

# Performing Normal: Party Tricks for a New World

A CARE INDEX PROJECT





During the performance-workshop, Germaine sits with her arms crossed as Claire wraps a long yellow yarn around her. Jaspreet, facing away from the camera, dances with her arms in the air.



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# Performing Normal: Party Tricks for a New World

A CARE INDEX PROJECT

One of the main departure points of *Performing Normal* was the realisation that our sense of normalcy<sup>1</sup> is fluid and ever-changing over time, geographies, and cultures. Yet, we continue to encounter frustrating comparisons against what the majority perceives as a fixed and defined ‘normal’ in everyday life.<sup>2</sup> When a person is perceived as having an undesirable condition or disposition, they are frequently labelled as ‘abnormal’ and therefore sidelined, ignored or undervalued as individuals.

The lived experiences of my fellow artists show how these societal standards can marginalise those who ‘do not fit’ and limit the expression of individual identities. For many, managing expectations around the ‘right’ way to give and receive care, as well as masking<sup>3</sup> to blend in, makes performing ‘normal’ a difficult and frankly, unsustainable task. It shapes an unfair world that caters to and endorses a specific way of communicating, living and thriving. Their stories are a powerful reminder that everyone deserves to be seen and embraced for who they are.

**We asked: how can we take a pause, reorient ourselves and influence others to embrace alternative modes of being in this world?**

Emerging from over a year of collaborative art-making under the umbrella of the *Care Index*<sup>4</sup> project, we developed a series of participatory workshops and performances to examine how

prioritising caring practices offer new ways of challenging ableism and the pressures to conform to normative expectations. Our work uncovers fertile and potent grounds for exploring ways of relational connection undefined by our behaviours or characteristics. Centering care in how we live is an active act of *listening* for what is being unsaid, hidden or seemingly illegible at first glance. It is the ways that we see and relate to each other, even when we face differences or conflict. It asks us to embrace the unknown with curiosity, challenges our capacity to respond sensitively to the needs of others, and ultimately creates more space for each of us to speak our truths.

This small book hosts a vast universe of approaches to how each of us can do so. A year of collaboration, creation and reflection is captured here, along with an index of 'party tricks' we've learned from embracing everyone as legitimate and full of potential.

We invite you into this porous space of collectivity, connection and curiosity.

**Alecia Neo, Artist**

1 See Lennard J. Davis, [Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body](#).

2 See Tanya Titchkosky, [Rethinking Normalcy](#).

3 Masking in mental health refers to the behaviour of concealing true thoughts and feelings related to mental health issues to meet societal expectations, despite internal contradictions. See Dr Hannah Louise Belcher, [Taking off the Mask](#).

4 See [careindex.net](http://careindex.net)

A monochrome image of Claire with a white cane. She is followed by participants standing in line with eyes shut, hands on the shoulders of the person in front.

**Claire:**

Now, it's time to step into something new.  
Close your eyes, open your mind.  
Feel the tapes, leading the way.  
A line, rough yet grounding.  
Beneath your feet, the ground shifts—  
The disorientation of unfamiliar ground.  
But this is part of the journey.  
Do you hear the soft footsteps around you?  
The bated breaths, thundering hearts?  
The rise and fall of shoulders  
Trust your senses,  
They will guide you through,  
Toward what we've called normal,  
But perhaps never truly understood.  
Step by step, you walk not to be found,  
But to re-orient,  
To reframe,  
To find the balance in being unbalanced.  
And when we reach the gallery,  
You'll find yourself—  
in the act of letting go,  
And learning a new normal.

# Foreword

**Normalcy**

**The norm**

**Normal behaviors**

**Normal artists**

**Normal expectations of them, of me, of us**

Over a year ago, we approached artist Alecia Neo to develop a body of work with young emerging artists at ART:DIS as part of a collaborative project with Singapore Art Museum. We had no expectations of what the outcomes would look like. Only that the work had to hold the voices and presence of our disabled artists, and that it would eventually be presented at SAM Art Dose – a programme series on wellbeing. We trusted in what process-based art would lead to; we trusted in new vocabularies that could emerge from deep collaboration between artists of different backgrounds—particularly in our instance, young disabled artists.

This important project serves as a proof of concept that there is so much to unearth from working with disabled artists who have never been part of the institution—of the contemporary, of critical discourse where they are treated as equals and not ‘the community’. ‘The community’: a label that has permeated throughout history and is still today a continuous tension, and all of the invisible categorisations that we impose and are complicit in. We hope this body of work, when encountered either in its live performance or in written form like this publication, will offer glimpses into a process that respects divergent perspectives, bodies and lived experiences of this world. We have so much more richness in understanding who we are as individuals and in our shared humanity, when we begin to rethink the dynamics of who belongs and whose presence matters.

**Angela Tan, Executive Director,  
ART:DIS (Arts & Disability) Singapore**

# Care Index: Performing Normal

**22 June & 20 July 2024, 2-4pm**

What does being normal mean to you?

What masks do you wear to fit into society?

This participatory workshop delves into the complex relationship between care, performance, normalcy and societal expectations through improvised dialogue, creative movement and collective conversations.

Workshop participants will gain insights into how looking through the lens of disabled persons can help us to reimagine our worlds, negotiate space and foster a more inclusive culture. As participants observe conversations and embody movements choreographed by the artists, they will also be led to reflect on and discuss self-identity and care in relation to kin and community.

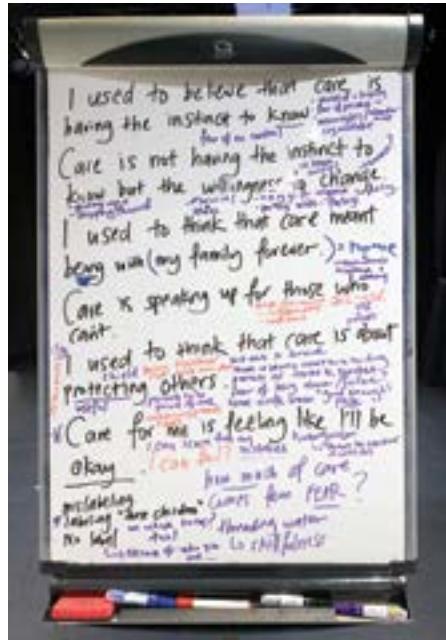
**PERFORMANCE-WORKSHOP**

TOP

Whiteboard with colourful writings capturing the artists' discussions of what care means to them.

