# Media Release

**Celebrating outstanding achievement at the 2020 National Arts and Disability Awards**

Emily Crockford, Gaelle Mellis and Abbie Madden have been named recipients of the 2020 [National Arts and Disability Awards](https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/news/events/national-arts-and-disability-awards/?mc_cid=e50c929067&mc_eid=a7c28c0233), presented by the Australia Council for the Arts and Arts Access Australia.

On the International Day of People with Disability, the national awards recognise artists who have made an outstanding contribution to the artistic and cultural life of the nation.

Emily Crockford receives the2020 Australia Council National Arts and Disability Award for an Emerging Artist, capping off an extraordinary year of achievement that includes being a finalist in the 2020 Archibald Prize. Emily is an artist with [Studio A](https://www.studioa.org.au/) and her large-scale public artworks can be seen across Sydney.

Two South Australian-based recipients also received awards:

Gaelle Mellis receives the2020 Australia Council National Arts and Disability Award for an Established Artist*,* recognising her outstanding and sustained contribution to arts and culture for more than 30 years. Her extensive career spans theatre, dance, circus, opera, disability arts, visual arts, installation, digital engagement and more.

Abbie Madden, recipient of the 2020 Access Australia’s National Leadership Award is recognised for her leadership as a dancer, performer and choreographer, and founder and artistic director of Blindful, an inclusive dance and circus company.

This is the second consecutive year of the National Arts and Disability Awards. Previous recipients include Dion Beasley, Janice Florence and Madeleine Little.

Australia Council CEO Adrian Collette AM congratulated the recipients.

“Today we are thrilled to celebrate three outstanding artists and arts leaders, and acknowledge their contribution to the cultural life of our nation.”

“Our [research](https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/research/creating-our-future) continues to show that Australians with disability are strongly engaged as creators and audiences of arts and culture. Participation in arts and culture is a human right. An arts and cultural sector that celebrates and reflects all Australians will drive many positive outcomes, including a more inclusive, cohesive and just nation and great art.”

Arts Access Australia CEO Matthew Hall said:

“The National Arts and Disability Awards recognise and celebrate the talents of Australian d/Deaf and disabled artists and arts workers, and the vibrant and critically important contribution we make to the fabric of Australian culture.

Arts Access Australia is delighted and honoured to present this year's National Leadership Award. The Award emphasises the importance of disability-leadership in long-term change making. It provides $10,000 and other support to the recipient to develop leadership skills to realise their leadership ambitions”.

An event celebrating the achievements of these three outstanding artists will take place online today from 2PM AEDT. The event will be Auslan interpreted, captioned and audio described.

Join us at <https://eventcast.net.au/artsdisabilityawards> for a celebration of the award recipients, including performances by leading Deaf poet Walter Kadiki and the Liz Martin Trio.

**Recipients**

**Emily Crockford (NSW)**

Australia Council National Arts and Disability Award (Emerging Artist) ($20,000)

**Gaelle Mellis (SA)**

Australia Council National Arts and Disability Award (Established Artist) ($50,000)

**Abbie Madden (SA)**

Arts Access Australia’s National Leadership Award ($10,000)

More information about the awards is available on our [website](https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/news/events/national-arts-and-disability-awards/?mc_cid=e50c929067&mc_eid=a7c28c0233).

**Media contact:**

Brianna Roberts, Media Manager

Australia Council for the Arts

Phone: (02) 9215 9030   Mobile: 0498 123 541

Email: [b.roberts@australiacouncil.gov.au](mailto:b.roberts@australiacouncil.gov.au)

**More information**

**Emily Crockford, NSW**

***Recipient of the 2020 Australia Council National Arts and Disability Award for an Emerging Artist***

Emily Crockford’s broad creative practice encompasses painting, textiles and soft sculpture.

Her work can be seen in large scale across Sydney and in high profile institutions.

Emily was a finalist in the 2020 Archibald Prize, and has been awarded high profile public art commissions, including a 39 metre mural for Westpac’s Concord offices, two works for the City of Sydney’s Creative Hoardings Project (Midnight Zoo, 2019 & Sydney Opera House at Night, 2017), a 175 square metre collaborative mural for the University of Technology Sydney (Bird Life Jungle Disco, 2019) and a major hoarding for Lendlease at Barangaroo titled Garden Pop Bird Bop (2020). Recently she unveiled Oysters Eating Rainbows (2020), an 81.5 metre mural commissioned by Cultural Capital for the new WestConnex M5 motorway.

