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Harbourfront Centre Launches a New International, Multidisciplinary Deaf and Disability Arts Festival: CoMotion Festival 2022

CoMotion offers an international series of performances, workshops, exhibitions and panel discussions in this inaugural event, with in-person and digital programming

TORONTO, ON – Harbourfront Centre announces one of the largest scale Deaf and disability arts festivals in Canada, **CoMotion Festival**. Launching **April 20 to May 1, 2022**, the festival will offer in-person and virtual programming at Toronto's 10-acre waterfront campus. Curated by renowned Canadian playwright, actor and disability arts advocate **Alex Bulmer**, the festival celebrates art informed and shaped by the lived experience of disability or Deaf culture, with an international perspective from this global community of artists. Featuring a diverse series of engaging performances, events, visual art exhibitions, workshops and panel discussions, the festival will include a world premiere performance, a leadership development opportunity and eleven new visual art commissions.

"Disability is an experience of living in a world dominated by a 'one size fits one' design," says Bulmer, disability arts advocate and CoMotion Festival curator. "A growing international assembly of Deaf and disability-identified artists are pushing back against this design, shouting to the world 'We exist!' CoMotion Festival brings an international perspective to the disability experience and celebrates these new expressions and ideas through unexpected art and crip aesthetics."

"We are immensely proud to launch CoMotion, our first international Deaf and disability arts festival showcasing some of the wonderful work of local, national and international Deaf and disabled artists," says Iris Nemani, Chief Programming Officer. "Working with curator, artist and activist Alex Bulmer has allowed us to forge relationships with many of these wonderful artists, many of whom are being presented at Harbourfront Centre for the first time. Building on previous projects like *Crippling the Arts*, *Crippling the Stage* and *Pandemic Postcards*, CoMotion is an opportunity for our audiences to be introduced to Deaf and disabled artists in a variety of genres all in one place, challenging us to broaden and redefine what it means to be accessible. From *Pay What You Wish* ticket pricing, to relaxed performances, to ASL and audio described work, both in-person and digitally, we hope to welcome, entertain and enlighten our audiences."

The innovative program line-up features a mix of in-person and digital programming inclusive of a wide range of performance and visual art genres, including music, theatre, dance, aerial arts, photography and more. The inaugural festival at Harbourfront Centre presents striking works from some of today's most lauded artists and advocates from the Deaf and disability arts communities, including the world premiere of *Dancing With The Universe* from Canada's **REASON d'etre Dance Productions** and multidisciplinary artist and athlete **Vivian Chong**; the Ontario premiere of the theatre/VR hybrid performance *VIOLETTE* from Montreal's **Joe Jack & John**; and the digital sign language performance from UK-based Deaf Japanese artist **Chisato Minamimura**, *Scored in Silence*, about the Deaf survivors of the atomic bombing of Japan in 1945.

The festival will include several Nordic Spotlight presentations, including a live musical performance from Finnish Deaf rapper **Signmark**, two exhibition premieres from Denmark's **Gudrun Hasle** and Iceland's **Erla Björk Sigmundsdóttir**, commissioned by Harbourfront Centre, and the inauguration of Harbourfront Centre's first International Visual Artist-in-Residence: Finland's **Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen**. Nordic Spotlights are part of **Nordic Bridges**, a year-long initiative that will connect hundreds of creators from Canada and the Nordic Region throughout 2022 in an exchange of art, culture and ideas from coast to coast to coast.

"CoMotion festival puts Deaf and disability art at its centre and invites visitors from multiple communities to experience excellence both onsite at Harbourfront Centre and in digital space," explains Bulmer. "The festival celebrates the power and voice of independent Deaf and disabled artists and community led organizations who, for years, have been re-imagining practice and innovating the shape and form of art internationally. CoMotion is true to its title: the festival values collective motion, interdependence and the noisy disruption of expectations."

Designed to reach as broad an audience as possible, festival programming prioritizes accessibility options, including relaxed performances, ASL interpretation, audio description and braille, audio description introductory notes and visual stories available at harbourfrontcentre.com.

To learn more about programming and to buy tickets visit harbourfrontcentre.com.

Single tickets are on sale March 9, 2022 at harbourfrontcentre.com. In support of Harbourfront Centre's inclusive *Pay What You Wish* pricing model introduced in 2022, ticket buyers are encouraged to select the ticket price they wish to pay for each individual performance or event. Suggested ticket prices for CoMotion Festival digital and in-person events range from \$15-\$35.