## BOTTOM

The audience's Mentimeter responses from the first performance workshop feature words like "connection," "trust," and "challenging" in red, blue, and pink, with "connection" being the most prominent. The words are arranged both horizontally and vertically, forming a cluster in the center of the black screen



# Sensory Space

In this sensory space, you can experiment with a range of different materials with varied textures such as soft fabrics, yarn and beads to create a sensory toy or object. You can calm your emotions and empty your mind by focusing on your sense of touch as you play with this object. This self-directed activity features creative prompts from the artists in [Performing Normal](#).

**DROP-IN ACTIVITY**

**TOP LEFT** Families create sensory objects on tables set up in a crowded room, using materials like mesh fabric, pipe cleaners, cardboard, and more.

**MIDDLE LEFT** A young boy holds a fluffy green string as he and his father work on a sensory toy.

**BOTTOM LEFT** A smiling toddler plays under a shiny mesh covering on colourful fabric.

**TOP RIGHT** A young audience member explores and searches through containers for materials while holding red and orange fabric in her arm.

**BOTTOM RIGHT** A young girl plays with white fluff to create her sensory toy.



# An Invitation to Move Differently— on care as a relational act

*Performing Normal* opened with a deceptively simple question: **What does being normal mean to you?** This question lingered as participants moved through exercises that asked us to embody our perceptions of normalcy, our departures from it, and the invisible labour involved in conforming to societal scripts. I found myself wondering: **How might our bodies move differently if they were freed from the pressure to conform?** It was striking how easily our bodies could be conditioned to shrink, to accommodate, to assimilate—and how liberating it felt to disrupt these learned performances, even momentarily.

One of the most powerful moments of the workshop emerged during the guided movement exercise that asked participants to explore care through bodily interactions. As we worked in pairs, I became acutely aware of the subtle yet profound ways in which care manifests through movement—how a simple gesture of mirroring, a shift in weight, or a moment of stillness could communicate understanding and support. In those moments, care was not just a passive offering but an active negotiation, a mutual act of listening and responding. I found myself tuning into my partner's rhythms, their hesitations and confidences, learning when to lead and when to follow.

## How do we know when to take up space and when to step back?

I reflected on the tension between authenticity and survival—the ways in which performing normalcy often becomes a strategy for safety, access, and belonging. Listening to artists with disabilities challenged me to reconsider my positionality—the privilege of navigating normalcy by choice, rather than being constantly measured against it. It became clear that normalcy, so often taken for granted, is a construct shaped by dominant narratives, determining whose bodies are centered and whose must adapt. Claire's reflections on care were particularly poignant, reminding us that care looks different for each person. She emphasised the importance of asking rather than assuming—of practising empathy not as a projection of our expectations, but as an act of deep listening and respect. This shifted something in me. **How often do we impose our version of care onto others, believing we know what is best? What shifts when we let go of assumptions and simply ask: What does care look like for you?** Claire's insight reframed care not as a static act, but as a dynamic conversation—one that requires humility, patience, and an openness to difference.

This exercise underscored how care is deeply relational—how it is shaped not just by intention but by the ways we attune to one another's needs, limitations, and strengths. It made me reflect on the care we each give and receive in our daily lives, and the ways in which this dynamic is often constrained by societal notions of independence and self-sufficiency. **What would a world look like where care is seen as a shared, fluid exchange? How might we start imagining new ways of being together?** To me, *Performing Normal* is an invitation to move differently in the world—to unlearn, to listen, and to co-create a world where normalcy is expansive enough to hold us all.

TOP

In a performance-workshop, a participant makes a hand gesture representing a mouse deer while facing others in a circle.

BOTTOM LEFT

Germaine and Jaspreet guide the workshop as Germaine lifts her arms while Claire traces the floor with yellow yarn. Participants mimic their movements.

BOTTOM RIGHT

Participant Jia Qi Quek embraces herself, gently patting her shoulders. A sign language interpreter signs beside her.

FACING PAGE

A monochrome image of Jiaqi sharing her reflections while sitting cross-legged, holding a microphone. Another participant listens beside her.



**Claire:**

Before, I thought care was having the instinct to know.  
Now, to me, care is being willing to learn and change from old ways.

**Germaine:****Acceptance:****Circle of trust, Embrace, Mirror**

Sometimes, she looks into the mirror and ask:  
How much do I love... myself?

**Independence:****Triangle, Square, Diamond**

Who likes to do housework?

For Jaspreet, doing housework means she can take care of herself.  
Jaspreet used to think that care means being at home.

Slowly trace a square around your body.

This is your space, and everyone has to respect our boundaries.  
In this space...

Jaspreet is a precious diamond formed under pressure.

**Advocacy:****Heart, Leaf, Mousedeer**

Can you form a heart with your fingers?

**Jaspreet:**

Care is speaking up for those who can't.

**Germaine:**

Care for me is feeling like I can learn from my mistakes

What is your relationship with care?

Share one word that comes to mind when you think about care?

# Art, caring and notions of embodied differences

During a workshop activity, participants stand in a circle with their arms raised high in the air.



AUDIENCE REFLECTION

Over the past decade, artistic practices that both incorporate and disseminate care have received increasing attention from artists, curators and scholars alike. I have followed Alecia Neo's *Care Index* project with interest in recent years and attending July's performance-workshop *Performing Normal* offered an inspiring opportunity for me to continue to unlearn and relearn what is included—or excluded—in the 'canon' of art history.

The collaborative activities, discussions and performances drew on the personal experiences of Jaspreet Sekhon Kaur, Germaine Goh and Claire Teo with space for improvisations.

The audience was invited to participate in a variety of ways—from watching, listening, sitting and observing to sharing, touching, walking, guiding and being guided. These shifting roles of engagement stimulated a variety of sensory experiences. While these practices enhanced the understanding of how our senses shape our presence and interactions with others, they also reinforced the artists' intention to activate examinations of the disparities within the expectations of people with and without disabilities.

By foregrounding embodied differences, interdependence, and individual hopes for forms of care, the artists questioned the norms of 'normality', not only in society but also in contemporary arts. In addition to the timely institutional critique of how art institutions deal with disability, the workshop raised several

important questions about definitions of beauty, representation and artistic languages. As a member of the audience, challenging these conventions led me to reflect further on the differences between watching, staring and seeing. This in turn reminded me of Petra Kuppers' insights into the meaningful interventions that come from combining performative practice with disability as a culturally disruptive force:

“...the disabled performer in contemporary art signals a historical moment where a culture is examining its bodies, sorts and counts its differences, allocates new quarters, and reinvents itself. Performance is a place where cultural uncertainties can find expression—the unknown is framed by the conventions of the stage or the gazing scenario.”  
(Kuppers 2003:3)<sup>5</sup>

In socially engaged art practices, storytelling, space-making and audience activation present alternative ways of sharing and caring between communities. The intersection of contemporary art, disability and care can offer a radical rethinking of artistic practice, its education and production processes, moving us beyond mere 'inclusion' towards a restructuring of access, aesthetics and labour. When given the same seats at the table, artists with disabilities can open new ways of rethinking the possibilities and responsibilities of contemporary arts by transforming both artistic methodologies and institutional policies.

