

Towards A Consideration of All Bodies

The Lab Gallery, November 7th, 2018

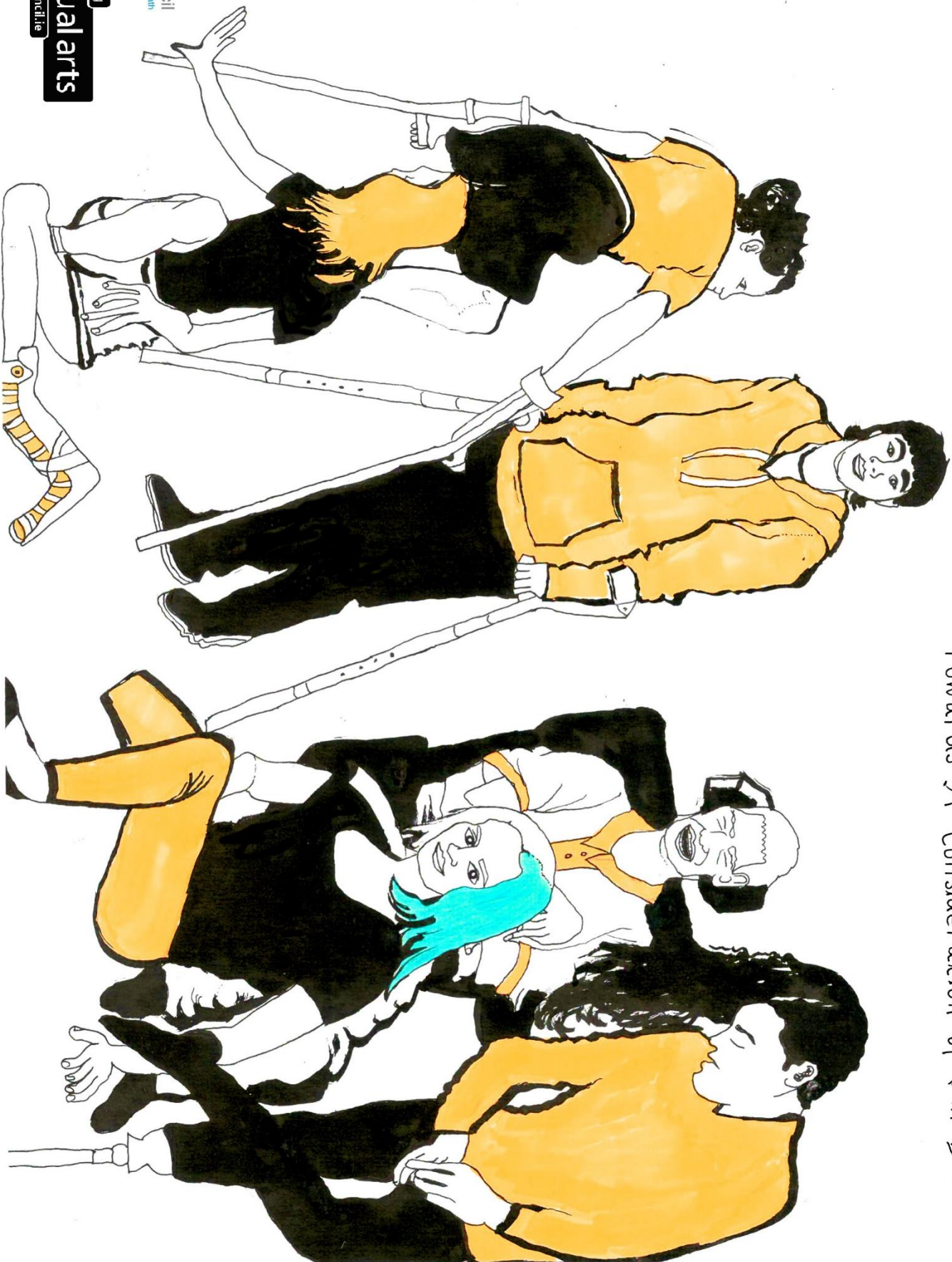
People with disabilities are a constellation. The human rights of oppressed and minority groups in society have only ever improved from action within the oppressed group. Nothing will change if we do not collectively raise our voices. Within our group there are infinite variables; different disabilities or chronic illnesses and different severities of impairment. There are the categories of physical, sensory, intellectual, learning disabilities and chronic illnesses. The names for these categories change over time. Within those there are the specific disabilities, there are variants on the same disability and there are different severities. People often have multiple disabilities. There are visible disabilities and invisible ones. Often people with disabilities do not identify as being disabled and even when we do it is not an all-consuming identity.

We are a scattered group. This makes it difficult for mass mobilisation and action. Often people with disabilities depend entirely or partially on their family, friends and carers. For mobilisation to occur families and organisations need to be on board. On board with activism and political action. There are activists and groups, but I have yet to see a mass movement.

Platforms for people with disabilities pop up from time to time in the media, Evie Evans from Disabled People for Choice and Paddy Smyth from First Dates Ireland. Others in the background include Disabled Women Ireland, Arts and Disability Ireland and University of Atypical to name, but a few, I am sure. Yes, in recent years there has been a vast improvement in rights, services and access for people with disabilities. However, it is not enough. Progress is at a snail pace. The UN Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities was signed by Ireland in 2007, but only ratified in April 2018. That is more than a ten-year gap. Why did it take so long? We now have a Minister for Disability, but people with disabilities and their families still have enormous difficulties accessing state services thanks to the tangled red tape. Government Policies need to change.

Towards A Consideration of All Bodies is only dipping its toe in the ocean of things that need changing. I hope it will contribute to the transformation of the general public's attitude towards people with disabilities, suggesting consideration for *all* bodies, rather than just the socially accepted 'normal' body, of which there is none in any case, whether you are disabled or non-disabled. The Social Model of Disability suggests the use of 'contact theory'. Discrimination of people with disabilities reduces if contact between disabled and non-disabled people increases. We need to demystify ourselves to non-disabled people. Disabled people are a diverse group of the population. We are laden with presumptions and stereotypes by the general-public about what we can and cannot do. Every one of us can do different things; none of are the same. Non-disabled people are often unaware of how to ask us questions in an appropriate, non-discriminatory fashion. Going about my business on the street, shopping for groceries, entering night clubs, using public transport and house hunting, I have been insulted, harassed, given unsolicited advice and been obliged to answer questions about my body. This experience is normal for many disabled people. As it is with other oppressed and minority groups. Don't get me wrong we don't mind answering questions, but they should be phrased appropriately and not asked by interrupting us while we choose which spinach we want to buy at the supermarket. The 99cent packet weighing 200gram? "What's wrong with your leg?" or the 2 euro one weighing 350grams? Towards A Consideration of All Bodies aims to encourage contact and questions between disabled and non-disabled people. However, we must be considered as an equal rather than as an alien other whose feelings and autonomy do not matter.

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