CoMotion Festival Highlights:

IN-PERSON EVENTS (TICKETED)

The Clearing (United States)

JJJJerome Ellis

April 20, 2022 at 8pm, Harbourfront Centre Theatre

Musician, poet and stutterer JJJJerome Ellis offers a performance that celebrates stuttering and disabled speech more broadly as a vital way of being.

This will be a relaxed performance. ASL interpretation and live audio description provided. Audio description introductory notes and a visual story will be available at harbourfrontcentre.com.

Dancing with the Universe (Canada)

REASON d'être Dance Productions

April 23, 2022 at 8pm and April 24, 2022 at 2pm, Fleck Dance Theatre

Dancing with the Universe tells co-director Vivian Chong's emotional life story of losing sight and re-discovering herself as a multidisciplinary artist and athlete. A book launch for Chong's recently

published graphic novel *Dancing After Ten*, shortlisted for the Toronto Book Awards, will be held after the opening night performance.

ASL interpretation provided on opening night. Relaxed performance on April 24. Live audio description will be available for both performances. Audio description introductory notes and a visual story will be available at harbourfrontcentre.com.

One Night with Signmark (Finland)

Featuring Signmark and Infinite Flow Dance

April 29, 2022 at 8pm, Harbourfront Centre Theatre

Signmark, a Finnish Deaf rapper, spreads his message over strong beats where complex, low frequencies and bass play a crucial part in his performance. The presentation will open with a performance by Infinite Flow Dance, an LA-based non-profit professional dance company that employs disabled and non-disabled dancers. **Nordic Spotlight, part of Nordic Bridges.**

ASL interpretation and live audio description provided. Audio description introductory notes will be available at harbourfrontcentre.com.

VIOLETTE (Canada)

Joe Jack & John

April 29, 2022 from 5–9pm and April 30 – May 1, 2022 from 12–8pm, Lakeside Terrace

Become a witness to an untold story, both magical and tragic. In this interactive VR experience, *VIOLETTE* welcomes you into her personal space. This immersive experience designed for a solo patron is an innovative hybrid between interactive theatre and virtual reality, offering a meaningful and intimate exchange with a neurodivergent performer while tackling themes of isolation, consent and sexual abuse.

Select performances are offered in French. VR options include captions and French translation. Relaxed performance. Sighted guide and active listener will be provided. Audio description introductory notes, the introduction script and a visual story will be available at harbourfrontcentre.com.

Deafy (Canada)

Chris Dodd

April 22, 2022 at 8pm and April 23, 2022 at 6pm, Brigantine Room

Deafy is a poignant and humorous storytelling piece that reflects on the experience of what it is like to be a Deaf person in a hearing world. *Deafy* serves as a bridge between Deaf and hearing audiences, with lines from the play simultaneously being signed, spoken and displayed in surtitles.

ASL interpretation and surtitles provided. Audio description introductory notes will be available at harbourfrontcentre.com.

IN-PERSON EVENTS (FREE)

Hoops: A Circus Extravaganza! (Canada)

Erin Ball and Jayeden Walker

April 24, 2022 at 2pm and 4pm, Harbourfront Centre Theatre

A family-friendly, fun-filled afternoon with circus artists Erin Ball and Jayeden Walker, hosted by Deaf actor Elizabeth Morris. Aerial acts, live music, pirates, mermaids, accessibility, a chance to learn some hula hoop moves and more! **Registration is required for this event.**

Low vision friendly, integrated creative access and open audio description. Low vision friendly descriptions will be offered during the workshop.

There will be an informal touch tour after the performances where audience members can engage with the performers and props. Priority will be given to blind or low vision patrons and anyone else who will benefit.

Audio description introductory notes and a visual story will be available at harbourfrontcentre.com.

DIGITAL EVENTS (TICKETED AND FREE)

Scored in Silence (United Kingdom/Japan)

Chisato Minamimura

April 26, 2022 at 8pm

Scored in Silence is a solo digital sign language performance by London-based Deaf Japanese artist Chisato Minamimura. The show unpacks the hidden perspectives of Deaf people from the handful that survived the horrors of the atomic bomb atrocity in Japan in 1945.

A Crash Course in Cloudspotting (United Kingdom)

April 21 and 28, 2022 at 12pm, April 23 at 3:30pm and May 1, 2022 at 11am

A Crash Course in Cloudspotting asks you to connect with the subversive act of lying down. It's about public rest, acts of bravery and the depths of human connection we don't see. Conceived by Raquel Meseguer Zafe, this digital piece is part theatre, meditation and a rare and intimate journey of fragile beauty.