**Dr. Minna Valjakka, Art historian, Researcher and Associate Professor of Art History and Asian Studies (University of Helsinki)**

LEFT

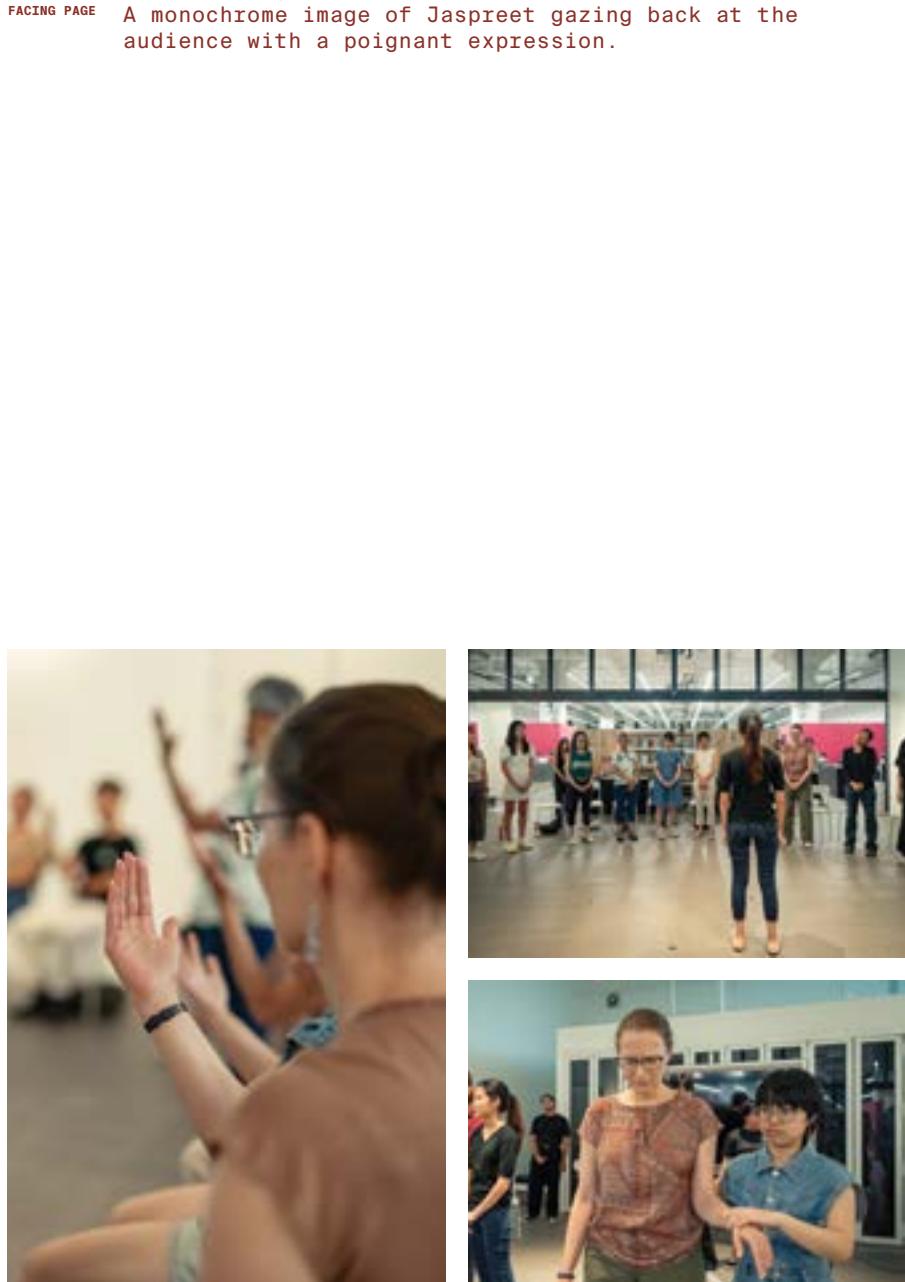
During the performance-workshop, participants sit in a circle and raise their hands to look at their palms. The participants form a circle around Claire, who stands in the center.

TOP RIGHT

Dr. Minna Valjakka has her eyes shut as another participant guides her, while Claire offers prompts in the background.

BOTTOM RIGHT

A monochrome image of Jaspreet gazing back at the audience with a poignant expression.



**Jaspreet :**

I'm not an alien! I'm normal.

Society tells me I should be independent.  
They say I should take control of my life.  
And yet, when the moment comes,  
they speak not to me, but around me.  
They ask the questions, but not of me.  
They make the decisions, but not for me.  
I am here, in my own life, and yet I am treated as a guest.  
A guest in my home...

But I have learned patience.  
I have learned how to stay still, how to wait.

A room of my own. A life of my own. These are not things  
I ask for lightly.  
They are not things I will surrender easily.

And now that I am here, in this room, I will not let it go.

I am steady.  
I am here.

I'm the girl who told my kindergarten teacher to calm  
down when I fell and had to get 6 stitches on my forehead.

I am the patient who readily and fearlessly told my doctor  
to operate on my thumb when I was 20.

I am the daughter who will keep worrying for my mother every  
time she goes under the sun because the heat will cause her  
migraines.

And I am the person who will keep telling strangers to  
stop staring at that boy with Down Syndrome because  
he doesn't talk much.

I am a mountain in the middle of a busy city.

I'm here to stay.

# Seeing Otherwise: A Guided Tour

**16 Nov 2024, 2-4pm**

Led by a visually impaired docent who audio-describes a series of live performances, participants are invited to navigate the museum and to reorient their senses and beliefs. They encounter artworks that speak back.

Performed by Germaine Goh, Jaspreet Kaur Sekhon and Claire Teo, this participatory performance examines societal perceptions surrounding disabled bodies and their modes of communication and expression. Through valuing stimming and self-regulation as innate, asserting their right to privacy on their own terms, and dismantling restrictive labels, the artists boldly reveal how ableist culture limits our ability to understand and connect with one another.

This programme is presented in conjunction with the exhibition [Lost & Found: Embodied Archive](#), which explores the intersection of contemporary art and social issues.

**PERFORMANCE**

Performers in a dark gallery at Singapore Art Museum.  
Claire throws sheets of paper into the air, captivating  
the audience.



8  
MAX LOAD-4000KG





The audience lines up with eyes shut, hands on the shoulders of the person in front. Claire leads at the front with her white cane.

