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: It represents your mum?

DEB: And they're all flowers.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Beautiful! Thank you so much, Deb. I love that. Is there anything else you want to tell us about this painting, or we'll move on to the next one?

DEB: No.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: OK. So, we'll move on to the second painting now. So, the second piece has - like, it's mostly bright blue with, like, little bits of flecks of white in the blue. The left and right edges of the canvas and the painting are decorated with paint of different colours. And so this kind of gives the impression, or it made me think of a body of water with, like, leaves around the edges. So, Deb, can you tell us a bit about this one?

DEB: This is the...

LAURA PETTENUZZO: What was that, sorry?

DEB: It's called The Sea.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Oh, The Sea. Beautiful! I love that. The Sea is excellent, and you have depicted it beautifully here. So, we might move on to the next piece now. So, this third piece on screen is a white canvas and then it's got stripes of paint that look like they have been applied with a paint roller, and so some of the stripes are, I guess, like, thicker than the others, so the paint comes across clearer. Whereas some of the stripes are thinner and there's, like, different-coloured stripes. So, like, there are some red stripes, some black stripes, some yellow stripes, and some green ones. Deb, could you tell us a bit more about this one?

DEB: Broken glass.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Broken glass? Oh. Love it. I see. 'Cause, like, the stripes are kind of, like, yeah, like, they give the idea of bits of glass. I love that.

DEB: Yep.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: We might move on to the next one now. Amazing. So, this piece that we've got up on screen now, that one is a dark pink cube, and you can kind of see the, like, most sides of the cube. And then the background is light green paint. So, Deb, can you

tell us a little bit about this one?

DEB: It's called The Cube.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: The Cube? Amazing.

DEB: Cubism.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Oh, you did cubism! I love that. And we've got another piece of artwork to show. Yep, here it is. So, this piece of artwork is, like, mostly dark-coloured paints and they're kind of, like, dripping down the canvas. So, there are some white and some blue. It kind of looks like paint has been applied and then dripped in, like, really artistic ways, and then on top of the drips going downwards we've got some horizontal lines through the painting and the canvas. What can you tell us about this one, Deb?

DEB: It's a river.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: It's a river? Oh. Beautiful. I love that. And so you have just showed us here, and what we've showed on screen, is lots of different ways to paint, and lots of different things that you can paint. You know, the river, the sea, the one that you talked about representing your mum, which is so beautiful. And then in this one here, this next piece of art that we're showing, we've got the bottom half, which is painted white, and then the top half, we've got kind of like a blue background, and then some green and then we've got splodges of red in the green, which is kind of, like, gives a really bright idea and a really bright sense of something that we're looking at. So, Deb, what does this one mean or represent?

DEB: Waterfall.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Waterfall? Beautiful. So, we've got the white foam of the waterfall at the bottom of the page. Love that. Amazing.

DEB: Yeah.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: And there has been so much love in the chat for your art, Deb. I just want to make sure that you know that so many of the guests at our event today have been talking about how much they love your artwork, and I just want to say I am one of those

people.

DEB: Thank you.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: And I also really love your artwork, so great to see that appreciation for Deb in the chat. Thank you, everyone.

DEB: Can I just say something?

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Yeah, please.

DEB: Art is like the world. Art revolves every single day. Art is part of the world. It is. And what happens, every five seconds, people are doing new art. What's happening is that world of art is snap, crackling and popping. And then it explodes, and it's exploding every day around the world. And it's very important 'cause it's part of our culture, part of our understanding, and it's part of...part of life. People, you know, people are doing art nearly every day, and I think that's a beautiful thing. And it shouldn't be wasted. And people should not say that you can't do art, because you can. There's no such word in my vocabulary as "can't". And that is the most important thing to learn. We have schoolchildren come up to where I work that were disabled, and they just sat down, got a piece of paper, and started drawing. And they were amazing, very amazing.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: I love that so much. There are so many things that I really hope resonated with the audience and that the audience can kind of take away from what you just said.

DEB: I can't even see them! (LAUGHS)

LAURA PETTENUZZO: That's OK. They're all commenting in the chat, which is brilliant. And I really love that idea that art is part of life and part of culture and part of the world.

