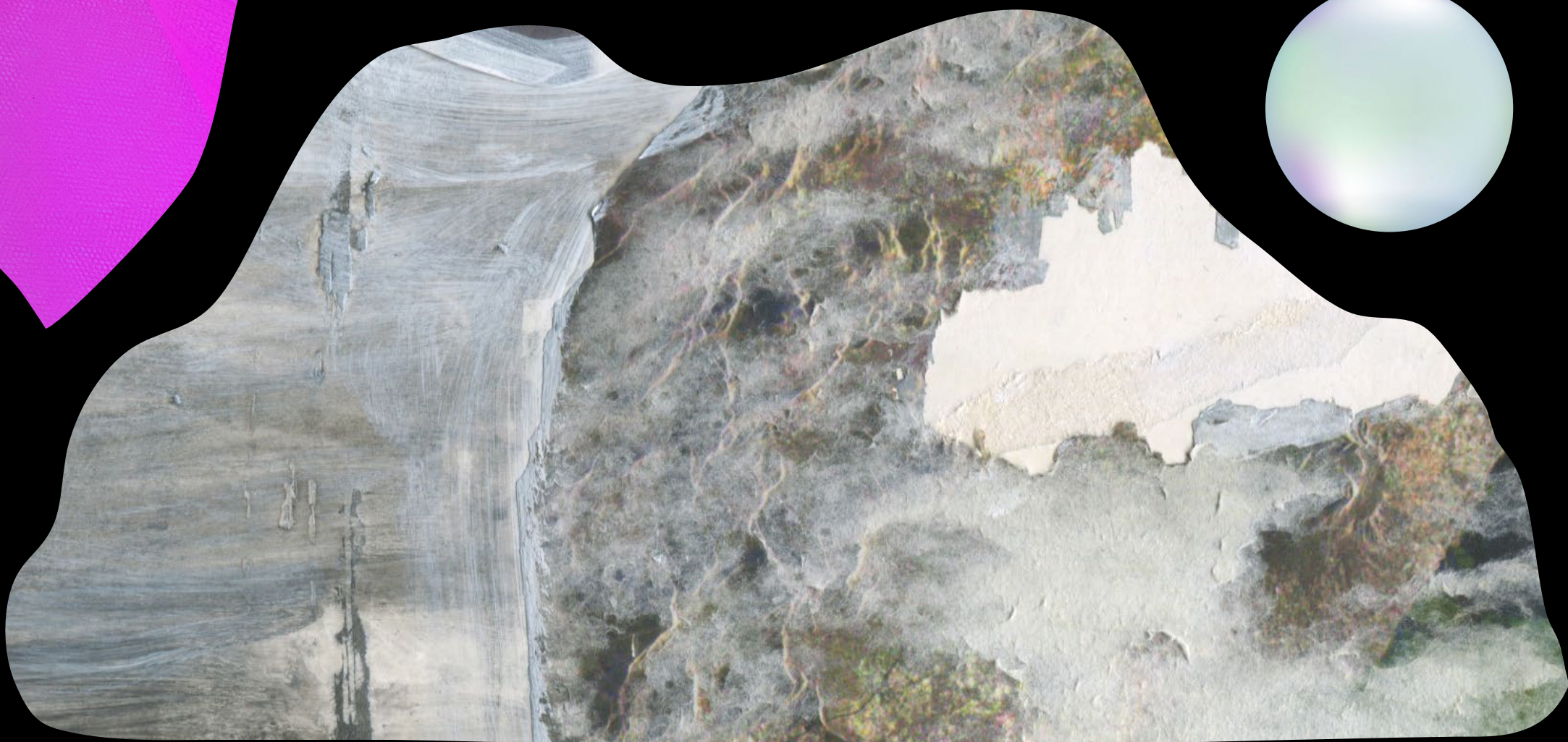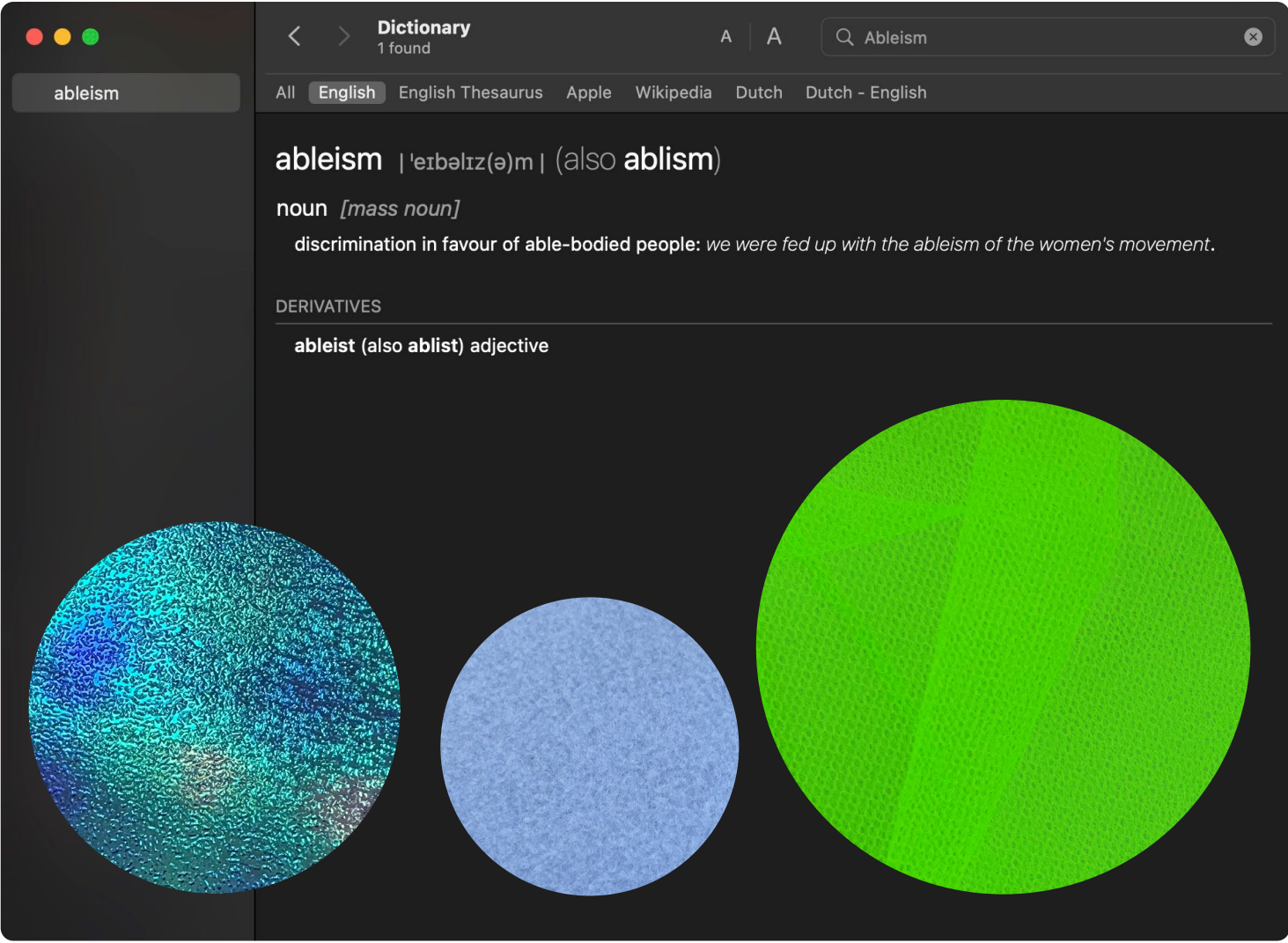# COMMONING ACCESSIBILITY AT CASCO ART INSTITUTE!

