**Inclusive Arts Vermont**

**Pride Panel**

**Artists: Liam Malone, Aurora Berger, and Shea Witzo; facilitated by Richard Elliot from PCVT & Heidi Swevens and Kat Redniss from Inclusive Arts Vermont**

**Kat:** So hi everyone. I am Kat Redniss. I am here with just a dynamo group of humans for our pride panel. And this is just a quick overview. This is a panel exploring the intersections of queerness, creativity, and disability in the arts and in community.

And we're going to introduce everybody but we want to do a couple of you know, acknowledgments and housekeeping things first. So I'm gonna invite Heidi to share with us first.

**Heidi:** Great. Thank you, and, and as we begin, we pause to acknowledge the place we exist, connect, and create is the traditional unsurrendered territory of the Abenaki people.

One of 5 Wabanaki nations who have a continued and enduring presence with this land. Presence with mountains, with vistas, with forests, waters, and winds. Presence with people, relations, culture, and creations. Presence with light. In Abenaki, *waban* refers to the white flickering light in the sky, and *aki* is the word for land or the earth. So the Wabanaki are the people of the dawn lands, and we acknowledge Wabanaki ancestor’s past, present, and future.

**Kat:** Thank you for that. Yeah go ahead.

**Heidi:** Yeah. I was just saying with that, I always pause after that.

**Kat:** That's a good moment to pause.

**Heidi:** And we have some information in the chat box about the Abenaki artists and education. So with that, I'll introduce myself. My name is Heidi Swevens, and I use she/they pronouns. I am the director of Community Partnerships at Inclusive Arts Vermont.

And for access purposes, I'll do a visual description of myself and surroundings. I have blue eyes and pale skin with short brown hair, and today I'm wearing a turquoise button-up shirt with earrings that have turquoise people, and water droplets. Behind me is an abstract painting, rectangular painting, against a white wall.

I, also, for the purpose and relevance in this conversation: I am a queer disabled artist, and, and I am thrilled to be here with this group of people. And I'm gonna pass it on to Kat so we can continue on with the conversation.

**Kat:** Thank you so much, Heidi. And if you are with us along on Facebook, we are putting some of the contents in the comment section. So the information about Abenaki artists is there and if you're watching along with us that's a great place to put comments, questions, thoughts for our artists.

This is also being recorded, and so if you can't make it with us here today. There'll be opportunities to engage with this material later. And we're all accessible later. You can connect with me, and Heidi or Richard. We’ll share some of that information.

But yeah, so I am Kat Redniss. I use she/her pronouns. I am the Director of Communications and Development for Inclusive Arts Vermont. A visual description for me is: I’m a fat, femme, platinum blonde person. I have chubby cheeks and pink lips on today, and straight platinum bangs across my forehead. I'm wearing a cozy oatmeal cardigan and I'm sitting in my sunroom which has black paned windows letting in light, and there's foliage seen through the windows. There's some furniture behind me and there might be a cat that wanders into the screen at some point. I also am a queer artist and I'm so happy to be here as part of this queer community.

And I am mostly a performing artist and so thrilled to be here and hear about the artist that we have on this panel as well.

Just for accessibility, if you're watching along with us and also an invitation to our artists - take care of yourself while you're doing this. If you need to step away or turn your camera off for a moment, that’s totally fine. We're here. We're just in conversation today, and so feel free to ask questions of one another, and if you're following along feel free to ask questions of us or engage with us through the comments section as well.

Also, a note and I'll say this and our artists may say this: if they're chatting about something specific. We're talking about queerness. We're talking about identity. We're talking about disability. We're talking about creativity. Some complex ideas may come up in there. So just, you know, an awareness that we're all talking about things that are very personal and very big. And that really kind of you know, a lot of heart things, a lot of head things, a lot of community things. And so just a mindfulness about that, and take care of yourself in whatever way you need to as we're having these conversations.

Great, I'm gonna invite…We’re here part of what we're so excited about this is Pride month. We also want to recognize we just, just celebrated Juneteenth, and for our the Black members of our community to honor that as well. But we're here during Pride Month and we are so excited to collaborate with the Pride Center of Vermont, and we're here with Richard one of our co-facilitators.

Richard, would you introduce yourself for folks?

**Richard:** Sure. Hi! Hello, everyone! My name is Richard Elliot as Kat said I work for the [Pride Center of Vermont](https://www.pridecentervt.org/). I work in our health and wellness program as a coordinator as well as our QTBIPOC program, a queer trans person of color program which builds community and joy amongst the Black and queer Vermonters.

I am a relatively young individual, a light-skinned African American wearing a like new colored shirt, blue bandana, clear glasses, rainbow earring in the left ear. My background is a pale blue, baby blue, powder blue wall against a white wooden door. Awesome.

**Kat:** Awesome. Thank you so much, Richard. So Richard works for the Pride Center. We work for [Inclusive Arts Vermont](https://www.inclusiveartsvermont.org/). These are two non-profits that are really engaging folks through the community in ways to create community in ways to support folks and do professional development around working with LGBTQIA+ folks. We work specifically at Inclusive Arts Vermont making sure arts environments in the art ecosystem are accessible and inclusive for folks from birth to elders, for folks with disabilities, and also work with organizations to do professional development to help them make their programming and make their environments more accessible.

We do this through, we're working in schools, we're working with early childhood centers, we work with adult arts. We do professional development with other non-profits and arts organizations. We also do, and that's where we got to meet some of our artists today, we do an exhibitions program. And we do a biennial exhibition featuring Vermont artists with disabilities, and I'm going to let Heidi tell us a little bit more about that.

And then we're going to get like actually into the meat of talking to our artists. Thank you for bearing with us.

**Heidi:** I do want to just check - Richard, do you want to say anything more about the Pride Center at this point?

**Richard:** Sure. So at the Pride Center, we do have an education and training program as well. The program is built to go out to community, go out into organizations, whether it be healthcare organizations, clinics, schools, companies, local startups, and teach about queerness, teach about LGBTQ individuals, the LGBTQ community. With things such as teaching individuals about pronouns, how to ask questions about queerness, how to ask questions about LGBTQ community.

We give LGBTQIA basics so essentially kind of a 101 of the LGBTQ community. Some of the other things we addressed is how to properly use pronouns, how to support LGBTQ people, how to be a proper ally, how to take up space as LGBTQ people, and how to step back as an ally. Yes, our education program is under works right now, but we are doing things to ensure that it is updated and better.

**Heidi:** Thank you so much. Yeah. Thrilled to be collaborating on this panel and the last thing I'll say before we turn it over to the artists is a bit of a how did we get here. You know, so currently Inclusive Arts Vermont has an exhibition called [MASKED](https://www.inclusiveartsvermont.org/community/exhibitions/). It’s a visual arts exhibition featuring 22 Vermont artists with disabilities, two of whom are with us today.

It is the fourth visual arts exhibition that the organization has done in the past 10 years, and as Kat mentioned, we have a commitment to do biennial exhibitions traveling the state. You can find out more about this on our website. I'm excited. I could talk a lot about it but it is designed and intended to share the work of artists with disabilities. Amazing artists with disabilities in Vermont, and also to be a community space where accessibility and accessibility features are part of what happens for inclusion.

*MASKED* arose, the theme masked arose early on in the pandemic and it has taken on a life of its own. The call to artists was about things that are hidden or veiled, or kind of, you know, masked. Not out in the forefront and disability identity, invisible disabilities, often there’s shame, there's layers there's complexity, as can be true in the LGBTQ communities.

And so a couple of our artists in their artist statements, also identified their queer identities, and we got to thinking, and pride month and we thought wouldn't this be interesting to invite artists to talk about identities of disability and queerness around creativity in their process. And that's how this got started.

So I'm gonna pause at that. I'm sure there's more in different angles that… I'm thrilled to be here. I'm thrilled to be part of this conversation and I want to hand it over to who's going to facilitate the introductions of the artists, and thank you, everybody, for being here. So excited to hear what you have to share.

