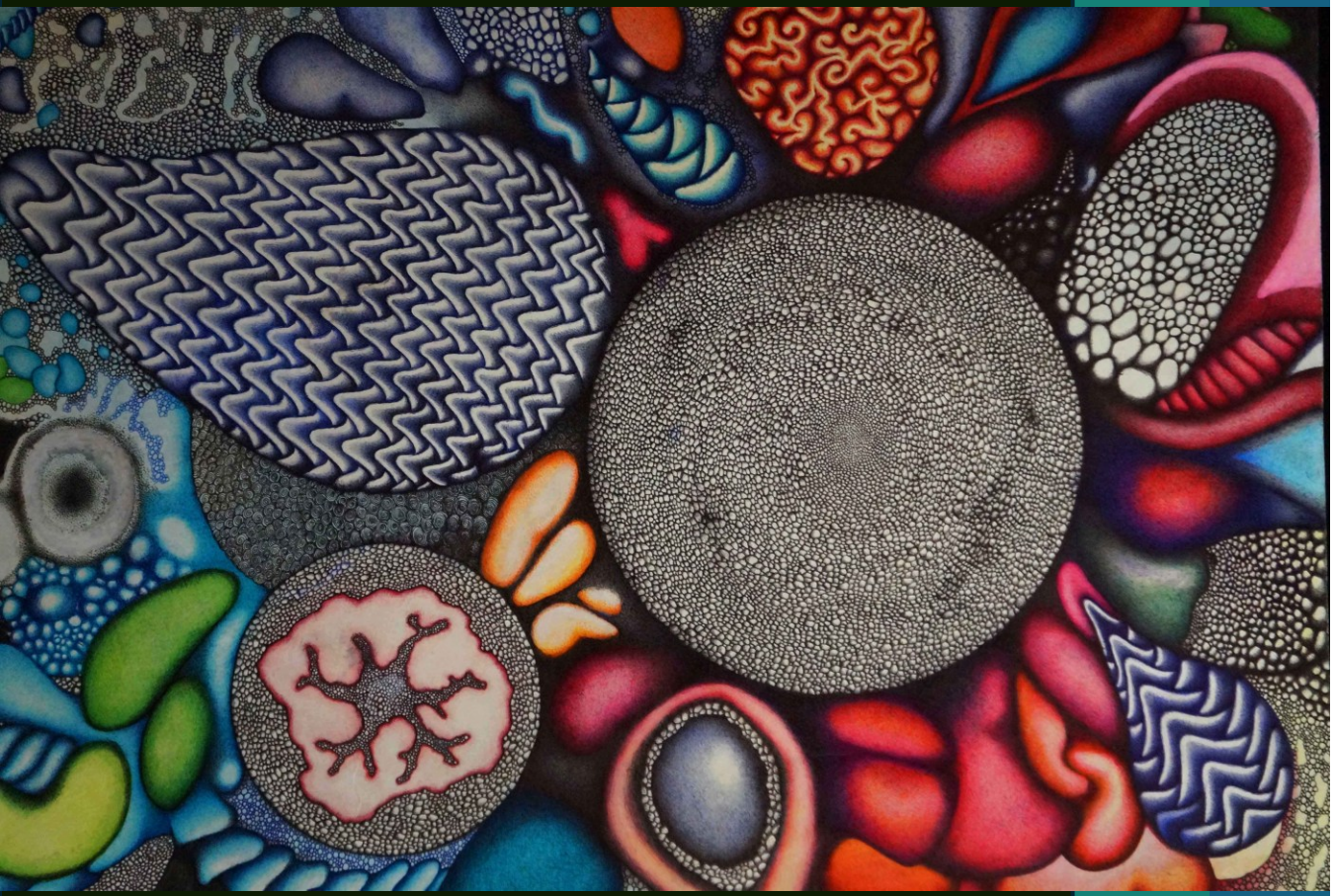

Jeremy Hawkes - *Psychopathy*

DAHA Disability Arts History Australia

Disability Arts History Australia

Archiving, Access & AI Report

15 October 2025

Australian Government
Australian Research Council

QUT

Creative Australia

Curtin University

ARTS ACCESS VICTORIA

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Country throughout Australia.

We acknowledge that these lands have always been places of storytelling, and artistic and cultural expression.

We pay respect to Elders past, present, and emerging.

Acknowledgement of Disability Community

We acknowledge the labour, advocacy, and artistry of the artists and allies who have worked for more than fifty years to make the arts, media, and cultural industries more inclusive for the d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent community.

We thank you for dealing with discriminatory systems and institutions, lack of funding and resources, lack of accessible training, production, presentation, and exhibition opportunities, and lack of understanding of our crip time, space and methods.

We hope to follow your example, making and holding space to support the practice and the pride of future generations.

Contents

Archiving, Access and AI

Archives are vital cultural resources (Mason et.al forthcoming).

Mainstream archives, libraries, and cultural institutions have not historically included the work of d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people.

They have under-represented and mis-represented our work.

They have also had attitudinal, systemic, processual, physical, or digital barries that make them difficult for us to access – as authors, or as audiences.

This historical exclusion has created silences in representation and memory, and perpetuated bias in curatorial practice, language, and content.

As archival scholar Terry Cook articulates it

> “Archivists are what they keep, but they are also what they do not keep. Archival selections have social, cultural, and political repercussions” (Cook 2011: 181)

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Disability Action & Inclusion Plans

In recent years, research has looked at how institutions in Galleries, Libraries and Museum sector can better include d/Deaf, Disabled, and Neurodivergent people (Rieger 2022; Rieger et.al 2023).

Individual institutions and have launched Disability Action Inclusion plans, for example

- the Australian Museum *Accessibility Inclusion Plan 2018-2021* (2018)
- the National Gallery of Australia *Disability Inclusion Action Plan* (2022)
- National Library of Australia *Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2024-2026* (2024).
- The Arts Centre Melbourne – which hosts the Australian Performing Arts Collection (APAC), with more than 850,000 items from dance, theatre, opera, music, and circus – has launched *Disability, Equity and Inclusion Plan 2023–2027*.

