

# Arts and Disability in Jordan

## Literature and Practice Review – Summary

### March 2021

#### Background

The Disability Under Siege project seeks to examine what are the opportunities and barriers to promoting discussion of culture, disability, and inclusive education in Jordan? And how can such discussions be developed through collaborative partnerships between cultural partners and disability-led organisations?

This review undertaken from December 2020 to February 2021 mapped and reviewed available literature and cultural practices relating to arts and disability in Jordan. This report provides a summary of available literature and practice to help the project engage the following key questions

- How do contemporary cultural practices engage with disability?
- How do disability organisations engage with contemporary cultural practices?
- What can these models of engagement tell us about the priorities of each institution?
- Are there productive ways of engaging the institutional structures of cultural practices to reflect upon the issue of inclusion and disability education?
- How can discourses and social practices related to disability reflect upon political concerns about marginalisation within cultural practices, including issues around identity, ideology, the body, and social injustice?

All arts practices identified as a result of this study have been mapped to a database which can [be viewed here](#)<sup>1</sup> The full Literature and Practice Review of Arts and Disability in Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and Jordan can be found at <https://disabilityundersiege.org/current-research/>.

#### Summary

There was **little by way of structured academic literature on the subject of arts and disability produced with Jordan in mind**. The majority of literature on arts and disability was generated through cultural institutions and one-off projects. The Jordanian art scene comprises largely of private foundations and some government sponsored institutions. All of them have the potential to develop or host events related to art and disability.

The **relative lack of academic resources, absence of evaluation mechanisms, and the insufficiency of unified policies**, while troubling given the concerns and issues around disability and the rights of persons with disabilities, can be also understood as an opportunity for disability-led and cultural organisations to develop projects that address their own priorities in relation to inclusivity and education. In general terms, future projects and/or research could include an examination of how institutions often use the concept of inclusivity in the arts but neglect disability.

The **use of arts as a means of therapy could create opportunities for further engagement and collaborations between art and cultural practices and disability-**

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<sup>1</sup> If you would like to contribute further evidence of literature and practice related to disability in Jordan please contact [disabilityundersiege@bham.ac.uk](mailto:disabilityundersiege@bham.ac.uk)

**led organizations.** The opportunities therefore involve the development of both practical elements and theoretical discourses on disability. This would encourage the development of already existing interdisciplinary collaborations, as well as encouraging research-led practices in the art sphere to further activate the multi-sector role of art in social and community transformations.

Given the significant potential for arts and cultural practices to develop education programmes around issues of inclusivity and the politics of representation, there is a **need for further coordination between literature and practice in the arts, cultural organizations and civil society.** In partnership with arts and cultural organisations, disability-led organizations could develop their expertise and knowledge on the needs of persons with disabilities and, in turn, produce vital projects and initiatives in the field of measuring the impact of arts education in relation to disability.

Supporting **research-based practices and collaborative initiatives would encourage engagement with the arts in the lives of persons with disabilities** and would support the development of a cultural infrastructure that is capable of engaging more fully with disability.

## Areas for Discussion

While our research maps the relationship between art practices and disability-led practices in the cultural sphere, there are further areas of research that need to be expanded upon to give a fuller sense of the potential to be had in supporting cultural organisations and disability-led organisations in the development of projects.

A number of key questions emerged throughout this research, one related to the opportunities and barriers to promoting inclusive education through collaborative partnerships between cultural partners and disability-led organisations; the other was concerned with how disability studies could affect an alternative methodology for cultural practices to further engage with the politics of representing forms of exclusion? In light of these questions, three further areas of research need to be expanded upon:

- Disability Studies and Arts Education
- Disability, the Arts, and Digital Methodologies
- Art Activism and Disability in The Middle East

In effecting collaborations between cultural activities and disability organisations we can, as a result, encourage research-led practices in the arts and humanities to develop a number of interrelated outcomes in partnership with disability advocates and organisations, including:

- the improvement of public understanding of, and everyday engagement with, disability;
- the development of local, regional and international capacities to address issues of access in education for those with disabilities;
- the promotion of interdisciplinary research methods for research-informed policy and future practice;
- the development of legacy programmes through developing communities of practice within cultural and disability organisations;
- the enhancement of multidisciplinary forms of knowledge production and methodologies.