**Richard:** Oh, so that's going to be me. So we have 3 panelists here today. and I'm going to ask them to give their name, their pronouns, a visual description of theirselves, their surroundings, their specific artist genre, as well as any identifying language terminology they may want to use for themselves as a LGBTQIA person and/or an individual with a disability. And also we would like to know anything about you. Anything that you want to share with the audience. Alright, alright, everyone. Awesome, let’s start with Liam.

**Kat:** (Laughter)

**Liam:** Okay, that was…caught off guard. Shouldn't have been but here we are. My name is Liam. I use they/them pronouns. I am a fair-skinned - kind of looks yellow in this light, but individual with dark brown hair, dark brown eyes. I’ve said this before, an unfortunate amount of facial hair. I have pink clear glasses on and a sweatshirt that is baby blue and baby pink and white. Because I am a trans non-binary artist and I thought it'd be a cute representation.

Behind me is a disaster so I have turned blur on so you can't really see anything behind me. My artistic genres, I would say mixed media methods. I paint, I take photographs, I make graphic art. So yeah, I, and I also like to combine them all, which is what I ended up doing for the *MASKED* exhibition. So there's that. I am a queer non-binary disabled artist. Anything I want to people know…I think we're gonna get into that. I don't need to take up too much time in the intro to talk about that. So, thank you.

**Richard:** Thank you very much. Liam. Let's bounce to Shea.

**Shea:** Yeah, so happy to be here. My name is Shea Witzo. So I use they/them pronouns predominantly. I am a fat white person. I have wire-rimmed glasses on. I have very long graying, dark brown, straight, Willie Nelson braids on today. As usual, I'm wearing a tan shacket, which is a combination of a shirt and a jacket and behind me, there's a bookshelf that's full of plants and clutter-y knick knacks. There is a pie safe and there's a piece of art on the wall that's from Bread and Puppet that says ‘Strategy', and it has a yellow circle with a chair and a heart and an outstretched hand on it. And I'm very happy to be here.

I am also a queer artist. I live with chronic illness. I am a sicko who's coming into disabled identity and I make things in so many ways. I'm a musician. I do performance art, and sort of outdoor landscape-based spectacle work.

I'm a zinester, I do drawings, I do printmaking, I play music, I make puppets. I'm one of those folks that stuff just shoots out of my hands in any type of way that it wants to, and I can't really control it. Gift from source I guess. Makes for a great chaotic studio space. But I'm here, and I'm grateful

**Kat:** I just wanna say zinester is like one of my new favorite words. I love that.

 **Shea:** Zinester. Made some fat, fatty zines back in the day.

**Richard:** Amazing love that. Thank you, Shea. Up next we have Aurora.

**Aurora:** Hey all. I'm Aurora. My pronouns are she/her. So visual description. I am sitting outside a coffee shop. So if you overhear background noise while I'm talking I apologize. I cannot control the rest of the world and also some trucks and motorcycles like really loudly go by (perfect timing, car). So behind me is a brick wall on one side, and a window that is reflecting like an umbrella. Behind me, on the other side, there are some great pillows behind me which are very pleased by. I am a pale white woman. I have dark blonde hair in a bun. I have rectangular black metal glasses. I am wearing a black sweatshirt with a white zipper and little white strings. I have a black and white flower tank top underneath that. I also have some black Bluetooth headphones on that are very annoying. And I have a little silver necklace with a piece of ponderosa bark. I also have a lot of silver rings and a watch, and I talk with my hands a lot. So I assume you'll see them at some point

What do I do? Good lord, I'm a photographer by trade. Photography is the work that I've had in it Inclusive Arts Vermont shows, so primarily photographer, I guess. But I’m also an art teacher. I teach art in Stratford, Vermont, and also now at the Mountain School in Berkshire, Vermont.

So I have been branching out in my artistic methods because you can't teach cyanotype with the kindergarteners. At least not without getting parents to sign a release and I didn't want to do that.

So I also am a writer. I write a lot about disability and contemporary arts, historical arts. Some of that work is on my website if you would like to find it.

**Richard:** Thank you very much for that sharing. Thank you, Aurora. Thank you everybody for introducing themselves. We greatly appreciate it.

**Heidi:** And this is Heidi. I think it's time to get into the, the depth of the conversation, and when we were planning this, we thought we're gonna keep these questions to a minimum, these prompts to a minimum because I don't think it's gonna take long to get the the conversation going.

But the first one, and this is for the panelists and, and we'll kind of reflect later. But how do queerness and/or disability identities influence your creative process?

Yes, and I'm gonna just see if there's anybody who wants to go first, and if you can raise a hand, Kat will announce. I, with my low vision, I won't necessarily see that but we'll see if there's anybody who wants to go first on that one.

**Kat:** Go ahead Aurora. Yeah. Yeah.

**Aurora:** I could do that one. So queerness and disability identities are kind of what my art is about. So for the last - How many years have I been living here? For the last, like 6 or 7 years my art has been primarily about disability, and the experience of being a disabled woman, a disabled queer person in my life. I was gonna say in society, but it's very specifically about me. Because maybe I’m a narcissist but most of my work is self-portraiture. And it's very much about being in my body, being in the experience of the situations that I've been living in for the last 5 or 6 years, which have all been very heavily influenced by my disability. Not so heavily influenced by my queerness, because I have come from a very liberal family, lived in very liberal places, and went to very liberal colleges, and so I very luckily did not have to deal with a lot of the discrimination that I would have faced living elsewhere. Which is incredibly lucky, and I’m incredibly thankful for it.

However, it is something that has come up a lot in my own explanation of my work, because what tends to happen is - I take a photograph of myself, and I see what I see in it. And then other people come to it, and they bring their preconceived notions of what they expect to see in a photograph of woman, a disabled person. And specifically, the piece of art that I have in this show, which I think will show later, has a bunch of tulle in it. And that work got heavily critiqued by my professors when I was in grad school, as being about a wedding dress, and I continually brought up that tulle does not have to mean wedding dress, but it was something that came back over and over and over.

‘Is this a piece about a wedding dress?’ ‘Is this a piece about getting married?’ ‘Are you like trying to show your wedding dress and like build some kind of…’ It wasn’t. It was about connective tissue. So they were way off, but it was only kept coming back, and that was, I think, actually, the first time that queerness was really part of the critique of my work because I had to keep bringing it back to no this is a self-portrait is about my life. It's not about whatever projected life you put on it. But it's about me, and my disability, and my connective tissue disorder, which is why I made a bunch of connected tissue out of tulle.

So heavily influenced, really interesting to see how other people put their perceived ideas of what a queer disabled person should be onto self-portraits. Hopefully, that gave Shea and Liam enough time to get their thoughts together.

**Heidi:** Thanks, Aurora. And we're gonna spin back around. So you know if you have a thought after, we’re, we're trying to design this, so it's a back and forth and the conversation meant to be generative. And no right or wrongs. But I'm curious, whose next? Who’d like to go next?

**Shea:** I’m gonna go next if you don't mind Liam. Awesome.

I think my previous statement about being sort of medium-less is really related to me, to my relationship to gender, and sexuality, and disability, and body, which is, that I am not a person who feels a particular like liberation and specificity of identity.

I feel like I'm always finding language that's close enough. I'm always finding like, you know, close enough language to help me meet other people who have similar enough experiences. It functions as a way of connecting with community mostly for me in that I feel like language falls short for my personal experience of my body in this world, my relationship to this world. And I also feel that way about art practice, which is, I am finding the medium the way of communicating that's gonna get me close enough to these sort of like lightning visions that come to me, or these like magic next horizon utopic worlds I want us to live into, etc.

And so you know if puppets are the medium that's gonna get us there, we're gonna do puppets. If it's music, it's gonna be music, and if it's the print, it's gonna be a print. But like it's not, I'm not, I don't feel very committed to any specificity, and there's pros and cons to that worldview.