Peak bodies representing the GLAM sector have also initiated plans, for example

- the National Association for Visual Arts *Disability Action Plan: 2025-2027* (2025)
- the Australian Museums and Galleries Association *Strategic Plan and Pillars 2024-2026* (2024), which includes disability in broader plans.

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It is more difficult to find these in relation to archives, and digital archives - defined as institutions or web-based databases that collect, catalogue, provide the public with access to historical records in a range of formats – until very recently. For example,

- the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, which is an audiovisual archive of film, television, and radio history with an online record, launched its first *Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2024-2027* (2024) less than a year ago (at the time of writing)
- The Australian Human Rights Commission, which retains archival records of public enquires, policy submissions, and legal decisions, launched its first *Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2024-2026* (2024) in the past year.
- The Australian National Archive indicates it's Diversity Plan in 2023-2024 has focus on increasing representation of Children and Young People, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, and people with disability (2023-2024) but does not appear to have made this or a more specific disability related Plan public yet.

Universities, which hold a range of collections, have launched Plans – though typically for the whole institution more so than the archive. Institutions like the CSIRO Archives, with records of scientific research and inventions, though publicly funded and stated to follow Universal Design principles, do not appear to have specific Plans, outlining accountability for language, representation, and accessibility. According, in a number of cases, the accountability for inclusion and access would be based on the Government's general public service standards.

Custodianship, Stewardship, and Autonomy

The recentness and aspirational ambitions of these Plans and Policies demonstrate the degree to which d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent have been excluded from cultural memory.

Advocating for our right to leadership – including custodianship, stewardship, and autonomy in relation to Disability related records and data – is mentioned in some of the most recent plans (e.g. NAVA Disability Action Plan 2025-2027).

The majority, however, focus on the basics of physical and digital access, employment, and representation, not governance.

They are – at best – derived from consultation with our community, not lead by our community.

The draft principles articulated by the National Disability Data Asset, which is referencing Government records in relation to Disability, and does recognise our right to custodianship, stewardship, and autonomy, does not appear to be widely known amongst other archives and archivist.

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In this context, as we have argued elsewhere, having the time, space, platforms and support to create, retain, and display records of our work – on our own terms – is a privilege Disabled people in Australia have not yet been afforded (Mason et.al. forthcoming).

In the developing the Disability Arts History Australia archival website, we have sought to address the fact that Disability Arts is “largely invisible within mainstream culture” (Mason et.al forthcoming). We have set out to

> "profile the people, companies, works, and critical moments in arts and disability policy that have helped shape the development of the field of Disability Arts in Australia". (Mason et.al. forthcoming).

We have, in alignment with principles of community archiving and custodianship, attempted to give artists, allies, and other stakeholders agency to tell their stories, and share their histories, on their own terms (Mason et.al. forthcoming). We have been curators, custodians, and stewards of over 10,000 cross-referenced items, including 1,600 records provided by organisations, and recollections of individual artists and allies in 49 interviews, as at site launch in 2025. We have engaged our community in co-design workshops, to identify principles for disseminating our own cultural heritage. We have, throughout the process, encountered a number of challenges, tensions, and contentions. This, as arts archivist Sara Callahan says, is to be expected – in the current climate,

> “[t]he archive has turned from a source towards a subject, and is now increasingly understood as a site of contestation, where power, memory, and representation are negotiated” (Callahan, 2022, p. 2).

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Identifying, cataloguing, and gaining consent to use records in a context where collaborators have limited time to assist, or are not clear if participants at the time understood they would be providing consent to disseminate records publicly, is a challenge (Mason et.al. forthcoming). Resources – including time and funds available – has further complicated the effort to collect archival records (Mason et.al. forthcoming). In addition to these perhaps anticipatable challenges, we have confronted a number of issues with the accessibility of both creating and disseminating records through databasing software. This means our archive is necessarily fragmented, incomplete, and a different experience for different users based on access requirements (Mason et.al. forthcoming).

In this report, we focus on how we have sought to address the (in)accessibility of archival databases, and in particular digital archival databases, to d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent authors and audiences.

As archival content management specialist Margot Note says

> “Archives embody the principles of access, stewardship, and service. However, for some users, physical and digital archives remain challenging to navigate, use, or even enter. Barriers to archival access are often unintentional, stemming from outdated facilities, inaccessible technologies, or limited awareness of diverse user needs.” (Note 2025)

In Australia, most Universities and research organisations align with FAIR and CARE principles for archive creation, use, and access. The FAIR – Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable – principles suggest there should be clear descriptions, clear consistent categorisation, and clear access conditions to support users to engage with data (Wilkinson et.al. 2016). The CARE – Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics – principles outline Indigenous people's right to data sovereignty (Caroll et.al. 2020). The Australian Research Data Commons advocates for these principles (ARDC 2022, 2023). The Australian Research Data Commons 'Accessibility' page indicates 'partial' compliance with WCAG, and says nothing out our stewardship of our data as Disabled people.

The National Disability Data Asset Charter (2024), and the National Disability Research Partnership Co-Design Guidelines (2023), do articulate the importance of our own stewardship over our own data – to ensure we control collection, representation, use, and accessibility.

However, these latter are rarely included in statements from Australian University and research organisation policies, principles, or commitments. This 'limited' awareness of and attention to diverse user needs has, indeed, proved a barrier for our work.

In this report, we consider whether modern technology, in particular Artificial Intelligence has assisted in navigating these challenges, in a context where our right to determine how data is collected, represented, used, and accessed is still not widely acknowledged.

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We outline some of the technologies we have used or tried to use to make authorship and audience accessible to ourselves and our community, where this has worked, where this has not worked or not reduced labour-intensiveness, and where this raises ethical concerns.

We find that, while a few AI technologies have assisted with metadata extraction, content summarisation, site navigation, and alternative accessible formats, many AI technologies do not yet offer fuller access and/or less labour intensive access to Disabled authors and audiences.

There is still work to do make archival database software and platforms available to us as authors and as audiences, and to make AI truly helpful in navigating barriers to access.