DEB: No-one should take that away from you.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Absolutely.

DEB: No-one.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Definitely not. And I guess I also would want to know, Deb, when you make art, where do you get your inspiration from?

DEB: How can I explain this? Which I hope people don't think it's weird. I look at things and they look back at me, and they speak to me through my heart and my soul and my head. And I just do what I have to do to produce that painting and make it look really good. Because when you're an artist, you have to make sure that you've done it the right way and that people will come in, love it, and buy it, and put it anywhere. Yeah. Yeah.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Absolutely. That is a very powerful reflection on inspiration and on the way that we can think about our art, and the power of our art. And you've already touched upon this beautifully when you were talking about how art is really important. I guess I just wanted to ask you to tell us a little bit more - could you tell us why do you think it's important for people with disability to make art?

DEB: So they can show the world who they are. And they can show the world that they can stand up for themselves and do this art without anyone saying, "Oh, that's awful. You can't do art. You're a nobody," you know? So, that, to me, is important. I want to let everyone know that it takes a lot of guts, a lot of time, a lot of effort to get that art done. Because sometimes it can take up to one week... No, a day, a week, a month, maybe even a whole year. But the thing is, that doesn't matter. What matters is that people love it and people will buy it. I have been to - what do they call those places where they have art?

JODI: Art galleries.

DEB: Art galleries all over the world and they are beautiful. I have seen some fantastic art in my life, hundreds and hundreds of years' old. Things like, well, the era of art that we're in now, people are making beautiful designs. It's not just doing acrylics, it's not just doing paper and all that sort of stuff, it's the image, the image that you put on that canvas. And it also has to do with how much things cost. It does. 'Cause it takes... Every time I go and buy a canvas, they usually start from \$20 upwards, but I buy the best 'cause I can use the best.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Laura speaking. I did not know that. Yeah, I don't use canvases, so I feel like I'm learning a lot, and I'm sure our audience is learning a lot too. And especially I love that you talked about how people with disability can show the world who they are through their art.

DEB: Yeah.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: That is so beautiful.

DEB: Yep.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: I love it. And I know that, like, everyone in the audience has talked about - or many people in the audience have talked about - how much they love your art. So, I wanted to ask where can people find your art, like, if they want to buy it or if they want to...?

DEB: If they come to Australia, they come to the Sunshine Coast, they can find me, and a whole lot of other artists, I'm the residential artist at Image Flat Road in Nambour, and we call it Spiral. And I go there two days a week and we work flat out, believe you me. They can find me there. They can find me at Image Flat Road, and they can find me on Facebook.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Amazing. Thanks, Deb. And I think there will be a link to where you can find Deb on Facebook in the chat.

DEB: Yep. Yeah.

G TRELOAR: Yeah, thank you so much, Deb, for sharing that. I mean, I know I love looking at all of the art and looking at some of the comments in the chat - everyone is absolutely loving it. I really liked the piece about your mum as well, I think that was really, really beautiful, and the waterfall one too, I think the colours you used there just looks beautiful.

DEB: Yeah. I've got more paintings than that! (LAUGHS) From one end to the other!

G TRELOAR: Love it, love it. We are going to go to some questions from the audience now. So, we had Janelle ask, "We are also in Queensland, where are you situated and do you offer art activities for people with disability?"

DEB: I work at Nambour. And what people do, if they want to come and be with us, they have to come in, they have to have an interview. And within that interview with the criteria for that person to come in. So, what happens is they come in, have a look around, have a talk, and then decide whether they want to come or not. And then they come in and that's where the art life really starts at Spiral. Yeah.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Thank you, Deb. Maybe you'll have some new people joining you at Spiral after today's event. That's exciting.

DEB: Yeah.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: And we've also got a question from Rachel and Sally. So, Rachel and Sally asked, "Deb, are you an independent artist or are you a member of an art group or a company?"