It's a bit confusing. It's kind of amorphous and more of an existential crisis than it needs to be maybe a lot of the time. But you know I think when I was coming into my identity as a queer person I really felt like I wasn't sure where I fit, because I didn't have very clear language about it because it was really messy. My specific way of being queer was- I didn't meet anybody who had had my specific experience before. It was sort of like, maybe called pansexuality or bisexuality now, but like growing up in rural Iowa, I really did not have any models for that.

My like experience of gender is like ‘Well nothing's really right. So I guess I'm other.’ You know what I mean? Like I'm outside of this construct, obviously, but like I don't have really like affirming language for what it is. And around my body. I feel like coming into disability identity is like been a slow process of like. Oh, these things, these things inform, socially inform, the way that I move in the world. These ways of my body being informed the way I move in this ableist world. And so I think this is the closest language that will help connect me to other people who experience the world in this way or help people understand my experience of the world in this way.

But yeah, I think that I’m, I'm essentially, I’m a hot mess on every front, and it's very consistent, and that is how it's connected to me. (Laughter)

**Heidi:** Thank you, Shea. Yeah and I'm imagining that people have notes, and they're gonna wanna respond. But Liam I wanna turn it over to you first, and see what your responses to the prompt about how the queerness and disability identities influence your creative process.

**Liam:** So in listening to Shea, a lot of things resonated around like not necessarily having words about identity, or like concrete ways to express identity. And I think that, I mean the earliest art that I have is like all rainbows, so like I've been drawing rainbows since I could you know, hold utensils. I think also in terms of what Aurora was saying about self-portraiture, a lot of my work has been self-portraits. In high school I did my like the my senior like thesis - this was a high school. It's like no I didn't go to art school - but it was a series of self-portraits that really explore gender across the spectrum.

I have paintings of me very feminine in a dress and then I have paintings over there that are me looking very much like Justin Bieber. And looking back on, you know that collection of work has been really interesting. You know, like hindsight I'm like ‘Oh, I was like dealing with this gender thing a long time ago.’ And, and now things started making sense. Things started making a lot of sense when the pandemic first hit and we were all inside, and I was living in Western Massachusetts and I had recently left my job due to migraines. I was having migraines every single day, and so, even like before the pandemic, I was spending a lot of time at home by myself.

And I came across Alok, like the, the artist [Alok](https://www.alokvmenon.com/) and I almost immediately went online and like bought feminine clothes because I was like, ‘If I’m only gonna be at home by myself then I can wear whatever I want.’ Which has like..here we are a few years later, translated to me being able to feel confident dressing however I want it out and public.

 But let me circle it back. So self-portraiture. Bought the clothes, did a photo shoot with myself wearing the clothes. Then I like keeping my closet so I can like see that it's okay for me to wear all these beautiful clothes. And that's how gender identity comes in and then I think in terms of I also just I've always been a creative person writing, music, performing arts, in a way that's really allowed me to express myself outside the social norms.

You know, even doing plays in -Oh, sorry- I'm doing plays in elementary school is where I could, you know, be extra without being criticized for being extra. And I forgot my last oh, the last one I was gonna make was I also related a lot to what Shea was saying about kind of not having a specific medium.

I just being like, ‘Where is this project gonna take me’? And I think that my neurodivergence is both like a blessing and a curse when it comes to that because I can see beauty and a project in literally everything, and therefore I have so many projects going at the same time.

But yeah, so living with a disability…the neurodivergence is one thing, but then the like chronic migraine, sometimes I'm at home by myself, kind of in the dark for days at a time, and sometimes I can like collage and do stuff like that. So I’m gonna end it there because I that those were all the thoughts I had.

**Heidi:** Thanks, Liam. Yeah. Don't know If there's any responses to that initial prompt before we move on to the second one. Are there artists who are like ‘Wait, wait! I gotta say something. I wanna add’?

**Aurora:** Quickly to add to Shea, especially. Well, first of all, I had a professor in college to be at the hot mess. It would introduce me that way to people so like, ‘Do you know this person? This is Aurora. She's a hot mess.’ So I got you. What I was going to say before you said that was that I really relate to the artistic existential crisis and the just not having language, or even art materials that can quite express what it is that you're trying to get to because I know that that's definitely true for me. For a long time, I have felt like there isn't language to explain my queerness to people, and so I just don’t. Queer is just sort of my blanket term for it.

And people will be like ‘What does that mean?’ and I'm like ‘I don't know what to tell you about that. Sorry.’ But also like the material, the materiality of trying to find the thing that expresses the ideas the best. I go through a lot with material I do a lot with like different weird materiality, with photographs.

And lately, for some reason, I've become a watercolor artist. I don't know about that. That's I think more out of pure accessibility than true desire to be a watercolor artist. But, it's something that I can do while laying in bed, and taking self-portraits in the woods is not a thing you can do all laying in bed and is a lot more physically demanding. But I was thinking about that, and how much I relate to that.

The other thing I thought of that I did not say which was important was the reason that I'm a photographer. Which is that I have a visual disability and cameras sort of compensates for it for me. And so I've always been really drawn to cameras because they let me see things that I can't see otherwise. That is the reason I'm a photographer, not some other obscure reason. So.

**Heidi:** Thank you. Yeah,

**Richard:** I do have a quick question for all the panelists, because I know it's a bit of a throughline. If you all don't mind me asking? Sure. Is it right in saying that each of you have a bit of a tumultuous time figuring out your queerness? Is that it, more or less? During those times when you were figuring out your queerness, and you knew you were an artist, do you sense a change between your art then and now? If there is some, some sort of reflection you've done on your art, that would have came to those things?

**Shea:** Can I share something? I have been a performer forever. I feel like artist is the least you know questioned of the many identities I hold in a way. It's just like always been really forward.

But the other day I saw a picture from a parade float. But I was the star of as a child where I was wearing a muscle suit and was it was a Beef Days parade because I'm from Iowa and we celebrate beef where I come from. And they’re playing *Macho Man* by the Village People and I'm like doing muscle poses in the center of this parade float in this muscle insulated muscle suit. And I sometimes don't understand how myself and all the other people around me were not understanding my gender and queerness stuff at the time. I'm like thinking back to my first theatrical roles, I was always a “cross-gender” cast. I played a wizard. I played problematic Aladdin as a 6-year-old, very awful. I played all these roles as a child where I was always either an old crone or a man. And I look back at this like throughline of this like performance career and I'm like ‘Where were you all?’ Why was no adult in the room like ‘We need to have a conversation.’

And so I feel like I always knew on some level that I felt alienated by the structures around me, around dating and gender and all these things. But I didn't have like a forward model of like what to name it.

So in a way, it was not tumultuous at all. And in a way, I feel like it's been very consistent, and maybe the languaging, or finding community or being able to live it out loud in a different way have been developments. But I look at art that I made back when I thought I was a straight woman in it is very, very, very queer and genderqueer it's like I had yeah, I don't know.

**Kat:** Yeah, Liam go ahead. Yeah.

**Liam:** I have a very similar experience of you know, even, you know, performing. I was cast as Oliver in the musical *Oliver*, and it was the highlight of my young performer career because I got to play this little boy and it brought me such joy to be able to just, like, the unapologetically like just like be a different gender in a way that people weren't like critiquing. Nobody was like ‘Oh, like, why is that little girl playing a little boy?’

It was like, ‘Wow, you're really good at what you're doing’ and yeah looking back on how like how I became like more and more socially constructed in terms of things, in terms of gender, or in terms of queerness, and even in terms of like disability, and masking. It felt like there's been so much like I can look back and be like ‘Wow, I was living my best life’. And then like society, and then like now I feel like I'm in this process like taking off different masks. And that's been incredibly liberating to like look back and be like 'Oh, wait! This existed the whole time, this has always existed.’

And yeah, I learned the term, like, [neuroqueer](https://neuroqueer.com/neuroqueer-an-introduction/) during the pandemic, and I think that that is something that resonates most with me as somebody who like doesn't necessarily…I’ve never really understood like social constructs, or as a child, they didn’t, right?