This includes a need to increase overall accessibility, address legacy content management, and the labour intensive nature of digital archiving, as essential to supporting us to be the curators, custodians, and stewards of our own data and data management protocols.

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Developing the Disability Arts History Australia archival database site

In developing the Disability Arts History Australia website, we have encountered a number of central challenges, articulated by our participants and collaborators, and embodied in mainstream archives we have engaged with.

This includes issues in relation to representation, attitude, policy, accessible content, display, and technology, and funding and resources.

Representation

- The belief that there is not a high volume of content by, and with, as well as about Disabled people, and/or that it is therapeutic and community rather than professional work that may not fit curatorial intent of collections
- The lack of differentiation of work by, with, or about Disability
- The changing language used to define and describe Disability over time – including terminology that is now unclear and/or offensive to contemporary audiences
- The practice where some institutions have changed language – including, in some cases, pulling content from display, or changing the description with play, to minimise collecting institutions contribution to bias, barriers, and problems for Disabled people

Attitude

- The belief that work by and with Disabled people is not of equal quality
- The belief that engaging with Disabled artists and allies, co-designing collection and curation processes, and co-designing strategies, techniques, and resources to ensure this is accessible to all Disabled artist and audiences is too costly, time consuming, and/or technical

Policy

- Lack of national, industry, and institutional policies/plans for including d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people – as authors, and audiences – in archives
- Lack of protocols to clearly differentiate work by, with, and/or about Disability in collections
- Lack of commitment to Disability-led governance of collections of work by, with, and/or about d/Deaf, Disabled, and or Neurodivergent people – data custodianship, stewardship, autonomy
- Lack of funding, resources, training to create accessibility
- Lack of promotion of archives, libraries, and other cultural institutions holdings of work by, with, and about Disabled people
- Lack of governance and accountability

Accessible content, display, and technology

- Statements clearly signalling accessibility – or lacks in accessibility – in promotions
- Site, venue, display mapping to guide engagement physical and digital collections – including institutions internal, external, and social sites
- Appropriate/adjustable signs, rooms, furniture, equipment in physical spaces
- Assistive/adaptive technology to support employment and engagement
  - WCAG standards in digital content/websites
  - Auslan, captions, transcripts
  - Audio description
  - Colour contrast, font, format
  - Relaxed/tactile engagement options
  - Quiet/sensory rooms, and sensory maps – high and low noise, light, scent locations and times
  - Plain English / Easy English information
- Application access standards to workflow for staff as well as experience for audiences

Funding

- That supports access, or requires access as a condition of support
- That supports d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people – as the cohort most excluded from education - to train to work as archivists, curators, and creators of archives and collections
- That supports allies to undertake Disability-led training in Disability Cultural Competence for archiving
- That supports d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people – as the cohort most excluded from employment and economic participation – to engage in this work on a non-volunteer basis, around their non-traditional work, life administration, and disability administration

Progress in inclusive and accessible archiving in Australia

As indicated, archives, libraries, and collecting institutions have – in some cases, and to some degree – begun to recognise the need to address these issues for d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent authors and audiences.

The National Library of *Australia's Disability Inclusion Action Plan* (2024-2026), for example, includes goals for improving representation, access, and inclusion for Disabled people – in the workforce, and in the physical and digital experience of collections. This plan seeks to build inclusive culture in a Disability confident organisation, embedding access in policy, planning, and operations, employing Disabled people, and physical and digital access to services, collections, and exhibitions through strategies like Bindi maps to support wayfinding, and assistive/adaptive technology in venues like Rading Rooms.

As noted, most Plans do date do not discuss our rights as d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people to establish our own Policy, Plan, and Procedures.

The fact that we have a right to expect this, in the same way other historically marginalised cohorts do, is recognised in the draft position statement principles of Australia's new National Disability Dataset, a resource designed to link data from across government systems.

The principles in this document stress that we as Disabled people must have control over what is in a data set, what consent, privacy, and safety protocols are applied to a data set, who engages with a data set and how, and how the data is used to inform development of policies, systems, and resources to serve our community.

While acknowledging the need to improve accessibility of systems, most Plans for archives, collections, and academic institution holdings do not – yet – recognise this.

They do not draw a clear line between accessibility, including digital accessibility, and supporting our right to custodianship, stewardship, and autonomy. Many address us mainly as audiences – at best, there is discussion of aspiration to implement systems to ensure they are employing more disabled people – not leadership and governance.

Using AI for Digital Archiving

In developing the Disability Arts History Australia website, digital accessibility for ourselves and our community – as authors and as audiences – arose as a key challenge, and key set of learnings, in relation to our right to lead and govern how we are represented in archives. As AI-driven tools are already shaping access, assistive technology, and archives/digital archives, we explored use of a range of tools to assist.

As information technology specialists Shibu Chemnad and Razak Othman outline

> “Digital accessibility, as defined by the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), implies that people with disabilities should be able to access, navigate, perceive, and interact with content [Initiative (WAI), 2022]. Digital accessibility refers to the practice of designing digital systems and services in a manner that makes them accessible to all individuals, including those with disabilities (Sharma et al., 2020).” (Chemnad & Othman 2024)

“Digital accessibility is,” they argue

> “integral to modern times, especially because a significant percentage of the population is with one or multiple disabilities today… It ensures that everyone, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, has equal access to digital content and services, and is an essential factor of an organization that provides digital content or services” (Chemnad & Othman 2024)

All archives today include digital content and services, to greater or lesser degree.

The volume of what Lise Jelliant (2022) describes as born-digital data and data collections has changed approaches to archiving, approaches to retaining, searching, and engaging with records. This can be via the creation of digital archives, with born-digital or a combination of digitised and born-digital data, as well as searching content in physical and digital archives, and engaging with this content as a researcher, student, or everyday audience member.

While Disability Access and Inclusion plans often stress accessibility – if not cultural sensitivity and agency for d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent authors and audiences – organisations can also view time and cost as barriers to implementing more accessible systems.