[Image description: A diamond-shaped asteroid and underneath it, a leaf-like shape filled with hot pink textile texture. On the bottom right is a mountainous shape with a collage resembling mossy textures. Part of the shape is washed with white paint. On the right, next to this shape, floats a small pearl bubble.]

Information and tips on grassroots, mixed-ability accessibility organizing

For anyone who already knows "why" and is interested in learning "how?"

Dictionary
1 found

ableism

All **English** English Thesaurus Apple Wikipedia Dutch Dutch - English

ableism | ˈeɪbəlɪz(ə)m | (also **ablism**)

noun [mass noun]

discrimination in favour of able-bodied people: *we were fed up with the ableism of the women's movement.*

DERIVATIVES

ableist (also **ablist**) adjective

[Image description: An Apple dictionary screenshot taken while looking up the word "ableism," meaning: discrimination in favor of able-bodied people. The three circles below the definition are filled with various textile textures. Thin arrows connect to a black and white drawing of a cross-section of a human head depicting the facial muscles. To the right, is a yellow mountain-like blob.]

Casco Art Institute envisions more just ways of living together through practicing art and fostering the commons. Through co-exploration and study with collective art projects, as well as organizational experiments, our projects grow from posing critical questions and practicing radical imagination — forming community and generating art and knowledge as common resources.

This is not an exhaustive list on access and disability, nor is it a comprehensive manual (there are many more thorough ones out there!), but a summation of tips learned along the way that reflect our particular findings during the period of exploration. These languages and tools will inevitably change over time, particularly as accessibility becomes a creative life practice for more people.

"Commoning Accessibility" does not separate body from mind, instead understanding the mind as embodied. Improving accessibility for all bodyminds is a way to find commonality among differences and to establish new ways of un/learning together. Art and culture are privileged fields in which to practice accessibility, precisely because of the inherent possibilities of multimedia experimentation and expression. We want to share some of our findings after a year-long intensive exploration of accessibility practices, supported by the City of Utrecht.
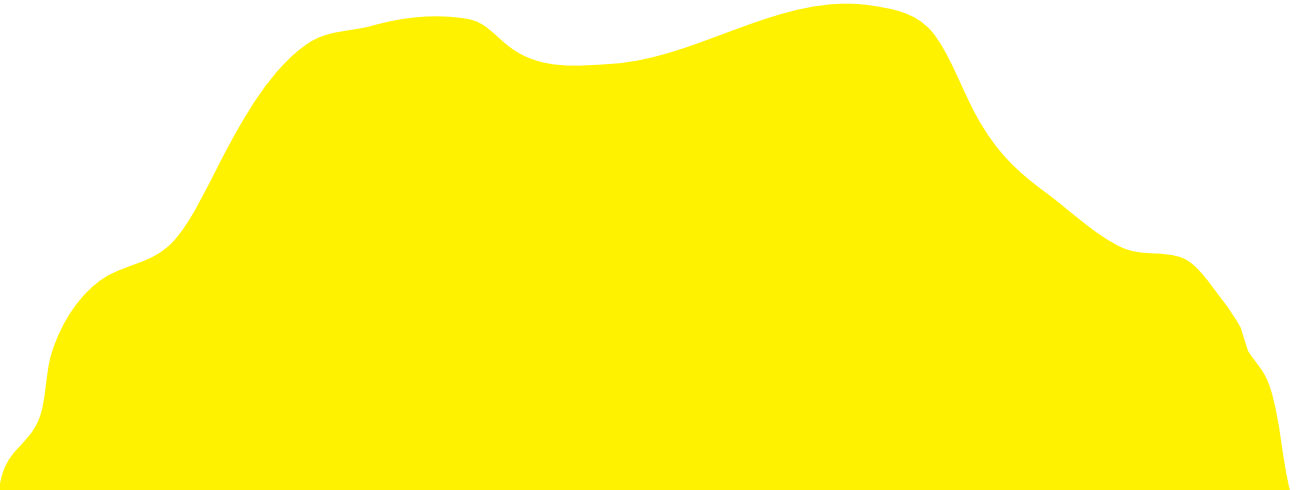
During our period of investigation, we embraced a practice of "mixed-ability" access organizing, meaning some of those participating in accessibility practices are themselves part of the disability community in some way. Disability is not a monolith; accessibility is beneficial/favorable to/for everyone.

Access organizing is a full-time pursuit. Larger institutions, such as museums, may create dedicated roles, since they have a civic duty to the public, in addition to more resources to formalize and fund this work.

This document shows that access organizing can also be done from the bottom-up. It should be the responsibility of everyone in the institution — artist, curator, educator, administrator — to advocate for accessibility. For some, living with a disability is like a full or part-time job.

[Image description: A large pearl bubble bleeds off the bottom of the page. On the top right of the page is an uneven square filled with a bright textile texture.]

Our perspectives on accessibility are informed by:

Sins Invalid, a disability justice and arts activism performance project, and the **Disability Justice Movement**. Both organizations are informed by and center the legacies and work of trans and queer BIPOC artists and activists.

> "There are always going to be crips. There are always going to be people in pain — that's just the nature of being in a body. But the social body, we can change!" — Patty Berne, in conversation with Stacey Milbern, Sins Invalid and Barnard Center for Research on Women, 2017

The **milieu of artists and organizers** involved in gatherings such as *I wanna be with you everywhere* (2019), Performance Space New York

> "Access has this capacity to break through the boundaries of medium, because of the way it makes art necessarily iterative. Through access, a single artwork might exist as a description, as a notation, as sign language, as a transcript or as a tactile object — depending on what people need." — Carolyn Lazard, interviewed in *Frieze*, Issue 225, 2022
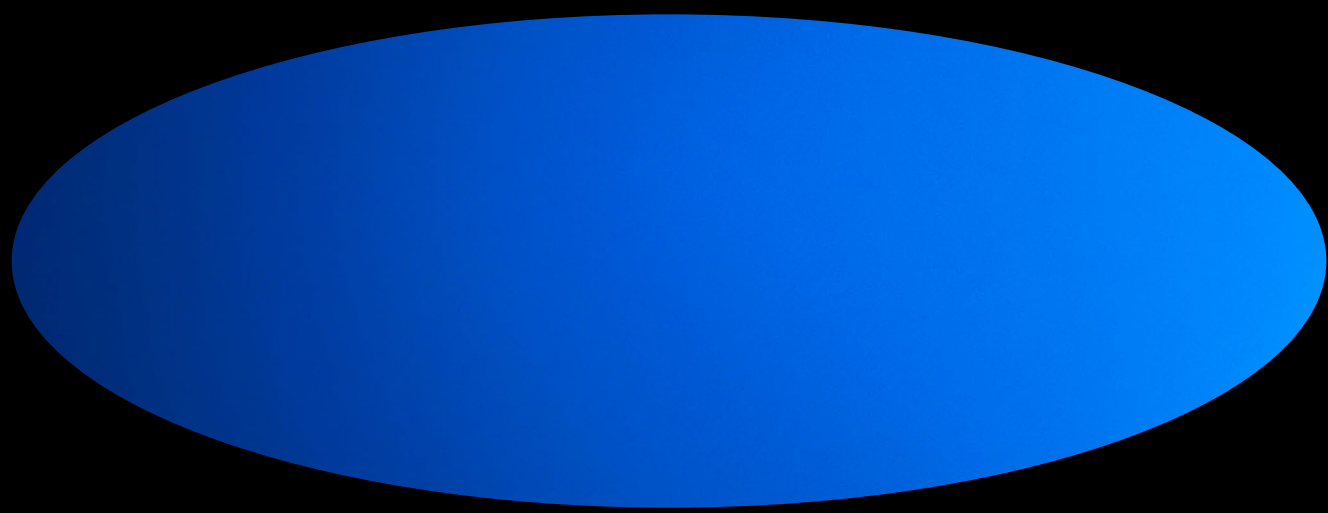
COMMUNNICATION AND COLLABORATION

