# Transcript: Beyond Function: Alt Text as Poetry with Finnegan Shannon.

Webinar recorded on March 20th, 2025.

Note: This transcript has been edited for clarity and brevity.

**Sinéad:**

Hello, everyone. My name is Sinéad Burke. I am the CEO and founder of Tilting the Lens.

And I feel very lucky to be welcoming you here this morning, this afternoon, and this evening to our conversation with Finnegan Shannon. Before delving into the conversation, just up top to share information around the accessibility for today's webinar. We are joined by two sign language interpreters. We have James on ASL and Altan on BSL. We also have Kimm, our live captioner, who is providing captions and also providing a live transcript which will be available to you within the chat box. This is a space of safety and access as a baseline. If at any point there are access considerations that you need that would support your participation in the webinar, I would really encourage you to in the chat box send a message to my Tilting the Lens colleagues.

They are Conny and Emma... and they will be able to support you with technical support or access functionality to ensure that you can enjoy today's webinar. Thank you for joining us. We're thrilled to have you here. If this is your first time at a Tilting the Lens webinar, you are most welcome. To give you a sense of who we are and what we do, Tilting the Lens is on a mission to design a more equitable and accessible world. What does this mean practically and more specifically? We are committed to making a meaningful and measurable impact on the lives of disabled people. We do this by working with disabled people and by working with clients to create pathways for employment that don't just result in recruitment, but focus on retention, promotion, and positioning disabled people as leaders, creatives, and innovators. We invest in disabled people and contribute to the economic progress of the community to our research, and collaborating with disabled people scale our capacity and project output. We do this in the built environment, product and service design, digital accessibility, and company culture and HR. But we also try as much as possible to open source and share our network, our research, and our learning. Which is why I'm so pleased about today's conversation. From my very first iterations on the internet, I have been an admirer of Finnegan Shannon's work. In the background today of my home office here in Ireland is a copy of Alt Text as Poetry, which has been a text which has shaped my experience of access and my practice. I would love to introduce you, everybody, to

Finnegan Shannon. Fin, you are very welcome here today.

**Fin:**

Hi, everyone. This is Fin. I'm so happy to be here.

**Sinéad:**

Fin, for access purposes, most particularly shall we begin with a visual description of ourselves? I feel like there's certain expectations for a visual description. I'll let you go first.

**Fin:**

I always, yeah, I always think about my self description and I struggle with it. I'm on screen today from my studio in Manhattan in New York. And I'm a boyish white person in my mid 30s with bleach blond hair. And today I'm wearing my NYCtransoral history T-shirt.

**Sinéad:**

Thank you. And to echo, I'm going to give a brief visual description. I am a white cis-gendered woman. I use the pro nouns she and her. I identify as queer and physically Disabled. I have dwarfism. And in preparation for today's conversation, Fin and I met earlier this week. And we were talking about merchandise and I was expressing my desire for an "Alt Text as Poetry" cap or beanie and shared with them that we have Tilting the Lens sweatshirts. So I am wearing a pink Tilting the Lens sweatshirt.

So Fin, we have done visual descriptions of ourselves. I would love for you to tell me and us how do you describe yourself? Who are you?

What do you do for those who are new to you and your practice?

**Fin:**

I am an artist. That's kind of the primary realm that I'm working in. My background is in visual art in drawing and print making. But now I really work in so many different ways.

I have done projects like "Alt Text as Poetry" with my collaborator Bojana Coklyat, that take the form of a book and workshop curriculum. I have done installations. I have made furniture pieces. But I think at the core of everything that I do, I'm really interested in what I think is ultimately a kind of an unanswerable question which is what is disability culture? Or what are disability cultures? And yeah, I think that's always kind of, like, yeah, what I'm thinking about.

**Sinéad:**

Great. I noticed Patricia had her hand up. I'm not sure if it's in the -- if so, I'm going to ask for those had her hand up. I'm not sure if it's in the -- if so, I'm going to ask for those if we can

move it to the Q&A box. If those using screen readers and engaging in a session like this, if their screen reader is audible, every time a chat comes in, the screen reader reads out that chat and text. It's often a distraction from the content.