## Review of Literature

There is little by way of structured literature on the subject of arts and disability produced with Jordan in mind. The majority of literature on arts and disability is generated through cultural institutions and one-off projects—see the review of practice below. The general disability literature includes Thompson (2018), and a UNESCWA report on persons with disabilities in Jordan (Zovighian, 2009). Further reports on Syrian refugees with disabilities in Jordan have been published by the UNHCR (Australian Aid, 2018).<sup>i</sup>

One of the more engaged contributions on the subject of models of rights and disability involves Nagata's study that reviewed the process and outcome of constructing a "rights model of disability" that was culturally specific to Jordan and Lebanon (Nagata, 2008). The objective of the empirical part of Nagata's study was to survey the current level of attitudes of non-disabled people towards their persons with disabilities in Jordan, and to compare the attitudes of, in particular, Lebanon's university students towards five different categories of persons with disabilities (persons with, mental disabilities, psycho-social disabilities, physical disabilities, hearing impairments, and visual impairments) so as to highlight the variations and diversity among them.

Nagata's study, which includes Lebanon for comparison, also examined the relationship between the attitudes and various demographic and social characteristics of the respondents across Jordan. The set of findings was further tested and triangulated through meta-analysis of individual views expressed in the qualitative studies. In Jordan, the attitude of 191 randomly selected non-disabled people was studied, using a Scale of Attitudes towards Disabled Persons (SADP). The participants from 4 communities within Jordan exhibited overall negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities. Socio-economic-demographic characteristics showed almost no difference regarding their attitudes towards persons with disabilities. In Lebanon, a more complex scale composed of four sub-scales—namely, the "Baseline Survey of Student Attitudes towards People with a Disability"—was used to survey 94 university students' attitudes towards five different categories of disabled people, and a set of indices for future comparison was constructed.

The results indicated the same pattern of gradations of attitude differences (found in other countries) towards persons with physical or sensory impairments (better), intellectual impairment (middle) and mental illness (worse). The main findings of this empirical field research showed particularly negative public attitudes towards people with intellectual impairment and mental illness, specifically, for this study, throughout Lebanon. Finally, the validity of the proposed rights model of disability and the empirical findings of this study were further examined and co-validated through analysis of the collective views of those who took part in the questionnaire surveys and the participatory focus group discussions, which took place in Lebanon in 2005 and 2007, and in Jordan in 2005, as well as a series of intensive on-line and/or telephone interviews of a few informants comprising of persons with disabilities and experts (*ibid*).

An earlier study on disability and provision in Jordan focused on policy and legislation, but, again, no references to culture were made. In this study, background information on Jordan, the current situation of disabled people and dominant social attitudes to disability were presented by way of context (Turmusani, 1999). The subject of physical disability, gender, and marriage in Jordanian society was discussed throughout Jalal and Gabel, 2014, where the authors observed three Jordanian persons with physical disabilities and their views on gender, marriage, family, and disability in Jordanian society. They refuse to marry women with disabilities, Jalal and Gabel note, "even while they recognize their own stigmatization and oppression. They long for 'real women' while absolving themselves of any guilt in the oppression of disabled women. They want wives who can provide the physical assistance they need while facing significant barriers to fulfilling their role as husband, father, and provider." (Jalal and Gabel, 2014, p.51).