ACCESS NOTES are provided by institutions or event organizers and detail spatial accessibility and event accommodations. ACCESS DOCS or CARE RIDERS help communicate needs on an interpersonal and structural level in order to better work together. Check out <u>Access Doc for Artists</u> for tips.
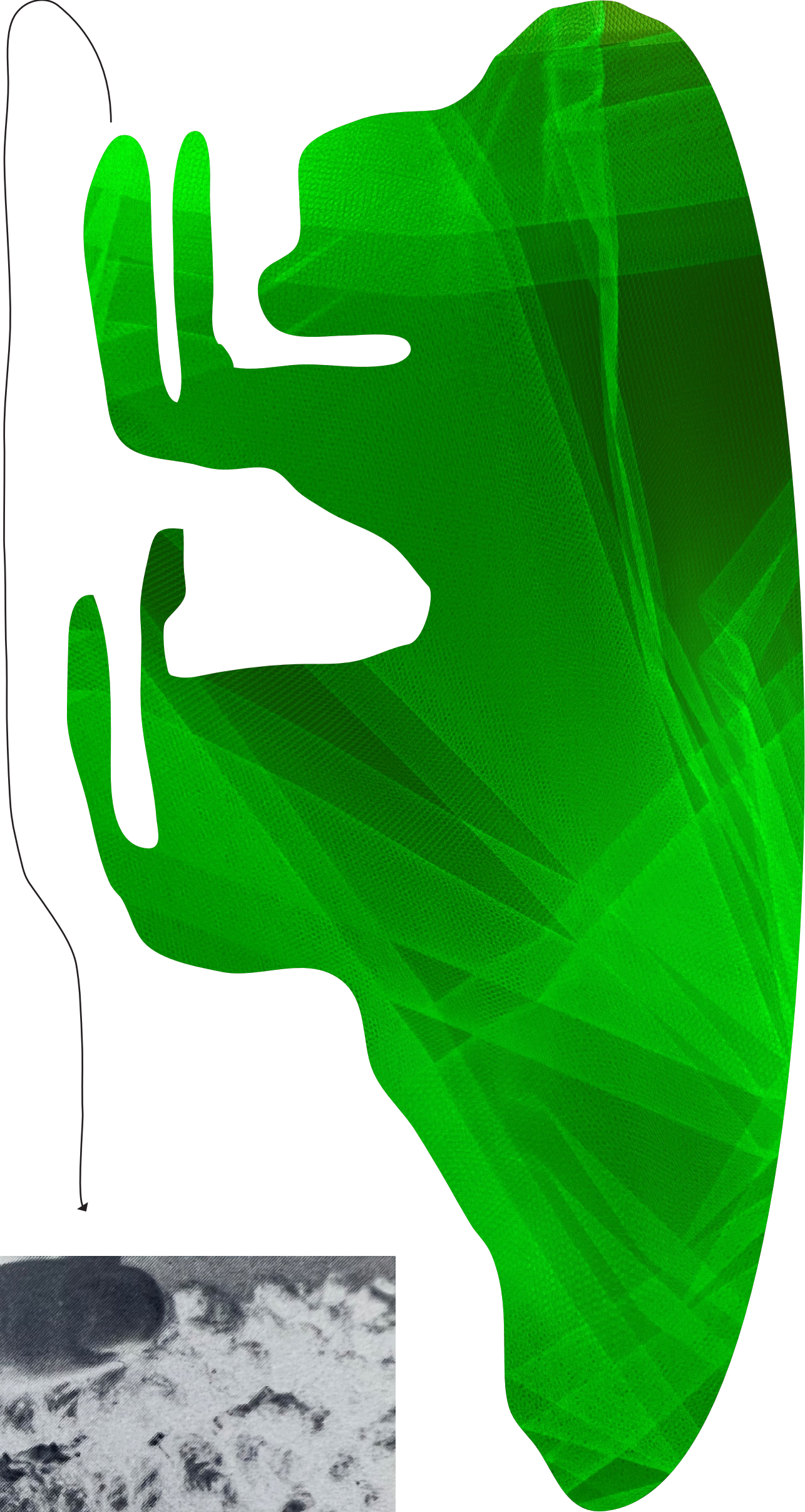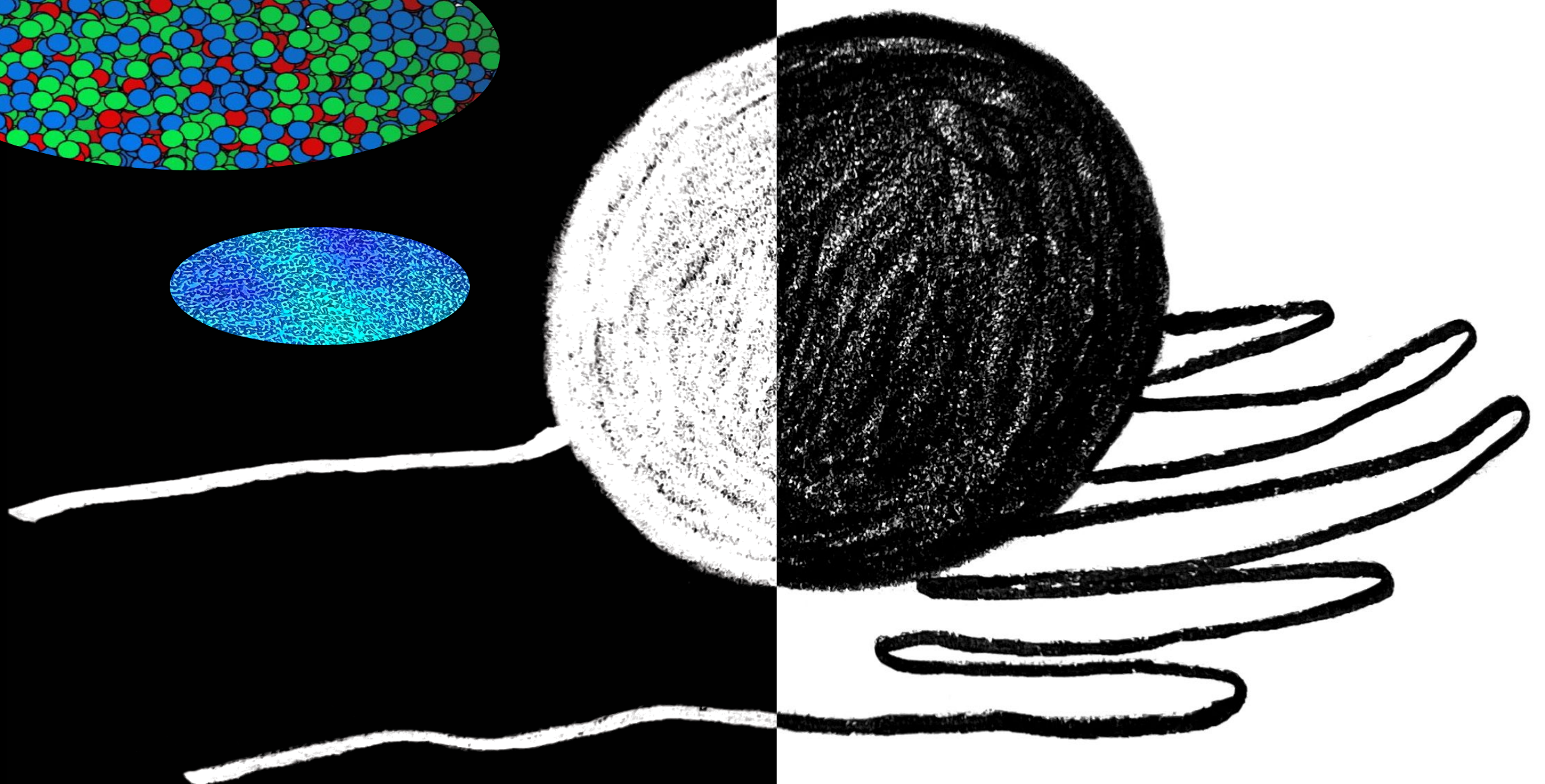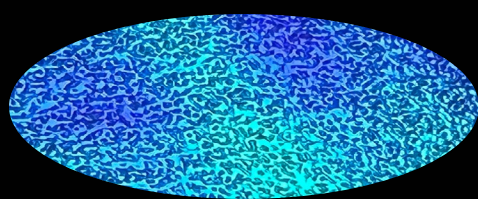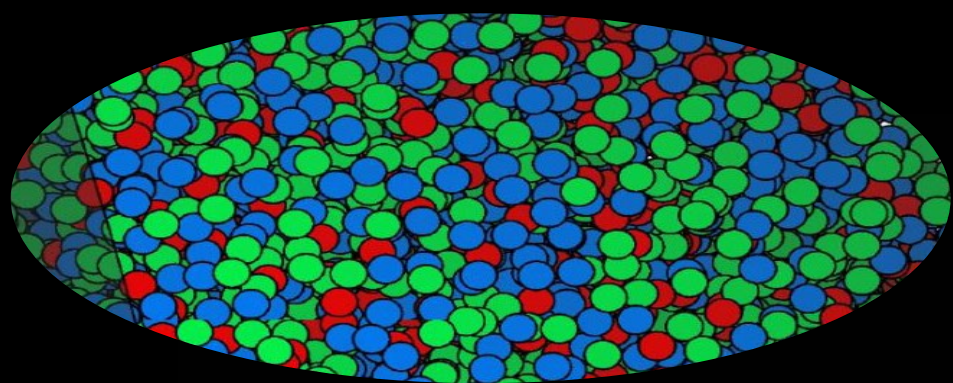
[Image description: Two images placed side by side depict a pair of hands holding a spool of wool. The left image is black and white and the image is the inversion of the black and white image. Next to this is a drawing of a black and white ear. Above is a large green blob filled with fabric textures.]

