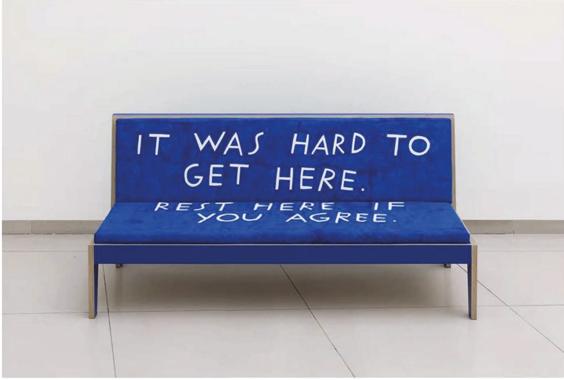
Finnegan Shannon’s provocative work champions art world access for disabled people


IT WAS HARD TO GET HERE.
REST HERE IF YOU AGREE.

For the past decade, they have worked to make galleries, museums and exhibitions more inclusive and imaginative spaces.

Words **Daniel Milroy Maher**

19 August 2024

Work Art Painting
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Based in New York, American multidisciplinary artist Finnegan Shannon has made a name for themselves through their subversive, access-focused artworks. Their practice has always spoken to the disabled community, and they say their art is defined by a constant questioning of “how we, as [a society], can move towards more nuanced and more transformative approaches to access.”

Working across design, installation and studio art, Finnegan’s focus has culminated in a range of innovative projects and exhibitions, including *Anti-Stairs Club Lounge*, a purpose-designed space within the Wassaic Project in New York. Here, seven floors and no elevator make much of the work housed within inaccessible to those who cannot use the stairs, but Finnegan’s space counters this with an artwork-cum-seating area that offers reading materials, refreshments, a charging station and a mural that says ‘The higher you climb, the farther you fall.’

Another notable project from Finnegan’s oeuvre is their series of benches that have been placed in museums around the country. Titled *Do you want us here or not*, the series challenges these institutions on their lack of seating options by providing custom-made blue benches with white text painted on top. Lines from the benches include: ‘It was hard to get here. Rest if you agree’ and ‘This exhibition has asked me to stand for too long. Sit if you agree’. Simple in execution yet inherently provocative, Finnegan’s unique brand of art mixes the mundane with the political.

Speaking on the questions that drive their work, Finnegan says “How can practices of access nourish cross-disability solidarity and connection? How do we make spaces and experiences that disabled people not only *can* access but *want* to access?” They conclude: “By centering fellow disabled people as the primary audience for my work, my hope is that my experiments point to and manifest settings where disabled people are not just tolerated but where we can be together and thrive.”

The Latest

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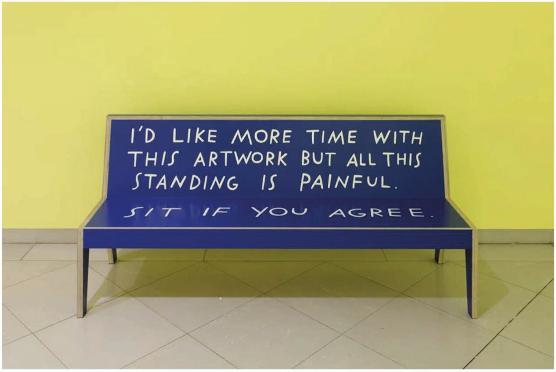
I'D LIKE MORE TIME WITH
THIS ARTWORK BUT ALL THIS
STANDING IS PAINFUL.
SIT IF YOU AGREE.

Above Finnegan Shannon: Do you want us here or not, Bench 3 (Copyright © Axel Schneider, 2021)

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et partenaires pour 2023
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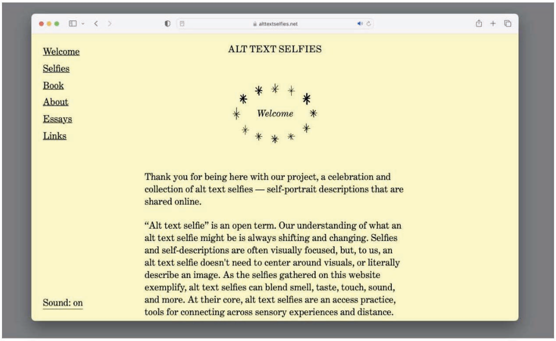
Above Finnegan Shannon: Bench-to-daybed conversion research (Copyright © Mareike Tocha, 2023)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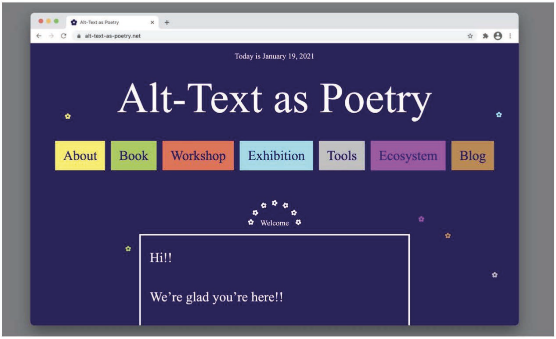
ALT TEXT SELFIES

Welcome

Thank you for being here with our project, a celebration and collection of alt text selfies — self-portrait descriptions that are shared online.

“Alt text selfie” is an open term. Our understanding of what an alt text selfie might be is always shifting and changing. Selfies and self-descriptions are often visually focused, but, to us, an alt text selfie doesn't need to center around visuals, or literally describe an image. As the selfies gathered on this website exemplify, alt text selfies can blend smell, taste, touch, sound, and more. At their core, alt text selfies are an access practice, tools for connecting across sensory experiences and distance.