## Arts and Cultural Networks and practice in Relation to Disability

The Jordanian art scene comprises largely of private foundations and some government sponsored institutions. All of them have the potential to develop or host events related to art and disability. To date, there have been a number of community-based projects and educational programmes on the

arts, largely developed by the **Khalid Shoman Foundation** and **Darat al Funun**, who, according to their mission statement, “aim to provide a platform for contemporary Arab artists, to support art practices and artistic exchange, to stimulate critical discourse, and to research, document and archive Arab art.”<sup>ii</sup> They have hosted multiple online workshops in 2020 and their activities include summer academies and research seminars. Elsewhere, the **Creative Arts Centre** is a pioneering model for cultural centres in Jordan, based on an approach that provides skilled and creative artists with an innovative and creative Art & Design learning experience. The centre is focused on offering a space for the community to learn traditional artistic practices.<sup>iii</sup>

**Wild Jordan Workshops** hold workshops and seminars that help to conserve nature by providing new sources of income and employment for families in villages near nature reserves to reduce their dependency on the reserves’ natural resources. The workshops use the natural assets of protected areas to create sustainable economic and social benefits for local communities. The focus of the workshops is to teach traditional crafts and art-making skills to local communities, giving a source of income to local practitioners and also preserving the Jordanian wilderness in the process.<sup>iv</sup>

In collaborations with UNESCO and UNFPA, **Qalam Hurr** has developed workshops for children to teach illustration and cartoon creation within the local community. Their projects seek to address children and war, youth employment and women's empowerment.<sup>v</sup> Omar Adnan Abdallat, cartoonist and activist, is the co-founder of Qalam Hurr.<sup>vi</sup> In a similar model, the **Raneen Foundation**'s work focuses on art and storytelling practices to improve children's learning. The Raneen Foundation was established in December 2009 as a Jordanian non-profit organization that produces audio books recorded in a dramatic way with sound effects and music to inspire children and encourage them to use their imagination and creativity.

### **Cultural Institutions with projects relating to Disability and the Arts**

The **Children's Museum Jordan** is based around interactive learning for children, with many activities and programs. Through their disability programme, they launched “I am Me” in 2015 as part of their Community Connections Program entitled Children with Disabilities Month.<sup>vii</sup> The program aimed to raise awareness about disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also sought to highlight the fact that disabilities are part of the natural differences between individuals. The museum designed a special program full of activities reflecting the aim of “Children with Disabilities Month”, and welcomed for free all children with disabilities and their families, alongside disability specialized schools and institutes.

With a similar focus on youth, the **Jofeh Community Rehabilitation Centre** is a community centre that works with young people with physical and intellectual disabilities. The centre serves over 60000 people in 13 villages and is focused on working with people with physical, mental and learning disabilities. It provides a range of services. One of which is a focus on using crafts and art practices to provide the service users with a vocation and skills.<sup>viii</sup>

Artists who have engaged with or work with disability-led groups, include **Ala Younis**, a prominent research-based artist based in Amman. Collaboration forms a big part of her practice, as does curating and joint book projects. Using objects, film and printed matter, she often seeks instances where historical and political events collapse into personal ones. She tends to combine personal narratives with collective and national histories of the region.<sup>ix</sup> Younis currently sits on the board of **3ala-l-Jisir** (On the Bridge), a community-based set of initiatives in and outside Amman that is led by a group of cultural practitioners (musicians, artists, and others) who aim to develop, include and foster local capacity in the arts. 3ala-l-Jisir is in the process of setting up a community-based rehabilitation and outreach program in Al Ghour in the Jordan Valley area. The site is a 50,000 sqm piece of land, secured as the base for the project through a 10-year agreement where land is given for free and gets developed in return. 10,000 sqm of this site will have a school (or a training centre) for persons with disabilities (low vision or visually impaired, hearing impaired, Down syndrome, and other), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This project is produced in close collaboration with activists and experts from the field, including Hala Bana who is a specialist in early intervention and has a long history of working with people and programs on disabilities in Jordan, UAE, Yemen and other places.

The programme of **Accessible Jordan** is focused on raising awareness of the issues faced by persons with disabilities, improve accessibility in workplaces, homes, restaurants, tourist and cultural sites. Accessible Jordan states that “we want to raise awareness about the challenges people with disabilities face when it comes to lack of accessibility and how it hinders their full inclusion in society. We also want to highlight how improving accessibility will help more than just people with disabilities”.<sup>x</sup> Although not primarily arts focused, it does provide data on what arts and cultural sites are accessible and has the goal of increasing accessibility in places that are not necessarily accessible.