ACCOMMODATIONS (AN EXCERPT)

LIVESTREAM AND RECORDING

This might not need an introduction, but institutions returning to "normal" consequently means returning to in-person events without a livestream option. For a long time before the pandemic, publics have asked for programs to be made accessible online. Now, we have a better idea of how to creatively host these spaces. This baseline accommodation makes the various accommodations below more possible.

[Image description: A rough pencil drawing of a hand holding an orb with three variously sized ovals floating above it. The top oval is filled with a blue gradient, the second is filled with green, red and blue balls while the smallest oval is filled with a blue iris paper texture.]

IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS

Image descriptions narrate the content of an image or video, and are read by a screen reader for blind or partially sighted people. These texts may also include information not legible in the image in order to encourage deeper understanding.
See <u>Alt Text as Poetry</u> by artists Bojana Coklyat and Shannon Finnegan. These can also be spoken within a video, like in a public Zoom gathering where a presenter describes their appearance or what is presented on screen.
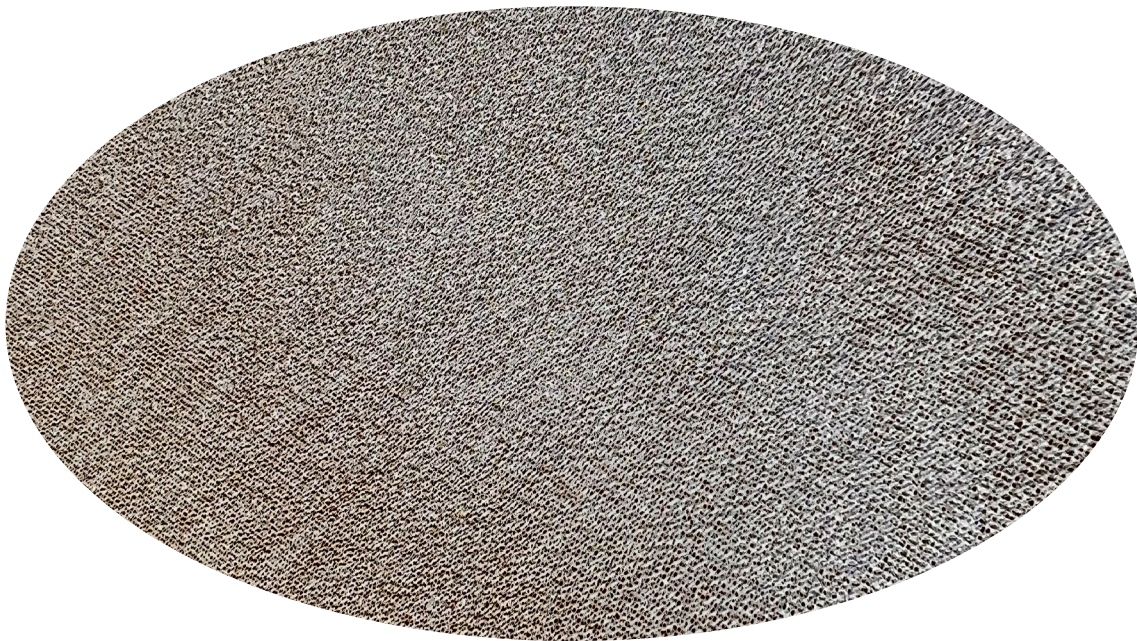
[Image descriptions: Image found online of white hands caressing white silk fabric. A black and white photograph from an old physical therapy book of two hands inspecting a foot. The left hand holds the heel of the foot while the right index finger presses the side of the big toe. The toenails on the foot are fairly long. To the left of the image is an oval shape with a silverish textile inside. The image is "held" by two large yellow brackets.]

VERBAL DESCRIPTION TOURS

Verbal description tours (or visual description tours) of exhibitions are an accommodation for blind and partially sighted people that describe the exhibition experience. These are also a useful resource to anyone who cannot visit the exhibitions. In our case, we invited artists and writers to create these texts and made transcripts and recordings available in both English and Dutch.

[Image description: A black and white image of a bare white body, stretching the left arm, while placing the fist into the palm of the another person's hand. Two yellow arrows cross over the two hands. A thin yellow oval falls across both of the arrows.]

Haptic sign note: how to say "blushing". Stretch your fingers and place your hand flat against your back, with fingertips pointing upwards. Move your hand upwards while splaying your fingers like a blush spreading across someone's face. From The Danish Association of the Deafblind, 2012.

TRANSCRIPTS

Radio programs are more accessible when there is a transcript version of the content provided. Transcribing a radio show means providing not only speech, but also audio descriptions.