I'm not sure if that is the issue. Hit it by accident. I have misunderstood that. Thank you. I'm glad you can join us.

As a reminder, we would love for a lot of the content and conversation to move into the Q&A box just to ensure anybody using a screen reader can also participate in the dialogue and conversation. Okay, so Fin, we have established your artistry and your practice. I have known of your work for a very long time. And I think what we have in common if I could be so bold is that we spend a lot of our practice challenging perceptions around disability and accessibility. What was the moment when you first realised that this was the work you wanted to do? And wanted to build an artistic practice around it?

**Fin:**

I think for me it really came from the experiences I had with other disabled artists and writers' work and just how transformative it was for me to see them articulate their experience on their own terms and how supportive that was for me in terms of understanding myself. And yeah, I just felt like, wow, what an honor it would be to be kind of part of that dialogue and conversation.

**Sinéad:**

How has your practice evolved since due to that influence and exposure?

**Fin:**

I think one of the things that feels really core to my work is cross disability solidarity and I think that is a practice that is always changing. You know, I have some of my work really comes from my own needs and experiences. But I'm not interested in living in a world where only my needs are met. And yeah, and I really think of other disabled people as the primary audience for my work, and I want to -- because so many art spaces are so inaccessible, like I kind of realised that I had to help shape the container that my work could be experienced within. But it also for me is like a constant learning process. There's truly, you know, infinite things to know about disability and access. And so, yeah, I'm always curious about, yeah, kind of like the edges of what I know and what I want to know more about. And yeah, I definitely for example have seen my work get way more multi-sensory throughout my practice. You know, I went to --

I have a studio art visual art training, and there was never any discussion of working visually as a barrier. And through my collaboration with Bojana Coklyat and also the work of so many other amazing blind creatives, I feel like I have really been able to reorient to visual communication and be much more thoughtful about how and when I am communicating

visually. And also when I do want to use visual access as one entry point, thinking about how there can be really luxe and interesting alternate entry points for experiencing the work.

**Sinéad:**

I love that idea.

Because what it speaks to is access is something that is not just about creating an entry point for compliance nature in a way. But actually is about how do you create an equal if not better visual experience for somebody who isn't engaging in the visual material. How do you do that through narrative, through storytelling, through specific commentary on identity. I want to talk about "Alt Text as Poetry." But I'm mindful we have people joining us that are very familiar with your work. We have people who are experts in visual accessibility. And we have people who have come to this conversation for the first time.

I'm mindful that already I have used the phrase "Alt Text as Poetry" more than once. Can you tell us what is Alt Text and then in turn what is "Alt Text as Poetry"?

**Fin:**

Yes. I will try. I feel like I have been working on this project with Bojana Coklyat for over seven years now, but I feel like it can be a tricky thing to explain.

Alt Text is a system of descriptions of images or GIFs that are built into digital interfaces and the internet. And Alt Text is used actually in a few different ways. For example, it's also really important for people with slow internet connections, because the Alt Text will display before an image loads.

And it's also really important to people who are using screen readers to access digital content. And a screen reader is a piece of software. It can be on any device, a computer, a phone, a tablet. And a screen reader user on a website, for example, is able to -- the screen reader can either output text to speech, so things can be read allowed, or to a digital braille display. And on a website, for example, a screen reader user might go to the menu bar, might go to the title of the page, a paragraph of text, the next paragraph of text. But when the screen reader gets to an image, it can't read the image. So it knows to look for this piece of information that's associated with the image and the code, and that is called Alt Text. And for sighted people or nonscreen reader users like that is not visually apparent on a website usually. Which can sometimes cause confusion. But yeah, if, you know, basically the purpose of the Alt Text is to give some context for what that image is, why it's there, what kind of information it's conveying. And yeah, and I think as you've alluded to, like many access things, Alt Text has often been treated in a very compliance-oriented way. This really kind of the idea of if there is Alt Text, then it is accessible. And I think as artists coming to this, Bojana Coklyat and I both were like, wait, what? What do you mean?