**Seenaryo** is a leading specialist in participatory arts and education with marginalised communities in Lebanon and Jordan. Having reached 64,000 children, youth and women to date, it uses arts and play to transform education and equip people with the tools to collaborate, think critically and build transferable skills. During the consultation workshop in Lebanon for the DUS project, they mentioned that they are aiming to work further with disability-led organizations.<sup>xi</sup>

**Wadi Finan Gallery** showcases Arab artists internationally and brings a heightened contemporary and modern aesthetic to its surrounding heritage by hosting public exhibitions, workshops and leading special community collaborations. They recently launched an exhibition in collaboration with **Ruwwad Al Tanmeya** NGO, featuring ceramics and paintings created by persons with disabilities.<sup>xii</sup> **Art River Mosaic Workshop** has been set up to provide training and employment for persons with disabilities. Jobs for persons with disabilities in Jordan are very limited, yet 60% of the people working at Art River have some form of disability. The organization has been created to provide work and training for persons for disabilities.<sup>xiii</sup>

**Studio 8** is a collective comprising a group of young artists aiming to shape and humanize dance art. Studio 8 care mission objectives aim to promote dance art and culture in Jordan, to make dance creation and production accessible, foster dance education and research, and promote diversity and inclusion so that the organisation becomes a portal for international collaborations and exchange. Recent activity related to disability came in support for the Lebanese after the August 4, 2020 Beirut explosion: “With the guidance of creative members of Jordanian deaf community and their supportive circle, after two-month intensive rehearsals, a dance performance is created as our statement to express that we will remain by the side of Lebanese people to continue our collective work during these challenging times”.<sup>xiv</sup>

**Our Step Association** is an innovative project and the first national association in Jordan established with the aim to include people with mental health issues in the community. All activities within this project have been implemented by service users, ranging from awareness raising, training, advocacy, networking, partnerships, and collaborating with other NGOs. The association is set up to provide support to persons with mental health issues and disabilities.<sup>xv</sup>

Specific examples of artists engaging with institutions on one-off projects would include the **Royal Academy for the Blind** collaboration with artist **Suheil Baqaen**, who launched **The Colour Reader** program for the people with visual impairments to teach them how to paint.<sup>xvi</sup>

**Baqaen** is an artist who works closely with disadvantaged communities, and has instigated other projects, such as his other initiative with the Touring Museum in rural areas.<sup>xvii</sup>

**Madaline Marrar** is a visual artist whose “goals are many, from working on as many creative projects as possible to bringing people closer through my art. I have the commitment, passion and zeal within me to one day show the world what art is and what it can be”.<sup>xviii</sup> For instance, she paints bowls made by adults with special educational needs.

**Murad Abu Saraya** is a theatre practitioner, drama therapist and drama teacher. He specifically teaches drama and theatre to persons with disabilities.

**Dalia Hussein** has a PhD in Musicology and she works on a music album with songs composed and written by persons with disabilities. Although there is not much information on her work available.

**Yara Hindawi** is a street artist her work often focuses on issues of mental health.

**Saba Inab** is an architect, urban researcher, and artist based in Amman and Beirut. She has worked as an architect and urban designer with UNRWA on the reconstruction of the Nahr el Bared Camp in the North of Lebanon.<sup>xix</sup>

Finally, within a literary context, Palestinian-Jordanian academic and activist Rana Dajani founded the **We Love Reading** programme in 2006. We Love Reading trains local volunteers to hold reading aloud sessions for marginalised children in their communities so as to increase empathy and social understanding, and to alleviate mental stress from trauma.<sup>xx</sup> The We Love Reading methodology has been incorporated into disability organisations in the region such as the **Khalidiya Society for Special Education** in Mafraq, which now runs reading aloud sessions as well as reading sessions for students with hearing impairments through sign language.<sup>xxi</sup> We Love Reading has also collaborated with local writers, illustrators and publishers to develop a new range of children's books featuring inclusive content around themes such as gender and disability.

