



MUSEUM VISITS  
ARE HARD ON  
MY BODY

REST HERE  
IF YOU AGREE

# Shannon Finnegan: Lone Proponent of Wall-to-Wall Carpet

Curated by Heather Anderson and Fiona Wright

STUDENTS FOR ACCESSIBILITY  
STAFF FOR ACCESSIBILITY  
ARTISTS FOR ACCESSIBILITY  
ACADEMICS FOR ACCESSIBILITY  
COMMUNITIES FOR ACCESSIBILITY

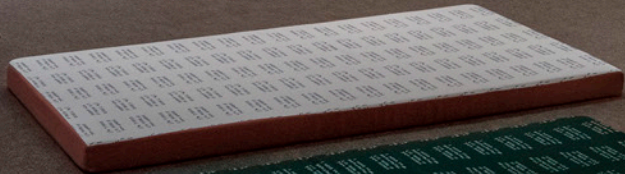


BEHAVING AS THOUGH  
AN ARTIST AND YOU  
THE PERFECT INCUBATOR



THE  
FOR  
YOU

THE  
FOR  
YOU



# Introduction

Fiona Wright and Heather Anderson

Shannon Finnegan makes text-based artworks that are grounded in their experiences of disability and disability culture. They have said: “I think about disabled people as the primary audience for my work because so often, we’re not being spoken to.” The Brooklyn-based artist calls out ableist systems in public places, including art galleries and museums. In their exhibitions, they work in response to a site, creating welcoming spaces where visitors can encounter and think about issues of and ideas about access.

Finnegan’s work provocatively asks: “Do you want us here or not?” By “us,” they mean individuals with disabilities. Their question is rhetorical—they assume that all organizations would answer with a resounding YES! Saying yes means taking concrete positive action over the long term, with the intent of taking fuller, more meaningful approaches to access through listening, flexibility and creativity.

In *Self-Portrait* and *Portrait of Danielle Durchslag*, Finnegan approaches the practice of portraiture through text, representing individual identities as arrangements of colourful narrative drawings. Each work describes aspects of their lived experience that are specific, relatable, playful and sometimes painful.

Finnegan’s murals are composed by assembling individual cut-out letters into affirmative messages. “Reinventing my strangeness as an art form that only I am the perfect practitioner of,” for example, celebrates and claims space for the disability community, representing disability not as a “lack” or something to cure, as it is often portrayed in society, but as a source of innovation and difference.

Finnegan’s series of custom seating options, titled *Do you want us here or not*, and handmade cushions, titled *For when we need softness*, invite you to get comfortable in the exhibition space. Fabricated by Carleton University’s Industrial Design technicians to the artist’s

specifications, the benches are inlaid with Finnegan's humorous messages that call out ableist assumptions about how easily (or not) exhibitions can be navigated.

These works foreground the ways that art galleries (CUAG included) ask you to spend considerable time standing and walking when you visit. You can choose to sit, to rest and to participate in an act of solidarity with Finnegan's critique. The benches are expressions of care, from the artist to you, offering us a place to gather and rest together.

Ableism operates to isolate us from one another, not just physically. And just as wall-to-wall carpet is the ideal flooring material for Shannon to walk on, their work proposes a "completely customizable world where everything is exactly as [you] like and need it." This moves far beyond "access" as a responsibility governed by compliance to legislation, instead envisioning a world committed to ongoing, responsive and collective care.

**Note:**

Shannon Finnegan works actively in the area of alt-text, seeking to make it a more poetic and expressive form. Alt (or alternative) texts are narrative descriptions of web-based images, read aloud by a screen reader for those with low or no vision. Alt-text is often computer-generated and is typically perfunctory and sometimes inaccurate. Through their practice of writing alt-text, including leading workshops, Finnegan inspires people to author alt-text and explore its possibilities.

The limitations of alt-text have inspired the format, content and tone of the extended labels in this exhibition. We put digital images of Finnegan's artworks through an online alt-text generator and included the resulting alt-text on the label. Below the alt-text, you'll find CUAG's alternative text, more in keeping with the type of label text we typically provide. How would you describe these art works?

# Drawings



*Self-Portrait* (2017-18)  
Coloured pencil  
Courtesy of the artist

**Computer-generated alt-text:**

“a sign that reads” “on the side of a building”

**Our text:**

This is a self-portrait represented in the form of text, without images. There are 18 drawings in the series, divided into two groups (one of 6 and one of 12) and hung in two sites in the exhibition space.

Finnegan made each drawing using two colours of pencil crayon: one for the text and one for the background. The colours are muted, but cheerful. Sometimes the contrast between the colours is subtle, like yellow on light pink, and sometimes the contrast is bold, like red on light blue. The letters are written in upper case and are slightly irregular.

