



THE OUTSIDER

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IN THIS ISSUE

MESSAGE FROM THE COLLECTIVE

THE ARTIST

- Ben Robback

BUILDING THE NETWORK

- Alternative Creations Studio

LITERARY CORNER

- DTES Writers Group

COMMUNITY NEWS

WHO WE ARE

MESSAGE FROM THE COLLECTIVE

Welcome to the inaugural issue of The Outsider, the bimonthly newsletter of the Connection Salon Artists Collective. We aim to create something lively, useful, and a little different—especially for artists working beyond the usual art-world spotlight.

Outsider art is both a practice and a movement. It includes artists—sometimes formally trained—who create despite systemic barriers or limited institutional recognition, even though their impact on contemporary art has been profound and too often overlooked.

In every issue we'll spotlight an artist and an organization aligned with our mission to promote and empower underrepresented creators. You'll also find a literary corner plus news about exhibitions, events, and workshops.

We'd love your feedback, tips on what to include in future editions and links to upcoming events.

THE ARTIST - BEN ROBBACK

What brought you to the arts, and how would you describe your practice and your works?

Since I was a boy, I've always been an "inside cat". And due to constraints, reading and writing have remained difficult for me. Drawing, on the other hand, has always been of interest since it gave me the freedom to create my own world. Originally, I started colouring with my grandmother those old doodle art posters. I remember being inspired by native art colouring sheets too, and their attention to positive and negative space, as well as their use of geometrics and images featured within the image. Other artists that have inspired me are H. R. Giger, M.C. Escher, Alex Grey, and Salvador Dali. Japanese manga drawings influenced me as well. I eventually developed my own style and have been pushing its boundaries for years, exploring what is possible. I was lucky to attend some art classes at Langara and Emily Carr where I was introduced to a basic understanding of perspective and art theory, where each drawn line can do more than one thing and indeed can serve as flow, shading, contour, gestalt... I settled on doing over-arching images, mostly figurative if not exclusively people I know and or admire, embellished in my own style. This latter has been more of a point of departure too, as I've explored pets, wild animals, and landscapes. As for materials, I'm still a bit of a Luddite, working on paper with pencil, and though I've moved from felt marker to water colour paint and the occasional use of coloured pencil. The use of digital tablets is not far off on the horizon. In a consumer culture with AI I feel a style of art that is a notable time sink is a symbol of defiance if not a labour of love.



Red Rider + The old man



Multiple

What advice would you have for other outsiders from your experience?

I was told the purpose of life is to find your gift, and the meaning of life is to share it. That, coupled with Albert Camus's saying that the meaning of life is whatever prevents you from committing suicide. I know earning the basics of survival is tempting us to turn everything we do into a hustle in an attempt to obtain the means to pay the rent. I think if art can disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed, it's doing what it should. Personally, my work is well-received initially. Then people nitpick, saying I should do away with the pattern, or for whatever reason, be it optimization or some borderline racist thing about how painted faces are evil. My honest advice is to do what you need to as an artist. On that blank page, you are God, you need to make countless decisions, and it can be overwhelming. Hopefully, your mistakes are happy accidents, but let's be real, they're yours and you have to own them. You are the artist, and that is your work. Then you send your creation out to the world and hope you have communicated your heart, thoughts and soul to challenge, entertain and change the viewer.

BUILDING THE NETWORK - ALTERNATIVE CREATIONS STUDIO

Tell us about yourself, how you came to do the work that you're presently engaged in, and briefly about the organization.

I'm Katie. I work as an art facilitator and Studio Coordinator at Alternative Creations Studio. For most of my life, I felt out of place around others. I looked like a typical human, but my brain and body weren't built for typical environments. While others seemed to breeze through malls, small talk, and social expectations, I moved through the world like a scientist in a foreign ecosystem—observing, analyzing, and adapting. It was constant, invisible work, and it was exhausting. Art became my refuge—a place to breathe, recharge, and simply be without performing or explaining myself. By the time I finished high school, I decided to put all my years of studying human behavior towards a career in psychology. I was accepted into a graduate program where, inside that academic bubble, I was trained to help others by assessing, diagnosing, and developing treatment plans to fix their differences. When I began working in the field, I realized the people I was meant to treat didn't need fixing. Like me, they were struggling because the systems around them weren't built to support their differences. They didn't need to adapt—the systems around them needed to expand. I chose to step away from a clinical model towards work rooted in creativity, relationship and access. That shift eventually led me to Alternative Creations Studio, part of PosAbilities, a nonprofit supporting adults with developmental disabilities to live full lives in inclusive communities. Here, I work alongside a team of facilitators and a collective of artists who have often been excluded from mainstream spaces. We share materials, make decisions together, exhibit our work, and move at our own pace. The studio is grounded in care, collaboration, and belonging - less about correcting differences, and more about creating conditions where everyone can thrive. This work has been deeply affirming. It has helped me trust my own process, unlearn years of masking, and remember the transformative power of art—not just to express ourselves, but to imagine and practice a more accessible and compassionate world.