And then I, and then I became aware of them, and then they kind of dictated who I was in the world. And, and learning the term neuroqueer kind of gave me permission to be like ‘Actually, like, existing outside of the lines it is what I've always done and it’s okay for me to continue to do that.’ And holy cow, it feels a lot better. I'm living a much better version, I’m living life as a much better version of myself, I guess.

**Richard:** Thank you both for that. Aurora do you want to add anything to that, or…

**Aurora:** Sure. Interestingly, now that you bring it up, I think I started taking self-portraits, the naked self-portraits, right around the time that I like fully decided like that queer was the correct term for what I was, what I was dealing with. So I sort of came into that piece of my identity right around the same time that I started doing a lot of my disability identity stuff that I think it was mostly that I took a long hard look at myself and was like ‘Whatever the heck you’re doing it's not working. You need to figure out what, what it is that you're actually doing.’

And it was also at the same time like the first time that I had lived alone.

It was the first time that I had, had any sort of like control over the things that were going on around me. But they all sort of culminated at the same time as this, like self-portrait, photo journey thing that has been going on ever since.

**Kat:** Richard, is it okay if I just can- I just offer a quick reflection on this?

First of all, thank you all just for the beautiful sharing that you're doing. It's just wonderful. And I just think like, and I don't want to make a false comparison, but I also think that like anti-fatness is so rooted in ableism. And I think about like what you're talking about right now is so important, because you're talking about like the arts, the arts give us an opportunity to try things on that maybe in a moment in our lives weren't safe for us to try on in actuality but that performing it can be, - and I apologize for the dogs barking in the background. But you know, like I think, too, about you all putting art into the world that represents that trying on, or that early exploration.

And I think about like for me as like a queer or fat person like when I finally saw bodies like mine represented in art the way that, that changed how I could embrace myself, and like, look at my own fatness, my own queerness, and own it in a different way was so crucial. And I think like so many fat liberationists’s that I follow like that's what they say is representation, seeing, or experiencing other folks who shared identities that was the single most impactful thing about self-acceptance and self-liberation that I ever experienced.

So I love like one that you're talking about how you explore that and two how you're talking about what you're putting out in the world. I think about other people experiencing that also, and what that might, the impact that might have for other folks. So thank you for letting me share that.

**Shea:** And just wanna say a moment about fat liberation also, which is that I feel so grateful to my younger self for doing some big work around fat acceptance, and fat liberation that paved the way for me to be able to accept my increasingly disabled body much more readily. And to like really be so grateful to be like moving into that community when that experience came into my body later on, because I had been you know making art about the way that fatness informed my like social relationships for such a while already that you know it was not a big stretch for me to then say, okay, now, like disability is another, you know, different but analogous experience in some ways where I'm immediately able to like understand that seeing disabled artists in the world is probably gonna help me contextualize my experience. Immediately be able to say connecting with this disabled community is probably going to really help me like, move through and process, and be in this experience, in ways that are liberatory or healing, or peace-making, or whatever in my life.

And I have very regularly I'm grateful to baby Shea for, for like taking that leap kind of early because it was less popular at the time. We didn't have Instagram. And that became a really useful sort of like framework of how to move into sort of marginalized identity space for me later, when I was like ‘Oh, my gosh now I've already been, I’ve already been challenging fat phobia. I've already been the person who's like, being a you know, a challenger of this thing in space for a long time.’ As well as trying to be an ally or an accomplice, to other marginalized people for some time. But like not really made becoming chronically Ill a lot more less shocking and more like accepted and normalized for me like, Yeah, people have all kinds of bodies, obviously. Duh.

**Kat:** Liam go for it. I see you got something on your mind. I love it. Share?

**Liam:** Well, I think that there’s, there's this intersection of queerness and disability specifically around like chronic illness that comes to mind. And, and I did my thesis in graduate school a little bit on this, in terms of like, you know, like queerness and like experiencing and challenging things as a youth. And so like in the, the what happens to the nervous system under like chronic stress, or like not seeing yourself portrayed and like this, this state of being in defense against you know, constantly having to defend yourself, or you know - And so it to me makes a lot of sense that a lot of queer folks also have, have chronic illnesses, chronic conditions, or are disabled. And yeah, I just wanted to draw that line as well.

**Kat:** Yeah, just anecdotally I saw a statistic today, too, it is a much it's a higher percentage. It's you know it's about the national population like for folks with disabilities is about 25%. I think it goes up to about 33% if you are just looking at the LGBTQIA population. So it is a higher percentage of folks with disabilities in queer community. Yeah.

**Shea:** And I work at a queer anti-violence program inside of Pride Center, - shout out to Safe Space - and a huge percentage of the folks that we're connecting with and supporting and being in community with name disability as a central aspect of their lives, in addition to queerness or transness or you know other marginalized identities. And I feel like when I'm seeing that I'm always like, ‘And where is the disability forward language in all of the pride events that are happening out in the world?' You know what I'm saying? This is a huge huge part even if it was a small part, it would be worth it. And this is a huge part of our community, and I think we have a long way to go within the LGBTQ+ umbrella to like really center access practice in the way that you all so excellently do at Inclusive Arts Vermont. And you know, Pride Center does a lot of access work, too, and in the larger community, we have a lot of work to do to make pride events and all events more accessible to all folks.

**Kat:** Thanks for that.

**Heidi:** And this is Heidi. I want to say just one thing around the sort of invisible disabilities and higher percentage in people who are queer because of stress and that sort of thing.

And, and thank you, Shea, for this. But disability, people with disabilities are in all communities, all groups of people, all ages, all genders, ethnicities, races. It’s, it’s just my experience, which is just my experience, but there was so much shame at having a disability because of inherent systems of ableism. And for me, I was kissing girls in high school, and a lot of shame around that, too that was hidden, and then I had changes in my vision in my early twenties, and I remember, like in hindsight having this thought, ‘I can't be blind and gay.’ Like that was just too much marginalization for me at the time, my twenty-something-year-old self, and it turns out I am queer, you know whatever language you want to have. But as I've unpacked and un-layered, and met people who are disabled, who are wonderful, who are queer, the shame has just dissolved and I think that that's part of what keeps things hidden in our society. So, the more visibility the more conversations, the more one person can be okay with themself and like, take that nude picture and share or not. That, that just has like sparkling effects. And hopefully, younger people now will have more examples and more models of people to look up for, and all the diverse packaging and beautiful beautifulness.

But I'm really glad I've changed since that twenty-something-year-old. So because the blindness isn't going away, and the queerness isn't and I don't want it to. I'm mindful of our time - I’m so not usually the timekeeper but I wonder if it's okay if we move on to the second prompt, which will take us from I feel like it's a bridge right like from what we do as artists to like the putting it into the world so.

**Richard:** I’ll take you from here then. Some my, the next prompt’s gonna be: So can you all share your experience with us navigating the art scene and the art profession as a disabled queer artist?

**Kat:** Go for it. Liam.Yeah.

**Liam:** So I think this connects, really, this is a very good transition, because I, as Shea was talking about accessibility, I…part of experiencing chronic migraines, is missing out on a lot of community and spending a lot of time by myself which is very lonely. But really, yeah, I just lost my train of thought.

But it really prevents me sometimes from being able to engage in community, and being able to be around people who look like me, who you know, have similar disabilities and gender identities. And so the isolation…I think having a chronic condition has also kind of like birthed my like art from a place of looking for connection elsewhere. And yeah, there was more to that thought, but that's all I got for this second.

**Richard:** It’s fine. If it comes back it comes back. You can speak up. Shea, Aurora, you wanna jump in?

**Aurora:** Sure. So my, my big thing is also definitely related to access. I mean being queer in the arts community is kind of lovely because you meet other queer people. There's a lot of queer artists out there. You end up, you know, in community with people who have things in common with you.