# Torquing aesthetics and accessibility

TOP

Claire performs in a dark gallery, holding Alecia's hand and sharing her thoughts as a visually impaired person while the audience watches from behind.

BOTTOM

Claire's silhouette is in the left foreground as she watches Jaspreet lying on the carpet. Claire describes her movements from where she sits.



AUDIENCE REFLECTION

A moving and stimulating collaborative work, the *Care Index: Performing Normal* performance on November 16, 2024 thoughtfully torques conceptions of aesthetics and access in art and performance, most illustratively through the provocative introduction of a visually-impaired guide, Claire, who provided the live audio commentary to the different segments. This structure of the performance attuned the audience to the sensorial and creative activations and limitations which went into Claire's act of guiding, improvising, commenting, and multi-sensory translation. Jaspreet, Germaine, and Claire's individual performance segments heterogeneously channelled vacillating modes of hope, pleasure, anger, and frustration in living with disabilities across everyday and cultural contexts. The questions, demands and desires presented by the artists through these performances do not elicit neat solutions or pat emotional resolutions from audiences, nor the cultural institutions whose normative practices they critique and challenge. This element of indeterminacy was transparently rendered and engaged me continuously during the performance, and well beyond.





Jaspreet performs with her arms wide open and a strong, defiant expression while reading her lines in front of a living room set in the gallery.

Monochrome image of Alecia and Claire's silhouettes holding each other's arms, surrounded by lines from Germaine and Claire's segments of the Seeing Otherwise: A Guided Tour performance.

### Germaine:

**Teacher** But this is not what they want.

Audiences want precision.

A straight line, a clean curve.

No stumbles. No tremors.

**Student** The tremor is the rhythm.

The twitch, the pulse.

It isn't a stumble.

It's the way the wind bends.

It's the way water ripples.

If they look closely—

They'll see.

It's movement, just like theirs.

But it's mine.

**Teacher** What are you doing now?

This isn't part of the routine.

**Student** The routine's still here,

Underneath.

But it bends.

It shifts.

Like the bar they gave me.

And I follow.

Like light through water,

Still whole, but moving in ways you can't expect.

And I follow.

This is where the dance starts.

**Teacher** What will they think?

Will they call you a dancer?

**Student** Maybe they won't.

Maybe they'll see something else.

But this is my dance.

It always has been.

Each flutter,

Each tremble,

A step no less beautiful.

If they look again,

Maybe they'll see.

My dance.

**Claire:**

Visual Impairment,  
250g  
Simply life altering

Deaf, 300g  
Silence in stereo

Autism, 400g

Handle with care.  
Inspirational.  
Broken.  
Hero.  
Victim.  
Invincible  
Strong.  
Overcomer.  
Incapable.  
Stupid.  
Invalid.  
Tragic.  
Burden.  
Inconvenient.

Can I tell you the truth? This space, it scares me. There's a darkness here, an unknown. Without you beside me, I'm not sure I'd walk willingly through it.

And how will I experience these works? In the museum, they say not to touch the artworks, but without touch, I'm left drifting, wondering how to connect. Sounds echo off the walls, and I don't know where to place my attention. Each piece seems to call out and talk over each other.

I wonder: how do we choose which artworks get seen, which voices get heard, which stories take up space? Whose story is more worthy of our attention, our time?

And who am I to decide, when my truth is only one truth amongst so many?



Germaine performs her dance piece, holding a pink noodle like a dance bar. She stretches her arms and body to the side, illuminated by colourful lights on her face and arms.



# The Usual Party

**29 March 2025, 3-5.30pm**

What's the vibe? Is there a dress code?

Who else is invited?

The Usual Party is a participatory performance that highlights how environments and systems can simultaneously include and exclude different individuals. It addresses the ways in which personal needs for safety and belonging can clash and be met. Through mingling, party games and an eclectic musical excursion led by two first-time party hosts, attendees are invited to reflect on what it means to truly listen to and see one another, beyond stereotypes and preconceived notions.

Performed by Germaine Goh and Jaspreet Kaur Sekhon, two neurodivergent artists, and co-conceptualised by a collective of interdisciplinary artists, this work draws from lived experiences of disability. It explores the tension between self-reliance and community, confronting societal notions of normalcy and inclusion. As the performance unfolds, the party becomes a potential space for connection, vulnerability and the courage to embrace authenticity.

**PERFORMANCE**

**TOP LEFT**

Alecia's drawing features an alien with a blue star-shaped body. Its thin arms have green hands, while its wide feet wear vertical striped socks. The alien has two green-glowing eyeballs, one taller than the other, and a shy smile.

**TOP MIDDLE**

Jaspreet's drawing features a friendly ghost shaped like irregular popcorn, with rectangular arms on each side and a wide smile as it floats above the ground.

**TOP RIGHT**

Germaine's drawing of a lion features a red mane, yellow face, orange body, and brown limbs. The lion has a shocked expression, with its mane standing and arms raised.

**BOTTOM LEFT**

Young Germaine, in a pink dress, smiles at the camera while holding a chocolate cupcake with pink icing and a yellow smiley topper.

**BOTTOM RIGHT**

Young Jaspreet dances in a beige saree at a family party, smiling at the camera with her hair down.



# Care as resistance in *Performing Normal*

The cast and crew with audience members.  
They are all gathered and smiling at  
the camera.



ESSAY

In a society where expressing emotions is often dismissed as a display of weakness and in which modern productivity leaves little space for us to address human needs, practising care becomes an act of resistance and liberation. To care is to push back against the prioritisation of efficiency over empathy, individualism over interdependence, and detachment over connection. Care ethicists call for a world where care is not just a private responsibility, but a fundamental principle shaping all levels of society and extending even to global politics.<sup>6</sup>

In 2020, at the height of the pandemic, when isolation became the norm and care felt more absent than ever, artist Alecia Neo launched *Care Index*, which sought to document and celebrate everyday acts of care. The latest iteration of *Care Index, Performing Normal* now turns the lens on those with identities defined by society as requiring more care: 'disabled' individuals who display needs or behaviours seen as less than 'normal'. Named thus as such, *Performing Normal* sheds light on a standard of normalcy as a social construct and a performance. The year-long collaboration between six multidisciplinary artists dismantles rigid binaries between 'abled' and 'disabled', allowing for a more fluid, inclusive understanding of being 'normal', and the existence and expression of more dimensions of the human experience.

## Challenging the politics of normal by reclaiming agency

Who dictates what is normal, who enacts it, and who is forced to abide by it? By asking questions surrounding normalcy, *Performing Normal* invites audiences to question how they, too, perform and reinforce social expectations of ability, behaviour, and independence. Recurring motifs emerge through the various performance-workshops led by the artists, one of which is the power shift that occurs when they reclaim agency in challenging what 'normal' means in each of their lives.