[amorphic colourful blob touching you through the ceramic shield glass]
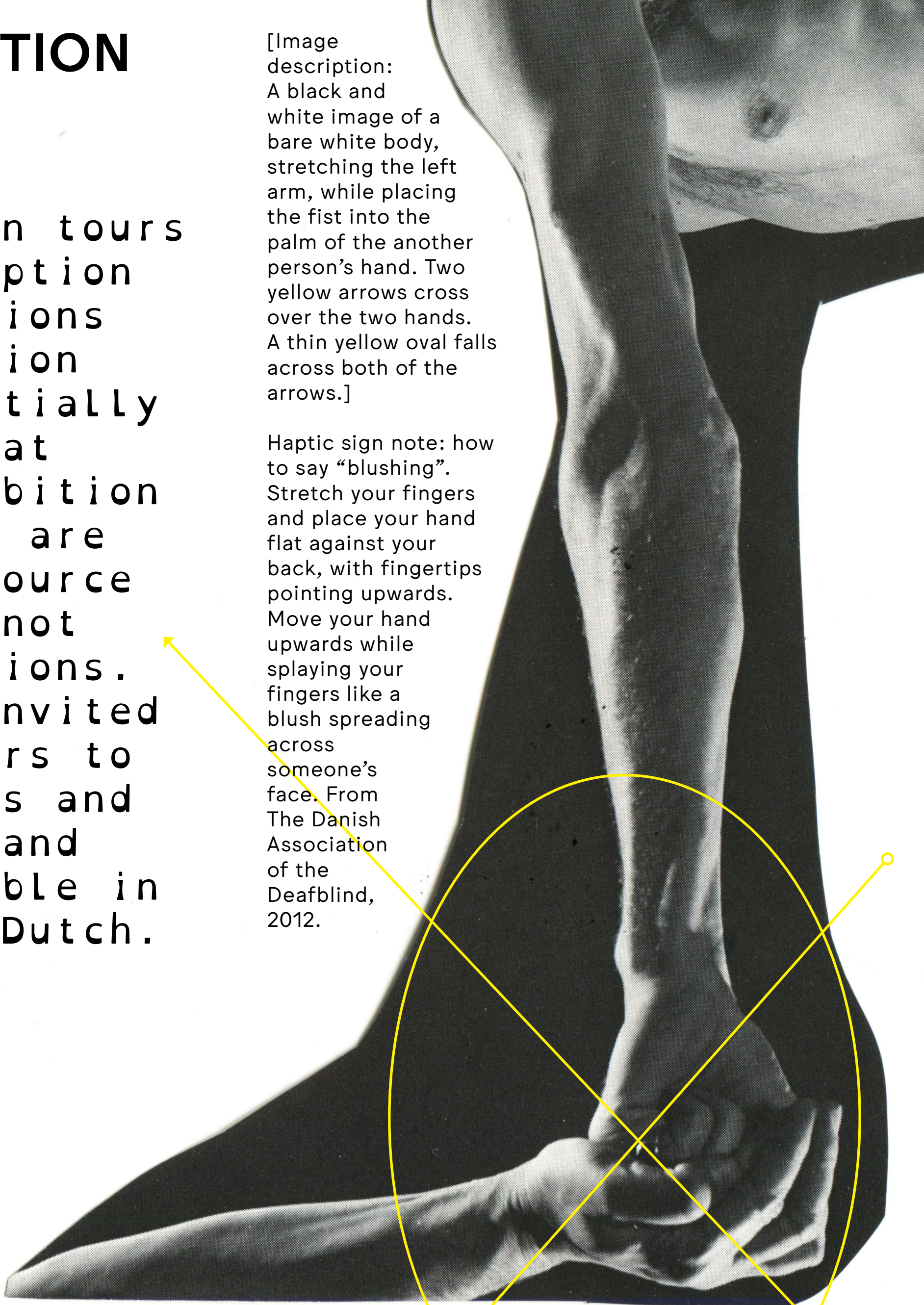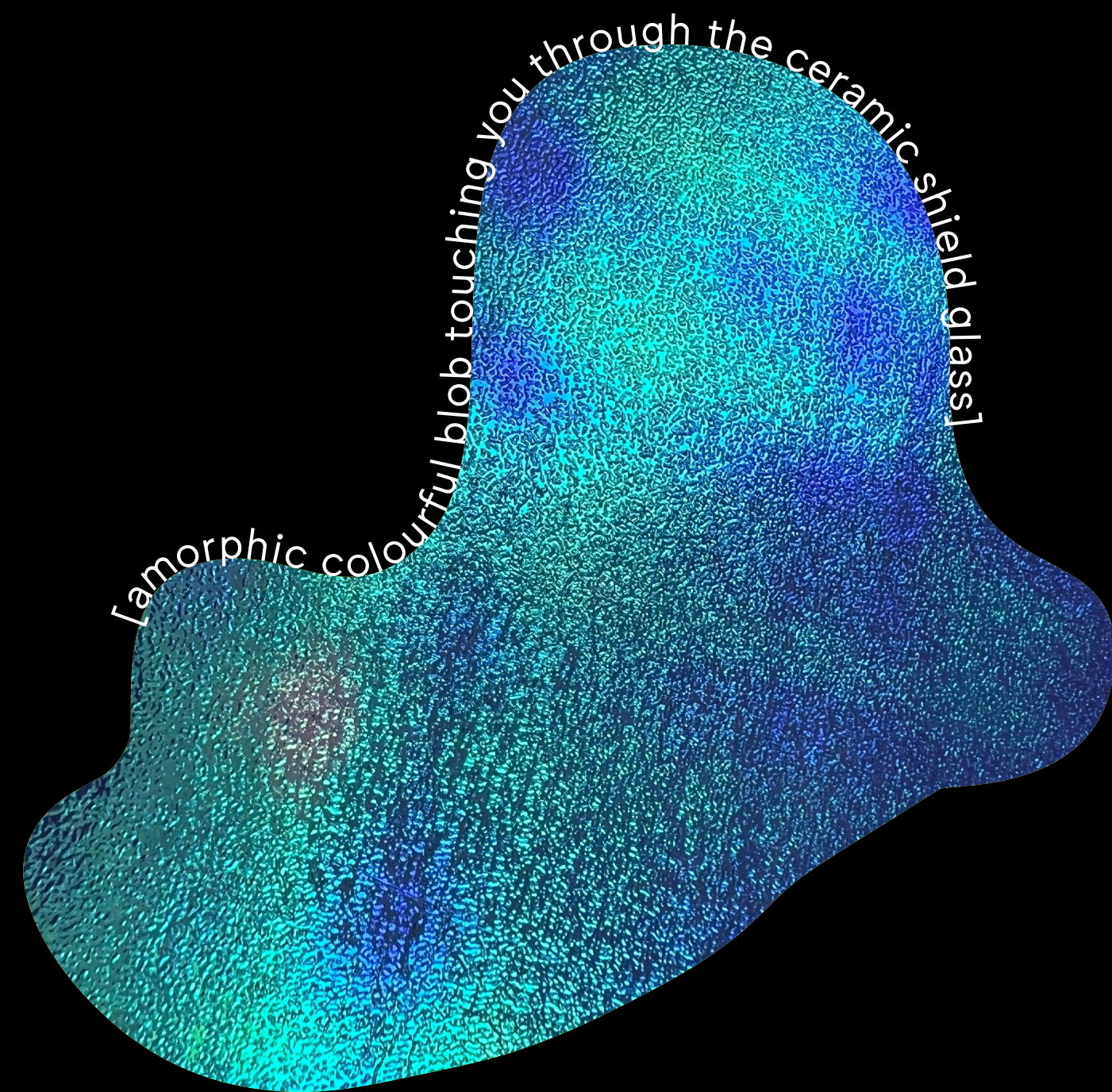
CAPTIONING

The captions are a component of the audiovisual material and are necessary for D/deaf and hard of hearing people, in addition to others who require textual support. For our online events, we commissioned a mixture of "amateur" (beginners who want to learn and support) and professional captioners. You can also consult online services like rev.com.

AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

These texts describe the audio component of a video and are included along with captioning. Instead of simply describing "[piano music]" the audio description elaborates on the qualities of the sound in greater detail: "[sensual piano music]" or ["soft piano like fingertips trickling down your back"].

[Image description: Amorphic blob filled with a blue iris paper texture. Text borders the shape and describes the sound of its movement: "amorphic colorful blob touching you through ceramic shield glass." On the right is an image from Google AI of hand gestures with various skins colors and x-rays. Deaf communities in collaboration Google have developed software that could pave the way for smartphones to interpret sign language.]

SIGN LANGUAGE

Sign Language is a vital part of Deaf culture(s). Providing captions alongside audio visual material is the bare-minimum requirement for creating access. Fostering inclusive multilingual spaces entails including sign language as well.

There are many different sign languages. Consider who you are connecting with! NGT is Dutch Sign Language, and there's also International Sign, which is an auxiliary language. Many people know American Sign Language (ASL) because there is a Deaf university in the US. In some cases, you can use multiple sign languages depending on who you are communicating with/ engaging.

[Image description: Two photographs taken while talking (or walking?) through a park. One image is taken with my eyes closed (labeled "Closed") and one with my eyes open (labeled "Open"). A blue blob filled with soft textile texture hovers above it.]

Get to know both hearing and Deaf Interpreters before you hire their services. It is important to consult with deaf people as to who they like to work with (but do your own research first!).

If you have an event that runs for over an hour, it is necessary to hire two interpreters so that they can interchange and rest.

Consider hiring a Deaf Interpreter! For example, if you are delivering a speech read from a script, or would like to produce an inclusive tour of your exhibition or a video about your organization, it would be advisable to hire a Deaf Interpreter. Hire and employ deaf people as much as possible.

[Image description: Black and white image of two hands in which the left index finger and the right thumb are pinned under the thumb of another person's hand. The image is split into two misaligned in which one side is inverted.]

TRANSLATION

Striving for multilingual content is essential for connecting with local and international contexts and audiences. It is also a struggle! For example, this document is currently only available in English. "International Art English" and accompanying concepts are not always accessible or easy to understand, while over-simplifying such concepts runs the risk of coming across as patronizing. Un/learning is like a spiral in motion.
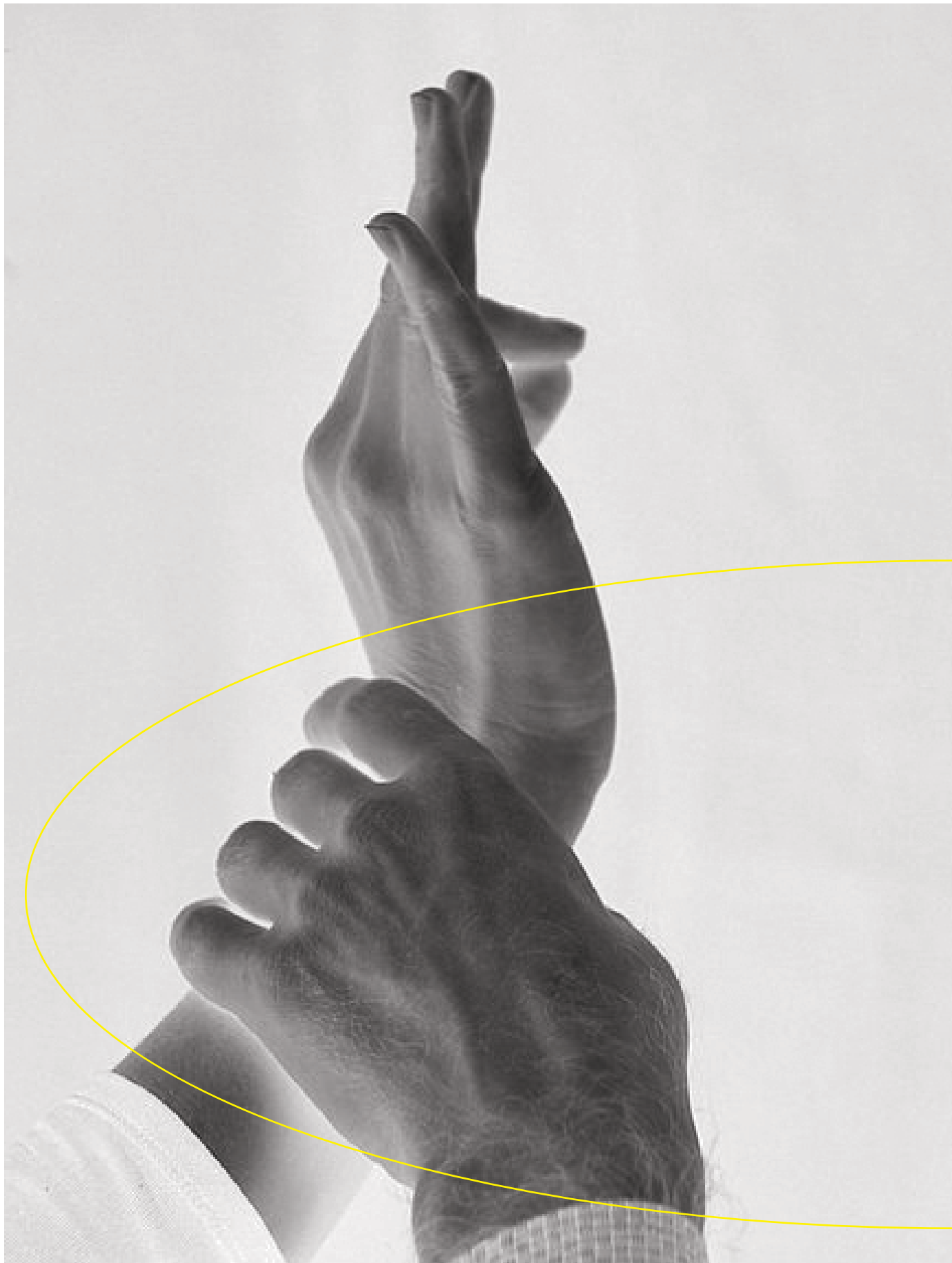
MORE MORE MORE!
A PROMISE AND
A PRACTICE

So much to consider!
Accessibility in
the Arts: A Promise
and A Practice is an
incredible resource
to start with.

[Image description: On the left a black and white inverted image of a pair of hands performing a haptic sign. On the right side of the page, an inverted image of a blue hand holding a sphere comprised of green dots.]