Artificial Intelligence – the simulation of learning, problem solving, and reasoning by machines and machine learning, including large language models – has already been flagged as having the potential to transform approaches to assistive technology and Universal Design for accessibility (Chemnad & Othman 2024). Indeed, many AI tools, technologies, and platforms began for and with Disabled users, before gaining wider traction. For example, speech-to-text and text-to-speech technology began forth and with Disabled users, long before using agents like Siri or Alexa to voice command a range of devices and applications (e.g. Kurzweil et.al. 1976).

AI, and the use of AI, is controversial in an arts context – many critique the its potential for inaccuracy and bias, it's use of authors/creators intellectual property without payment or acknowledgement, its implications for privacy and safety, as well as its heavy use of environmental resources like water. This, Chemnad and Othman (2024) say, means use of AI to improve access – in archiving or any other context – needs to be approached with "caution and focus on inclusivity." (Chemnad & Othman 2024)

At the same time, as Reshmy Krishnan and Sivakumar Manickam say

> "With its ability to learn, adapt, and make decisions, AI has opened up new possibilities for people with disabilities. AI-based assistive technologies can analyze data, recognize patterns, and make predictions, making them more efficient and effective than traditional assistive technologies." (Krishnan,& Manickam 2024)

In a systemic review of 43 articles on the topic, Chemnad and Othman (2024) found that AI is used for access for people with visual, speech, and hearing impairment – there are less technologies for people neurological, neurodevelopmental, physical mobility, and other impairments available – mainly spell checkers, grammar checkers, alternative controller systems for these.

> "There is a paucity of comprehensive AI systems tailored to address the unique challenges faced by people with other disabilities such as speech and hearing impairments, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), neurological disorders, and motor impairments" (Chemnad & Othman 2024).

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This partly because large language systems, at present stage of development, have more capacity to transcribe and translate English spoken or written language, less capacity to transcribe and translate multimodal sign languages that use manual, non-manual, and at times vocal features like Sign Language. It is also partly percentage of Disabled people included in development, training, and User Experience testing of the technologies, let along leading this process. There has been heavy critique of non-Disabled people developing what Liz Jackson (2019) calls ‘disability dongles,’ solutions that appear appealing at first glance, but are not solutions to problems Disabled people asked for, and do not see usage by our community. There is, Chemnad and Othman say, “[a] need for a more equitable distribution of research efforts” (2024), and agency, to address this.

Groups like AI4LAM - AI for Libraries, Archives, and Museums – on GitHub have acknowledge this, and shared content to assist archive, library, and museum professionals to use AI for a range of purposes – including access. Mannheimer and collaborators (2024) note AI is used in large/academic libraries in particular. It is used to extract metadata, make search recommendations, and use materials in text/image search, archives. In this sense, the use of Natural Language Processing, image recognition, and bots for search recommendations and content summaries, is as prevalent in archives, libraries and collecting institutions as it is in other settings – for example, analysing and reporting on medical images and data in Health settings (Chemnad & Othman 2024).

Using AI in the Development of the DAHA digital archive

The Disability Arts History Australia website was funded by the Australian Research Council, Creative Australia, QUT's Centre for Justice, and Curtin University's Centre for Technology and Culture, in collaboration with University of Melbourne and Arts Access Victoria, with ethics approval granted by QUT (Approval 2021000382). The site was created by, and co-designed with, d/Deaf, Disabled, and Neurodivergent artists. It is build on Omeka S, and hosted via the ARDC Nectar cloud. The site, at launch, includes over 10,000 cross-referenced searchable items, from over 1,600 documents and URLs, and 49 interviews. All content is either public domain or used with permission; original creators retain copyright.

The first steps in developing the site addressed a number of challenges

- Difference in preference, and changes over time, in definitions Disability, and description d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent artists and their work
- Difficulty collecting due to lack of clarity if records are by, with, or about Disabled people
- Difficulty collecting due to data gaps
- Difficulty collecting due to time, energy, effort to identify, digitise and represent

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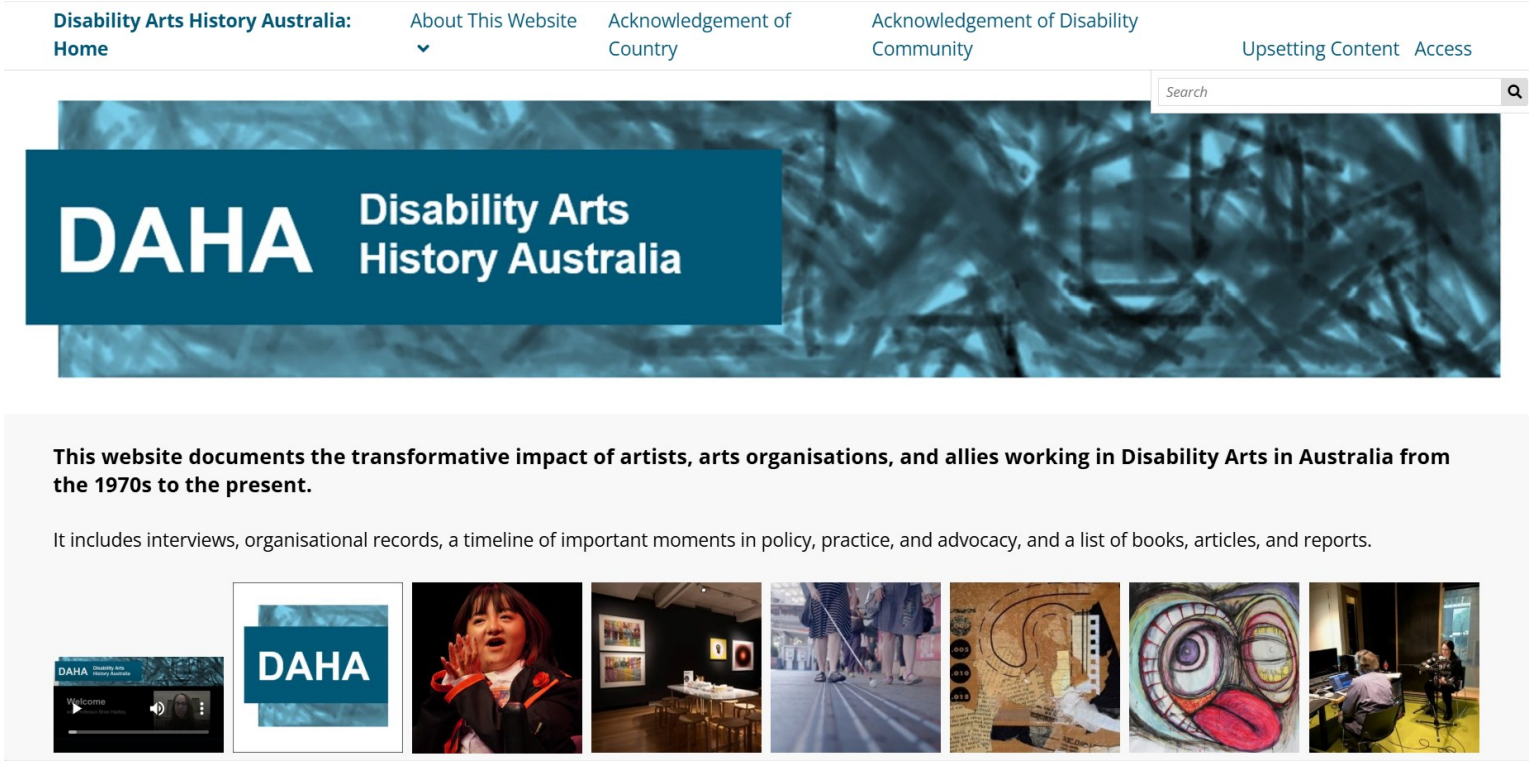
After a volume of data was collected, the next challenge was digitising, categorising, and uploading content, in digital archive platforms that are not fully accessible to Disabled people as authors or as audiences.

