

Organizing the 2nd International Disability Studies, Arts and Education Conference and Looking to the Future

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Biography

Dr. Mira Kallio-Tavin is Associate Professor of Arts-based Research and Pedagogy and the Head of Research in the Department of Art at Aalto University, Finland. Kallio-Tavin has developed arts-based research methodology within social context and in relation to the questions of dialogue, community, ethics and philosophy of contemporary art and its education. Her research area focuses on questions of diversity, disability studies, social justice, critical animal studies, embodiment, and art education beyond anthropocentrism, including perspectives from “more than human” and critical issues from the perspectives of “less than human”.

Professor Kallio-Tavin serves as a World Councilor of InSEA (International Society for Education Through Art), and as the Chair of Disability Studies in Art Education (DSAE) interest group in the NAEA (National Art Education Association) in the United States. She is the founder of the International DSAE conference, and the founder of Nordic Visual Studies and Art Education (NoVA) master’s program. She is the author and editor of six books, and editor of journals *Research in Art and Education* (the chief editor) and *The International Journal of Education through Art* (editor).

Biography

Lauren Stichter is the Director of Art Education, and assistant professor, at Moore College of Art & Design in Philadelphia. Lauren is passionate about accessibility in the Arts and presents regularly at national and international conferences, in district-wide professional development days, for museum and community arts events and in webinars. Most recently Lauren has worked with the Disability Studies, Arts & Education group, the Kennedy Center VSA program, the National Art Education Association, the Council for Exceptional Children, the National Gallery, the Barnes Foundation, KidSmart, the Art Educators of New Jersey, the Georgia Art Education Association, and in a wide range of college settings and school districts across the United States.

The 2019 Disability Studies, Arts and Education Conference was held in the city of Philadelphia in the United States, on October 3rd-5th, 2019 at Moore College of Art & Design. The conference was organized by the faculty members of the College, with support from it as an institution and from its leadership, and in collaboration with the International DSAE Conference Executive Board (DSAE-CEB). The conference brought together artists, educators, researchers, students, and members of the disability community from around the globe who share an interest in, or whose work addresses, the intersections and interplay between critical disability studies, arts, and education. With over 400 people in attendance and 100 presenters, the scope of the conference comprised various art forms, such as visual arts, performing arts, music, dance, and film, as well as different educational contexts, such as primary education, higher education, pedagogical work in cultural institutions, professional artists' education, and public pedagogy. The number of enrolled participants surprised the organizers, as it was almost four times more than for the first international DSAE conference held two years earlier in 2017, in Helsinki, Finland. The significantly increased interest in the conference convinced everybody involved that there is indeed a need to expand the international conversation on Disability Studies, Arts and Education. As disability cultures seldom pass from parents to children as many other cultures do, it is crucially important to come together and share voices, experiences, research, and arts

practices within disability cultures.

The 2019 International DSAE Conference featured 80 parallel sessions, performances, and other artistic formats, and an art exhibition, two keynote speeches, and two film screenings with panel conversations. The opening keynote speaker, LeDerick Horne, was exceptionally moving and dynamic, sharing his spoken-word poems and experiences of growing up with a learning disability. As a strong advocate for people with disabilities, he discussed his ideas on equal opportunity, pride, self-determination, and hope for people with disabilities in varied situations. His dynamic performance set the perfect tone for the entire conference to see a bridge between learners and leaders for all races, genders, and generations.

The second keynote session included a panel of artists from the local organization, *Art Ability*. This panel was moderated by Jean Kozicki and featured the artists Meg Quinlisk, Sal Panasci, and Carol Spiker. The specialized conference events also included an exhibition of photography by Philadelphia local Harvey Finkle, who has documented over a quarter of a century of the disability rights movement in the United States, particularly depicting disability activism with the Disabled in Action (DIA) movement on the streets of Philadelphia. This exhibition was curated by Amanda Newman-Godfrey and Jeremy Johnson.

The film screenings of *Defiant Lives* and *I Am* were followed up with panel discussions by the films' creators and participants. *Defiant Lives* is a documentary film that traces the origins of the disability rights movement in the United States, Britain, and Australia. The film includes never-before-seen archival footage and exceptional interviews. The film *I Am* documents a unique ten-week collaboration in choreographic work and rehearsals of the Pennsylvania Ballet II and St. Katherine Special Education Day School.

This conference was intentionally held over the first Friday of the month, which is when all Philadelphia galleries and many cultural institutions are open for free and hold specialized events. While attending the many wonderful programs that the DSAE conference had to offer,

attendees were also given time and encouraged to explore all that the city of Philadelphia had to offer.