For Jaspreet, it is about shifting the narrative from one of limitation to one of capability. Rather than being defined by Down Syndrome, Jaspreet insists on being seen as the person she truly is: fun, sexy, confident—even reframing her condition as *Up Syndrome*. She invites audience members to be part of her storytelling process and her story through embodied movement in the performance-workshops, as they dance with her to form shapes. In November's performance, audience members are unable to enter a space she alone controls, designed to resemble her new home. This imagining of her actual housing plans for later this year symbolises her long-awaited right to set and exercise boundaries rather than being seen by society as one of "those children".<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, Germaine reveals through her work how expectations of normality have shaped her self-perception and daily life as an autistic person and her ways of reclaiming agency. She

shares the tensions in her everyday from living by rules taught by her parents and school teachers meant to help her appear ‘normal’ enough in public, which suppress ways of expressing her emotions stigmatised as socially unacceptable. Stimming,<sup>8</sup> which is a self-soothing behaviour for her, is similarly often judged as abnormal rather than accepted as a valid way of existing in the world. In *Performing Normal*, Germaine reclaims these acts for herself by inviting the public to make their own stimming toys, turning a personal and often misunderstood need into an open, visible, and creative expression. Her November performance is a powerful metaphor for her journey of self-acceptance. It starts with her bound by the rigid instructions of a ballet teacher before breaking into fluid contemporary dance in a demonstration of a shift from striving to meet external expectations of perfection, to embracing movement on her own terms.<sup>9</sup>

By placing the artists be the true authors of their stories, *Performing Normal* subverts dominant narratives about disability, allowing audiences to relate to each performer’s experiences as facets of humanity. In doing so, the boundaries between disabled and non-disabled, caregiver and care recipient, and socially acceptable and unacceptable dissolve. With each iteration, it is as if a veil is slowly lifted for us as the audience, allowing us to see—and challenge—the invisible rules that govern what is deemed ‘normal’.

## Redefining care as an active way of dismantling hierarchy

Claire's stories reveal the complexities in relationships of care and the unspoken, unfair power dynamics that come from assuming care as a one-way relationship. Instead, Claire proposes care as a practice of give-and-take, an opportunity to connect and communicate: a conversation. In her performance-workshop, audiences experience being guided by fellow participants in movement with their eyes closed, and how improper guidance by strangers, like being forcefully pulled by their backpacks or pinkies, or pushed by the nape of their necks, can feel oppressive. She also shares how these same gestures done by her father, with the intention of comforting her through play, subvert the harm and hurt of the original action and transform them into an expression of love and connection.

Assumptions of care can also be harmful when they turn into internalised narratives. In a post-show discussion, Claire shares reflections on how she had felt unable to advocate for her preferred form of care given by her mother because of an internalised, unspoken norm that family or caretakers know what is 'best', rather than the one receiving care. The audience participative exercise and Claire's experiences in being guided by strangers also underscore how presumptuous though well-meaning help from strangers can be harmful, whilst those requiring assistance may feel they cannot critique it.

Ultimately, Claire asks: Who defines what is normal? Why do we struggle to express how we want to be cared for? And how does the fear of disrupting social norms and the status quo keep us from voicing our needs? A true exercise of care, one that listens and is willing to learn, allows us to challenge the unspoken norms and hierarchies in relationships. When practised in a collective and responsible manner, care can be a powerful counterforce against ‘care-less’ actions between individuals as well as institutional processes that quantify and monetise care, rather than focus on the value and humanity care can bring.

**“Maybe care is about leveling the hierarchy and acknowledging that as much as we can provide care, we also receive from it.”**

—Claire

TOP

Participants during the performance-workshop. Jaspreet and Germaine are demonstrating dance movements for the audience, who are trying to follow. Their arms are pointed right with palms up.

BOTTOM

Participants dance in a circle with arms pointed inward and palms upward.



TOP

Participants mime actions facing Germaine. A male audience member pretends to wear a crown, and a female audience member smiles with her chin cupped in her palms.

BOTTOM LEFT

Alecia speaks into the microphone, responding to the audience, with a sign-language interpreter on her left and Claire on her right.

BOTTOM RIGHT

On the left, a participant with her eyes shut is guided by another audience member, while on the right, another participant has his eyes shut with someone's hands on his shoulders.



## Imbuing care each step of the way towards *The Usual Party*

The aesthetics of care<sup>10</sup> values trust, solidarity, mutual concern, and empathetic responsiveness in artistic processes. This is reflected in *Performing Normal* through its non-hierarchical and inclusive approach: where accessibility for both performers and audiences is prioritised<sup>11</sup> and the collaborative process behind *Performing Normal* embodies co-creation as an ethical practice each step of the way, emphasising care, communication and shared authorship.

The collaborative process behind *Performing Normal* embodies co-creation as an ethical practice each step of the way, emphasising care, communication and shared authorship. This is reflected in the rehearsal and devising process. Rather than adhering to a traditional hierarchy, where a director dictates the vision, the production operates as a collective, centering the agency and voices of the disabled artists and ensuring that their lived experiences shape the work at every stage. The script written by Claire is not a fixed blueprint but a flexible document, constantly evolving through discussion and improvisation. The non-performing artists, Alecia, Li-Chuan, and Zihao, act as facilitators, asking questions rather than imposing decisions.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst each rehearsal is task-oriented, there is always room for play. During a costume try-on, Germaine, decked out in her whimsical Gaga costume, euphorically runs through the rehearsal

room, eliciting smiles from everyone. Jaspreet often shares humorous anecdotes, and some of her jokes are integrated into the script of *The Usual Party*.

This co-creative and playful ethos extends beyond rehearsals into the performances themselves. The dynamic of trust and understanding between the performers allows them to play off each other's improvised lines and attune to each other's cues. In November's iteration, Claire, who is blind, takes on the role of audio-describer, typically a role meant to serve visually-impaired audiences as accurately as possible. However, in this context, her description becomes a site of playful choreography improvisation, with Germaine and Jaspreet responding to her cues and vice versa, and with Claire even challenging sighted audience members to contradict her narration.

The traditional power dynamics of the art world are further underscored in Claire's performance when she expresses the exclusion she feels as a blind person in museums with 'no-touching' rules for visual art. *Performing Normal* thus repositions disability in art not as a limitation, but as a generative force for rethinking norms of artistic production and presentation.

### **An invitation from *Performing Normal***

*Performing Normal* is not just a performance: it is an invitation. It invites us to rethink the definition of art, to re-evaluate the rules that structure our roles and hierarchies in society, and to question the limits of what constitutes normal, including who and what are excluded.