In a related project, Jordanian writer **Lina Abu Samha** was inspired to write the Arabic children's series *Miryana's World* after struggling to identify any children's literature that reflected her daughter's experience of living with cerebral palsy.<sup>xxii</sup> Another Jordanian mother of children with disabilities, Reem Al Faranji, developed *Team Hero*, an animated TV programme which "aims to build positive attitudes towards children with disabilities and other differences."<sup>xxiii</sup> Al Faranji is also the co-founder of **Habayna** – "Our Loved Ones" – an Arabic language website supporting families of children with intellectual disabilities, which features videos of parents sharing their own personal stories and experiences.<sup>xxiv</sup>

### **Disability-led Institutions for Further Consideration**

**Humanity and Inclusion** are an international organisation that provides support to people with disabilities across the world. In Jordan, they specifically have been supporting Syrian refugees, and also provide psychosocial support to persons with disabilities alongside physical support.<sup>xxv</sup> Although it is presently unclear as to whether they have art based interventions or practices in their services, a number of case studies exist that would suggest potential collaborations with art practices.<sup>xxvi</sup>

**Christian Blind Mission (CBM)** focuses on enabling local and national partners in developing countries to implement services for persons with disabilities, mainly for people with: visual disabilities, hearing disabilities, physical disabilities, mental disabilities, or intellectual disabilities.

**World Blind Union** is a non-political, non-religious, non-governmental and non-profit organization, representing over 160 million persons who are blind and visually impaired in 177 member countries. It is the internationally recognized organization speaking on behalf of people with visual impairments at the international level. The World Blind Union does not provide direct services or programs to people who are blind and partially sighted but rather brings together major organizations of people with visual impairments and those providing services and programs to them from around the world.<sup>xxvii</sup>

**Inclusion International (II)** is a global federation of family-based organizations advocating for the human rights of people with intellectual disabilities and their families worldwide.<sup>xxviii</sup>

**The WHO Disability and Rehabilitation Team (DAR)** is situated within the Department of Injuries and Violence Prevention in the Cluster of Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health. DAR works to enhance the quality of life for persons with disabilities through national, regional and global efforts to raise awareness about the magnitude and consequences of disability; facilitate collection, conduct analysis and dissemination of disability-related data and information; support, promote and strengthen health and rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities and their families; and promote community-based rehabilitation (CBR).

**Al Hussein Society** offers a holistic approach to healthcare to persons with physical disabilities in Jordan and the Middle East. The centre provides a comprehensive method of treatment, which takes into account intellectual challenges and social factors, in addition to the physical symptoms of cases.<sup>xxix</sup>

**The Information and Research Center – King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF)** is an information and research centre that has been in operation since 1996, working largely as a catalyst for socio-economic transformation through research, information and dissemination of knowledge. They have initiated several major projects which tackle vulnerable groups such as women, children and persons with disabilities.<sup>xxx</sup> With the support of IM Swedish Development Partner, IRCKHF has been given the opportunity to continue its work on researching and advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities. They launched a National Campaign on persons with

disabilities rights, aiming to focus on Jordan's Disability Law and the CRPD Concluding Observations.<sup>xxxi</sup>

## 1.1 Methodology

The research methodology used throughout was primarily based on first-hand knowledge of the cultural networks under consideration (through observation, meetings, and previous research), online research, a consultation workshop carried out with key stakeholders, and focused interviews with artists and institutions.

The interviews were undertaken with a particular focus on modes of work and praxis in relation to disability (including concerns around access, cultural policies, the politics of collaboration and representation), and the issue of agency and self-representation. Conducted by researchers based in the report is underlined by critical inquiry, social network analysis, content analysis, visual analysis, case studies, and participant observation. The focus on art practices ensured that the research is largely qualitative with some quantitative analysis of statistics.