Thoughtful planning means including accessibility related costs in your initial project budget. It was beneficial to have a financial pot designated to overall accessibility, meaning we could be flexible and adaptable to our needs and the needs of others. There are a number of funding options available and by mandating accessibility in exhibition and program production, it will likely begin to reinforce itself and become increasingly available and standardized. We do, however, want to emphasize the messy magic of DIY practice.
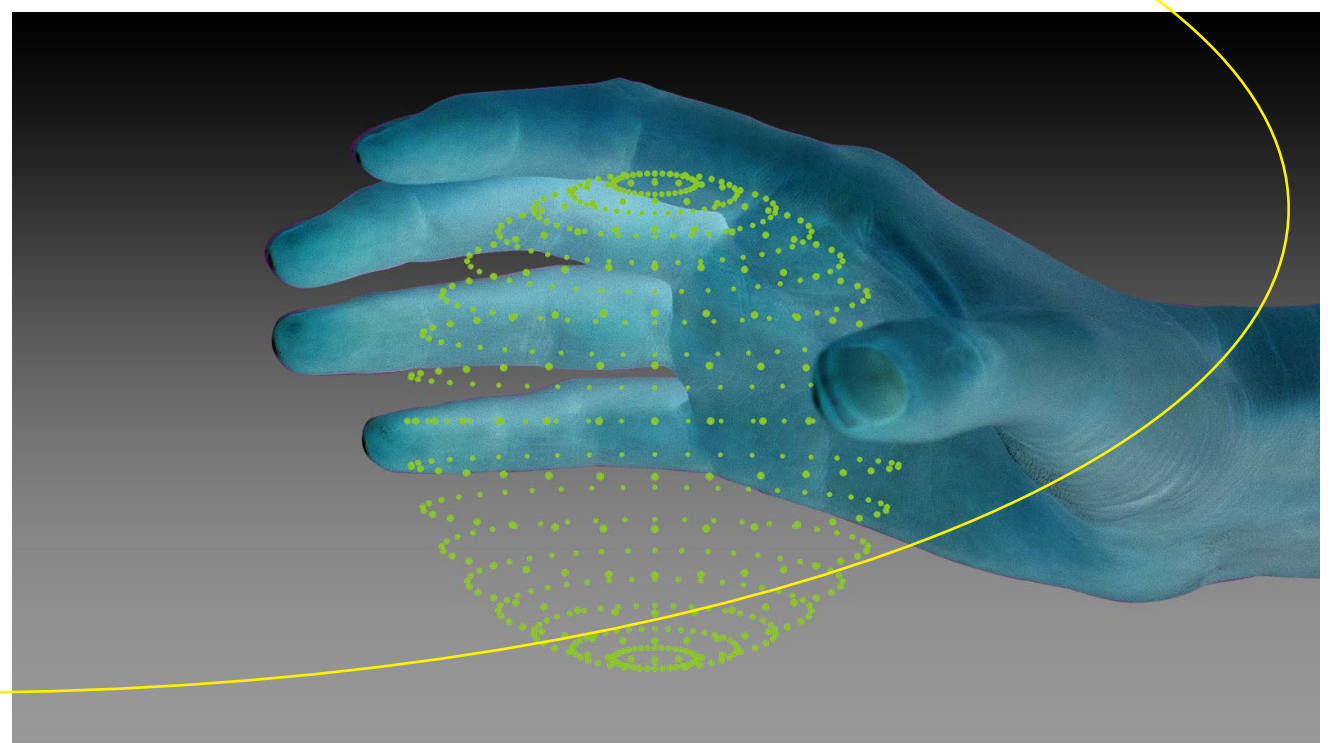
CYCLES OF LIFE

Consider the following two cycles:

Inaccessibility cycle — institutions and funders need to critically investigate what serving the "public" actually means. Who exactly constitutes the public? Funders sometimes ask "Well, where are the disabled visitors?" We have to reply, "there are none because we don't offer accommodations or meaningfully connect!"

vs.

"Access is love" cycle — the more you connect with the disability community and continue to adapt, nurture and sustain access with them across time, the more value you generate for disabled life and the more you improve accessibility.

* "Access is love" is a visibility campaign by disabled Asian American activists Mia Mingus, Alice Wong and Sandy Ho.
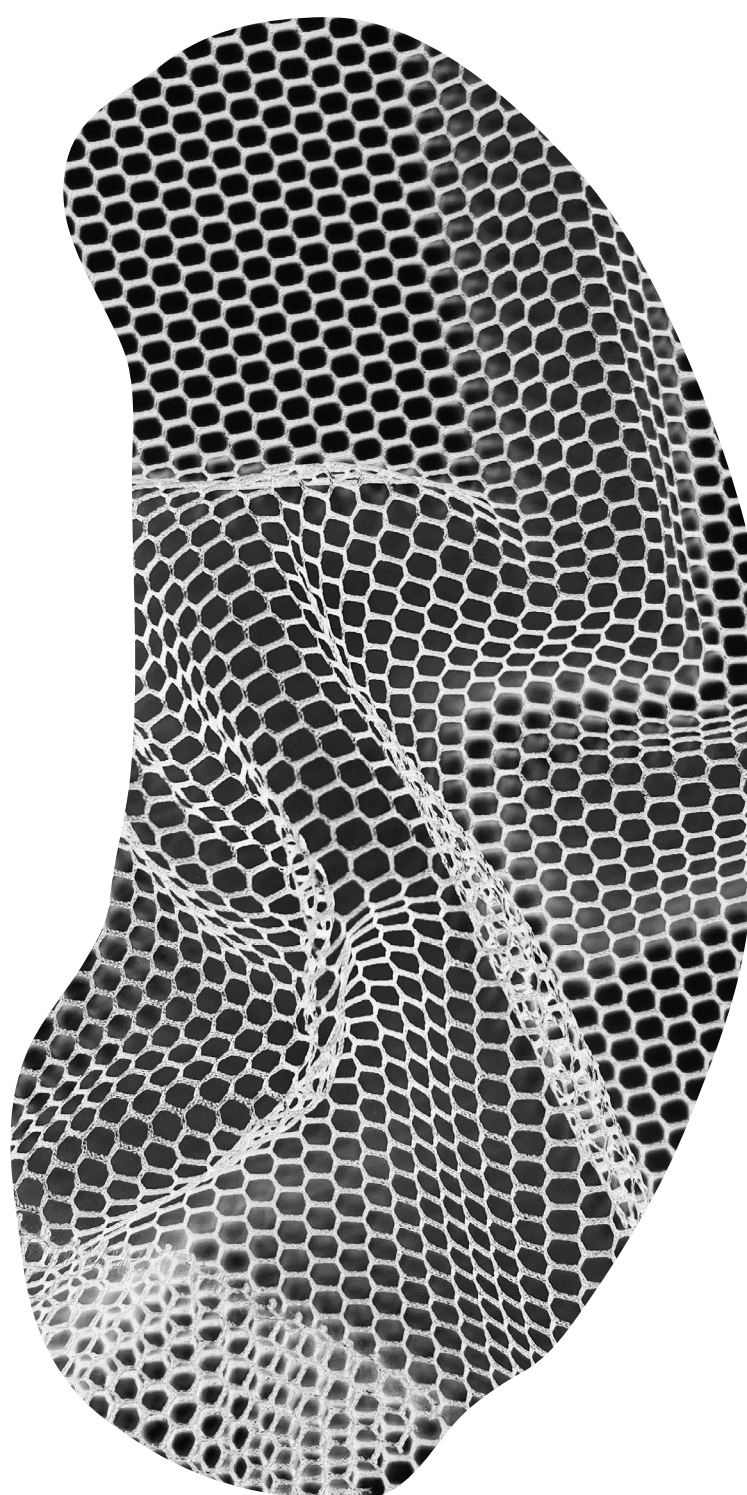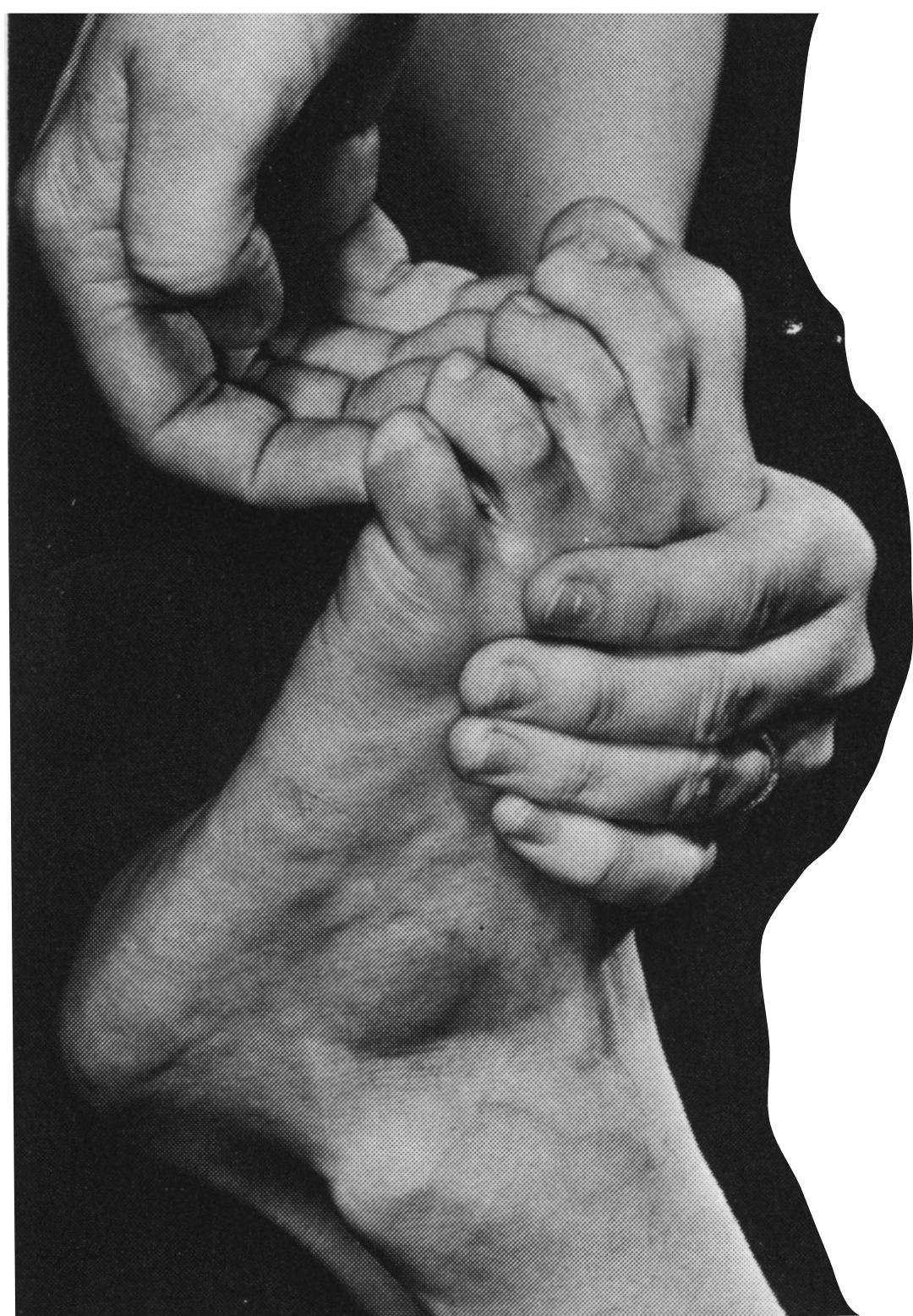
[Image description: A black and white image of a hand grabbing the inside of another person's toes causing the toes to curl over the fingers. The top of the foot is supported by the other hand.]