Figure 1. Harvey Finkle exhibition, curated by Amanda Newman-Godfrey and Jeremy Johnson
Image credit Steve Weinik.



Figure 2. Opening words for the conference by Mira Kallio-Tavin, Image credit Steve Weiniké



Figure 3. The opening keynote speaker, LeDerick Horne, Image credit Steve Weinik.



Figure 4. Poster session. Image credit Steve Weinik.



Figure 5. Alexandra Allen giving her presentation during one of the conference's parallel sessions, with a sign interpreter. Image credit Steve Weinik.

The international conference on Disability Studies, Arts and Education (DSAE) was originally established to advocate for first-person accounts of disability all around the world. The founders of this conference understood that while there were national associations and activities (see e.g., the DSAE Interest group of the NAEA), an international forum that would engage all art forms and all levels of activities was missing. Within the conference, disability is understood as a cultural identity, as an orientation to life, which brings variation, diversity, and richness to the disabled and nondisabled people, in culture and in all areas of society, because disability cultures concern each individual in society. The aim of the international DSAE conference continues to affirm disability as identity, as a positive factor of subjectivity, and as an agency, at the intersection of society and its discourses, which create and maintain disability through values, conventions, and significance. This conference was established and is maintained to support and strengthen these values and ideas. The main goal of the conference was, and continues to be, to increase conversation between critical disability studies, arts in all art fields, and education in its different contexts. There is a need for a forum where practitioners, researchers, and activists can come together for deeper conversation, and to make space for these conversations in cultural and educational institutions and in other artist, academic, and professional sites.

Alongside the establishment of the conference, in 2017, an advisory and steering board for the conference was established. This board is called the *DSAE Conference Executive Board* (NAEA-CEB), and it consists of a network of individuals who oversee the conference, help to ensure that the values and the ideas of the conference are followed, and provide advice and troubleshoot for the international DSAE conference organizers where necessary.

The original idea of the conference was that it would be mobile and biannual. The reason for the traveling nature is to ensure that the conference allows diversified cultural and institutional opportunities for organizing and participation, and perspectives on varied global issues, by being mindful of the important local questions. After the first conference being held in Northern

Europe (Helsinki), and the second on the East coast of the United States (Philadelphia), there was a need to engage more global perspectives for the conference, which already has been extremely international by its nature. Plans were therefore made to organize the 2021 conference in a non-Western location. In short, the conference recognized the urgent need to turn attention to global issues in local contexts. According to WHO, approximately 80% of disabled people are located in the so-called Global South. “Global disability” or “disability in the global south” has hence come to stand “as a new field of thought and practice” (Grech, 2015, p. 2). The 3rd International DSAE conference in 2021 will particularly invite presentations that examine the global meaning of disability justice and anticolonialism in the arts, activism, and education. The conference call is addressed to seek submissions that describe how contemporary artists, artisans, art educators, curators, activists, and researchers intersect with disability and anticolonialism.

As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the conference executive board (DSAE-CEB) decided to organize the next conference in 2021 fully online. Even though the decision was made as early as in the summer of 2020, the board was convinced that the world would not go back to pre-pandemic times, at least not by fall 2021. Most importantly, ethical issues around traveling and accessibility were thoroughly discussed. The global pandemic has highlighted the inequity of economic resources, the exploitation of the most vulnerable people, systemic racism and police violence, and the disproportionate effects of climate change on developing countries. Therefore, at this conference, we ask how the pandemic has fore fronted social justice in disability studies and art education. It is important to acknowledge that while Aalto University will serve as the coordinator of the 2021 International DSAE conference, the conference is being developed, advised, and even organized in collaboration with many individuals and institutions around the world, from many different continents. The call for proposals and other information can be found on the conference web pages: www.dsae2021.com

As mentioned, the conference is a biannually organized event. In those years when the conference is not organized, a publication is edited. Both times, in 2018 and the 2020 issue in hand, this has not just been proceedings of the conference, but peer-reviewed academic journal special issues. Both times they have been published in *Research in art and Education* (previously named *Synnyt/Origins, Studies in Finnish Art Education*). The editors of the 2018 special issue were Alice Wexler and John Derby (2018).

We want to thank the editors of this issue, Karen Keifer-Boyd and Jenifer (Richardson) Eisenhauer for pulling through a great journal issue in this difficult year of the pandemic, and congratulate them for their great work! We also congratulate all the authors of this issue. While we enjoy reading the articles in this issue, we are also looking forward to the future of the International DSAE conference and all the different levels of collaboration and engagement.

References

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