



A residency unlike any other

Local organization provides funding in support of artists with disabilities

The phrase "artist residency" may conjure images of an Italian villa retreat for painters or cabins in rural Vermont for musicians. Artist residencies are often held in remote locations so participants have plenty of quiet time to advance their craft. But for artists with disabilities, the possibility of securing one of these residencies isn't always feasible. There can be accessibility issues—will there be an ASL interpreter? Will a wheelchair fit

into the small bathroom? Does funding include a personal care attendant?—but the challenges go beyond access.

"While most artists need time away and isolation to give themselves space to work, the problem is that artists with disabilities are already isolated," says DHD associate professor **Carrie Sandahl**.

The 3Arts Residency at UIC seeks to change that. This

residency was inspired by a three-year research study on barriers and facilitators to arts careers conducted by Sandahl and **Carol J. Gill**, DHD professor emeritus, and is a collaboration with local nonprofit organization 3Arts. Led by executive director Esther Grimm, 3Arts supports Chicago artists with disabilities, women artists and artists of color.

Since 2014, funding from 3Arts and the National Endowment

for the Arts has supported one to two artists with disabilities each academic year at AHS. The gifts support all costs of the residency, while UIC provides the artists with professional development, mentoring and resources.

"We set up this residency to address some of the barriers we identified and connect artists with cultural institutions, as well as with disability culture and disability studies," Sandahl says. "That's why it's at UIC."

This context also helps inform what the residency is not. It's not simply paying a guest lecturer to teach in a few classes. It's not a mechanism to teach audiences about disability. It's not for artists with impairments who are uninterested in disability culture.

"Our artists have to be willing to think about how disability

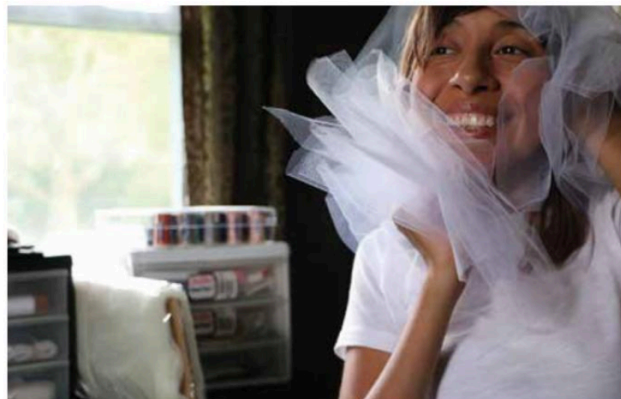


Carrie Sandahl

influences their working process or their aesthetics," Sandahl explains.

Apart from this requirement, the residency is intentionally open-ended, a luxury that the artists aren't always accustomed to.

"Prior to the residency, I was taking every opportunity I could and trying to make it work, which sometimes meant I wasn't totally thrilled with what I was putting out," says artist Matt Bodett, the fall 2017 resident.



Reveca Torres

Sandahl knows this frustration well from her own experience seeking grants to support initiatives like the residency. "I would have to warp my projects to fit the criteria," she says.

That's no longer an issue thanks to the generosity of 3Arts. Their thoughtful approach to funding means artists can dream big, while Sandahl can spend her time mentoring the artists, rather than cutting through red tape.

"This is a foundation that really understands the research and sees how it affects a real-life problem," she says. "They came through for us."

Sandahl emphasizes that it's a relationship of trust, support and collaboration. She also says the funding arrangement is one that is fully replicable between other organizations and UIC faculty.

"If there's a graduate or donor who has a particular affinity with an organization, I would encourage them to see who the researchers are at UIC in that same area," she says. "Form those relationships and see what happens."

Sandahl learned that anything can happen. Case in point, she couldn't have anticipated the global reach of the 3Arts Residency program. In addition to speaking at conferences nationally, Sandahl has



Matt Bodett

presented on the residency in Canada, Germany and Switzerland.

Meanwhile, Bodett brought the performance art series he created during his residency to the Freud Museum in London and the No Limits Festival in Berlin. "The residency gave me a new type of confidence," he says. "It made me realize that my only limitation is myself."

Having recently moved to Chicago from Boise, Bodett was struggling to find his way in the Chicago arts scene before he started the residency. He's grateful that Sandahl's mentorship and connections opened doors at the Poetry Foundation, Victory Gardens Theater and Steppenwolf Theatre.

"The weight of what this residency represents in the community is very strong," Bodett says. "I'm connected to the disability community and culture in a much more

substantial and lasting way now."

Reveca Torres, the fall 2018 resident, agrees. "This wasn't a one-time transactional thing where you receive resources, write a report at the end and then they're done with you," she says. "I've become part of a community that's going to support me for a long time."

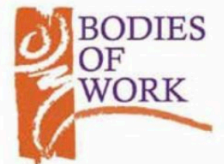
That community even extends to students she met in Sandahl's "Disability and Culture" course, which Torres audited during her residency. Some of those students have been volunteering with Torres' nonprofit, BACKBONES, a network for individuals with spinal cord injuries and their families.

Other students have found mentors and advisers in the 3Arts Residency artists, as well as academic topics to pursue. "It's been great for my students' work and their research,"

Sandahl says. "Students are publishing and presenting about it."

This speaks to the exponential impact of the 3Arts Residency. Thanks to the generosity of this foundation gift, AHS is engaging with people who are both familiar with and new to disability art and culture.

"We are developing new types of work," Sandahl says. "We're developing new aesthetics—not only artistic choices but also techniques that are interesting to people all over the world. This partnership is helping to make that happen." ■



To learn more about the 3Arts Residency and Bodies of Work, visit go.uic.edu/BOW.