Plant of Lava
by Kiersten Hakford

What advice or suggestions would you give to underrepresented artists?

To other outsider and underrepresented artists—especially those still questioning whether they belong—I want to say this: trust your way of making. Much of the traditional art world is built around narrow ideas of what art and creativity should look like. Your work doesn't need to fit an existing framework; it can create new ones. You don't need to soften your edges to be taken seriously. Your perspective has value. Outsiders often notice what others overlook. That way of seeing matters, and the art world needs it. Protect your creative energy. Your work isn't something to be mined or rushed. Ask for what you need. Rest without guilt. Pay attention to where you feel supported and where you feel drained, and let that guide where you place your time and care. You don't owe your presence to spaces that weren't built with you in mind. Community matters. Outsider artists don't have to work alone. Seek people and spaces grounded in care, collaboration, and shared resources. Even small acts—sharing materials, checking in—can shift the conditions for everyone. Like trees, we're stronger when our roots grow together. Let your practice breathe. Let it change, rest, and surprise you. And when you can, help create the spaces you wish existed. Start small. Notice what's emerging. Build slowly—and build together.



Mountain Climber
by Rachelle DeSousa

LITERARY CORNER - DTES WRITERS GROUP

Downtown Eastside Writers

We are a group of DTES writers who have been meeting for about five years, a continuation of Thursdays Writing Collective, started and led by Elee Kraljii Gardiner for ten years. Vancouver poets and writers are invited to lead the group, which runs from September to June with a holiday break. Along with Elee, Vancouver's Poet Laureate, previous laureates Fiona Tinwei Lam and Evelyn Lau usually lead a session in the spring and in the fall. DTES Writers are also involved in organizing the yearly DTES Writers festival, now in its fifth year. The festival runs for five days at the end of May. We write, we share, we support each other's creativity, and we have a good time. We meet at Carnegie Community Centre on Thursdays at 1:00 PM in Classroom 2 on the third floor.

Do Trees Dream by Gilles Cyrenne

Do trees dream of logging's end
Do the 2x4s in my walls
remember their roots
Does the wood that is my desk
still breathe
This paper I write on
does it reminisce about wind
that once had leaves dancing

Getting to Truth by Gilles Cyrenne

Know yourself and that knowing will set you free
Truth will set you free
But first it will piss you off

Learning who and what I am clears the way
For deeper discovery

I am the world and the world is me as bebop
Jimmy Green saxophone Good Morning Heartache
Jazzes my day brain body and soul

Emerge language and music create reality
As day begins with Ella drinking black coffee with me
Drowning regrets in coffee and cigarettes

My routine no longer needs nicotine and I'm over
Sick spasms who believe death better than abstinence
As Miles comes on though I scarce believe
One day my princess will come

Though I do know I'm in the promised land
Me pages music words stanzas
Feel work only just beginning

Before enlightenment write chop wood carry water
After enlightenment . . . ? write chop wood carry water

COMMUNITY NEWS

In this section we want to share news, relevant information and projects from our community that resonate with our goal. We hope they will be of interest to you and invite you to send us events that we can post.

Upcoming Events with Connection Salon at the Gathering Place Community Centre:

Workshops

Free Watercolor Art Classes with Jimmy Ko

Saturdays: March 7, 14, 21, & 28
1:00-3:00pm

Art Studio

Gallery Exhibition

Surviving to Thriving

March 16 - April 27

Meet the Artist

March 25th
5:30-7:00pm

Mad Arts Coffee House

April 2nd
5:00-7:00pm

Other News

Become a Kickstart Disability Arts & Culture member

Help shape disability arts & culture, get access to exclusive opportunities for d/Disabled artists, and more. Memberships are pay-what-you-can with a suggested donation of \$5.

Kickstart Disability Arts showcases the artistic excellence of artists with disabilities working in a variety of disciplines. We offer training, mentoring, exhibition and performance opportunities, especially highlighting those with intersecting identities, such as Queer, Black, Indigenous and people of colour disabled artists in BC and across Canada. We continue to push the boundaries of Disability Arts and Culture.

Join: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScmiv9mZOYUX23lZqWmomNn0Esx9G4gR0zc_aE-

We welcome feedback and ideas and news as we develop this newsletter.
Send to connectionsalon9@gmail.com with Newsletter in subject line.

WHO WE ARE

Founded in 2018, Connection Salon Artists Collective empowers underrepresented artists, especially those with lived experience of mental health challenges. As the only artist-run collective in Vancouver centering Mad-identifying artists, we work to dismantle stigma and systemic exclusion through inclusive programming, cultural celebration, and collective care. We see neural diversity not as a deficit, but as a vital source of creativity, insight, and community strength.

If you want to know more about us or are interested in joining the collective, please email us at connectiosalon9@gmail.com