The audience experience of *Performing Normal* is a multi-sensorial one that asks more of us than just passive spectatorship—it asks for engagement with each and every sense, with the use of sound, touch, and movement in participative exercises in each iteration. There are access workers onsite as well as sign language interpreters translating each word uttered by performers and audiences alike. In engaging not just the visual faculty, the multimodality of *Performing Normal* challenges the visualist culture that dominates the art and museum world, advocating for more inclusive art by embedding audio description into script and participatory elements into the work.

By not just watching, but embodying the lessons of *Performing Normal*, they become more deeply ingrained in our psyches. Through its participatory nature and ethos of co-creation, it asks us to practise care: not as an abstract ideal but as a lived, relational practice. If autonomy is indeed a myth, then perhaps true freedom lies not in self-sufficiency, but in the willingness to shape and be shaped by others. As we leave the performance, carrying with us the artists' 'party tricks',<sup>13</sup> we also carry the responsibility to continue this work: to move through the world with more care, openness, and with a deeper commitment to inclusivity.

6 For more on the ethics of care, refer to writings by feminist philosophers Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, Virginia Held, Joan Tronto, and Eva Feder Kittay.

7 Jaspreet shares a personal story during the rehearsals about how a medical doctor referred to patients with Down Syndrome in a discriminatory tone.

8 Stimming is a self-soothing mechanism commonly undertaken by people with autism. Germaine shares: "People stim in different ways. Verbal, visual, tactile, echolalia, and many more." For her, it is through dance or squeezing soft toys.

9 This change has gradually manifested in her daily life, a growth in her confidence which has been noted by Zihao, who is also her dance instructor at ART:DIS.

10 Learn more in James Thompson's' Performing the 'aesthetics' of care, and other writings by him on the topic.

11 At the start of each performance, the host shares that there are calm rooms available for any audience members who might struggle with sensory sensitivities. During the performance-workshops, symbols referenced in Jaspreet's dance are shown on a screen in the middle of the room for the benefit of deaf audience members alongside two sign language interpreters who stand in the middle of the room, translating every word that is uttered by the performers and audience members during sharings. For post-performance discussions, pieces of paper are provided for audiences who might not feel comfortable with sharing their thoughts verbally.

12 "What do you feel about the script? Does it inspire you in your dance moves, or should we change these directions?" Alecia, Li-Chuan, and Zihao consult Germaine when it comes to amending the script for a part of the show in which Gaga narrates her dance moves. At another point, they ask Jaspreet: "How can we put in your wonderful beliefs and integrate it into this script?", encouraging her to share what messages she wishes to imbue into her closing soliloquy. Germaine and Jaspreet's skill at improvising the script as they rehearse is also dutifully noted down by Alecia, who amends the script each step of the way.

13 See pages 54-67

**LEFT**

Jaspreet has her hand gestures in Alapathma with fingers opened and thrown above her head with long straight arms. Participants in the foreground raise their hands, following her instructions.

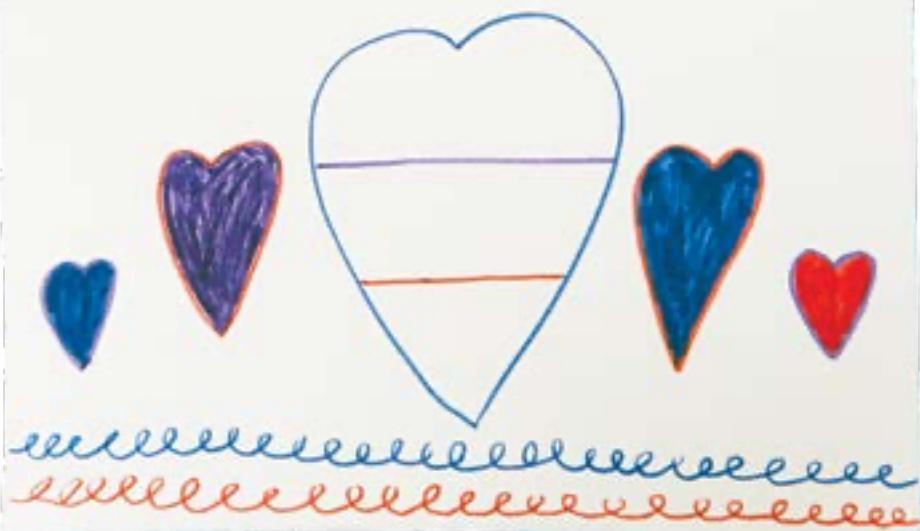
**RIGHT**

A paper displays Germaine's handwritten notes and drawings from an audience feedback session. At the top, the text reads: "One caregiver is talking about imperfection from me. I made interesting decisions for the audience. I feel confident to tell the audience of how can I ask the questions from them." At the bottom, there are various hearts in blue and red wavy blue and red lines.

One caregiver is talking about imperfection from me.

I made interesting decisions for the audience

I feel confident to tell the audience of how can I ask  
the questions from them.



# Care Index: Party Tricks For A New World

So, you're at a party. Someone spills their drink. Someone else tells a bad joke. And then—oh no—you spot a disabled person. Your hands go clammy. Your eyes dart around. You freeze, unsure whether to look, smile, or just pretend we don't exist.

A blind girl is trying to find the toilet—  
you stick your pinkie out and  
push her gently towards the door.



Germaine dances before a blue and purple halo, her hands pointing outward. Holographic mesh drapes over her shoulders as the audience sits attentively on the ground.

# Claire: Dismantle the Hierarchy

- Instead of speaking for disabled people, speak with them. Openly. Casually. Not like you're handling a delicate artifact from a museum exhibit.  
  
I learned this first-hand from my co-performers. I walked in thinking I understood access, thinking I was aware.  
  
Until I watched them dance.  
  
Germaine and Jaspreet didn't wait for permission to move. They didn't filter themselves to "fit" into expectations. They felt the music and let it move them—freely, unabashed, fully alive.
- And me? I was afraid.  
  
Afraid of looking strange. Afraid of taking up too much space. Afraid of getting it "wrong."  
  
I began to unlearn. To flow with them, with the music. To allow past expectations and rules of performance to blur and take on another shape.  
  
Don't be the hero.  
Be the collaborator.  
Don't lead with pity.  
Lead with curiosity.  
Don't be afraid to move.  
Allow yourself to be moved.  
  
Maybe then, we stop "helping" and start seeing each other fully.

TOP

Performers during performance-workshop. Claire sits in a chair, smiling as she asks Germaine questions. Germaine dances around her, performing ballet movements with her arms outstretched to the right, while yellow yarn is strewn across the floor.