Finnegan’s text drawings narrate their personal observations, wishes and experiences. The title of this exhibition, *Lone Proponent of Wall-to-Wall Carpet*, appears on one of the drawings. It references the general disdain for wall-to-wall carpet (in comparison to hardwood floor). For Finnegan, though, it is much easier to walk on a padded surface.

THE JOYS  
OF HAVING  
THE SAME  
PHYSICAL  
THERAPIST  
SINCE I WAS  
18 MONTHS  
OLD

FALLING  
BEHIND IN  
A GROUP  
OF PEOPLE  
WALKING

EXPLAINING  
THE SOCIAL  
MODEL OF  
DISABILITY  
TO SOMEONE  
I LOVE

BEING  
ACCIDENTALLY  
PERCEIVED  
AS LA-  
ZY

DISTANCES  
TOO SHORT  
TO TAKE A  
TAXI BUT  
TIRING TO  
WALK

WHEN  
SOMEONE  
PREFACES  
THEIR QUESTION  
WITH "I DON'T  
WANT TO  
OFFEND YOU"

FALLING  
BEHIND IN  
A GROUP  
OF PEOPLE  
WALKING

BEING  
ACCIDENTALLY  
PERCIEVED  
AS LA-  
ZY

GOOD  
AT  
FALL-  
ING

FASHIONABLE GAMES  
HI.COM

CHOREO-  
GRAPHY  
BASED ON  
MY EVERYDAY  
MOVEMENTS

GREAT  
VELCRO  
OPTIONS  
AT MY  
PEDIATRIC  
ORTHOTIST

I WISH I  
HAD ASKED  
FOR THE  
ACCOMMODATION  
I NEED

A COMPLETELY  
CUSTOMIZED  
WORLD  
WHERE EVERYTHING  
IS JUST AS  
I LIKE &  
NEED IT

LOVE  
PROPONENT  
OF WALL  
-TO-WALL  
CARPET

AN  
EXHIBITION  
OF ALL THE  
DIAGRAMS MY  
NEPHROLOGIST  
DREW FOR  
ME

A  
STRANGER  
IMITATING  
THE WAY  
I WALK

I ASK FOR  
ACCOMMO-  
DATION  
WHEN I  
NEED IT

PROBLEMS  
THAT CAN  
BE SOLVED  
BY  
MONEY

REVEL-  
ATIONS  
FROM  
GAIT  
ANALYSIS

GREAT  
VELCRO  
OPTIONS  
AT MY  
PEDIATRIC  
ORTHOTIST

A COMPLETELY  
CUSTOMIZED  
WORLD  
WHERE EVERYTHING  
IS JUST AS  
I LIKE &  
NEED IT

LONE  
PROPONENT  
OF WALL  
-TO-WALL  
CARPET

I ASK FOR  
ACCOMMO-  
DATION  
WHEN I  
NEED IT

*Portrait of Danielle  
Durchslag (2018)*  
Coloured pencil  
Courtesy of the artist

**Computer-generated alt-text:**

“a pair of scissors sitting on top of a table”

**Our text:**

This is a portrait of Danielle Durchslag, a Brooklyn-based artist, filmmaker and educator. It consists of 12 framed drawings, hung on the wall. Finnegan made the drawings using pencil crayon to render texts in soft blues, yellows, pinks and oranges.

The texts are based on the artist’s conversations with Durchslag. They are variously charming and vulnerable, expressing moments of frustration and inspiration from Durchslag’s life. This is the first in a new series of portraits by Finnegan, created with the goal of representing the diversity of experiences of people with disabilities. As they have said, “Understanding other peoples’ experiences helped me understand my own experience.”

INSURANCE  
DOESN'T  
BELIEVE  
ANYTHING  
I TAKE  
IS  
MEDICINE

CALCU-  
LATING  
WHAT'S  
WORTH  
IT

EMPTY-  
ING OUT  
DAYS  
FOR RE-  
COVERY

ENOUGH  
MONEY SPENT  
ON PROBIOTICS  
TO BUY A  
NICK CAVE  
SOUNDSUIT

MY  
SECRET  
LIFE  
ON THE  
TOILET

I HAVE TIME,  
MONEY, AND  
FLEXIBILITY,  
AND IT IS STILL  
SO HARD TO  
NAVIGATE THIS  
FUCKED UP  
SYSTEM.

LOOKING  
GREAT  
AND  
FEELING  
SICK





TOO  
MANY  
MALE  
DOCTORS

CROOPING  
CRYING  
WHILE  
POOPING

TOI-  
LET  
MAP-  
PING

CONVOIS-  
SEUR OF  
WAITING  
ROOM  
DECOR

DOCTORS  
TELLING  
ME MY  
PHYSICAL  
EXPERIENCE  
IS WRONG

# Murals

*Portable Mural 1 (2018)*

“Reinventing my strangeness as an art form that only I am the perfect practitioner of”

*Portable Mural 2 (2020)*

“Students for accessibility /  
Staff for accessibility /  
Artists for accessibility /  
Academics for accessibility /  
Communities for  
accessibility”

*Portable Mural 3 (2020)*

“In search of the alchemy that happens when disabled people are connected”

Chipboard and ink  
Courtesy of the artist

**Computer-generated alt-text:**

“a picture of a man in a suit and tie”

**Our text:**

These three large murals are installed on the gallery’s long wall. They celebrate and advocate for disabled artists working within a community of support. Finnegan made the murals from letters cut out from chipboard, an inexpensive material made from reclaimed paper stock, and inscribed them with white ink.

