



"Am I My Pain" choreographed by Robby Lee Williams, featuring dancers (from left) Maggie Bridger, Kris Lenzo, Robby Lee Williams, and Sydney Erikh. CounterBalance 2021, Momenta Dance Company. Photo by Marcela Rafea.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Click here for images and artist bios](#)

3Arts expands Disability Culture Leadership Initiative to advance advocacy efforts in the arts

New video conversations with four artists from Chicago's dance and theater communities added to online hub for disability art and culture

CHICAGO, IL (January 18, 2022)– **3Arts**, the Chicago-based nonprofit organization, announced today the four dance and theater artists added to its **Disability Culture Leadership Initiative (DCLI)**, an online platform that elevates the work of Deaf and disabled artists and encourages the arts and culture sector to prioritize Disability Culture in programming and organizational efforts. The new featured artists are **Brian Balcom** (theater director), **Tsehaye Geralyn Hébert** (playwright), **Wilyum LaBeija** (dancer), and **Robby Lee Williams** (dancer).

All artists are recent alumni of the **3Arts/Bodies of Work Residency Fellowships**, a program centered on the creation of new work, professional development, and advocacy for Disability Arts & Culture. After their fellowship periods, alumni are invited to participate in videotaped conversations to document their work, experiences, and evolving dialogues on disability aesthetics.

The newly enhanced **DCLI website** now features six insightful and candid video conversations on a range of topics, including "Creating Spaces for Belonging" and "Inclusive and Introspective Theater." Videos featuring the four new artists are moderated by disability culture advocate **Anita Gonzalez**, professor of Performing Arts and African American Studies at Georgetown University and co-Founder of the Racial Justice Institute.

The DCLI web presence has been expanded since its 2021 launch, with all videos updated to include full written transcripts, making the content more accessible and better optimized for search engines and ultimately elevating these artists even further. The new DCLI videos, accessibility resources, and profiles on participating artists are now available at **www.3arts.org/disability-culture**.

“3Arts is proud to add four stellar artists to our growing platform and to share and celebrate the dynamic work of artists on the cutting edge of the Disability Art and Culture movement,” said 3Arts Executive Director **Esther Grisham Grimm**. “This web platform is more than a resource for the field. It reflects an ever-expanding network of Deaf and disabled artists in Chicago who support each other through and beyond their art, and we look forward to working closely with them as they continue to raise the bar each year.”

The launch of DCLI in 2021 stems from work that began seven years ago, when 3Arts partnered with **Bodies of Work**—a network of artists and organizations whose art reflects disability aesthetics and experience—to establish the 3Arts Residency Fellowships. The program was designed to build audiences and opportunities for Deaf and disabled artists in the Chicago metropolitan area and beyond. 3Arts has worked closely with the Bodies of Work consortium to develop the Fellowships and establish this new Disability Culture Leadership Initiative. Bodies of Work is co-directed by **Carrie Sandahl** (professor at the University of Illinois Chicago’s Disability & Human Development department) and **Sandie Yi** (assistant professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s department of Art Therapy & Counseling, and program director of the Disability Culture Activism Lab), with additional partnerships with Access Living and UIC’s Disability Cultural Center.

In addition to the four new artists, the eleven other program alumni featured on the website include: dancemakers **Ginger Lane** and **Kris Lenzo**; theater practitioners **Michael Herzovi**, **Arlene Malinowski**, and **Robert Schleifer**; sound artist **Andy Slater**; multidisciplinary artists **Matt Bodett** and **Reveca Torres**; and visual artists **Riva Lehrer**, **Mariam Paré**, and **Pooja Pittie**. Their video interviews were moderated by filmmaker and disability advocate **Justin Cooper**.

The DCLI and the 3Arts/Bodies of Work Residency Fellowships are programs of 3Arts and supported in part by grants from the **Art Works Fund**, **The Joyce Foundation**, and the **National Endowment for the Arts**.

About the Artists



Brian Balcom (Theater)

“I think for the first time in my life, I have felt embraced and I have felt supported by a community... All these doors have opened and I don't just mean opportunities, but relationships and a sense of belonging.”