The access features we incorporated into design of the layout of the site, based on co-design workshops with d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent artists and allies around Australia included simplified layout, blue rather than red colour scheme, dark-on-light contrast without being too bright, short text sections, sans serif fonts, no autoplay media

The access features also include Auslan interpretation, captions, transcripts, screen readable descriptions of content, with ALT text, audio of reports, Plain/Easy english of reports. A key problem was that PDFs – particularly PDFs that are scanned from 1970s and 1980s documents – are not screen reader accessible, or easy for Dyslexic authors to read, with poor font and colour contrast. Further, while we used links to websites captured in Trove, or that we added to Internet archive, to make the URLs we linked to more stable, as they are external sites we could not know if the ARIA code was screen reading, or the font, colour, contrast, and layout was accessible. Funding limitations meant that re-creating all text and re-describing all images across thousands of pages was not feasible. Providing a clear description, and coding, in the Omeka site entry, and also in Accessibility Tags in the document, was the most we could do in the funding and time envelope available.

The result, on launch, is a site that is not a complete record of the history of Disability Arts in Australia, and not completely accessible – due to those PDFs. Our developers and User Experience testers indicate about 70% accessible (see WCAG Conformance Statement).

As we reach launch of the site, we are left with questions, and learnings, about the pros and cons of attempting to use AI to create an archival database that is more inclusive of d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people, as both contributors and users.



Contribution of AI Tools to Access

The different types of AI tools we attempted to engage with in developing the Disability Arts History Australia website broadly align with the categories of assistive technologies authors in the field have identified

> "**Visual**: Individuals with limited vision, color blindness, or blindness.
>
> **Auditory**: Individuals with hearing impairments.
>
> **Motor**: Individuals with tremors and spasms, slowness of the muscles, or restricted fine motor control
>
> **Cognitive**: Individuals who struggle with reasoning and problem solving, memory problems, learning impairments, or attention issues."

(Krishnan & Manickam 2024)

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AI Guided Navigation

- We are and have been aware of AI navigation tools, as part of our broader research. The majority are for physical venues and environments. These typically require subscription, set up, venue installation – technical support at the creator end - and have limited coverage in some regions/institutions. Non-bespoke and free apps may have limitations, particularly in new/public spaces. There can be safety issues if inaccurate in these spaces. There was note an equivalent for online archive wayfinding that we discovered in developing this archive.
  - Seeing AI (Free, iOS): Camera speaks text, describes surroundings, content of barcode, and location people, places, and items it has entered into it.
  - BindiMaps (Free/Paid, Mobile): Australian app, Bluetooth beacons and AI for wayfinding in Universities, Shopping Centres, Hospitals, and other cultural institutions, voice navigation nfor Blind and Low Vision users.
  - Maze (Free/Paid, Mobile): Australian platform used in cultural institutions and public spaces, wayfinding, sensory maps, and personalised navigation

AI Speech-to-Text, Text-to-Speech, and Icon-to-Speech

- AI Speech-to-Text and Text-to-Speech are amongst the widely known and used technologies. In developing our archive, we made use of Microsoft Office Suite's 'Read Aloud' type functions – which do integrate screen readers and similar tools into native set up. However, we found these had limitations, when reading digitised scans of historical documents in non-readable formats, on coloured paper, with difficult to read 'Courier' type fonts. These agents also present challenges in terms of their ability to interpret Australian accents, Indigenous Australian words, and disability-related language, which means the results of usage can require a lot of editing. The cost of subscription, and customisation, can be a barrier to usage.
  - Speechify (Free tier, Mobile/Web): Converts text to speech, including web pages, emails, documents.
  - Microsoft Office Suite (Mobile/Web): Includes Read Aloud, Dictate, and Immersive Reader, support speech-to-text and text-to-speech.
  - Google Speech Services (Mobile/Web): Android voice typing and screen reading, converts speech to text and vice versa.
  - Widgit Symbols + SymbolStix (Desktop/Web): Converts visual symbols to spoken words, icon-to-speech tools used in AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) systems, used in Education and Disability support