How is the image being described and what's described? And yeah, and like, you know, there's often this feeling that can come through an access of this very, like, dry, perfunctory, minimum effort type feeling. And instead -- yeah I think that feels really different than the type of access that I experience around other disabled people, in disability art spaces. I was experiencing a lot of really exciting and creative approaches to description in dance work and performance. And yeah, and so we really, like, created the project in order to have time and space to talk with other people about the questions that come up when translating visual information into text. And the idea of "Alt Text as Poetry" really came from this idea of, like, maybe we can shake people out of this compliance-oriented mind set if we frame this as a creative writing practice. And also there's been a lot of thinking that's been done in the world of poetry that might be interesting to reference.

So things like attention to language. Thinking about what words we're using, what's the tone. Of course there's lots in poetry that shows us that you can write something very short and concise that's also very expressive. And then yeah, just this idea of experimental approach. Like it felt like a lot of the Alt Text that we're reading was really one note. And being like what happens if we try some different approaches. And maybe some of those won't be right.

Yeah, let's see what's possible and kind of build more of a collective tool kit around how we could approach this.

**Sinéad:**

I think this is so important that we have this conversation now. Being mindful of what is happening in the world globally around disability and particularly around access.

Whether that is the removal of legislation or whether that is what is happening in Europe, which is the introduction of the European Accessibility Act. On June 28th, 2025, the EAA will come into force. So businesses that are selling products and services into the EU will have to be accessible. And Alt Text is one of those pillars or formats of accessibility. And when you talk to that notion of it being compliance-based, I think depending on where or who you engage in advice around Alt Text often the instruction is it should be no more than two lines and it should be succinct and brief. What I have learned in my practice around accessibility is that there is more than one way to create access. And what is accessible for one person, even one person who is blind or screen reader user is not necessarily what another person wants. As we think "Alt Text as Poetry", that can be beautiful escapism for some or beautiful visual language for another, and a complete nuisance for someone else in a way that people have different interests in life also. And trying to create a greater visual lexicon is important.

The other thing for people to know is that if you are newer to this conversation around Alt Text, what Fin was talking about there in terms of websites or your own practice on instagram or social media for example, Alt Text is most often than not built in my design. So

more often than not what we are seeing is those spaces for Alt Text are left blank. There is no visual communication for those who are screen reader users. Now with the prevalence of AI, and we'll talk about this later, we are seeing them filling some of the gaps.

But it's not creating the visual language that we are talking about. In that notion of visual language, I want to ask you about Alt Text Selfies. If I think about the evolution from "Alt Text as Poetry" to whether that is in museums or art spaces or broadly on the internet, and really moving that dial from function to creative practice. Tell me a little bit about Alt Text Selfies.

**Fin:**

So, Alt Text selfies is a newish project that was kind of an offshoot of "Alt Text as Poetry." It's also a collaboration with Bojana Coklyat and a third collaborator, Olivia Dreisinger. And actually as I was briefly looking through the attendee list, I think there are also, Thomas Reid wrote an essay for it. Thai Lu has a selfie in it. It's basically, you know, "Alt Text as Poetry" is a curriculum. It's really about creating kind of space for practice. And I think Alt Text selfies is really just a celebration of a kind of a genre of writing which is like how people share images of themselves online. And how they describe those images. So we did an open call where we collected over 100 self descriptions. And they -- there's a huge variety.

I think going back to this idea of -- yeah, the ways that like disability culture holds so much difference and nuance. And so yeah, so we now have a website that houses those. We also published a chat book that has a selection of 30 of them. But it's truly like for me it's just -- yeah, I learned so much from the way that other people describe themselves. Both in terms of strategies for self description but then also I think there's a really -- it can be a really generous social interaction. You get to understand more about how someone perceives themself. And especially thinking about social media or something like that.

And the idea of a selfie generally is kind of like sharing of a certain type of witnessing or allowing yourself to be witnessed I think is really beautiful. So yeah, I truly -- yeah. I am so grateful to everyone who shared a selfie for the project. We're collecting those on an ongoing basis. So if anyone here wants to add to the project, the idea is that it will continue growing.

**Sinéad:**

Yeah. And we will share both the links to the Alt Text selfie project and "Alt Text as Poetry" in terms of where people can purchase the tool kit and the book. I want to talk about the practicalities of Alt Text. Whether it's a selfie or an image, how do you start? What does that artistic practice look like?

