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3Arts launches Disability Culture Leadership Initiative to advance advocacy and justice efforts in the arts

Eleven Deaf and disabled Chicago-based artists are featured on a new online hub that launched today and includes video conversations, profiles, and resources to raise awareness in the field

CHICAGO, IL (January 15, 2021)— **3Arts**, the Chicago-based nonprofit grantmaking organization, announced today the launch of the **Disability Culture Leadership Initiative (DCLI)**, featuring a new online platform created to elevate Deaf and disabled artists and encourage the arts and culture sector to prioritize Disability Culture in programming and organizational efforts. **DCLI** features candid video conversations among eleven Chicago-based Deaf and disabled alumni of the 3Arts Residency Fellowships at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), as well as a report that chronicles the trajectory of the Fellowship and the city's approach to creating and supporting the Disability Art and Culture movement. The DCLI videos and accompanying report are now available at www.3arts.org/disability-culture.

The launch of the DCLI stems from work that began six years ago, when 3Arts partnered with UIC's **Bodies of Work**—an artist and organizational network that showcases and celebrates the disability experience—to establish the 3Arts Residency Fellowship. The Fellowship was designed to build audiences for disability art and strengthen the professional pipeline for artists in the Chicago metropolitan area. 3Arts has worked closely with UIC's Bodies of Work to develop the Fellowship and to create this new Disability Culture Leadership Initiative.

“With this new initiative, we are reaching beyond considerations of accessibility and ADA compliance, as important as those issues are,” said 3Arts Executive Director **Esther Grisham Grimm**. “We want to recognize the revolutionary and expansive nature of the Disability Culture movement and the important role that Chicago artists play in its development.”

The goals of the DCLI are to document the experiences of alumni in the program, advocate for the artistic and economic mobility of Deaf and disabled artists, and highlight the potential for disability aesthetics to expand and enrich every artistic discipline. Representing leading artists in Chicago's disability community, the eleven participants in the DCLI include: dancemakers **Ginger Lane** and **Kris Lenzo**; theater practitioners **Michael Herzovi**, **Arlene Malinowski**, and **Robert Schleifer**; sound artist **Andy Slater**; multidisciplinary artists **Matt Bodett** and **Reveca Torres**; and visual artists **Riva Lehrer**, **Mariam Paré**, and **Pooja Pittie**. Four video interviews, conducted by filmmaker and disability advocate **Justin Cooper**, assembled the artists in small groups around shared artistic disciplines.

The new initiative is also informed by an online convening with the eleven artists that took place in November 2020, facilitated by Deaf theater artist and disability advocate **Richard Costes**. The accompanying report outlines key take-aways from the group's conversation such as the importance of continued connection and movement-building within this cohort and future fellowship participants, as well as the desire for an archive and/or physical space to serve as a center for Chicago Deaf and Disability Culture.

"We are activists every time we go out and try to make a theater or class space accessible," said dance artist **Ginger Lane** at the convening. "We're making a statement just by being there and by insisting that we have a seat at the table. We've seen the growth of this movement over the past 25 years, which has been terrific and helps us celebrate our resilience and our strength as artists and really what it means to be human."

Bodies of Work is directed by **Carrie Sandahl**, associate professor in UIC's Disability & Human Development department and head of the Program on Disability Art, Culture, and Humanities.

The DCLI is a program of 3Arts and supported with seed funding from **The Joyce Foundation** and the **National Endowment for the Arts**.

About 3Arts

3Arts is a nonprofit organization that advocates for Chicago's women artists, artists of color, and Deaf and disabled artists who work in the performing, teaching, and visual arts. By providing cash awards, project funding, residency fellowships, professional development, and promotion, 3Arts helps artists take risks, experiment, and build momentum in their careers.

Since 2007, 3Arts has supported 1,100 artists—representing 70% women artists, 70% artists of color, and 10% artists with disabilities—and distributed \$4.3 million through direct grants. By providing cash awards, project funding, residency fellowships, professional development, and promotion, 3Arts helps artists take risks, experiment, and build momentum in their careers.

For more information about 3Arts, please visit www.3arts.org.

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Contact: Amanda Berrios/Beth Silverman
The Silverman Group, Inc.
847.421.8517 (cell)
amanda@silvermangroupchicago.com