The artist David Hammons has called for artists to “Abandon any art form that costs too much. Insist that it’s as cheap as possible [...] and also that it’s aesthetically correct.”<sup>1</sup> Finnegan acknowledges that this resonates with their experience of disability as it relates to their artistic practice. They devise strategies that make things feasible for their specific body and small studio space. Finnegan thus designed their murals to be flexible and portable so that they could be reconfigured in different public spaces.

1 Kellie Jones, *EyeMinded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art* (Duke University Press, 2011), 253.

REINVENTING MY STRANGENESS AS  
AN ART FORM THAT ONLY I AM  
THE PERFECT PRACTITIONER OF



STUDENTS FOR ACCESSIBILITY

STAFF FOR ACCESSIBILITY

ARTISTS FOR ACCESSIBILITY

ACADEMICS FOR ACCESSIBILITY

COMMUNITIES FOR ACCESSIBILITY

IN SERVICE OF THE  
ALCHEMY THAT HAPPENS  
WHEN DISABLED PEOPLE  
ARE CONNECTED

# Cushions



*For when we need softness*  
(2020)  
Custom fabric and foam  
Courtesy of the artist

**Computer-generated alt-text:**

“A laptop computer sitting on top of a table / a man is sitting with a book in his hand”

**Our text:**

This is a series of six floor pillows: two square, two rectangular and two round. Each pillow contains three-inch-thick foam. Finnegan’s aunt sewed the covers, using solid-coloured fabric, either deep blue, pink, light blue, forest green or red.

The texts on the pillows, which are written in upper case, issue invitations. For example: “I need softness. Rest here if you agree.” The pillows’ plush feel evokes the ‘softness’ referenced in the artwork’s title. Finnegan’s texts remind us that when we are engaged in activist work, it is important to rest and to take care of ourselves and each other.





Furniture

*Do you want us here or not*  
(2018–ongoing)

Baltic birch, poplar wood,  
plastic laminate, carpenter’s  
glue, water-based contact  
cement and wood screws

Produced by Walter Zanetti,  
Anthony Dewar and Paul  
Durocher, School of  
Industrial Design and Brant  
Lucuik, Azrieli School of  
Architecture & Urbanism,  
Carleton University, 2020

Courtesy of the artist

**Computer-generated alt-text:**

“a sign that is on the side of a building”

**Our text:**

This is a series of furniture that includes benches, a chair, a lounge chair and an ottoman. They all have flat surfaces, are bright blue (a reference to the International Symbol of Access), and are inlaid with white texts that look handwritten. Finnegan created these in response to their observation that many museums and galleries do not prioritize the comfort and care of their visitors. Unlike most museum furniture, then, Finnegan’s is designed to be highly visible, present and used. Please feel free to take a seat!

Shannon Finnegan  
Lone Proponent of  
Wall-to-Wall Carpet

Shannon Finnegan's "Lone Proponent of Wall-to-Wall Carpet" is a series of blue-painted wooden furniture pieces, including a chair and a table, that feature white text. The text on the chair reads "I WOULD RATHER BE SITTING. SIT IF YOU AGREE." and the text on the table reads "I NEED A BREAK. REST HERE IF YOU AGREE." The pieces are displayed on a grey carpeted floor in a gallery setting. A white wall in the background features a framed informational text panel.

Curated by  
Heather Anderson  
and Fiona Wright







IT WAS HARD TO  
GET HERE.

REST HERE IF  
YOU AGREE.



# Audio tour

An audio tour of this exhibition is available at:

<https://bit.ly/2UvVxJc>

The audio tour expands the accessibility of the exhibition. It creates a non-visual option for you to engage with the exhibition.

INGENESS AS  
LY I AM  
ONER OF



This publication is produced in conjunction with *Shannon Finnegan: Lone Proponent of Wall-to-Wall Carpet*, curated by Heather Anderson and Fiona Wright.

The exhibition opened at CUAG on 9 February 2020 and closed on 13 March due to COVID-19. It was then made accessible online and closed on 23 August.

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ISBN 978-1-4884-0027-8

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General editor: Sandra Dyck

Design: Patrick Côté

Photography: Justin Wonnacott

Front cover: Shannon Finnegan, *Do you want us here or not [Drawing 5]*, 2017, digitized drawing, courtesy of the artist.

This publication is supported by the Diana Nemiroff Publishing Fund, Carleton University, the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario.



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