Do you start with background, foreground, person, identity, is there one way to do it? What does better or best practice look like?

**Fin:**

Yeah. I mean, this is always the question. There's really no -- there's lots of different strategies and ideas of best practices and things like that, and I feel like, yeah, in my role as an artist I'm really thinking mostly about the kind of questions that come up. But I can also talk about my own experience writing Alt Text. I think a lot of visual artists I don't think of myself as necessarily a strong writer or sometimes feel intimidated by writing. And but it's been a really fun journey for me.

Where, you know, and I really have felt like anything it's a practice. The more that I've done it, the more I feel some ease around kind of thinking about it. But yeah, for me I usually start by thinking about context and audience. Where is this image being shared? Who is it being shared with? Why am I sharing this image? And then especially if I'm sharing it on social media, I'm thinking about yeah, someone who is on my social media page is there for my perspective. So I'm rooted in how do I see or understand this image? And sometimes I'll think about kind of what I noticed first, what feels most prominent. But yeah, I think there's lots of different -- like, I've heard lots of different ideas about how to structure Alt Text. Yeah.

Starting big picture and going more granular. For me I find mood and feeling are really important. I think especially thinking about art work. And so yeah, I think when I'm thinking about the words that I'm choosing, just really tuning into what's the vibe of this image? Is it a goofy image? Is it serious? Is it sad? How do I make sure that the mood of the image is coming through in the writing?

**Sinéad:**

I have a kind of different process in the sense of -- maybe I could give two examples of projects that we at Tilting the Lens have worked around Alt Text. One we have worked with Gucci for quite some time and support them in implementing the work around creating greater opportunities for disabled people at Gucci. For a considerable period we supported them in designing and developing Alt Text for all their visual assets across social media. And inspired by "Alt Text as Poetry" we really tried to think about that imagery as a visual experience. So much of fashion’s vocabulary is rooted in that visualisation.

It is never just a pair of pants, almost to quote the devil wears prada. It is a specific colour, it is a specific fabric, it is a specific mood for a reason.

There is a reason why all of those things are picked. But also there is a reason why people need or want to know that information. Thinking about the fabrication of something particularly for neurodivergent or autistic and you may want to know if you have sensitivity to that. Most imagery doesn't communicate that information, whether or not you use assistive technology.

And that being a visual way into a world that feels so inaccessible to most people. And the

second piece was around when we as a team consulted on British Vogue's reframing fashion issue in May 2023. And one of the tool kits that we tried to put in place in advance of the images even being published or edited was trying to create or gather information from people. Speaking again about this opportunity for Alt Text to also communicate identity. One of the things that we were really specific on, was where are people from? How do they choose to identify? What are their pronouns? I think questions can be asked around whether or not that is relevant in Alt Text. But the reality is after the image is taken, if you don't gather that information in the moment, you may lose it so your alt text can't be as accurate. Or you then have incorrect or an unequal amount of information of everybody who is in the shot or in the image. Even just thinking about how do we gather that information in the insights so the Alt Text can be correct.

And thinking about other opportunities. Purely from an algorithmic perspective, from an SEO or search engine perspective, whatever industry you work in or even in creating your own content, the availability of Alt Text to be more informative and creative gives a greater likelihood that it will end up within the algorithm if that's something that you want. Thinking about those multiple focuses.

I want to ask you around thinking of, you know, this idea of people feeling that "Alt Text as Poetry" is a distraction from its essential function. Would you have a response to that?

And conscious we've talked already about how disabled people disagree. Much like anybody disagrees. How do we manage that friction in our community but also for allies and advocates who are trying to make the world more accessible but knowing that there isn't just one definition of accessibility.

**Fin:**

Yeah. I think for me, yeah, poetry has an association with being maybe hard to understand or very flowery language or things like that.

For me that's not really an essential part of poetry. And I think there's a lot to learn also from plain language movements about ways that very clear and direct communication can be incredibly beautiful and poetic. And I'll also say, you know, we try to be very clear in our workshops and in the book that for us access is always at the core. And that, like, yeah, we're only interested in experimentation towards access.