This initial mapping of arts and culture actors across Jordan, Lebanon and OPT has been recorded in a database throughout the process and is available through the Disability Under Siege Website ([www.disabilityundersiege.org](http://www.disabilityundersiege.org)). The research methodology was primarily based on local knowledge of the art scene, as well as further observation and research. The preliminary mapping was carried out by roughly listing all arts and cultural key components, i.e.: artists, collectives, institutions etc. and then investigating each entry through online research, as well as some additional interviews when needed. The aforementioned was carried out with a particular focus on extracting modes of practice in relation to disability, i.e.: methodology and/or policies of access, policies and ethics of collaboration, as well as a reflection on direct or indirect thematic representations of disabilities in the arts and culture sphere.

## 1.2 Report Authors

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## About Disability Under Siege

The Disability Under Siege Network+ Project is a co-created programme bringing together a community of researchers, educational practitioners, advocacy organisations and disability led groups in the UK and Middle East. It will contribute to research efforts by providing intellectual and logistical resources that local practitioners need to transform education provision for children with disabilities in conflict-affected countries.

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For more information please visit: [www.disabilityundersiege.org](http://www.disabilityundersiege.org)

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<sup>ii</sup> See; <https://daratalfunun.org/>

<sup>iii</sup> See; <https://cacamman.com/>

<sup>iv</sup> See; <http://wildjordan.com/workshops>

<sup>v</sup> See; <http://qalamhurr.com/projects/>

<sup>vi</sup> See; <http://qalamhurr.com/omarabdallat/>

<sup>vii</sup> See; <http://www.cmj.jo/content/i-am-me>

<sup>viii</sup> See; <https://afedj.org/institution/jofeh-community-rehabilitation-center-jordan-valley-jordan/>

<sup>ix</sup> See; <https://alayounis.art/biography>

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- <sup>x</sup> See; <https://www.accessiblejordan.com/en/about>
- <sup>xi</sup> See; <http://www.seenaryo.org/>
- <sup>xii</sup> See; <https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/people-disabilities-find-haven-mode-expression-art>
- <sup>xiii</sup> See; <https://www.responsibletravel.com/holidays/jordan/travel-guide/jordan-culture>
- <sup>xiv</sup> See; <https://www.studio8jo.com/mission>
- <sup>xv</sup> See; [https://www.mhinnovation.net/innovations/our-step-association?qt-content\\_innovation=2#qt-content\\_innovation](https://www.mhinnovation.net/innovations/our-step-association?qt-content_innovation=2#qt-content_innovation)
- <sup>xvi</sup> See; <https://thearabweekly.com/jordan-academy-helps-blind-would-be-painters>
- <sup>xvii</sup> See; <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/18/world/middleeast/in-jordan-a-traveling-gallery-brings-paintings-to-children.html>
- <sup>xviii</sup> See; <http://mmarrar.weebly.com/about.html>
- <sup>xix</sup> See; <https://marfaprojects.com/artists/saba-innab/>
- <sup>xx</sup> See; <https://welovereadng.org/>
- <sup>xxi</sup> See; <https://welovereadng.org/reading-turned-into-their-favorite-hobby/>
- <sup>xxii</sup> See; <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/let%E2%80%99s-fly-home%E2%80%99-mother-shares-story-daughter-cerebral-palsy>
- <sup>xxiii</sup> See; <https://www.f6s.com/teamherocartoon>
- <sup>xxiv</sup> See; <https://en.qantara.de/content/first-arabic-website-for-parents-of-disabled-children-habaybna-%E2%80%93-for-advice-community-and?nopaging=1>
- <sup>xxv</sup> See; <https://humanity-inclusion.org.uk/en/country/jordan>
- <sup>xxvi</sup> See; <https://humanity-inclusion.org.uk/en/news/being-a-child-with-a-disability-in-a-refugee-family>
- <sup>xxvii</sup> See; <https://worldblindunion.org/>
- <sup>xxviii</sup> See; <https://inclusion-international.org/category/regions/mena/>
- <sup>xxix</sup> See; <http://ahs.org.jo/programs/>
- <sup>xxx</sup> See; <http://irckhf.org/en/our-projects>
- <sup>xxxi</sup> See; <http://irckhf.org/en/project/national-campaign-pwd-rights-jordan%E2%80%99s-disability-law-and-crpd-concluding-observations>