BOTTOM

Kneeling on the ground, Claire senses Jaspreet's heartfelt movement of the arms and upper body as she entwines both of their bodies with yarn.



# Claire: The “Access isn’t a Charity Project” Mindset

Imagine this: You spend months making something accessible. You pour your heart into it. The big night comes... and the disabled audience you built it for doesn't show up.

Now what?

Do you declare, “Well, I tried! Maybe disability access isn’t worth it!”

I had this happen when we were rehearsing for *Performing Normal*’s November iteration. We argued so much about whether a visually impaired person (aka me) could do audio descriptions. I was worried about precision. Was it ethical if my descriptions were not accurate? But the point of this show was that all perspectives are valid. So we gave it a shot.

And guess what? I have no idea if it was effective. For the November performance, we had one Deaf-blind person attend our rehearsal to give feedback. But there were no blind individuals in the audience for the public performance.

Maybe it was insufficient outreach to the blind community. Maybe they had other plans. Maybe the weather sucked. Who knows? But here’s the thing:

- Stop thinking of access as a gift for disabled people. It’s not. It’s a bridge for awareness, conversation and connection. It makes art richer and more meaningful.

- Keep doing the work, even if the audience you expected doesn’t show up. Access is never wasted. Because you don’t know if a young student might be inspired to learn or contribute to the scene.

- Change happens through consistency, not one-time efforts.

The best connections happen when we stop assuming, stop fearing, and start seeing. Really seeing.

Yes, that means confronting the messy parts. The awkwardness. The conflicts. The times we try and fail. But failure is still movement. And movement is how we evolve.

Claire smiles as she holds out sheets of paper during her performance in the dark gallery space.



# Li-chuan: Hear Now—For Those Who Listen, and Those Who Do Not Know They are Listening

Imagine a room, a rehearsal space, a stage, a studio—a moment in time stretched across many Mondays. A gathering of artists, some who navigate the world in ways deemed ‘typical,’ others whose ways of sense-making follow less expected paths. I am here as a composer, sound designer, recordist, sound editor, and occasional dramaturg, holding space through sound, gathering voices, shaping resonances. But mostly, I am here to listen. Listening in a way that is not merely hearing, but with an openness to being altered, attuned, and retuned. One artist with low vision maps the world by texture and contrast, kneading her words into poetry and a foil for the emerging main character. Another, with Down syndrome, carries rhythm in her body, moving forward with what sparks joy, wasting no precious time on unknowns. A third, with autism, hears structure beneath noise, dancing in pride and self-knowing, stimming and self-talking. Their ways of making

sense are not deviations from the norm; they are reconfigurations of what we think ‘normal’ means.

Party tricks require sleight of hand, misdirection, and suspending disbelief. But the trick here worth learning is to see the performance of normalcy for what it is: a construct and a script written in invisible ink. Who decides what belongs? Who sets the tempo? Accommodating differences is not a matter of tolerance but of re-orchestration. In this collaboration, the act of “holding space” becomes literal: in the placement of a microphone, in the timing of an edit, and in the weight given to a breath before a line is spoken. Inclusion is not about addition (ticking a checkbox, a seat at the table) but about transformation—an understanding that the table itself may need to be reimagined, its shape altered, its legs adjusted, its surface smoothed for hands that feel before they see. Our process of music production is a composition

Li-chuan recording Germaine (top) and Jaspreeet (bottom) voices at Dance Nucleus with his sound equipment. Both performers are smiling widely at the camera.

of an ethics of care where the act of recording is one of witnessing, and where silence holds as much meaning as sound. The performance begins, and the question lingers: are we performing 'normal,' or unmaking it? Some hear music; others hear noise. Some recognise themselves; some do not. Yet, within this carefully composed cacophony exists belonging. A different kind of harmony not about sameness but from the radical act of hearing fully, openly and without presumption. The trick, then, is this: there is no trick. Only the deep, ongoing work of listening. The room, the stage, the studio—the space we hold—will never sound the same again.



# Zihao: I'm Not Gonna Lie, Lying May be Good for You!

From a movement practitioner's perspective, lying flat is a universal position transcending species, borders, and lifestyles. It unites us in our most vulnerable states. At birth, we greet the world lying down, and in death, many of us return to this position. We lie down when we've given up, but also during relaxation, healing, and connection with others. Whether on a plush mattress or a grassy field, lying flat offers universal comfort—a place of equality. Observing someone lying down reveals a lot—their breathing patterns, positioning, and comfort level. It's a silent language of alignment and posture, offering insights into their experiences and well-being.

Though some associate lying down with laziness or resistance, let's reclaim its positive aspects. In a world that glorifies constant motion, perhaps the most radical act is to lie down and find peace

in stillness, reminding us of our shared humanity and the simple pleasure of rest. Here is an invitation to embrace lying down as an act of self-care, introspection, and connection.

## One-Minute “Grounding and Breathing” Exercise

1. Lie down: comfortably on your back on a flat surface.
2. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth.
3. Feel the support of the surface beneath you, allowing your body to relax and sink into it.
4. Focus on your breath: Inhale deeply for a count of four, hold for a count of four, and exhale slowly for a count of six.
5. Notice any tension in your body and consciously release it with each exhale.

Enjoy the moment of grounding and connection!

### Notes:

- 1 This was written with the help of AI.
- 2 Why did the scarecrow lie down on the job? Because he was outstanding in his field!

TOP

Jaspreet is in rehearsal with Zihao at Dance Nucleus's studio. Jaspreet is on her side, lying on a reed mat. Zihao sits upright and giving pointers.

BOTTOM

Claire and Jaspreet during a rehearsal held in a theatre black box. They are both lying on their sides on the floor with their arms stretched forward.

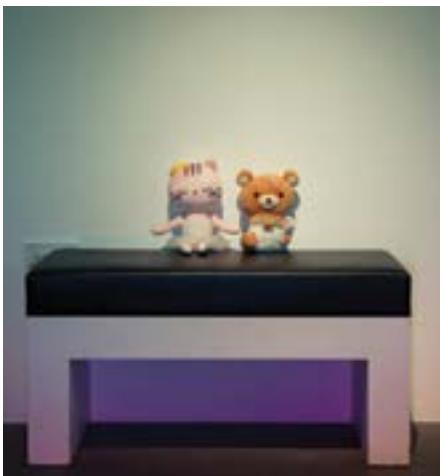


# Germaine: Squeeze and Release

When I want to calm down,  
I squeeze my plushies.

Breathe in,  
Squeeze

Breathe out  
Release



**LEFT** Ballet Cat and Cupid Bear are Germaine's stimming toys. Ballet Cat is pink with grey stripes and a grey tutu, while Cupid Bear is orange-brown with a blue bottom and tiny white angel wings. They sit on a bench with a soft ombre-purple hue around them.

