



## V&A to open exhibition on Disabled design and culture

### *Design and Disability*

7 June 2025 – 15 February 2026

The Porter Gallery, V&A South Kensington

Today, the V&A reveals further details on *Design and Disability*, an exhibition which will centre disability as an identity and culture through design. Opening on 7 June at V&A South Kensington, the exhibition will showcase the radical contributions of Disabled, Deaf, and neurodivergent people to contemporary design and culture from 1940s to now. It will act as both a celebration of Disabled-led design and a call for action, affirming the importance of embedding the experiences and expertise of Disabled people in design processes. Tickets for the exhibition go on sale today.

170 objects will be on display across three sections – *Visibility*, *Tools* and *Living* – spanning design, art, architecture, fashion, and photography. It will show how Disabled people have designed for every aspect of life through their own experience and expertise as well as trace the political and social history of design and disability. Through examples of disability-first practices showcasing the work of Disabled people and their collaborators, the exhibition will demonstrate how design can be made more equitable and accessible and aim towards design justice.

Designed with access integrated into every aspect of the exhibition, *Design and Disability* will re-think what an exhibition needs to be truly accessible. The exhibition will include self-regulation and resting areas as well as additional seating, has been designed to consider Deaf Space principles, and will feature an array of tactile objects, BSL guides and tactile surfaces and floors, to help orient blind and low vision visitors.

**Natalie Kane, Curator of *Design and Disability* said:** “*This exhibition shows how Disabled people are the experts in our own lives, and have made invaluable contributions to our designed world. Design and Disability aims to honor Disabled life as it engages with creative practice, presenting a strong culture of making that has always been central to Disabled identity. In putting this show together, it is an act of joy and resistance.*”

The exhibition will also explore the rich history of Disabled designers challenging ableism in the design industry, as well as the practitioners working today to ‘hack’ pre-existing design to make it more usable. Industry-leading commercial design such as the world’s first commercially made **adaptive Xbox controller by Microsoft** and **the original prototypes of the OXO Good Grips proposed by Betsey and Sam Farber with Smart Design** will be on display alongside DIY objects

made in the home and zines produced by digital collectives, challenging our ideas of who society might view as a 'designer'.

### **About the Exhibition:**

*Design and Disability* begins with a welcome and rest space for visitors to orient themselves and address any access needs. A tactile map, audio description and BSL welcome will be available to visitors, as well as both large print, sensory map and plain English guides.

The exhibition's first section, **Visibility**, will explore how Disabled makers visualise and express their own identities across fashion, photography, demonstrations, graphic design and zine culture. Highlights include the hyper visual ensemble by **designer and activist Sky Cubacub**, including their gender-affirming, adaptive garment Rebirth Garments Binder, which matches the Dragon Scale Head Dress that functions as a wearable weighted blanket; a handsewn **Notting Hill Carnival Costume**, inspired by Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* by **Maya Scarlette**, a fashion designer with ectrodactyly. Portrait photography in this section will include **Marvel Harris'** 'First Swim after Rebirth', a joyous self-portrait taken following gender-affirming surgery. As an autistic person who has dealt with issues of self-acceptance, well-being and gender identity, it celebrates Disabled joy. Also on display will be a portrait by Scallywag Fox of performer **Davina Starr**, a member of **Drag Syndrome Collective**, the world's first drag troop featuring drag Queens and Kings with Down's Syndrome.

On display will be examples of how disability has been represented in editorial and media, including the May 23' issue of **British Vogue Reframing Fashion**, the disability justice special, featuring activist Sinead Burke and Aaron Rose Phillip, as well as examples of adaptive wear from global brands including **Adaptive Crocs (2022)** and the **Nike Adaptive Trainer (2021)**.

Finally, the power of grassroots and digital communities will be celebrated through the display of graphic design and typography including zines such as **Able Zine**, a zine which aims to increase representation for Disabled and chronically ill creatives and **Bed Zine**, which is an exploration of the complicated feelings Disabled people have about the beds. Another example of editorial representation of disability is **Dysfluent Magazine**, which uses graphic and font design by **Conor Foran** to represent how people who stammer speak, de-stigmatizing stammering, and actively taking pride in it. Derived from the word 'dysfluency', meaning a disruption in the flow of speech, the typeface repeats or stretches letterforms, giving stammering its own visual identity.

The second section, **Tools**, will explore the creativity of Disabled people in adapting and subverting designed objects to suit a greater diversity of access needs. This section challenges the way society views Disabled people as passive users of design, instead focusing on their inventing, breaking, adapting and 'hacking' the designed world for themselves. Projects in this section consider how Disabled communities create design networks and work together collaboratively or individually to make new things.