DEB: I am a member of a company and I am a member of an art group. I'm the residential artist at Spiral, and we have about 30 people that do art at Spiral. I might say even more than that, but I'm not sure.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: That's really cool. I love that there are so many disabled people doing art together - that's really beautiful. Thank you so much, Deb, for that excellent conversation. The chat was, like, full of people saying that they loved what you had to say. And I loved it too, very much. We'd love it if you could stick around, and we would love to bring you back up again on screen with Dylan later, because the audience would love to ask you some more questions.

DEB: Lovely.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Amazing. For now, we're going to go to a 10-minute break. So, I would just like to invite everyone to have a stretch, you can grab a cup of tea or a coffee, or whatever it is that you might like to drink. But make sure you come back after the break because we've got some great discussions ahead. We're going to put a timer up on the screen so you know when to come back. We'll see you in 10 minutes. Thanks, everyone.

(BREAK)

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Laura speaking. I'm just gonna gently invite everyone back into the Zoom room because our 10-minute break is up. Rest and hydration are very important, so welcome back.

For the next part of today's Open Dialogue, we're gonna do something a little bit different to what we usually do in these events. So, today, G and I - your hosts - we're actually going to interview each other. So, G and I both work in the arts, so we thought it would be great, and we wanted to share some of our experiences and insights about

disability and art with each of you. And I'm particularly excited that I get to start off by interviewing G. So, the first question that I have for G is around, G, your background in stage management. So, you mentioned earlier that you've got that background, and I'm wondering if you could maybe tell us a little bit about what you've observed about accessibility or maybe inaccessibility, or a lack of accessibility, in stage management?

G TRELOAR: Yes, thank you, Laura. Look, I think we've seen some really good progress over the years regarding making theatre more accessible for performers and for audience members. Obviously, there's still a lot of work to go into that. But I do think, kind of, backstage roles and stage management have kind of fallen back in these conversations a little bit. You know, stage management can be such a physically and just mentally demanding job, and I know that I've found myself being expected to prioritise the production over my health and my own access needs. And I think... I mean, in a lot of theatre but specifically with stage management, accessibility is kind of treated as a bit of an afterthought rather than something that is built into the process from the beginning. I've always experienced a lot of expectations around working super long rehearsal hours, I'm always the first to arrive, last to leave, expected to work through my breaks. Having call times that change last-minute with no flexibility or just a structured timeline. And because I'm the stage manager, who's meant to be the glue of the project, I'm expected to just be able to do that.

And I think there's really "the show must go on" mentality in theatre and backstage crew, where you just keep pushing and pushing as long as the end product looks good. It doesn't matter what you had to do to get there, really. And there also rarely seems to be any conversations around disability backstage. So, there's also not an opportunity for people to talk about their accommodations or needs. Yeah. I also think there's kind of this really fixed idea as well of what stage management should look like and what the processes look like. I know, you know, from paperwork, communication styles, rehearsal structures, I mean, I studied it and I got taught how to do it, but from each show it pretty much looks identical and there's no real room for changing that. You know, for example, I know that I really like tables and structured tables in my documents, but that's not always accessible to people with screen readers, or people who just might take that differently. And I remember one time I did kind of try and change that a bit, and my director was kind of like, "Oh, don't do that," and I was like, "Well, why? There's no reason." Or we could have two documents. It's just, I think, a bit of a laziness sometimes for people when it comes to accessibility.

Another major barrier I've also experienced is just backstage and tech booths are so inaccessible just physically. It's always very tight squeezes backstage. The tech booth is always up, like, a massive flight of stairs. I remember when I was studying, one of my lecturers called me lazy 'cause I took the elevator up to the tech booth. And I was like, "Well,

I need... It took a little bit longer but that's what I needed to do to be able to give my all to the production." It wasn't lazy, it was me putting in effort to actually be there. But I think that kind of just, kind of, highlights this view on accessibility and laziness within disability, 'cause, yeah, what I did was not lazy whatsoever.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Absolutely. It was, like, the furthest thing from lazy. You know, it was you recognising what you needed and meeting your body's needs, and that is a thing that should be celebrated. And I, for one, am celebrating you for doing that. And I'm so sorry that that person, who had the absolute gall to call you lazy, didn't do that. And I'm really sorry that that happened. I think that reveals a lot about the layers to stage management and gives all of us a lot of reflections on areas of inaccessibility but also ways that we can make that better. So, that was absolutely excellent. Thank you.