But that being said because of my visual disability I can't drive, and that has been the most isolating thing I can possibly imagine at the moment because I - when the, before the pandemic started actually, the pandemic just didn't help- I moved from Los Angeles, where I could get a Uber or a train into downtown L.A. and I could go to galleries, and I could see people, and I could go to openings every night if I wanted to (usually too tired, but I could have), to living in very rural Vermont relying on my parents for rides anywhere I want to go or need to go like work, or doctors appointments or you know my daily trip to and from my job.

And so that has been really isolating and I live about 2 hours from Burlington and Montpelier so not able to go to openings even now that we have them again. I haven't been able to see one of the Inclusive Arts Vermont openings I have been part of. I will one day I swear, but I haven't made it to one yet.

And so that just disability has really created an access barrier for me within the arts community. And I've been part of several you know online shows. I've been part of several online residencies, but it's just not the same thing.

I so look forward to the day that I get to actually meet the people that I have these conversations with. I have had three different like video Zoom talks with Inclusive Arts Vermont, and I've yet to meet a single one of you in person. It makes me sad. It'll happen this summer. I swear once I like find a good way to get to Burlington. But I that’s, that's my big thing is the art world is so inaccessible to people who don’t have basic physical access to places.

**Richard:** Thank you for that, Aurora. Shea, you wanna - you have anything?

**Shea:** Yeah, I think experiencing particularly mobility challenges has really to a certain level like there, you know, that that can look so many different ways. And for me, it really looks usually quite a lot like pain.

And so it has, that aspect of my experience has really informed the way that I make work, and the way that I can see work. And it has informed my, you know, choices to do other things for work also. You know I can't be like a tour bus guide. I can't be like on you know like stay out late every night at places that don't have adequate seating, etc., etc. in ways that I maybe could of when I was 20. And yeah, So I feel like there you know there's just like a lot of things that I have to be more considerate of in my surroundings now, which really limits…The lack of those things being there really limits my ability to do a lot of different kinds of work professionally art-wise.

And I also feel like you know some work that I have sustained over time I think it's notable is in a group. I work with a performance company called the [Royal Frog Ballet](https://www.theroyalfrogballet.com/), and we do a lot of outside landscape-based theater work. And my crew has been such a tight team that were able to haul my props out to the backfield despite me not being able to do that on my own. Right, like there's from each according to ability to each according to need kind of a vibe in that small, well-developed collective space.

That means that I am feeling decreasing amounts of guilt over time at allowing someone to carry the like ridiculous thing I've constructed out into an orchard for me. And so I feel like, you know, in all of these aspects of identity I feel like interdependence is really important to me and I feel like that's the thing that informs my creative practice, and my life more because of the gifts that disability has given me. And I think you know that means that I can't do as much like solo stuff on my own without buddies as accommodations.

And I, you know I've moved into different materials and things that have allowed me to keep working. I do more digital stuff now. My like backwoods Luddite self has compromised a lot into the world of you know, drawing pads or my backwoods woodcut self has compromised into rubber printmaking materials, things that are just easier on my body have enabled me to keep going and keep making, often not professionally.

And I would say during the pandemic time, the, you know, it feels like much of the world, has moved on from accommodations for folks who are more vulnerable and I am struggling to figure out where my role is in a professional landscape of no masking and no distancing, and no, you know, packed venues full of maskless people, are not accessible to me right now in my health. And like that's really really been extremely

alienating and tough and sad, and like makes the landscape based outside theater stuff look more and more appealing all the time.

And you know, yeah, there's access limits everywhere there's roots and you know rocks outside that make it tougher for folks to be there as well.

So it's always about finding the most access we can I feel like in a space. And, and I say no to a lot more things now than I used to. ‘No’ is a whole sentence, and I'm learning that that's also a gift.

**Kat:** Yeah, go ahead Liam.

**Liam:** I also I, I wanted to like circle back. Thank you so much, Shea. I just also wanted to - Aurora mentioned, you know, moving to a more rural spot. I used to live in Western Massachusetts in Northampton, which was like queer Mecca.

And I, yeah, I had to leave my job due to these migraines, which put me on disability and also kind of forced me to move back to where I grew up.

Sounds like similar to what Aurora was talking about and something that I don't know if a lot of people know this, but I wouldn't be able to necessarily like live in Vermont with what I need in terms of like a single-person apartment on disability.

It’s, just to be frank, it's like like $1,200 right? And, and you’d be hard pressed to find an apartment that's under $900 throughout Vermont, not even just in Burlington. And so yeah, moving to my hometown has put me in a much more rural space where queerness is…(sigh)

When I was in high school I was the only queer person at my high school.

Only like out queer person at my high school, right like there were obviously other queer people but they weren't out. My understanding is now that the high school, now the high schoolers have, like a, a big queer following, or whatever queer community - but for somebody in their mid-twenties, there's no queer community here for me.

And so I think that, that has pushed me more towards art. Because like what am I gonna do. I like live literally in the mountains. And so I tried to make a living as an artist, but that can that brought its own challenges. Because it's really hard to do a commission piece and explain to the person, 'Hey? if it might take me a lot longer than it would take another person because I'm, dealing with all these different like conditions or experiences.’ And you know, the queer community has been really great about yeah, like, do what you need to do.

But that's not a great avenue to make like substantial income for me. And so yeah, I think that, that the financial piece of being a queer, disabled artist is very real.

**Kat:** Yeah, you brought up a couple of points that you know. I know Heidi, and I talk about a lot. This idea of independence versus interdependence. And independence is amazing, you know, and I think like, independence is amazing but we often stigmatize inter interdependence, and, like interdependence, is going to be the forever reality for a lot of folks.

And when we hold independence up on this pedestal of like the end all be all goal of everything, there are people who that's never going to be possible for and there's people who don't want that, many people who don't want that. And also our society, you know, maybe would functional a lot better if we, if we focus more on interdependence.

And then also this idea of professionalism. And what, how we define professionalism in all, in all forms of community. And I think, Liam, what you're talking about right there right is like, you know, traditional, very like white supremacy culture professionalism is: ‘You do things on this deadline.’ You know, ‘This is what it is.’ And ‘This is this., and ‘Everything's efficiency’, and ‘Everything's a timeline’, and ‘Everything's this.’ And you know, “ X amount of hours equals this, this, this.’ But that's not a reality that a lot of people can exist within.

And so I think that there is something amazingly radical and really important about breaking down those ideas of professionalism. But we're also still functioning in the society that adheres to them. There are many people adhere to them and so it can be a real challenge to try to say like ‘I don’t, I don't adhere to that.’ ‘I can’t, like, it's not my reality to do that.’ And so it’s, it's a very powerful and challenging thing, and you know it's another way that almost like, you know, we talked about masking. We talked about coming out or letting people in, that you know, to have those conversations can be vulnerable. To say, ‘This is what I need as an artist and a professional and it may be different than what you expect.’

**Heidi:** This is Heidi. And it might change. I mean, you know, I think the pandemic another.- And this is not a pollyanna silver lining kind of thing.

It's just sort of sitting with myself and my brain and heart and spirit.

But every plan, for a long time I've been saying I want to plan for spontaneity, because like you Aurora I’m a non-driver, and planning gets me places but spontaneity makes me come alive, so I want both.

I mean I want it all, right? But I think the pandemic for so many reasons and so many shifting moving pieces. There's a lot of present moments like ‘Oh that's what was gonna happen. It's gonna shift.’ It's almost like life's improv, you know? And there's some ways that creative, creative approaches and you know the disability community with adaptability and innovation, there's some skill sets and some knowledge from artists and disabled people in queer communities that I think, are relevant and could be of benefit to others, as frustrating as they can be.

I don't need to sit here and think ‘Oh, yeah I just adapt. I just attempt.’ I have a fantasy of an adult temper tantrum choreography. If anyone wants to take that on because there's just so much going on that’s, that's real.

But I think there's also like ways to have individual shifting moving pieces and understanding that it's not personal as much as it affects us personally, and coming together in community with that. Without the shame without the blame, you know like sometimes it's just something changed and it's not a person's fault.