Not just kind of experimentation for the sake of experimentation.

Though for people who want to do that, you know, I think there's a genre of writing that is in that arena that's beautiful and has its time and place. So yeah, but I think it also, you know, access is always about relationships. And it's always about, you know, the specific people who are involved. And so I think, like, yeah, it's always the process of, like, you know thinking through feedback, trying something, seeing how it lands, seeing who it works for,

seeing who it doesn't work for.

But yeah, I think for me well, and also just the poetry that I'm drawn to tends to be very kind of like grounded. That's the type of language that I really really love. But I think -- I mean, maybe there's a bigger question about like what is the role of creativity in access? And I think for me in conversations that I've had with nondisabled people about access in the compliance oriented framework, it feels like this huge chore.

And there are parts of access that are like, you know, that do just involve a certain amount of routine work. But I think one of the things that I found through thinking about access creatively or in the arts is that yeah, sometimes people don't know that access can be fun or access can be interesting or pleasurable or enjoyable. And I think, yeah, that's something that can draw people into this world and make them feel excited about doing more or being involved or things like that. And so for me that's kind of part of why I often go back to this idea of yeah, thinking about access in ways that are still really like clear and critical about things that are not working, but also yeah, make space for disabled joy and play and fun. Yeah.

**Sinéad:**

And access is iterative. To your point about it being creative. The reality is access will always be evolving. Accessibility will always be evolving. In order to ensure that we leave nobody behind. And it has to be about that constant and continuous progress and evolution. And ensuring that we are designing access with disabled people.

Particularly those who are underrepresented, multiply-marginalized.

To ensure that we design the systems of access, everybody is included. I think about what you said around should access be creative? And I wonder if there is other terms that we can also be using. So should access be creative? Should access be aesthetic? Should access be beautiful? When I think about whether it is in the built environment or digital accessibility, for such a long time, access has been designed for disabled people. Reaching a standard that was also designed without disabled people. And even if we think about the principles of universal design, of which there are seven. And I really like the notion of universal design. I think the idea of designing for one and extending to everyone is really challenging. But of those seven principles, there isn't a single one that is about aesthetic.

Which is why when you enter into a public accessible bathroom, very few of them have any aesthetic considerations. And I think that lack of focus on creativity, design, aesthetic, beauty further undermines the dignity that disabled people feel.

Because access is not something that we get to enjoy. But have to be in receipt of in order to exist. And I think there's a real opportunity to reframe that within our community ourselves.

Again, never distracting from the functionality and neccessity of access. But underlying that we deserve creativity. We deserve innovation. We deserve beauty and aesthetics and dignity. And we can be the authors and the artists of that.

Which I think is so fundamental, all of your practice. When we met earlier this week, I think one of the first things that I embarrassingly said to you, besides fawning, was where can I buy a bench? And immediately you knew what I meant. And you told me that you have a gallerist. And I went, okay, I'll save for a bit. You know, I think about your work, maybe to give a visual example. You have created lots of furniture pieces that have a blue and yellow theme to them in terms of colour way. The bench or the seat is blue and the text is yellow.

**Fin:**

Text is white.

**Sinéad:**

Thank you. Text is white. And they exist in museum and gallery spaces. And they often say things like, "This exhibition has asked me to stand for too long. Sit down if you agree". And it is a very physical reminder of just how many spaces are not designed for rest. They are not designed for disabled people to be there for any long time. And I would love to learn a little bit more about those pieces. How they came about. And I guess how you want people to engage with that work.

**Fin:**

Yeah. I mean, I think that work really comes from my own access needs. I think -- I'm an artist. I like to go to museums when I can. Museums are infamously hostile and tiring spaces. And I was noticing just -- I need to sit down a lot. I'm always tuned into where there are places to rest and where there aren't. I was noticing that museums had all this rhetoric around access and inclusion and then at the same time this thing that felt so simple of putting a bench in the gallery was just like not happening. And yeah, when I think about access there's lots of things that are, like, really big long-term projects. But I was like having a bench in a museum feels like really low hanging fruit. I think we are just -- something that feels doable. And as I was researching why there aren't more places to sit, what I was learning is that oftentimes it has to do with curators and ways that they are imaging exhibitions that don't include places to sit. And I basically realised if I made an art work that was also functional as a place to sit, it was a way of working around that problem. And kind of getting a bench into a space where there might otherwise not be a bench.