Brian Balcom is a disabled, Asian-American director working in Chicago and Minneapolis. With a BFA in directing from Carnegie-Mellon University, he started a small theater company dedicated to commissioning work from fellowship recipients at the Playwrights Center. He produced and directed several new plays, and his company was invited to present at The Southern Theatre and Guthrie Theatre. In Minneapolis, he also worked with Gremlin

Theater, The Playwrights Center, Walking Shadow Company, Artistry, and Mu Performing Arts.

Since moving to Chicago he has received a Steppenwolf Theatre Company Multicultural Fellowship and has directed readings and plays at Route 66 Theatre Company, Broken Nose Theatre, The Gift Theatre, Silk Road Rising, A-Squared Theatre, Jackalope Theatre, Theater Wit, La Jolla Playhouse (CA), and American Stage Theatre Company (FL). He currently heads the Access Project at Victory Gardens Theater.



Tsehaye Geralyn Hébert (Theater)

“Most people with disabilities have been so far ahead of the technology quotient, that we're showing other people how to do it. So that makes us brilliant end-users in understanding how systems work, because we understand how systems didn't work for us.”

Tsehaye Geralyn Hébert is a self-described “bona fide gumbo girl.” The nationally acclaimed playwright triaged between her grandparents’ rural Louisiana family seat, her Baton Rouge birthplace, and her mother’s beloved New Orleans. Steeped in African-Creole culture, she relishes quiet world-changing moments that live on stage alongside the hyperbole and spectacle of Mardi Gras.

The Northwestern University and School of the Art Institute of Chicago alum penned *The Chicago Quartet*, a series of works set across 19th and 20th century Chicago. Fearless in scope, Hébert's work is highly imaginative and might include Lucy Parsons, Ida B. Wells, Jane Addams, Chicago's Black avant-garde arts communities, or the lady sitting next to her at the salon.

The citizen artist is committed to inclusivity and sustainability. Hébert's writings and performances center race, gender, disability, and the economics and geography of making art. She brings communities and demographics together to grieve, heal, celebrate, and move boldly forward.



Willyum LaBeija (Dance)

"I can't let what has happened to me stand in the way of who I am ...Just because you are what they consider, 'the awkward one' or 'the one that doesn't fit in,' that doesn't mean that is who you are or that's what controls you. You are the master of your fate and the captain of your soul."

Willyum LaBeija is an actor, dancer, and choreographer originally from North Carolina and now based in Chicago and Seattle. He served in the US Army during which time he participated in the Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Soldier Show for two years as a dance captain. His training includes classical and urban genres of dance with an emphasis in vogue performance. He is currently a member of the Royal House of LaBeija since 2011. He is the recipient of the following awards and honors: New International Performing Arts Institute Residency (2020); Neighborhood Arts Entrepreneurship Project-Task force member (2020); Ways Residency (2020); Global Water Dances Choreographer/Site Lead (2019/2020); Movement Residency Brazil/Panama (2019/2020); Physical Theatre Residency in Austria (2019/2020); National Veterans Art Summit (2019) residency; Links Hall Co-Missions Winter Residency (2019); and Breaking Grounds Performance Series (2018).



Robby Lee Williams (Dance)

"The more that we allow our disability aesthetics to show in our art, in our works, the more that gets visibility on this community, on who we are, what we are, and letting people know we're here."

Robby Lee Williams is a dancer and theater performer who is coming into the fourth year of his disability. He has trained and performed with Tango 21 Dance Theater and has been overjoyed to join Momenta Dance Company since 2019 to continue his dance journey. He is looking to join his poetry and adaptive dance in a way that is meaningful and moving.

About 3Arts

3Arts is a nonprofit organization that supports Chicago's women artists, artists of color, and Deaf and disabled artists who work in the performing, teaching, and visual arts. By providing cash awards, project funding, residency fellowships, professional development, and promotion, 3Arts helps artists take risks, experiment, and build momentum in their careers over time.

Since 2007, 3Arts has supported more than 1,800 artists—representing 69% women artists, 71% artists of color, and 19% Deaf and disabled artists—and distributed \$5.8 million in grants and services.

For more information about 3Arts, please visit www.3arts.org.

###

Contact: Amanda Berrios/Alannah Spencer
The Silverman Group, Inc.
847.421.8517 (cell)
amanda@silvermangroupchicago.com