Your bio mentions that you were part of a show called Sheltered. Can you maybe talk to us about your experience on that show as a disabled person?

G TRELOAR: Yeah. So, Sheltered is a story piece created by, and performed, by a creative who has cerebral palsy, and the show kind of takes us through her early life with disability and going through group homes. I did it at the Adelaide Fringe and it was award-winning, which is always lovely, but it's also been through Melbourne and some other places as well.

So, yeah, Sheltered was kind of the first show I got to work on that actually showed me not only just how accessible theatre really can be, but also just, like, how easy it actually is to do, and it's not some big project where we need to change everything. Like, small, little changes are everything when it comes to accessibility. And I think it just really kind of helped me break down some of the ideas around the "show must go on" mentality, and that being prepared and just being able to make adjustments and not viewing these adjustments as a burden, you can really create some incredible, engaging art with people with disability.

So, yeah, so some of the adjustments that we made on the show was on stage, we just had a chair that at all times the actor could just go sit in. It didn't matter what part of the show we were in. We also had stage directions and notes on all of the walls that you could go and read in front of the audience. She was allowed to call out for prompts if she needed. She had a script on the wall with, like, dot points on it for where she should be in the scene. And then one of my all-time favourite parts of this show, but I think in any show, is she had a disability rest break built into the show. So, what she would do is she would just say, "Disability rest break," the house lights would come up and the Jet Pretty theme song would start to play. It would just be a couple of minutes of her on stage doing whatever she needed. She might lay down on the ground for a couple of minutes, might have a walk, stand side stage, out of the lights, whatever it was. The audience would join in, stretch their legs,

get a drink, do whatever they needed. And once they were done, the show would resume and carry on.

And I just think that was such an amazing and, like, refreshing idea. It did not take away from the show whatsoever. Like, it was an award-winning show, and why wouldn't a show about disability, with people, for disability, showcase disability? And I think that's the real thing for me, in my experience working with disabled artists on stage, you kind of...I was always having to hide the steps it took to get them on stage. And so I think just being able to work on this show, where it was not even just not hidden, it was so in-your-face, "This is what we're doing." I just think that was kind of an eye-opening experience for me. Yeah, just, like, those small changes, it didn't compromise anything. And then it was also the first show that I also directly got asked what my access needs were. And at that point, I had just finished studying. It was my, I think, second show after studying, and I didn't have an answer for that, 'cause I, one, it didn't really occur to me that I could have those, but that I also should. So, yeah, getting to work on that, and then started to think about what my needs were in theatre, and it now means that, you know, I'm probably doing one show a year now, but I know that that is my - that's what I need to do. I work in pretty much all disabled queer cohorts, and I just think, you know, having that experience has really helped me kind of just shape what I need to get the most out of my art that I do.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: That makes me so happy. And I'm not gonna lie - I have more than a little bit of FOMO, or fear of missing out, about the fact that I did not get to see Sheltered, because it sounds like you are showing, and Sheltered showed, so many people, disabled people - you know, you talk about how it showed you what was possible, but I hope it also showed non-disabled audiences and theatre-makers what can be possible if we make some adjustments to crip theatre, basically. And I use the word "crip" there to reclaim that word that used to be a slur against disabled people. Thank you.

G TRELOAR: Yeah, I actually will say one of the slogans for the show was, "Disabled beggars can't be choosers," which I think was such a cool, like, yeah... The creator, Kathryn Hall, is such an amazing artist. I think she's based here in Adelaide. But, yeah, if you ever do get a chance to see one of her shows, she travels around a bit, I absolutely recommend.

Amazing. So, I will now be interviewing Laura, which I am super, super excited about. So, Laura, I'd love to ask you some questions about your experience with art and how do you use your writing as a tool for resistance against ableism?

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Yeah, thanks, G. So, writing is my main form of art. So, I write stories - so, for example, like, I write about my own experiences as a disabled person.

