

Monograph Review

Title: *Lights...Camera...Attitude! Introducing Disability Arts and Culture*

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Reviewer: Steven E. Brown

This monograph is an excellent introduction to the current state of disability arts and culture, especially, but not only, in Canada. The Ryerson University disability studies research team of Jihan Abbas, Kathryn Church, Catherine Frazee, and Melanie Panitch, divide this monograph into chapters about arts and culture in the context of political change, misrepresentation of disability in the arts, audience responses, and moving forward. They also include a section on disability arts and culture links.

The authors do a skillful job of combining introductions to this material with more sophisticated analysis, providing jumping off points for both beginners to these concepts and more experienced disability arts and culture participants and observers. A good example of both these attitudes are seen in the following description of audience reactions to performances by artists with disabilities:

“At this point in their evolution, ‘soothing’ confirmations may be what most audiences want or can understand of disabled artists/performers. And yet, as we discovered, to witness a performance in this genre is to be challenged and made uncomfortable as much as it is to be affirmed and uplifted. What this suggests is that ‘changing attitudes’ is not an instantaneous and happy enlightenment arising from new and better information. Consciousness-raising about a group of people so negatively situated with respect to mainstream culture for so long can be troubling and difficult work. Disability Arts and Culture is at its most politically potent precisely here, in revealing this fallacy” (page 41).

The accompanying DVD, I found disappointing. First, it was not captioned, so anyone committed to using it who is also committed to universal access, is out of luck. I understand from correspondence with one of the research team that a captioned version is in the works. Second, it is a genuine sampler, with no complete entries. I found this extremely frustrating and disappointing. My recommendation: Get the booklet and hope that complete performances will be eventually released on DVD.