On display will be the **Touchstream keyboard** by **Wayne Westerman** and **Fingerworks (2005)**, a technology which revolutionised the tech industry and was later used in the iPhone 1. Designed to help with his severe hand pain, the touchpad replaces a traditional keyboard, utilizing sensors to

track movements like pinching, swiping and scrolling. Other examples of tools will include the **adaptive Xbox controller** by **Microsoft**, the first of its kind designed and manufactured at large-scale, and a landmark moment in videogame play, as well as a selection of **hacked prosthetics** including silicone cutlery holders and eyeliner holders used at home by **Cindy Garni**. Simple, clever, and ultimately more useful to Cindy than her expensive robotic hand, the prosthetics have challenged and expand our ideas of engineering and have been studied and chronicled by design engineering team **Engineering at Home**.

This section will also look at the relationship between design and disability across the world. On display will be photographs taken by Simon Way, which document **Jaipur Foot**, who makes free prosthetic legs, feet and arms for millions of people across India, many of whom became Disabled because of landmines, war, illnesses like polio, or railway accidents. Each rubber-based prosthetic is specifically designed for normal movement, allowing for squatting, sitting cross-legged and going barefoot, and are made at a low cost with parts that are easy and cheap to replace.

Finally, it will show examples of how designers have created complex, layered narratives to illustrate their worlds. The **Still III: Corona Diary** recorded Monique Jackson's experiences of Long Covid and medical injustice, the project was hand-drawn and published over a series of months on Instagram. Also, **Unpacking** by Witch Beam a videogame that uncovers a story of queerness and chronic illness as you play.

The final section **Living** will explore how Disabled people have imagined the worlds that they want to live in through design, how they have affected change in the environment around them through protest, and finally how they can thrive in society today. It will explore how Disabled people have advocated for access and design through artistic interventions and solidarity movements such as the **Anti-Stairs Club** by **Finnegan Shannon** and **Camp Jened**, a summer camp for Disabled people in New York that became crucial to the disability rights movement.

Highlight objects in this section include the **McGonagle Reader**, an audio-assisted voting device to help Blind and low vision people to vote independently, which was released in some parts of the country in time for the 2024 UK General Election. Also on display will be **'Public S/Pacing' Public S/Pacing** by **Helen Stratford**, a rest blanket for use in public spaces, which celebrates rest and highlights the failures of the design of public spaces to include Disabled people, challenging ableist assumptions with care and visibility.

**The Squeeze Chaise Longue**, a red recliner developed by artist **Wendy Jacobs**, will also be displayed in this section. The chair embraces the sitter between two red mohair arms, providing comforting sensory feedback for those who appreciate deep pressure stimulation. Wendy worked with the autistic animal scientist and agriculturalist **Temple Grandin**, inventor of the 'Hug Machine' on the design. The luxurious form of the chaise longue subverts conventional pared-back medical aesthetics.

The finale of this section is a specially designed decompression zone, for self-regulation, reflection, and rest. The area will include comfortable seats, a collection of objects designed by occupational therapists - many of them Disabled themselves - to adapt existing designs, books and objects, as

well as an installation by artist Seo Hye Lee [*sound of subtitles*] which uses creative, emotive subtitling to reimagine archival film.

- ENDS -

**For further PRESS information about the Design and Disability please contact [press.office@vam.ac.uk](mailto:press.office@vam.ac.uk).**

**A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from [pressimages.vam.ac.uk](https://pressimages.vam.ac.uk).**

**Support for the V&A is more vital than ever. *Design and Disability* has been supported by Oak Foundation.**

### **Notes to Editors**

- The exhibition *Design and Disability* runs at V&A South Kensington from 7 June 2025 – 15 February 2026
- The exhibition has been curated by Natalie Kane with support from Exhibition Research Assistant Reuben Liebeskind
- Tickets are available at [vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/design-and-disability](https://vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/design-and-disability)

### **Social Media**

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### **About the V&A**

The V&A is a family of museums dedicated to the power of creativity. Our mission is to champion design and creativity in all its forms, advance cultural knowledge, and inspire makers, creators and innovators everywhere.

V&A South Kensington is a world of extraordinary global creativity, with unmissable exhibitions, experiences and educational programmes for all. One of London's most iconic buildings, it is home to national collections of art, design, fashion, photography and furniture to theatre, performance, architecture, and ceramics, as well as the UK's National Art Library. It is a place where everyone can experience a story of creativity that spans 5,000 years and every creative discipline, which brings that story to life through programmes and activities for all ages and specialisms, and world-leading research and conservation. [Vam.ac.uk](https://vam.ac.uk)