And yeah, and I used my handwriting on them. So there is this kind of handwritten element that I hope kind of also creates space for other people -- maybe other people are like, I don't need seating here but I have other complaints about what's going on in this environment.

That it kind of maybe open us up a space for complaint. Or kind of an adversarial relationship with the existing infrastructure. Yeah. So in some ways the way that I want people to experience the work is just to be able to have to place to sit. And also for some people I sometimes hear from people it feels affirming to have a need recognised. I think sometimes it's easy to forget that all of the spaces that we inhabit are not neutral or inherent. That they embody choices that have been made over and over. And those choices have an ideology.

And that we can say no. We don't want that. We want something different. But yeah, as time goes on, I mean, that work I think is really the goal is sort of to make itself obsolete. My vision is not I have a bench in every museum. My bench making skills -- I can make a simple bench. But yeah, just that -- there's more kind of options in those spaces. That we have couches and day beds and all sorts of different options.

**Sinéad:**

I also that furniture is an explicit invitation to people. And whether it is a person with a disability, a chronic illness, somebody who is ageing. It is an explicit invitation and a symbol that you are welcome. Because so often there is just baseline expectations that you should be able to exist in a space in a certain way. And I think so much of your work asks the question of who is this space for?

Potentially also who is it not for and how can we make it be more for them? What's been your most surprising or powerful kind of response or reaction to your practice that you've seen to date?

**Fin:**

I mean for me I think it's always just like when people reach out and say that the work, like, moved them in some way. I definitely don't have any -- like for me the model of change is not like oh, I critique the institution and suddenly things are going to be different. I'm much more interested in the way that the work reaches other people. And you know both within the space of the institution or even the way that images or descriptions of the work circulate outside of that. But then that -- I mean I definitely had this experience with other people's work. Where it's like there's something that I didn't know I needed or I didn't know I could ask for, and then I see it being offered. And I'm like oh, okay. And so I think that's what I'm interested in. Yeah. This kind of like way that we can reach each other in order to organise together to hopefully make change.

**Sinéad:**

And seeing in the chat comments from some people.

Talking about, you know, no longer accepting the notion that accessibility benefits everyone.

And I think for many of us who are working in the space or require accessibility to be able to engage in spaces there is a lot of assumptions or myths or maybe even mantras or statements. Is there any myths or assumption about accessibility that you would love to see disappear or change?

**Fin:**

Yeah. I mean, I love that rejection of accessibility benefits everyone. I think I haven't read that blog post. But I definitely feel like I always feel this underlying logic to that. Yeah, just a person's needs aren't okay just because they need them. There has to be this other benefit attached to them. And yes, exactly.

Accessibility for disabled people is enough. Because disabled people are enough. So well said. And yeah, in terms of other myths that I feel like that I would love to see go. I think definitely the idea that access is boring. I think yeah, that you know it's like anything. Yeah, sometimes it's boring. But also sometimes it can be weird or fun or pleasurable. And yeah, it's never just one thing.

**Sinéad:**

For me, it's that accessibility is a distraction.

I often hear that a lot, particularly as we think about live spaces or events or webinars of this nature. And accessibility can only be invested in if disabled people are in the room. And to give context to that, what I mean is how it often comes about, a disabled person has to say and kind of emotionally invest and say, I want to go, can you put access in place in order for me to attend even this webinar. And I think one of the great challenges with that, it creates no readiness or no pipeline and places all the responsibility and labour on disabled people in order to ask for their access. Whereas if we create access by design, access as a baseline and continuously evolve and increase that baseline, it means that disabled people can thrive easier. Or at least with less friction. And that we are just creating that readiness. Whether it's in community, in the workplace, I think we all have a responsibility to continue to lift that baseline. I'm going to just mention to people who are in attendance to the webinar that there is still an opportunity for you to pose your question to Fin by using the Q&A box. We have great ones coming in. I am going to go to the questions in five minutes.