Sometimes, I write about ableism. Sometimes, I write about the strength that I get from the disability community. And I have used that as a tool of resistance against ableism because, by sharing my experience, I hope to show other people that they can speak up for their rights and speak up for their access needs. And I also hope that if non-disabled people read my writing, that they will learn some more about disability and maybe challenge the ableism that they experience as well, or that they think about, or that they maybe have but don't realise that they have. Because sometimes non-disabled people might not know that something that they say or think is ableist. And then I hope that they might read maybe me talking about someone who said something that was ableist and they can go, "Oh, actually, I can do that differently." I use my writing as a way to introduce people to what ableism is and what they can do to challenge it.

G TRELOAR: Thank you, Laura. Yeah, I think as someone who probably... I don't like using the term "came to terms with their disability" but kind of understood it a bit later in life, I think that is such an important thing. Not everyone knows all of the terms or what ableism is, so I think that's such an amazing thing that you're doing. I'd love to hear more from you but we actually are running a bit short on time and we do want to give the audience a bit of a chance to ask Dylan and Deb some more questions. So, now we're gonna bring Dylan and Deb back on stage for a bit of a panel discussion with some questions from the audience.

DYLAN MCBURNEY: It's also the first cat of the call! She is demanding attention. This is Honey and she has arthritis. We actually take some of the same medication, so I think that's beautiful! (LAUGHS)

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Sorry... Welcome, Honey!

G TRELOAR: I was just gonna say, I also do sometimes have to take the same medication as my cat and it's a bit of a delight, to be honest! It's just an experience. Alright. So, for our first question, we have, "As writers, what do we need to know or understand about navigating cancel culture when writing comedy that deals with the disability experience? How do we not end up being the disabled person being trolled for laughing about our reality?" Dylan.

DYLAN MCBURNEY: I love this question and generally I love difficult questions. I think that having those conversations is so important. This is what I always keep in mind when I'm writing and when I'm supporting other writers, is... So, I'm making, you know, if I'm making a joke about being transgender, I want to think about any transgender person who could be

sitting in the audience, how would this joke make them feel? Because I think that sometimes it's not an offensive joke or an offensive phrase that hurts someone. We've probably heard it before, to be honest. What's hurtful is being in a room of 60, 70 people and hearing everyone else laughing, because that reminds you that the social context is against you and not understanding your experience, and laughing at you. And so that is always what I think, "Who is the most disadvantaged person that could be sitting in my audience and could be hurt by this and be hurt by other people laughing at it?"

LAURA PETTENUZZO: I think that is a really beautiful and considered answer to what could have been a tricky question. Unsurprising, your answers are always excellent, Dylan. Love it. So, we also had a question for Deb from Kirsten. So, Deb, what is some advice you would give to other people with disability who want to try art but maybe they feel nervous or they're not sure where to start?

DEB: I would like to say, do not be afraid. Get out there and do it. I don't like that word "can't do it", because they can do it. What they've got to do is TRY to do it. And if they like it, keep going forever. I'm gonna say don't sit back because people are saying that you're a stupid idiot - don't listen. Tell me... Stand up for yourself. Show them that you've got the guts to do it. And don't ever, ever be afraid just because they say you're a stupid idiot and you can't do it. Show 'em you've got guts and determination. And make them proud. Make them proud.

G TRELOAR: Thank you so much, Deb. I think that's something I absolutely try to live by in life, and will always continue to. I think I will just have your voice in my head telling me that every time something happens. Laura, my next question is for you, considering our interview got cut short. I know you're really passionate about accessibility, so what does greater access and inclusion look like for writers and writing?

LAURA PETTENUZZO: Thanks, G. I could talk about accessibility all day but don't worry, everyone, I promise I won't! In addition to, like, sharing my stories through writing articles and memoir in... I was in a book called Crip Stories that came out recently. But another really important part of writing for me is writing plain language and Easy Read. So, a lot of books and stories are not as accessible as they could be because they're not in plain language or Easy Read. So, I write Easy Read stories because I want everyone to be able to enjoy books and stories. So, for example, I wrote an Easy Read story last year about my cat, Giles, and that won the International Easy Read Story Writing Competition, and that was very exciting for me because I got to write about my cat, and I love my cat, but also most

importantly because I got to share Easy Read with the world and help people understand that Easy Read is important as a way to help people access information and to help people enjoy stories.