AI Captions and Transcripts

- We made quite extensive use of AI generated captions and transcripts in developing our archive. We used these to transcribe recordings of interviews, provide summaries of interviews to aid searching and interpretability for some users, and generate captions to support engagement with videos for some users. In this case, we do find applications like Adobe's Premier Pro, though able to generate these, are not set up for those who do not use mouse/keyboard navigation, or use verbal navigation. Again, these can also misinterpret Australian and Indigenous Australian words, and disability-related language. They can misinterpret or 'skip' speech by d/Deaf, Disabled, and or Neurodivergent people, where we have our own communication modes. Accordingly, here again, results require a lot of editing, and use of additional/alternative platforms to produce results users can engage with, including things like Plain/Easy English summaries.
  - Sonix AI (Subscription, Web/Desktop): Used for generating transcripts, captions, and interview summaries
  - Otter.ai (Free plan, Mobile/Web): Real-time transcription with speaker identification. Good for meetings and lectures, but may miss nuance in disability-specific terms.
  - Microsoft Office Suite (Mobile/Web): Includes Read Aloud, auto-captioning in PowerPoint, and live transcription in Teams.
  - Adobe Suite (Subscription, Desktop/Web): Adobe Premiere Pro and Adobe Express offer AI-assisted captioning and layout tools.
  - Browsers (Mobile/Web): e.g. Chrome Live Captions auto-generates captions for audio/video content.

AI Audio Description

- We also made use of AI audio descriptions, to describe documents and images in ALT text, to be interpreted by screen readers, and transfer written documents into audio to be interpreted by Blind and Low Vision users who do not read text. Again, these can lack a range of voices and accents (e.g. Australian accent), can require cloning and additional editing to produce voice and accent interpretable to users (e.g. where an Americanised pronounciation is not likely to be clear to Australians), and recognition of complex images requires more cultural context (e.g. users calling on a volunteer rather than AI in Be My Eyes).
  - Microsoft Office Suite (Mobile/Web): Includes Read Aloud and Immersive Reader features that convert text to speech.
  - ElevenLabs (Free Tier/Web): Creates and clones voices, generates audio from text with high realism, used to produce audio versions of reports and presentations.
  - Be My Eyes (Free, Mobile): Connects users to volunteers or AI (powered by OpenAI) for real-time visual guidance. Can describe surroundings, images, or documents aloud. Effective for spontaneous audio description, but dependent on internet access and may struggle with complex or culturally specific content.

AI extraction of data to restore records

- In this project, our focus was on a digital archive – we did not find AI tools particularly useful in trying to make some of our records more legible, e.g. making older PDFs screen readable, and ended up using very manual approaches. We found, again, that a number of these tools were challenging when using other than mouse/keyboard to interface, along with drag-and-drop interfaces that were not designed (or adjustable) for users with different hand control and coordination (in the same way that, for example, the buttons on an Apple watch can be set to register slower clicking). Though Microsoft and Adobe had built in accessibility checkers, platforms like Canva offered less of this, and required a lot of additional labour to enter ALT text, audio description, and Plain/Easy English. The image restoration, and AI enhanced scanning and printing, needed to pair with other tools to check accessibility and add descriptors. Subscription cost and unclear terms around data ownership were/are additional barriers. Under the terms of our ethical clearance, we were not sharing any data publicly without consent. Even when using AI to work with data we did have consent to share publicly, using tools supported by our Universities – so data entered is linked to/limited by our University login, not sent to outside data sets – was still our preferred approach.
  - Copilot (Mobile/Web/Desktop): Extracts text and keywords from documents, generates metadata, generates CSV/JSON suggestions.
  - Gemini (Mobile/Web): Extracts text and keywords from documents, generates summaries and metadata.
  - Microsoft Accessibility AI (Free, Mobile/Web): AI enhancement image clarity, Windows 3D, Paint 3D, support for accessible formats and tactile printing printing
  - Adobe Suite (desktop/subscription): Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom offer AI-powered image restoration (e.g. removing damage, enhancing resolution), Adobe Substance 3D enables creation and export of tactile models for 3D printing.
  - Canva (Mobile/Web/Desktop): Limited image enhancement and restoration features (e.g. background remover, filters).

AI extraction to generate metadata

- We used similar tools for extracting data, formatting data (e.g. alphabetising names of persons involved in works, putting them into CSV formatted lists, for import to Omeka platform, etc.). They always required rechecking. They also presented challenges when using non-mouse/keyboard interface, screen reader, including difficulties with drag-and-drop and button pushing. They also, additionally, presented challenges with requirement to add ALT text, audio description, etc. – even if this included turning to another AI tool, or another Accessibility Checker in another tool – to try to assist with the process. Subscription cost – including, in the example of Adobe Express, additional subscription cost to access beyond-free-trial versions of the applications embedded in the Adobe application - and unclear terms around data ownership/were are additional barriers
  - Adobe Suite (Desktop/Subscription): Adobe Express includes features like AI-generated images and embeds external apps like HeyGen to generate avatars that speak/present text.
  - Copilot (Mobile/Web/Desktop): Transfers CSV and JSON-style data, generates metadata, and supports accessibility tagging. Offers ALT text suggestions and integrates with Microsoft Accessibility Checker.
  - Gemini (Mobile/Web): Transfers CSV and JSON-style data, generates metadata, and supports structured content creation.
  - Canva (Mobile/Web/Desktop): Offers AI-generated images, templates, and design automation.