If you have a question, please submit it there. We will ask and facilitate them.

I don’t want to leave this conversation without acknowledging what's happening in the world. And being really mindful that the anti DEI rhetoric, and it’s so much more than rhetoric. It is a reduction and erasure of policy and legislation, which in turn is an erasure of rights and dignity. How are you processing this pushback as someone who works at the intersection of art and activism, and access?

**Fin:**

Yeah. I mean, there's so much bad news. And there's so much -- yeah, I think about the way that medicare is being attacked in the United States.

And the tremendous -- it's so violent. I think for me, yeah, the work feels the same. The goal is always liberation for all people everywhere. And we keep moving towards that. And in ways that state structures are failing us, we need to build outside of that. I'm always inspired by mutual aid efforts and free clinics and things like that are showing what's possible peer to peer. And yeah, and I think for me I also -- yeah, I think it's so hard to process everything that's happening. Taking it bit by bit and yeah, but I think for me trying not to get distracted from, you know, like how I ultimately want the world to be.

**Sinéad:**

And I think in spaces like this which are often majority disabled, I think it's always really important that we iterate a necessity for our activism to be intersectional as we look even to the U.S. for example and the reduction of section 504, which is linked to medicaid, reasonable adjustments and accommodations.

I think we need to be really clear that our activism is also for the trans community. That our activism is also for disabled people of colour and by disabled people of colour.

Because I think for too long movements have continued to exclude those who are most marginalized. And to also be really mindful about while what is happening in the U.S.

absolutely has a global impact, but whether we look to Palestine, Ukraine, Sudan, that harm being caused to disabled people is global and our activism must also be global.

And I think despite all of that there is positivity and being rooted in disability justice movements and also I think being focused on what can be done now, both in the short-term and also in the long-term. And how do we look to systemic change, rather than just individual actions. Though those are valuable.

How do we look to that system wide change. And not just think about today, tomorrow but forever. I don't want to leave us on a note of that tone.

But I think it's also really important that we name it.

Because everybody is feeling it in the chest, hairs on the back of their neck. This feels like a very very vulnerable time to be disabled to be different in any way. But we have questions from our wonderful audience. First question comes from Sam. How do you recommend inviting folks to participate in intersectional projects? How do you create a council to drive access projects in museums and campuses?

**Fin:**

I feel like Sinéad, you have more experience with this than I do. I think yeah, I mean -- well,

one thing I will say is over and over I see the impact of disabled artists and ways that things become possible within that structure. And yeah.

Obviously I'm a bit biased. But I think museums working with disabled artists is -- yeah.

**Sinéad:**

I can give a couple of points on that. When we think about co-design as a methodology which is far better than inclusive design and universal design. But co-design and community centered practises. Sharing power. Creating feedback loops. Valuing insights contributions and lived experience. When we're creating councils, advisory councils or committees, very specific consideration has to be given to the power structure. So I think so often we create councils to invite feedback. But is that feedback actually going to change things or systems? Or is it a broadcast channel. Before inviting anybody to participate in a commitee, acknowledgment around the power structure and the capacity for feedback and change is vital.

Making sure that there is either a chair or somebody who is leading that conversation who potentially isn't the museum or the gallery or whatever the authority is isn't the lead person on that.

For somebody to be able to scaffold and echo those voices and insights. And the other thing I would say very briefly is making sure you are economically valuing people.

So often we say to people, you know, tell us what you need and tell us what you want. We will make systems better. One, that's not guaranteed. And two, lived experience is intellectual property. Making sure that you are valuing that and valuing the skill set and expertise. When you are economically valuing it, make sure that you are doing it fairly and flexibly. Being mindful of what people are participating right now, you may want to pay them with a voucher with different ways of getting that economic value. Paying them by invoicing may not be the most accessible way for people. Having considerations for all the aspects before entering into that power dynamic with disabled people or any community.

We have a question from Emily around Alt Text. Are there any types of descriptions, phrases, or language you would recommend we avoid when treating "Alt Text as Poetry"? For example, should we try not to use, “sight-centric” phrases, like looks like or in this photo you can see. For context, I'm an adaptive sports journalist and currently working on an oral history and photo archive of rock climbers with disabilities. Emily, put the link into the chat, we need to know more. But Fin, I'm going to pass to you.