Haptic sign note: How to say the word "orange". Use a flat, outstretched hand and turn your thumb downwards, making space between the index finger and thumb. Place the thumb and index finger hand side against the upper arm. Open and close the hand using outstretched fingers. Repeat the movement. From The Danish Association of the Deafblind, 2012.

UN/LEARNING

10 Principles of Disability Justice and *Skin, Tooth, and Bone: A Disability Justice Primer* by Sins Invalid

Do your own research.
No doubt you will make mistakes. Access, like care and safety, is not something perfect, stable, or complete — but rather something to strive for. Strive to do better every time!

Commit to accessibility over the long haul. It won't happen overnight! Imagine yourself gray-haired and still practicing your values. This also means unlearning a sense of urgency and the need to be productive. "Crip time" is a helpful phrase for communicating how   embodied
experiences   of debility
or delay   affect your
                                    life.

It starts with you!
No, it's not an individual problem — but institutions are made up of people. Channel your individual power into structural change.
If you are invited to take part in an institutional program, insist that access be a condition of your participation, or at least start a conversation about it. If this isn't possible, practice asking for help as well as asking how you can help others (internalized ableism can even make this a difficult task).

Working toward disability justice and accessibility directly engages the politics of visibility. It involves material and relational changes that are not always visible. It takes courage to care for what is unseen.

It would be wonderful to see the art and culture sector take part in greater accessibility, safety and care practices. Embark on your own research and learn about people who are different from you!

[Image descriptions: A mountainous shape with a collage resembling mossy textures with a white haze painted over it. On the right are two black and white images, one representing a haptic sign and the other a sign from Black American Sign Language.]

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OUR RADIUS

Musea in Gebaren/IN Gebaren (NL): helps make art and culture accessible to D/deaf and hard of hearing people

Feminists against ableism (NL): advocacy and activism

Op Frida's Vleugels (NL): recent podcast series organized by Eline Pollaert and Xandra Koster at Drents Museum

Speels Collitief (NL): mixed-abled dance theater company

Arika (GB): an aspiring model for accessibility practices — they also use access surveys after an event to understand how their accommodations are used

Crip News (US/INT): an informative newsletter, assembled and dispatched by Kevin Gotkin

MELT (DE): *ACCESS SERVER* is an email server that anonymizes, collects and financially compensates access requests that disabled people send towards institutions, and was recently presented (starting at minute 55.28) at Het Nieuwe Instituut (NL)

Access Intimacy: The Missing Link by Mia Mingus: "Access intimacy is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when someone else "gets" your access needs."

[Image descriptions: Leaf-like shape filled with hot pink textile texture with small pearl bubble next to it. On the top right of the page, an image of dark and light brown hands whose pinkies are interlocking with each other. The image is mirrored below so that another pair of hands appear to be growing from the top pair.]

COLOPHON

We hope that
you find this
information
helpful!

Gemeente Utrecht
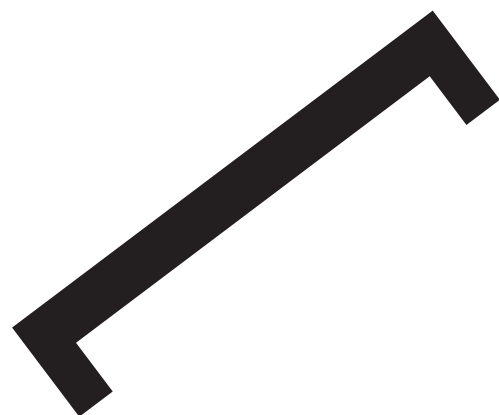
Casco Art
Institute:
Working
for the
Commons

[Image description: Amorphous
shape filled with green textile
texture.]

Haptic sign note: How to say "angry".
Place the tip of your index finger
against your back. Draw a 'mountain
peak' on your back to indicate
undulating emotions.