**Quick Trust and Slow Time: Relational Innovations in Disability Performing Arts Practice**

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**Plain English Summary**

**Source:**

**Introducing the paper**

In the last 10 years, governments, arts organisations, and arts researchers have developed a lot of plans, and many funding programs, to try to make the performing arts industry more inclusive of artists with disability.

This is positive.

However, the authors of this article – Bree, Eddie, and Maddie, all theatre makers and researchers from Australia – have found that, in Australia, most artists with disability still make their work outside, or alongside, the mainstream performing arts industry.

## Summary of approach

In this article, Bree, Eddie, and Maddie talk about what they learned about this problem during a research project called *The Last Avant Garde* project. The term ‘avant garde’ is French, and artists use it to describe really innovative art work. Recently, British born Nigerian artist Yinke Shonibare said the art world thinks of art by disabled people as the ‘last’ place where really interesting, innovative things are happening. In their project, Bree, Eddie, and Maddie asked 150 artists with disability around Australia what they thought about this. They asked these artists why and how they make art. In the project, the artists talked about their successes, the barriers they encounter, and their desires for the future.

## Summary of the research

*The Last Avant Garde* project took place at six locations around Australia over 18 months. At each location, performing artists with disability were invited to present workshops, which showcased how they make their art, for groups of 10 to 40 participating artists with disability from the local community. After the workshops, participants were invited to reflect on their process for making their art, their career aspirations, the things that helped or hindered them in building their career.

## Summary of the main findings

The research team learned that disabled artists need access to rehearsal spaces and venues. They might need physical supports like ramps, or other supports like interpreters to make art.

The research team learned that disabled people need far more opportunities for training in how to make art, and more opportunities to get paid jobs as artists.

The research team learned every artist is different, and while we all want better opportunities, we do not all agree on everything. So, it is also important to be welcoming and understanding of all disabled people, and all the different ways we make art.

The research team learned that, as disabled artists, we share a deeper understanding of what it means to be disabled, of what art we make, when, why, and how as disabled artists, and what is helpful or not helpful to our artmaking. Because we share this knowledge, we might find it easier to work with other disabled artists or in projects that are led by disabled people.

The research team learnt that disabled artists often work to support one another. We celebrate different bodies and different minds. We take the time to signal our access needs with each other. We might move slowly. We might move fast. We move with care. Our shared knowledge that different bodies and minds speak, move, think, and express themselves at different speeds means we are willing to work in a way that works for everyone. A way that supports everyone. Where we can be vulnerable, or ask for help, without always having to explain why, or get expressions of sympathy. This – slowing things down, to support everyone, at every step, without having to explain or get lots of sympathy about it – means we can start to trust one another quickly when we work together. The team from the *Last Avant Garde* projectsummarised this in one main sentence – for disabled artists, ‘slow time equals quick trust.’

**Summary of the main implications**

Trust between ourselves and who we make art with is a key ingredient to successful collaboration. In *Last Avant Garde* projectwe learned that trust is often missing when disabled artists are not in charge of the art-making process. When trust is missing, we can feel vulnerable. But there are also a lot of other artists who can feel like their needs are not met in art making processes for one reason or another, and they too feel vulnerable. This means that other non-disabled artists could learn a lot from us and our ability to create trust very quickly, through the ‘slow time equals quick trust’ principle.

The most exciting thing about *The Last Avante Garde* project was the opportunity to see the different ways disabled people are making theatre, dance and performance around Australia. Our difference is our strength. Our capacity to celebrate, nurture, and collaborate as different people is our strength. Bree, Eddie, and Maddie think that other artists, organisations and governments need to learn from how disabled artists make art too. Learning from disabled artists will make the future of the arts more equal, more open and more exciting and innovative.

**More information:**

Last Avant Garde Project website, Arts Access Victoria - <https://lastavantgarde.com.au/>