And now, what? How do we create a community of care here? For what needs to be done, and what's the priority now? I don't know if I was just babbling? I think I was. I hope that makes sense because what I’m- these are- We’re talking about survival you know? How am I gonna pay my rent? How am I gonna get my insulin? How am I gonna get to the you know whatever? So it’s, it's a both and all.

**Aurora:** And also this like sort of the whole conversation makes me think of a book that's kind of infamous in the disability community and possibly also the queer community which is[Care Work](https://brownstargirl.org/care-work-dreaming-disability-justice/) by Leah - I can never say her last name - Piepzna-Samarasinha -I want to say. Sorry, Leah, if I just butchered your name.

But it’s a book that I actually have some issues with personally, and the reason is that I don't think that her concept of communal care translates to rural areas. And she, she writes this, but…just about every like disabled you know, academic person is like obsessed with this book.

But it's something that has always bothered me about it, and it's the way that she frames disability is as a community of caring disabled people who were able to come together and lift each other and help each other, and that's something that I just don't think works in a place outside of cities.

And she's writing from a very disability-centric place. It’s, I mean she lives in Oakland, which is sort of the center of disability rights and all these people. It's where a lot of people end up who are disability activists, and I know that it's possible in places like New York City or L.A.

But when I think about who I can call where I live if I need something, it's a very, very short list that includes two people I'm related to and no one else. And those two people are contractually obligated to drive me places by you know, familial obligation. So I just, I think about that a lot because I see it come up a lot - of this idea of independence versus interdependence.

And there's just are places where interdependence isn't working. And how do we reconcile with the idea that maybe interdependence would be good, but it's not something that's available for people. And I took a job recently, and one of the big things about taking that job was, can I get to this job?

And I called Vermont Book Rehab, and they said, ‘Well, we can offer to pay someone for the first 60 days of your job to drive you. But after the first 60 days, we kind of assume you'll have it figured out.’ I said, there's 0 public transit between Stratford and Berkshire. Are you kidding me? It's literally a dirt road. And they were like ‘Well if you get a you know if you get assessed to get your rides, you can get 12 free rides a year from a volunteer driver -If there's a volunteer driver in your area.’ I said 12 free rides a year is not going to get me to a job. That doesn't work. And so I had to then have a very uncomfortable conversation with my parents. So it was like, ‘Hey, are you okay with one of you having to spend your whole week driving me to and from work?’ ‘Is that a thing that we can do?’ ‘Is that a thing that works in your schedule?’ ‘Is that a thing that's going to be really upsetting to you that you spend all your time driving your twenty-something-year-old daughter around so that she can have a basic job?’

And you know. Then they said well ‘If we're ever out of town or busy, we’ll just call someone else, and they can give you a ride.’ It's like I don't have that person and also everyone I would call is like my co-worker, and will be at work. But thanks for the thought, and so it's something that I think about a lot with that rural piece, and I can see Liam has a thought, so I will stop talking because I can go on forever.

**Kat:** Go ahead Liam. Thanks Aurora. Go ahead, Liam.

**Liam:** I was debating whether to put in the chat, but then I was like losing what you were saying, so I wanted to pay attention, so I was hoping that Kat would see my hand, but then it was like not super obvious. I just the only people really in my town is my mom, and my stepdad. And the other day I had to call my mom for something. And she's come a very long way in terms of accepting my queerness.

However, she still cannot use the right pronouns, does not understand, does not understand gender at all really. I’ve been out as a trans person. I transitioned you know, in 2015, and she has just now started using consistently he/him pronouns. So that's like progress, I guess. But just, the you know another layer of, of being a disabled person, and you know, those are the circumstances that brought me back to my hometown and then having to yeah, rely on family who doesn't acknowledge my gender identity is, you know, just fueled the creativity, I suppose, or my art. But yeah, relying on family is complicated.

**Kat:** Hmm, I just wanna, we are about 14 min from, kind of, when we've decided we would end this, which is also arbitrary. But I also want to respect your time and I want, because you're artists, and you, we have some work. I want to have an opportunity to show some of your art briefly, and then give a few minutes to kind of wrap up and think of any questions.

Does that feel okay? Is that a good moment to do that? Just so we can make sure that's happening. Great. Shea, I have your art pulled up first so Shea we're gonna start with Shea Witzo’s art. Shea let me know if you would like me to do verbal descriptions or if you want to do them. So I'm gonna share my screen and we'll get your art up. So this is Shea Witzo’s art collection. So great. So, Shea, you want to tell us a little bit about this first piece?

**Shea:** Yeah, this is a, this is just a, I just shared a random smattering of images with you, and I can describe each of them.

I don't think it's in any way like collectively representative of everything.

But it's a few things that I can share this is a photograph of me, a white person with a ukulele in hand, and I'm wearing a papier mache possum hat and a furry costume, and there are baby possum puppets mysteriously hovering above my shoulders, and I'm singing. And it's kind of lit from underneath and the background is very dark and so that visually describes a piece that I did with the Royal Frog Ballet.

My performance crew, which was, is a, we have done pre-pandemic annual fall sunset farm show of Surrealist work called The Surrealist Cabaret, and this piece was a mama possum singing to the babies about death and existentialism.

And I really in actuality am the babies, but for logistical purposes and playing the mom possum in this piece, and other folks are puppeteering the baby joey's above me and we all sign together - video available on the internet. I can like link in the comments later.

**Kat:** Very cool. Alright,

That’s, this is a photograph of a blue sky, sunny day, a farm landscape in the background. And two masked figures in grandma outfits and grandma papier mache masks, doing voguing poses in the front, striking a pose. And one of those masked figures is me, and these are some grannies from that same show, and I have loved inhabiting a crone character archetype in that I do not have to hide my back pain and my shuffling walk.

I can complain loudly about my pain and telling people to slow down and live it into this archetypical character. While, these, these characters live in that show context as the sort of guides, shepherds that help folks get to where they need to go, and that's one of the roles that I regularly play in that space.

**Kat:** Okay, great.

**Shea:** This is a photograph of a piece that I made. It's a gray overcast sky and you know grassy landscape that's autumnal. The grass is withered and tan oatmeal colored and overgrown, and there's a figure standing in the middle of the photograph. A woman with long dark hair and a sort of sequins dark outfit and a black hat, and she's standing over something that I will describe as a blanket puppet. She's standing over like a big weird object that's like a floppy thing, mostly fabric covered in little bits of fabric, tulle, glittery texture bubbles, and pompons and stuff.

And that is a piece that I use other folks as performers to perform. My body could not do the thing that was the vision. But this puppet started out on one side, with somebody hiding underneath it. And a figure walked over to the puppet and laid down on top of it, and then the whole puppet flipped over and the, the person underneath matched the world. So this is the second person.

Her outfit is cosmic, the puppet is cosmic. And on the other side of the puppet, the world is earthy, colored and green and leafy, and the person was wearing an earthy green outfit. So a bit about transformation about life and death mysteries.

**Kat:** Awesome, Shea. And this is the last piece we have from Shea.

**Shea:** This is an example of a print that I made. This is a you know, a small 8.5 and 11, by 11” piece of paper. Hey! Richard's got a, a copy of it in their little Zoom screen. It says in a black banner across the middle. “Justice requires movement", and it has stars, and wind, and flowers, and footsteps, and wheel prints, all moving toward the left.

**Kat:** Oh, amazing! Thank you, Shea, for that. Aurora I'm gonna go to yours.

Let me see, I just wanna make sure that we're switching. Great. I’m just Great. Okay, so or this is Aurora's piece that is in the *MASKED* exhibition right now. Aurora do you want to do a verbal description? Or would you like me to?