Inose/Fieldtrip (Canada)

April 20 – May 1, 2022

Inose [Ee-no-say] means to walk in a certain way, to a certain place. This 25-minute sound walk is an intimate aural experience emerging from the collaboration between artist Yolanda Bonnell and scientist

Dr. Jesse Popp, two Anishinaabe leaders deeply engaged with Indigenous knowledge systems in their different fields. *Inose/Field Trip* encourages participants to connect with their surroundings, awakening curiosity and the potential for new relationships with the natural world.

Adapted for Deaf audiences.

VISUAL ARTS/PHOTOGRAPHY (FREE)

This is not a Rehabilitation Project: A Visual Artist's Studio and Solo Exhibition (Finland)

Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen

April 2 to July 3, 2022, Artport Gallery

Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen's work deals with disability politics, aesthetics of assistive devices and gender issues related to disabled women. Her presentation will be part working artist's studio and part exhibition space of her most notable recent mixed media work alongside pieces created during this Artist-in-Residency. She is an award-winning multidisciplinary artist whose short film *Reflector of Living Will* won Best Screenplay at Italy's Pisa Robot Film Festival in 2018. This summer she will participate in the group exhibition, *Woman* as part of the 8th Biennial of Contemporary Art by ONCE Fundación in Madrid, Spain. **Nordic Spotlight, part of Nordic Bridges.**

Not Born Yesterday, Not Going Away (International)

Group exhibition curated by Alex Bulmer

April 20 to September 11, 2022, West Vitriines

Deaf and disabled people around the world have a long history of artistic expression. Still, the field of Deaf and disability art is relatively unknown or is perceived to be a new innovation to established forms. Eight artists celebrate the long history of Deaf and disability art, connecting living artists with their chosen ancestors. It gives an opportunity to create across time, to honour those who have shaped our present and to move forward with a strong sense of collective history.

Audio description and braille available.

Unseen (United Kingdom)

Suzie Larke

April 20 to September 11, 2022, South Hallway/Parking Pavilion

By combining photographs that take the everyday and skew it, Suzie Larke uses magical realism in her photography to create images that challenge our notion of reality. *Unseen* finds the visual language to interpret the subjective experience of struggles with the mental wellbeing of a group of participants.

Audio description and braille available.

My Words (Denmark)

Gudrun Hasle

April 20 to May 15, 2022, Various Venues

Displayed throughout Harbourfront Centre's Artport building, written sentences will appear in expected and unexpected places. The sentences will deal with feelings of loneliness, unbelonging and reflections on what it feels like to be marginalized, all designed to create a safe space to spark conversation and connection. **Commissioned by Harbourfront Centre.**

Audio description and braille available.

Mycelium: Interdependence in the undergrowth (Canada)

Wy Joung Kou

April 20 to May 15, 2022, Marilyn Brewer Community Space

This new tactile mosaic by Wy Joung Kou depicts the remains of a tree after its fall and death but continues to sustain life post-mortem. It highlights the growth patterns, movement and commotion created by the interdependent organisms that exist all around the detritus of the forest floor. The symbiosis surrounding the life, death and transformation in this environment suggests that when we can persist through grief and upheaval, we might find a home and a place held tight in the arms of the mycelium.

Commissioned by Harbourfront Centre.

Audio description and braille available.

Activist Wallpaper (Canada)

Syrus Marcus Ware

April 20 to September 11, 2022, South Hallway

This new iteration from Syrus Marcus Ware's *Activist Portrait Series* continues his exploration of BIPOC disability activism in the arts and media. The wall installation is a tribute and celebration of Black Deaf Olympian and artist Courage Bacchus.

Audio description and braille available.

Harbourfront Centre's health and safety protocols – in strict compliance with provincial health orders – can be viewed at: harbourfrontcentre.com/covid.

About Harbourfront Centre

Harbourfront Centre is a leading international centre for contemporary arts, culture and ideas, and a registered, charitable not-for-profit cultural organization operating a 10-acre campus on Toronto's central waterfront. Harbourfront Centre provides year-round programming 52 weeks a year, seven days a week, supporting a wide range of artists and communities. We inspire audiences and visitors with a breadth of bold, ambitious and engaging experiences. We champion contemporary Canadian artists throughout their careers, presenting them alongside international artists and fostering national and international artistic exchange between disciplines and cultures.

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