Emily is an artist with [Studio A](https://www.studioa.org.au/), a supported studio based in Sydney that tackles the barriers that artists living with intellectual disability face in accessing conventional education, professional development pathways and opportunities needed to be successful and renowned visual artists.

**Gaelle Mellis (SA)**

***Recipient of the 2020 Australia Council National Arts and Disability Award for an Established Artist***

For more than 30 years, Gaelle has made an outstanding and sustained contribution to the vibrancy of Australian arts.  Gaelle’s work traverses theatre, dance, circus, opera, disability arts, visual arts, installation, digital engagement and more.

Her award winning designs have toured Australia, the United Kingdom, Europe, Asia, New Zealand and the United States to critical acclaim. Gaelle has received numerous awards throughout her career including the Adelaide Critics Circle Individual Award, South Australian Screen Award, Creative Australia Fellowship*,* Adelaide Fringe Festival Award for Design, Adelaide Theatre Guild Award for Best Show, Drama for 'Take Up Thy Bed and Walk', Creative Partnerships Australia & Arts Access Award Arts Award at the National Disability Leadership Awards.As one of Australia’s most critical cultural thinkers, Gaelle is a respected role model who continues to make significant cross-generational impact in the arts and disability sector.

Her outstanding and sustained contributions as a designer, maker, disability advocate and arts manager have also received significant national and international recognition.

**Abbie Madden (SA)**

***Recipient of the 2020 Arts Access Australia’s National Leadership Award***

Abbie Madden is a dancer, performer and choreographer and founder and artistic director of Blindful, an inclusive dance and circus company.

Abbie has been a member of the Australian Dance Theatre’s Youth Ensemble, worked with Belfast comedy dance theatre company ponydance, and is a founding member of the highly successful YUCK Circus.

Abbie considers community arts the home of professional artists.

She believes that focusing on accessibility and inclusion at the grass roots where most people interact with the arts will normalise accessibility and increase representation of d/Deaf and disabled professional artists.

In receiving this award, Abbie will lead by example as she works to take Blindful to new artists, new stages and new audiences.

**Background**

**About the work of the Australia Council with the arts and disability sector**

The Australia Council believes that art is for everyone, and that Australians living with disability have the right to enjoy, benefit from and contribute to the arts and cultural life of Australia. Disability in the arts offers excellence and artistry, unique perspectives and lived experiences, and transformative experiences for audiences and communities. The Australia Council supports the arts and disability sector through all its activities, and for many years has also delivered strategic funding initiatives in this sector, designed to increase access to the Council’s support, build sector capacity and sustainability, and celebrate artistic excellence. The Council also produces research which highlights the barriers and disparities which still exist for people with disability across arts practice, employment, education, training, engagement and participation.

**About Arts Access Australia**

Arts Access Australia (AAA) is the national peak body for arts and disability in Australia. AAA works to increase national and international opportunities and access to the arts for people with disability as artists, arts-workers, participants and audiences.

Established in 1992, AAA is a disability-led company limited by guarantee. The CEO and at least 50% of its Board Members identify as a person with disability. AAA is a non-profit, member-supported organisation. Its members include state-based arts and disability organisations, individual artists, arts-workers and arts leaders with disability, and others within the wider arts and cultural sector. Website: [www.artsaccessaustralia.org](http://www.artsaccessaustralia.org/)

**Definition of disability**

People with disability are diverse and are not defined by their disability. There is no single definition or way of capturing such complex and multidimensional experiences.

The Australia Council embraces the social model of disability, which distinguishes between impairment of the person, and the barriers in society that are disabling. These can include attitudes, discrimination, or the physical environment. This definition includes mental health. However, not all people who experience a mental health condition identify with disability.

The term ‘disability’ can also include people who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing. However, members of the d/Deaf community may not always identify with disability, and may identify as part of a cultural and linguistic group with their first language being Auslan (Australian Sign Language) or another sign language.

The Australia Council recognises the term *people with disability* is widely used in Australia, including by disability advocates and peak bodies. We also recognise that the term is contested and evolving, with increasing use of self-identifying terms such as *disabled,* including in advocacy for change. We recognise that some choose to identify with a specific community such as d/Deaf or Autistic and may prefer not to refer to themselves as disabled or as having disability. We will continue to recognise self-identification and engage in dialogue as the terminology evolves.