**Aurora:** I can do it. So this is a black and white horizontal photograph of me. Shown from sort of the clavicle down. So you can see my shoulders and I'm sitting cross-legged on the floor against a black background, and I am wearing nothing but a whole lot of crumpled tulle. That's sort of wrapping all around my body and because the photos in black and white and the tulle is all shown in different shades of gray and white where it becomes more opaque wherever it’s overlapping on my body or overlapping on itself, and the pieces that are sort of one single layer against the black background are showing a lot darker.

And this is a photograph that I was referring to earlier. It's one of a few but it is one that kept bringing up the idea of a wedding dress and kept prompting random visitors to my studio to ask me if I was making art about getting married, which I wasn’t. I was making art about my connective tissue disorder, and how my connective tissue feels like that tulle looks which is very crumply and tangled up.

**Kat:** And then the title of it's -it’s *Fibrosis Covered in Tulle* right?

**Aurora:** Yeah. Sure is, and fibrosis is scar tissue.

**Kat:** Yeah, and just a quick this is on our website which is in the comments of this for both Liam's work and Aurora's work. They are both part of an audio tour of this exhibit as well. So there are verbal descriptions, and their artist bios are also on our website. So you can find those as well. And then I also want to call up Aurora’s…Sorry, I'm just navigating let's see… I'm trying to like do this while…I'm gonna stop sharing for a moment. And then start again, just because, let me see, we’ve got, I've got a lot of tabs… great - so perfect.

Let me share Aurora, this is Aurora's Instagram. So I'm gonna just scroll and find…So, as you can see. Well basically I’m just gonna do a quick- I'm scrolling through a desktop Instagram, which is a grid of 3 pictures across, and then it goes down. In the top, we're seeing some of Aurora's new watercolor pictures and photographs. Aurora, how about this one? I love this one.

**Auora:** So that, so this is a photograph. It's a black and white photograph of my body. It's my back and all of my hair. I have like sort of long curly-ish hair and it's sort of all pulled over one shoulder. You can visibly see that one of my shoulders is lower than the other and that they're kind of curved. And I am once again naked, and I'm sort of sitting with my knees in front of me, like as if I'm holding my knees in a fetal position, which I probably am in that photo. And superimposed across my lower back is a white line of an EKG heartbeat taken from an EKG from when I was 9 years old. I think that one’s from when I was 9 years old.

We'll say it was. And actually, the reason that this reappeared on my Instagram so recently, because I made this piece when I was in grad school, was I was looking at some of my old work and this piece really called me. And I remember when I made it, one of my professors told me that the white line was too bold like it was too overpowering the image and I should like, do something with it. I should like take it off of the black, or I should make it a black line so it’s more subtle, and that it was like I was throwing the, the heartbeat in people's face. Like I was making people look at it, and at the time because I was in grad school, and a professor told me I needed to change something I like really struggled with that. I did a bunch of different versions of it. I just didn't really like any of them and so eventually just sort of trashed the piece, and I was looking through all my images, and I was like ‘She was wrong. This is the right way for this piece to work.’ So I’m glad it got reconciled. But I really love that piece too, I'm glad you like it.

**Kat:** I love that piece. Let me find one more. Aurora, if there's anything that you are really feeling but I'm just gonna…

**Aurora:** Do you want to do a cyanotype?

**Kat:** Yeah, how about let's do this one?

**Aurora:** Cool. So my big thing of the recent years has been cyanotyping.

I do it with digital negatives, so they tend to be anywhere from like 5 by 6 up to 22 by 30 inches. I made those ones in a kiddie pool, and they are incredible to make, to me because…Well, to start cyanotypes are a UV process, so you need to use the sun to print them. And this one in this image is called *Titania* and it's a blue print - Sorry a motorcycle is going by me very loudly - it's a blue print of a photograph of me lying on the ground outside with leaves, dead leaves, under my hair.

It's a photo I took in the fall. I'm once again naked. And I have my eyes closed, and I have one of my hands sort of cradling my head, and the print is on a piece of white paper that you can tell because the edges are clearly, they're really irregular. They were painted on, I painted it on in the dark. And I clearly did a terrible job of covering my piece in cyanotype, because there's this huge white patch at the top that kind of curves in where my neck is and so it's actually one of my favorite cyanotypes I've ever made. And the reason I love cyanotype so much is that it allows me to embrace the amount of chance that I really feel was missing from my digital work because I only do digital photography for both, like access reasons mostly.

But I missed that moment of chance and of unpredictability that I really feel is important to my process because of disability. I feel like there's a lot that I can't predict, and that I have to just leave up to chance. And also that chance can just change everything in a moment. And so the cyanotype process has been really transformative to my practice, because of that. It really it allows me to embrace things as, as they change and sort of allow nature to have it’s say on what my art looks like. Which is a big part of my practice. If you look at my other work.

**Kat:** Okay, and wonderful! I also want to finish up with…Let's see -sorry- I'm doing…Okay, let me get Liam's work. I also had this really fun thing happen where my screen, my computer shut down as we were starting to do this. So let me get Liam's work and…

**Shea:** Kat, there's a note in the chat that says the interpreters are not spotlit.

**Kat:** I’m gonna try to spotlight them. I'm gonna stop sharing again. Let me, this is just you know such a fun time. I'm gonna spotlight, spotlight Lindsey. You’re spotlighted. And then I'm gonna share my screen. Let me get Liam's work. And we are approaching 5:30 but we'll probably go a few minutes over just as a heads up to folks.

Great. So I am going to start with this is…Liam submitted several pieces, and one of the pieces is in, and so let me just get this, and we are gonna share now. Share, here we go. Okay, let me double-check - How that's happening on the screen. I just wanna make sure we get…Okay, great. There we go, perfect. And thanks for that heads up. So Liam I'm also going to spotlight you, and so we should get both of you now. So, Liam, would you like me to do a verbal description of this, or would you like to do this?

**Liam:** If you could do it that would be great.

**Kat:** Sure perfect. This is a collage, a multimedia collage. In the background are kind of patterned pieces. There's wallpaper, a floral wallpaper in the very back. It looks like there's flowers and maybe rocks in the back, crystals. And then overlaid over that are some square images.

One is that image of like a living room with a kind of sage green teal door and the flora wallpaper. There's a bright red chair at the center and a lamp on a table. And then there is also a picture of foliage. In a street there's some debris on the street, and there is coming out from the edge there is like a, like a parked trailer potentially. Over that is a figure sitting backward in a chair layered on top of that it says, “Chapter 28. Pandemics. Reducing the distance between me and my story. Unprecedented improvement. Thank you for your patience.” The figure their eyes are covered with red and with text. And then they're wearing a white shirt. They have white pale skin.One of their hands is at the bottom of their face. And then going through towards the figure is a helicopter.

You want to tell us a little bit about this?

**Liam:** Yeah, there's another message in the chat.

**Kat:** Oh yeah. I am going to remove you from the spotlight. We will hear you Liam but then we should get Lindsey back as the spotlight.

**Liam:** Okay. So this is a mixture of pieces. The collage in the back is from high school and it’s actually the collage. And then the box drawing outline, that was like a piece that I made in high school. And then the photograph was from that photo shoot that I had with myself where I was trying to embrace my gender euphoria, I suppose. And then I found in a magazine, I really like to do like found word kind of like poetry stuff. And I thought, yeah, this was appropriate. So this is like the the, the first piece of a series of pieces that I call *Chapter 28*, which is also the age that I am.

**Kat:**  Great. Okay, Liam, I'm gonna go through. We're gonna do three. So let me know. We've got the second one. The third one… I want to show the one that's in *MASKED*. But is there one of the middle ones that you'd like to show?

**Liam:** This one's good.

**Kat:** That one?

**Liam:** Sure. So I also during the pandemic I made like a calendar that was, it was collages with these different poems. So the like…Okay, this is a, there's two pictures here. The one on the right or the one on the left is a black and white painting of me in a bathtub. I'm facing, facing backward. And there's a sink next to me. It's like an old claw-footed bathtub. And yeah, it's like monochromatic painted, and then laid over that is an image of a stack of cookies, their chocolate chip cookies. And then there's text over it that says “They were truly generous during a difficult time. Reciprocate their kindness.” And this was a piece about embracing my body. And all of my body in a way that I hadn't ever. So yeah, it started as a, a photograph of me naked in a bathtub with all of my curves, and I turned that into a painting.