AI Supported Search Tools

- In this project, we received advice to and ultimately decided to use Omeka as our distribution platform – because, unlike WordPress designed for blog-based output, it is designed for archival and database output. A key difficulty, in making this decision, was that while there was an Accessibility module similar to Accessibility widgets for Wordpress for the previous version of Omeka there was no such module for the current version of Omeka. This is because these types of modules have been developed by community in GitHub, and, in some cases, the community member has not been able to continue updates. This mean a lot of labour in design, trial, and User Testing to see how accessible our site would be without widgets, and design as much accessibility as we could into it without requiring bespoke coding. The addition of UserWay type technologies was financially unfeasible – we did not have funds to build and maintain an extremely bespoke site, and at the end of the funded project period, we would have no funds for continued subscription. The additional functionalities of UserWay were also mixed in terms of whether we would have turned them on. A toggle to go between dark and light mode would have been useful. Advice was against a toggle to turn out a screen reader in a widget, as these can conflict with native assistive/adaptive technology on the users computer. While we found searchability possible in Omeka, we found the Search and Advanced Search in Dublin Core or Schema ontology was likely to be confusing and complicated for some users, and thus undertook labour to add filters to just click to see records associated with a State, artform, or cohort. With setting up cross-referencing and searchability being amongst the most time consuming and technically difficult tasks, we found that – although companies like Microsoft and Apple generally offer stronger relationship with native screen readers and captions, ALT Text/tagging suggestions, semantic structure and Plain/Easy English suggestions – they have idiosyncrasies. Apple phone, for example, screen read the underpinning HTML as well as the front facing text we wanted users to get through the CSS format. Omeka instructions, and GitHub advice, offered some support working through some of these issues – as a free platform, built on a community basis, one would not expect a lot of tech support, but we did find them responsive. Companies like Microsoft and Apple did not necessarily have readily accessible bespoke advice and support (phone/chat only no email support).
  - Microsoft Accessibility AI (Free, Mobile/Web): Includes tools like Immersive Reader, ALT text suggestions, and AI-powered search and description features.
  - UserWay (Free trials, Web): AI widgets that enhance accessible navigation by adding screen reader support, keyboard shortcuts, and visual adjustments. Often used to retrofit accessibility onto existing websites.
  - WordPress Accessibility Widgets (Free/Paid plugins): Includes plugins like WP Accessibility, One Click Accessibility, and accessiBe integration, offers skip links, font resizing, and contrast toggles.
  - Omeka Accessibility Modules (Free/Open Source): Includes modules like AccessibilityPlus and themes with ARIA support. Offers basic improvements like keyboard navigation and screen reader compatibility

Challenges and Concerns with AI Tools

Using AI was sometimes helpful in our attempts to build this archive, and make sure it was accessible to d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people, as authors and as audiences. While Sonix, Adobe Suite, and Microsoft Suite are all subscription, we have a certain amount of access through our Universities (as well as a data privacy protection through our Universities). These were actually amongst the useful, in extracting data, formatting it for CSV sheets to drive the searchable Omeka website, and generate things like audio versions of reports to increase the accessibility of the site.

Using AI also presented both technical and ethical concerns.

For example, while our users did indicate using Social Stories (Gray 1993), Visual Stories, and Infographics to engage would be useful, providing they were not too overwhelming. AI can generate things like images – though, because Adobe Express allowed us to generate images by uploading our own images and setting style prompts (i.e. using our own images we have the permission/ copyright to use as basis), it was preferred over others where permission/copyright to use images generated (or base images behind them) was not clear.

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We still had to instruct the AI in relation to visual contrast, or overwhelming content.

We still had to generate the ALT text and audio description, through alternative applications/platforms, whether through general ones like Microsoft Suite, or more targeted subscription platforms like Be My Eyes and Eleven Labs.

In the end, we have thus far opted for using voice only audio descriptions, with prompt to Eleven Labs to clone the Chief Investigator's voice.

We have not used things like the HeyGen, in Adobe Express, that will generate a visual avatar off the Chief Investigator's face, as well as the voice.

In part, this decision was to balance need, and ethical implications. We need screen readable PDFs of reports, and audio versions of reports, for Blind and Low Vision artists and audiences in our community. We, as d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent creators do not necessarily have the speaking capacity to do the amount required. We see the benefits of the audio, and the avatars, to assist here. However, we query, also, whether us extending the use of these tools brings us closer to the point where support agencies and funding requires non-speaking people to use these, and requires non-speaking people to use these instead of human supports, even if they do not want to do this.

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We would summarise the key challenges and concerns around using the AI to include

- Bias – misinterpreting, mislabelling, misrepresenting d/Deaf, Disabled and/or Neurodivergent users voices and content
- Apps and platforms themselves assume the creator is not using alternative creation, only the end user, and work better for some d/Deaf, Disabled, and or Neurodivergent users than others
- Labour of manual editing to ensure accuracy and accessibility standards
- Compatibility/integration with other tools
- Subscription cost and set up can be a barrier
- Continued management and maintenance
- Ethics - content origin and copyright
- Ethics – the double-edged sword of Universal Design, withdrawing other support/human support, because technological solutions now exist

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The Website

At launch, in 2025, the www.disabilityartshistoryaustralia.net website includes –

- 💻 **1661 Archival Records**: Annual Reports, Programs, Promotional Flyers and Cards and more, available via URLs or PDFs.
- 🗣️ **49 Interviews**: With d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent artists and allies, with Auslan interpretation, captions, and transcripts for each video
- 📍 **Search Tools**: To explore 10,864 people, organisations, and works associated with Australia's peak Disability Arts organisations, and filter for location, artform, or topics such as Access, Education and employment, Participation in public and political life
- 🗓️ **Timeline**: Important moments in Disability Arts practice, policy, and activism
- 📚 **Reference List**: Books, articles, reports and other helpful resources
- 🗂️ **Curated Histories**: Pages focused on specific themes such as Disability Arts Festivals or Government Policy, Strategy, and Funding

💻 Visit the Disability Arts History Australia website at:
https://disabilityartshistoryaustralia.net

🗣️ For media, interviews, further information, or enquires about tailored reports, contact:
Professor Bree Hadley, bree.hadley@qut.edu.au

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WCAG Conformance Statement

This website has been designed with reference to WCAG 2.1 Level AA accessibility standards, informed by consultation with d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent artists.

It incorporates semantic structure, screen reader compatibility, and inclusive design features identified as important by contributors. While the platform supports key accessibility functions, some features only partially meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA criteria due to platform limitations, budget constraints, and the archival nature of over 1,000 scanned documents.

The following breakdown outlines features that support WCAG 2.1 Level AA compliance, and those that are partial or non-compliant.