**Fin:**

I'm sure that there is lots of opinions about this. I know that Bojana Coklyat, my collaborator definitely bristles when someone is doing a description and says, here you see... because you are identifying the audience as someone who is -- who has a certain type of normative

sight.

So yeah, I think -- yeah, I definitely will sometimes use things like looks like to me or things like this when I'm trying to report back from my own visual experience. And what if there's uncertainty from me. I think that's something that often comes up. There's actually a lot of ambiguity in what sighted people see and how we interpret it. Trying to -- yeah, sometimes I want that to come through in the Alt Text. That I'm making a guess or that I'm not certain. So yeah, things like that. But I think that's definitely one -- the first one that I am definitely conscious of. Not assuming that the reader has a certain experience or would experience the image in a certain way.

**Sinéad:**

What I want to do after this conversation is create a kind of open sourced Google doc where we create synonyms for looks like. So we have this shared vocabulary if we want to make that Alt Text more informed. I have a question from Mary who asks a couple of different questions. Do you have advice on creating thought provoking, interactive installations that convey a message or theme and then a subquestion.

What tools, software, or technology do you recommend for creating inclusive multi art form events, particularly in music and dance?

**Fin:**

Let's see. Well, in terms of the second question. I think Zoom has a lot of limitations. But I also have been so excited by the way that disabled people have been using this platform to host dance parties, to share performance, to have a lot of really rich layers of access. To offer remote participation during the ongoing pandemic. And also acknowledging the ways that, you know, before COVID there were also lots of people who were at home or couldn't participate in public spaces. So yeah, I mean I think like all of these technologies that come to us via giant corporations, there's lots to be critical of and lots that could improve. But I also think disabled people are really good at using what we have. And making it work. And so yeah, that's one that comes up for me around the second question. Can you actually repeat the first question for me?

**Sinéad:**

What I might do to be mindful of time, is share these questions with you after and get answers back to people on email.

I was going to recommend Inclusive Dance Cork to Mary, which is run by a disabled woman Rhona Coughlan, which might be a useful resource for you. And thinking around that piece around dance in particular.

I want to end with a question from Claire.

Claire says, this is a gorgeous conversation. Thank you for sharing your empathy and expertise. This is not intended to be reductionist. I wonder if you could share something that gives you hope.

**Fin:**

I have been feeling – one of the things that I feel like has been giving me some hope or solice recently is looking to historic movements and just what people have done in other times of crisis or, you know, I think Act Up is always something that I'm really interested in. Also decolonial or anticolonial movements in the 50s and 60s.

And yeah, I mean, there's obviously so many things. But I think for me yeah, just looking at kind of other moments when people have tried to support each other, tried to make change against big powerful systems.

Has been something that's been nourishing to me recently.

**Sinéad:**

We're not alone.

While this feels different and awful and has felt different and awful before. So what can we learn from those people in the past? I had the great privilege of seeing some of your knitting this week. Fin and I both knit. I have just completed a blanket. And Fin has knitted many beanies. I think knitting as a restorative practice gives me hope.

Fin, I want to thank you enormously for your time. For sharing your practice and your expertise with us. As a reminder to everybody, the recording will be shared with you after this session along with the resources and the links and the transcripts that will be available next week. All of you will receive an email with those assets and details. If you have additional questions that you didn't get to ask, send us the questions. And we will do our best to try to answer them. At Tilting the Lens we're always trying to create moments like this. For community, by community. So if you have an idea for a webinar, if you would love to participate in a webinar like this, please do email us. If you would like to do a webinar with us, let us know at team at Tilting the Lens dot com. I want to thank our interpreters, Altan and James and our captioner Kimm.

I want to thank the incredible Tilting the Lens team. Emma who has been leading on this. Conny and Laia in the back end. And Fin, thank you so much for your time.

Thank you to everybody who joined us. And I loved what Patricia people said earlier in the chat, disabled people get to receive access without feeling like a burden. Without feeling compromise. Access is beautiful. Thank you, all. We will see you again soon.