And then have that piece on the right, it's again, it started off as a collage in the back, or it's I don't know how to describe it. In the back I suppose, is another picture of me sitting in a folding chair. The chairs backward and wearing a white v neck and earrings, and my arm is over the chair kind… of I don't know how you describe that.

**Kat:** One hand over the other with your hand in the foreground?

**Liam:** Sure. Yeah, and then sort of laid over that is another collage, and it, it's a bunch of images, a bunch of tiny images. I, I don't have - that was just a graphic that I found in a magazine. But the words say "For a moment your eyes open all the way. Explore the pleasure in taking it easy.” And yeah so again during the pandemic I, I stepped into my gender identity and stillness. And so that's what that is about.

**Kat:** Beautiful and I know we're over time. I just wanna do a quick share. This is Liam's piece that is in the exhibition right now that we have, *MASKED*. And this is another mixed media collage.

At the foreground on the left side is a red curtain being pulled aside.

Like a, like a curtain of a stage curtain and a white hand is pulling it aside, and it is showing a picture of I believe this is Liam, but a figure walking away from the gaze. They're next to water, and there are buildings around. And Liam, I, I remember you said this is a very distinctive building. Is it the botanical gardens? Was that what it was?

**Liam:** No, it's Scientology. (Laughter)

**Kat:** Oh, I knew it was something. Scientology very different. Okay, great.

**Liam:** Not any association just that was the…

**Kat:** Yeah. Yeah (Laughter)

**Liam:** that was the geographic location. (Laughter)

**Kat:** And this is overlaid faintly in the background. There's a bouquet of flowers, roses mostly yellow and pink roses, with a white flower going off to the right and at the top. And the person is in a t-shirt and pants with rolled hems and carrying a bag. And over top of it, it said, “But this doesn't tell the full story because they've bloomed to survive the best we could.”

And so this is the piece that is traveling with *MASKED* right now, and Liam I'm just gonna bring us all back. If there's anything you want to share about that piece, and I'm going to remove the spotlight and then. Folks, I know we are, we are wrapping up, and we are overtime.

But Liam feel free to share that, and then for my other artists. If there's like any last thing you want to leave us with, including how we can find your work, that would be amazing.

**Liam:** I think that piece just like the other ones, you know, it’s, it's a, a mixture of a digital print, actually that one didn’t have a digital print. It was a collage with a painting that was made from a photograph. And then another collage laid over that. So yeah, really the whole like set of pieces is just you know, all the different layers of my identities coming into one. Yeah.

**Kat:**  Thank you so much for sharing that. So folks, we, of course, we knew this. We are over time, and we, we - But you all did such a beautiful job of already like responding to each other. And so I just want to give everyone an opportunity to just share how people can find you, how they can find your art and so we'll just go around. Shea, can you just share how people can find you? How they can find your art? Any last thoughts? And then we'll go Shea, Aurora, Liam and then we'll check in with Richard and Heidi, and then we'll be done.

**Shea:** Hi. Shea speaking my business card says, ‘Cheap magic. Full service. For sale or for hire by chance or appointment.’

I feel like that's fitting. You can find me [@sheawitzo](https://www.instagram.com/sheawitzo/) on Instagram.

But it's not all art it's just life and the artist part of life. Also, the performance company that I sometimes do work with is called the Royal Frog Ballet.

You can Google it, it's the only one - there's a website. It's pretty cute. And you know reach out at SheaWitzo@gmail.com if you want to talk more about anything in particular. I don't have a snazzy art website up. That's how you can find my artwork and me as a person to connect with.

**Kat:** Great. And that's gonna be in the comment section of this video as well.

**Shea:** Sounds great.

**Kat:** Great. Aurora?

**Shea:** You’re muted Aurora.

**Aurora:** This is the problem with muting myself. Okay, you can reach me on Instagram [@auroraberger](https://www.instagram.com/auroraberger/). You can find me on Twitter at Aurora Berger, but I have not used that account in a long time. So if you find me there, it’s only going to be rants about disability.

I also have a website, [auroraberger.com](http://AuroraBerger.com). you can find more of my pictures, and varying amounts of clothing, and also some of my other work as well as some of my writing stuff.

I am also currently in *MASKED*, which is touring Vermont with Inclusive Arts Vermont. I have a show coming up online somewhere in the internet with Art Beyond Sight out of New York City.

And you could pick up a copy - a very expensive copy, I apologize - of *Redefining Disability*, which was recently published by Brill, and has a chapter in it that I wrote called *Disability Aesthetics: A Crip Artistry Manifesto*. Find me on the Internet, and I can give you a free copy. I didn't say that.

**Kat:** Great. And Liam how can we find you?

**Liam:** You can find me on Instagram [@theycreate.vt](https://www.instagram.com/theycreate.vt/). I have a website which I don't know how long, much longer I'm gonna have the domain for because that is too expensive. But it's [theycreatevt.com](http://theycreatevt.com) and I, I think I took my store down, but you can see some of my other art, including different kinds of portraits that I am happy to do as a commission. I do graphic or digital portraits, graphite portraits, painting portraits, painted portraits of people. I'm not very good at doing animals, so. I guess I could do like a landscape, too, if, if you like wanted that. But, yeah.

**Kat:** Wonderful, wonderful. Okay, and excellent, excellent. Any final thoughts? And this could be from Heidi, Richard, or any of our artists, or, excuse me, I, I always do that. I use our as possessive. Any of these brilliant artists. I do not own you. I am just grateful to share community with you.

**Shea:** I would like to name that our excellent co-facilitators are also all artists, and I feel like, I know it was a time crunch, but I would love at some point to hear more of your each of your brilliant voices about what you make. I feel like it's so great to have you as co-facilitators in the space, and also like I want to hear all the juicy stuff about y'all in your work. So just for the a shout out for other folks watching that, you know, maybe somebody could host a little Kat, Heidi, Richard chat.

I would facilitate it. I'm just saying, I don't know, but I just wanna honor that there's so much that you each bring that wasn't as present in this conversation that I just want to bring into the space, even just in name.

**Richard:** Thank you, Shea. Much appreciated.

**Kat:** I feel really grateful, Richard. I get to share my work life with Heidi, and I get to share my performer life with Richard, and so I know these two individuals. Heidi and I use a term *artner* to describe our working relationship.

And I feel very much similarly with Richard about that when we're in creative spaces together, and so thank you for acknowledging that.

And it's just it is really beautiful to share creative community with this cohort of people. And I have major gratitude for today, and for just the openness and sharing and generosity of spirit that everybody brought. And so yeah. Richard, Heidi, Liam, Aurora any final thoughts as we're wrapping up?

**Richard:** As well like, I would like thank everybody for coming. I know everybody has some type of Zoom fatigue at this point in time. It's a lot to get online and get on video and express about yourself.

So once again, Thank you. Everybody: Yeah,

**Heidi:** Yeah, this is Heidi. I just, I echo the thanks and appreciation.

And feel privileged to be able to listen, and you know, participate in the way that I did. And look forward to more conversations when they are able to happen.

**Kat:** Wonderful. So this will be on our Facebook page we'll also put it on YouTube as well. So feel free to share it around with friends. We have some you know just some gratitude shared in the comments for seeing everybody's work and experiencing that I want to think our interpreters as well Michael and Lindsey have been amazing, amazing companions on a lot of our digital programming. And they you know, they're here to, to do work but also it really feels like they're a beautiful part of this community.

So thanks to them for their effort, their energy, and their time. And thank you to everyone. Be in touch. We're around, we would love to connect with you more. And Happy Pride everyone. Go create, go, go kind of - I don't know. I'm just, I’m just really moved by this conversation.

So thank you. All, all right. Bye everyone thanks for being here with us!