And another part of accessibility and writing, for me, is about what people and organisations can do to make writing opportunities more accessible. So, many venues or events aren't as accessible as they could be, so for me, I've found that a lack of wheelchair access and a lack of COVID precautions have been tricky. So, I'd really love to see writing events, like festivals, use universal design so that disabled writers are expected and welcomed rather than an afterthought, so that people have to, you know, figure out what to do when we say we're going to come. Like, we, as disabled writers, can and should be allowed to be in all spaces with our access needs met. And I think, for me, places like Writers Victoria and their Writeability program has been really helpful because they had programs that were for disabled people and they were run by disabled people.

I also think something called crip time would be really important. So, "crip time" is the idea that time can be a little bit different for us as disabled people. So, activities can take us a little bit longer, but also we might not, I guess, achieve things in the same order that non-disabled people do - whether that's getting a job or getting married or writing a book, or whatever it is. And so things like having more time to enter a short story competition, or having more time to write an article, can be really helpful. And I also do something that's called authenticity reading. And authenticity reading is where a writer or publisher sends me, or sends someone with lived experience, a book or story that has a character with disability in it, and then they ask us to tell them what's good in the story and how they're doing well in showing disability, and what they can do better. And that's really important because when we see representation of disability that is harmful or that shows disabled people in a way that implies that we are "less than", then it makes people believe that that's true. Whereas if we have books and stories that show disabled people as all of the things that we know that we are - as strong and capable and proud to be disabled - then we can change how the rest of the world thinks of us.

G TRELOAR: Yeah, thank you so much, Laura. Yeah, some of the work you do is absolutely incredible and I do encourage everyone to check it out, if you are able to. I think this last question I have is probably best suited to Dylan. So, Jane asked, "When it comes to mainstream comedy - for example, TV sitcoms - they often use disability as a punchline. How do we start to get writers to understand how problematic it often is, with a common pushback being that you are 'tone policing' or 'being too sensitive'?"

DYLAN MCBURNEY: I think when you critique something a writer has written, it feels like

an attack. And so writers like to lash out by saying, "Oh, well, I'm not gonna acknowledge that what I've done is harmful or wrong, so I'm gonna put that back on you." It's difficult. Sometimes it starts the cultural conversation about disability that can bring more exposure to it, but I don't know that it's possible to get those writers to really understand, especially if they're already established in their careers. You know, they probably aren't gonna want to change. What I want to see is for those people to just, you know, retire, stop writing comedy, and to get new people in, young people, people with lived experience of disability. I want to see a new generation of artists who are making more informed and more meaningful art. So, I think, yeah, it's a shame that we can't speak for our own experiences and that we're not believed when we say that something is harmful or something is hurtful, but every disabled artist is working in their own way to shift the representation in the art world, and I think that is a beautiful collective effort that everyone here is a part of, and I'm really excited to see how that shifts the conversation.

G TRELOAR: Thank you, Dylan, so much for that incredible answer. And thank you, everyone else. This has been such a great conversation, and I want to thank our amazing speakers, Dylan and Deb, and also my co-host, Laura - thank you so much. We are going to wrap up this event now. Next month's Open Dialogue will be about the changes to the NDIS. I know this is a topic that is really important for lots of people in our community, so we'll put a link to that in the chat. And if you're interested, please do check it out and RSVP.

LAURA PETTENUZZO: And as always, we really want to hear what you thought about today's event. We've got a survey, and if you've got a few moments to complete that for us, we would really appreciate it. So, the survey will pop up automatically on your screen when the event finishes, but we're also gonna pop a link to the survey in the chat. We will also send a link to... Sorry, we'll also send you an Easy Read version of the survey in an email after the event. And the email that we send you after the event will also include a link to the full recording, as well as a summary of today's event. So, that brings us to the end. Thank you so much, everyone, for coming and being part of this discussion on disability and arts. We hope to see you next month! Thanks, everyone.

(End of Transcript)