Above Finnegan Shannon, Bojana Coklyat & Olivia Dresinger: Alt Text Selfies (Copyright © Finnegan Shannon, 2024)


Alt-Text as Poetry
alt-text-as-poetry.net
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Welcome

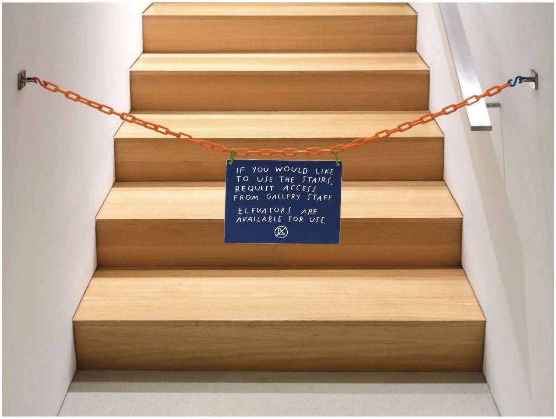
Today is January 19, 2021

Alt-Text as Poetry

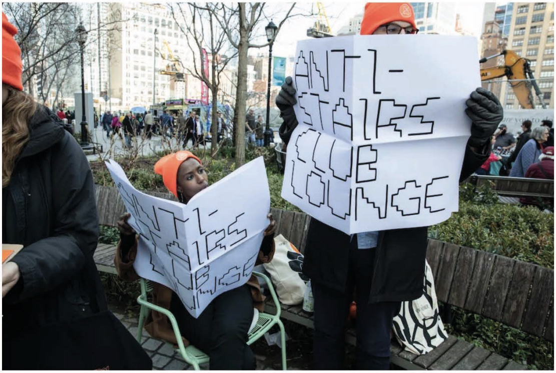
Hi!!

We’re glad you’re here!!

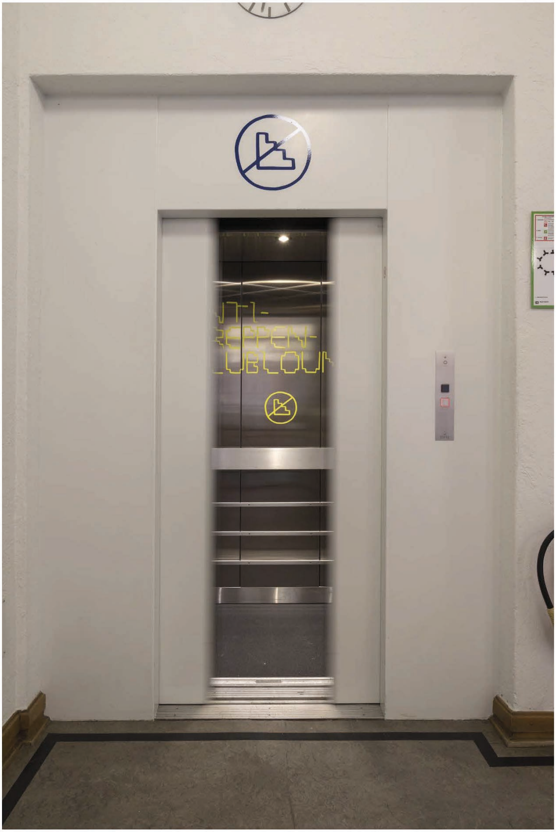
Above Finnegan Shannon & Bojana Coklyat: Alt Text as Poetry (Copyright © Finnegan Shannon, 2020)


IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO USE THE STAIRS, REQUEST ACCESS FROM GALLERY STAFF.
ELEVATORS ARE AVAILABLE FOR USE.

Above Finnegan Shannon: Inside joke between me and everyone who has had to make an access request (Copyright © Steven Probert, 2023)


ANTI-
STAIRS
CLUB
LOUNGE

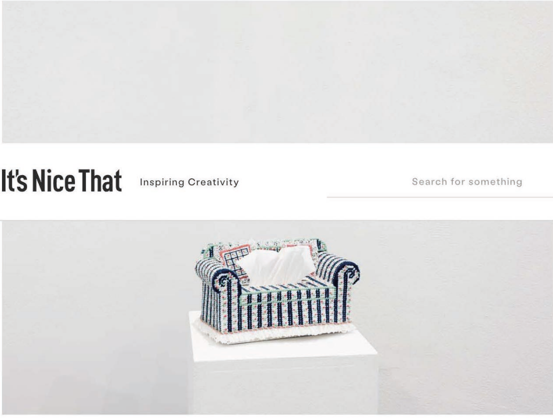
Above Finnegan Shannon: Anti-Stairs Club Lounge at The Vessel
(Copyright © Maria Baranova, 2019)



Above Finnegan Shannon: Naturally Occurring Anti-Stairs Club Lounge
(Copyright © Zoe Tempest, 2022)

CAREGIVER/CARETAKER

Above Finnegan Shannon: Hello from my bedside table (Copyright © Angela von Brill, 2022)



Above Finnegan Shannon: A little softness for you (Copyright © Simao Bessa, 2022)

WE SIT & ENJOY DON'T MIND IF WE DO WE LINK IN A CHAIN WE FLOWING WE LOOPING

Above Finnegan Shannon: Don't mind if I do (Copyright © The Dark Room Co, 2023)

Hero Header

Finnegan Shannon: Do you want us here or not, Bench 1 (Copyright © Axel Schneider, 2021)

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instagram.com/finneganshannon

About the Author

Daniel Milroy Maher

Daniel joined It's Nice That as an editorial assistant in February 2019 and continues to work with us on a freelance basis. He graduated from Kingston University with a degree in Journalism in 2015. He is also co-founder and editor of SWIM, an annual art and photography publication.