Features Supporting WCAG 2.1 Level AA Compliance:

- Semantic HTML structure using <header>, <nav>, <main>, and <footer> meets WCAG 2.1 Level AA – 1.3.1 (Info and Relationships)
- Screen reader compatibility meets WCAG 2.1 Level AA – 1.1.1 (Non-text Content), 2.4.1 (Bypass Blocks), and 4.1.2 (Name, Role, Value)
- ALT text for images and visual content meets WCAG 2.1 Level AA – 1.1.1 (Non-text Content)
- Use of plain English writing supports WCAG 2.1 Level AA – 3.1.5 (Reading Level)
- Font size, contrast, and layout choices meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA – 1.4.3 (Contrast - Minimum), 1.4.4 (Resize Text), and partially meet 1.4.8 (Visual Presentation – AAA)
- Absence of autoplay or disruptive popups satisfies WCAG 2.1 Level AA – 2.2.2 (Pause, Stop, Hide)
- Transcripts and captions for video content meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA – 1.2.2 (Captions) and 1.2.3 (Audio Description or Media Alternative)
- Consistent navigation and structure support WCAG 2.1 Level AA – 3.2.3 (Consistent Navigation) and 3.2.4 (Consistent Identification)

Partial and Non-Compliance with WCAG 2.1 Level AA:

- Omeka S does not provide a module or widget to toggle between light/dark mode, large/small font, or other customisation options. This is WCAG 2.1 Level AA compliant. It is not fully WCAG 2.1 Level AAA compliant – 1.4.8 (Visual Presentation)
- Omeka S provides semantic HTML navigation (<header>, <nav>, <main>, and <footer>), but it does not explicitly provide ARIA landmarks and role attributions (<header role="banner">, <nav role="navigation">, <main role="main">, <footer role="contentinfo">). It does not provide skip navigation/skip to content links. This partially meets WCAG 2.1 Level AA – 2.4.1 (Bypass Blocks) and 4.1.2 (Name, Role, Value)
- Scanned and photocopied archival PDFs have descriptions, including Accessibility Tags in each PDF, but do not include full text transcri full list of images and ALT text for over 1,000 documents. This means these PDFs do not meet WCAG 2.1 Level AA – 1.1.1 (Non-text Cor to time, budget, and technology constraints

Glossary

Terminology in this Report

Archiving: The process of collecting, cataloging, and preserving historical records for public access. In this context, it highlights the historical exclusion of work by d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people from mainstream archives.
Critical Disability Studies: A research framework that analyses disability by considering a wide range of factors, including **physical, psychological, educational, economic, and political** influences. It moves beyond traditional medical and social models to understand disability as a complex, socially constructed experience.
UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities): An international human rights treaty that sets out the rights of people with disabilities.
AIATSIS Code of Ethics: A set of ethical guidelines for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Disability Arts: Artistic practices created by people with disabilities. The report defines it as being central to the development of Disability culture and to exercising rights like education, employment, and self-expression.
Archival Records: Historical documents, such as flyers, programs, photos, videos, and organizational materials.
Steering Committee: A group of experts and stakeholders, including researchers, artists, and organisational leaders, who provided intellectual guidance for a project.
Semi-structured Interview: An interview format that uses a question guide to ensure consistent topics are covered but allows for flexible, conversational chains based on the participant's preferences and responses.
Co-design Workshops: Collaborative sessions where people come together to help design something – in this case, principles for building the project's website.
Disability Arts: Artistic practices and works created by d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent individuals. The report highlights its role in advocacy and its centrality to the development of Disability culture.
Archival Records: Historical documents collected for the project, such as flyers, programs, photos, and organizational reports. These records were used to show the historical evolution of the Disability Arts sector in Australia.

DAHA

Glossary

Terminology in this Report

Oral History Interviews: The process of collecting personal stories and insights from artists and allies through interviews.
Cognitive Ramp: A principle for accessible communication used in the semi-structured interviews. It involves an informal, preparatory session, often with a supporter, to help people with **cognitive differences** ease into a research conversation and confirm their consent and interest.
Auslan: Australian Sign Language, the sign language of the Australian Deaf community.
Medical model of disability: Defined disability as an individual problem caused by our physical, mental, or sensory impairments.
Social model of disability: Defines disability as a social problem caused by attitudes, systems, processes, physical or digital infrastructure that does not welcome different bodyminds
Critical model of disability: Addresses disability in terms of systemic injustice, power, and rights
Deficit-based language: Talking about what d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people cannot do, rather than our strengths, and what we can do
Disability-led practice: Work that is governed, managed, and created by d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people
Intersectionality: The multiple factors, such as race, gender, sexuality, and disability, that intersect as part of our identity, and impact our experience of privilege or non-privilege
Representation, Underrepresentation, Misrepresentation: Whether an historically marginalised group is portrayed, portrayed enough, or portrayed in the way this community feels is reasonable, in arts and media, including via the community's own self-expression
AI (Artificial Intelligence): The simulation of human intelligence by machines, used here as a tool to improve the accessibility of digital archives. Examples include using AI for metadata extraction and generating alternative formats like captions.

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Glossary

Terminology in this Report

GLAM Sector: An acronym for Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums, which are cultural institutions that the text discusses in the context of implementing disability inclusion plans.
Disability Inclusion Action Plans: Formal documents created by institutions to outline their strategies for improving representation, access, and employment for people with disabilities.
Community Archiving: A practice that gives a specific community, such as the Disability community, the authority to collect, curate, and preserve its own cultural history.
Custodianship, Stewardship, and Autonomy: A set of concepts that define the right of a community to control its own data.
WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines): A set of technical standards for making web content more accessible to people with disabilities. It serves as a benchmark for digital accessibility.
Access: The ability for people to engage with and use physical and digital archives. The text identifies multiple barriers to access, including attitudinal (negative beliefs), systemic (institutional policies), processual (complex procedures), and physical and digital (inaccessible spaces and websites).
Cultural Safety: Places, relationships, and people that make us feel that our lived experience, identity, and culture is understood, welcome, and valued
Labour: The physical, psychological, or emotional work required to manage barriers to access for d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people, the fatigue this labour creates
Sustainable/Sustainability: Having the physical, psychological, emotional, educational, economic, and environmental resource to support a liveable career, and a liveable life
Omeka: The platform used to build the Disability Arts History Australia website. It is a content management system designed for digital collections and archives, allowing for searchable filters and a cross-referenced database

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