

Media release

Friday 2 December 2022

Celebrating trailblazing Australian artists and leaders at the National Arts and Disability Awards

Three outstanding artists have been announced as recipients of the [National Arts and Disability Awards](#), delivered by the Australia Council for the Arts and Arts Access Australia.

Melbourne-based performance artist Roya A (who performs as ‘Roya the Destroya’) is the recipient of the award for an Established Artist. Roya is internationally acclaimed for her work spanning physical theatre, circus and dance.

Madeleine Little, a Brisbane-based actor, theatre and festival director receives the award for an Early Career artist, recognising her work as an artist, advocate and mentor for artists with disability.

This year’s [Arts Access Australia National Leadership Award](#) goes to Rafeif Ismail, an award winning emerging multilingual writer based in WA.

The announcement comes on the eve of [International Day of People with Disability](#) (December 3, 2022).

Australia Council CEO Adrian Collette AM said:

“These national awards recognise artists and arts workers who have made an outstanding contribution to the creative and cultural life of the nation – artists who inspire us with their unique perspectives, forged through both their lived experience and their imaginative reckonings.”

Arts Access Australia CEO Matthew Hall said:

“If we are to see more opportunities for artists with disability, we need more people with disability in positions of leadership. The National Leadership Award recognises, celebrates and supports artists and arts workers with disability who are emerging or potential leaders, and gives the recipient opportunities to promote their leadership experience and develop leadership skills and capabilities, and a platform to demonstrate their passion, and advocate to effect meaningful change.”

The Australia Council is celebrating the award recipients with a series of videos, produced by [IronBark Films](#) in collaboration with [Bus Stop Films](#) – two organisations that promote inclusive filmmaking for people with disability.

Reflecting on her award for an Early Career Artist, Madeleine Little said:

“If our stages are meant to represent our stories and tell authentic stories, there are so many stories that are being missed because disabled and d/Deaf artists aren’t included. As a disabled

artist, I still can't quite see someone in the industry whose career I can aspire to emulate, so it makes it feel very lonely sometimes trying to figure out how I can chart my own course.

“The most rewarding thing for me about acting is that moment when you can see the exchange of ideas and meaning between the performer and the audience. When you know that your performance has moved someone, that's the most powerful thing in the world – knowing you've made an impact on someone.”

Recipient of the Established Artist award Roya, said:

“It's important to represent people with diverse backgrounds and disability in the arts, (as well as) in every aspect of life. Movement has always brought me joy and realising how much joy and change it brings to others watching me – it makes my soul smile.”

Arts Access National Leadership Award Recipient Rafeif Ismail said:

“Art is a medium for advocacy. It's a way of life, a way of holding history and stories but also a way to forge change. I came to Australia as a refugee from a country that is still in civil war, and part of my early work was trying to raise of the issues faced by refugees from Northeastern African backgrounds. That's how I started creating at the intersection of art, health and disability. As a disabled black woman, it was really important for me to see works that represented people like me.”

Recipients:

[Roya A \(VIC\)](#)

Australia Council's National Arts and Disability Award (Established Artist) (\$50,000).

[Madeline Little \(QLD\)](#)

Australia Council's National Arts and Disability Award (Early Career Artist) (\$20,000).

[Rafeif Ismail \(WA\)](#)

Arts Access Australia's National Leadership Award (\$10,000).

Read more about the awards and watch the videos on the Australia Council [website](#).

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Background

About the work of the Australia Council with the arts and disability sector

The Australia Council believes that art is for everyone, and that Australians living with disability have the right to enjoy, benefit from and contribute to the arts and cultural life of Australia. Disability in the arts offers excellence and artistry, unique perspectives and lived experiences, and transformative experiences for audiences and communities.

The Australia Council supports the arts and disability sector through its activities and delivers strategic initiatives designed to increase access to the Council's support; build sector capacity and sustainability; expand opportunities for artists and arts leaders with disability; and celebrate artistic excellence. The Council also produces research which highlights the barriers and disparities which still exist for people with disability across arts practice, employment, leadership, education, training, engagement and participation.

About Arts Access Australia

Arts Access Australia (AAA) is the national peak body for arts and disability in Australia. AAA works to increase national and international opportunities and access to the arts for people with disability as artists, arts-workers, participants and audiences.

Established in 1992, AAA is a disability-led company limited by guarantee. The CEO and at least 50% of its Board Members identify as a person with disability. AAA is a non-profit, member-supported organisation. Its members include state-based arts and disability organisations, individual artists, arts-workers and arts leaders with disability, and others within the wider arts and cultural sector.

Website: www.artsaccessaustralia.org

Definition of disability

People with disability are diverse and are not defined by their disability. There is no single definition or way of capturing such complex and multidimensional experiences.

The Australia Council embraces the social model of disability, which distinguishes between impairment of the person, and the barriers in society that are disabling. These can include attitudes, discrimination, or the physical environment. This definition includes mental health. However, not all people who experience a mental health condition identify with disability.

The term 'disability' can also include people who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing. However, members of the d/Deaf community may not always identify with disability and may identify as part of a cultural and linguistic group with their first language being Auslan (Australian Sign Language) or another sign language.

The Australia Council recognises the term people with disability is widely used in Australia, including by disability advocates and peak bodies. We also recognise that the term is contested and evolving, with increasing use of self-identifying terms such as disabled, including in advocacy for change. We recognise that some choose to identify with a specific community such as d/Deaf or Autistic and may prefer not to refer to themselves as disabled or as having disability. We will continue to recognise self-identification and engage in dialogue as the terminology evolves.