**RIGHT** Germaine hugs a large greyish brown teddy bear with a brown and white bow, grinning happily while sitting cross-legged on the ground.

My parents say I'm the only person in my family who can dance.

Dance brings joy to people. It brings culture into our lives.

I feel so happy when I dance. You can fully enjoy yourself.



LEFT

During a performance-workshop, Jaspreet kneels with one leg outstretched, raising one arm and stretching the other back. Germaine sits behind her, reading from a paper, while Claire, assisted by Nurarina, enters with a ball of yellow yarn. A sign language interpreter signs in the background.

RIGHT

Jaspreet dances vibrantly in a living room set during Seeing Otherwise: A Guided Tour, her arms and fingers outstretched like a peacock.

# Alecia: Truth Needs Safety (and Practice)

Each artist has a different relationship with time, language and body. Our modalities of creative expression and personal histories shape how we read each other and the energies of our rehearsal room. In my early conversations with Claire, Germaine, and Jaspreet, we got curious to explore the types of relationships, activities and environments that sustained and nourished us. We wanted to understand what an ecology of care meant for artists with disabilities. What did it look and feel like? And how could we reimagine and reshape care practices and support structures with different bodies in mind? My collaborators shared that when there were more disabled artists present in an art project, the space transformed. They felt safe and that they could belong. The norms had shifted. Protocols, infrastructures and how people communicated evolved because it was necessary, not because isolated 'accommodations' were needed. Suddenly, what had seemed

originally impossible became integral and core to our work.

When we came together as a team, our aspirations for *Performing Normal* were to prioritise authenticity and embrace a deeply collaborative process where each artist would feel safe to express themselves and their needs. Where we held each other's views and needs with equal regard and care. This practice of caring meant learning not to interpret and presume knowledge about another person's experiences in ways they do not share. It meant not privileging particular modes of communication. It meant maintaining curiosity about each other's perspectives and behaviours, without judgment. Creating work together can be complex when our modes of communication and sense-abilities radically differ. Imagine verbal sense-making as opposed to visual cues and physical movement; the need for predictable structures versus the desire for spontaneity; the poetry

and interpretative prowess of audio-description in contrast with the potency of silence. We all wanted to give care and to be cared for differently.

The journey of creating this collaborative work thus focused on co-shaping a space of care and safety, allowing authenticity to emerge through embracing our differences. We learned to practise honesty with ourselves and each other by speaking out about what wasn't working and expressing how we wanted to be supported. We learned not to fear judgment for having differing opinions or needs. We became ready to receive another person's truth. A truly safe space that enables trust, respect and agency, must be entwined with accessibility. When our needs and perspectives are valued as essential to the creative process, we can bring our full selves to the rehearsal room, ready to take creative risks. In this way, safety puts no limits to creativity—it only lays the groundwork for bold and transformative truth-telling.

TOP

Zihao and Alecia answer audience questions after a performance-workshop, sitting cross-legged on the ground. Alecia speaks into the microphone while Zihao listens.

BOTTOM

Jaspreet and Alecia trace their feet on paper for a self-portrait exercise. Jaspreet finishes drawing hers with a red marker, while Alecia's left foot is inside the purple contour of her own feet.



## Acknowledgements

This book gathers the outcomes of *Performing Normal*, a series of performance and workshops presented in partnership with Singapore Art Museum, as part of their programme series on wellbeing – Art Dose. The programme was incubated through the ART:DIS Emerging Artist Residency Programme in partnership with Temasek Foundation and supported under the Dance Nucleus' ARTEFACT Creation Residency from January to March 2025.

*Performing Normal* is part of *Care Index*, an ongoing artistic research project by artist Alecia Neo, that seeks to understand care through movement, dialogue, and collaborative practices.

[careindex.net](http://careindex.net)

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## ART:DIS (Arts & Disability)

### Singapore Team

Charlene Haridas, Joo Soon Kang, Nurarina Awang, Yan Xi Ho

### Singapore Art Museum Team

Cecilia Chow, Maria Tang

### Event Photography

Yu Khing Poh

### Sign Language Interpreters

Azzam Akbar, Christalle Tay, Clara Chee, Daniel Tung, Evelyn Chye, Shawn Fang

### Editing

Xiangyun Lim

### Essay

Kirin Heng

### Contributors

Jia Qi Quek, Jill J. Tan, Dr. Minna Valjakka

### Design

Swell

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## Artist Biographies

### Alecia Neo, Artist & Producer

Alecia is an artist and cultural worker. Her practice unfolds primarily through photography, video installations and participatory workshops that address modes of radical hospitality and care. Her long-term artistic research, *Care Index*, is an experimental platform that collects and features diverse practices of care performed by people from all walks of life and has been presented at The Listening Biennial, *Assembly for Permacircular Museums* (ZKM, Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe), *New Season of Care* (Asia-Art-Activism) and *Presence of Mind* (*Gallery Lane Cove, NSW, Australia*). Active since 2014, her ongoing collaborations with disabled individuals and communities manifest as an arts platform, Unseen Art Initiatives. Alecia is also the co-founder of Brack, an art collective and platform for socially engaged art and the Ubah Rumah Residency on Nikoi Island, Bintan. Alecia received the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award (2016) and the National Youth Award Singapore (2019), and is currently an Associate Artist at Dance Nucleus, Singapore.

### Germaine Goh, Artist

Germaine has a profound understanding of various dance techniques and has developed a diverse perspective on dance that goes beyond techniques. Dance has always been a medium through which Germaine could confidently express herself, and she strives to cultivate more meaningful relationships with people through movement, incorporating the body's possibilities and beauty. Germaine has performed in various programmes, including *ART:DIS Theatre Production Welcome To My World: Chachambo: Taking Flight* (2023), *Singapore Writers Festival* (2022), *Singapore Youth Festival Arts Presentation*, *Asia Pacific Autism Conference* and *Purple Parade*. She also completed the Artist-In-Training level programme, Very Special (VS) Dance, with ART:DIS (Arts & Disability) Singapore in 2022.

### **Jaspreet Kaur Sekhon, Artist**

Jaspreet is an actor, dancer and a passionate advocate for persons with intellectual disabilities. As a Diverse Abilities Dance Collective (DADC) member, Jaspreet continuously refines her artistry through performing and teaching, and is an active advocate for inclusivity for people with Down Syndrome. She has spoken and presented keynotes at various conferences including in New York for a United Nations event (2014), Australia (2018) and Singapore (2018). Jaspreet believes that education is the key to overcoming the limitations and barriers created in the community. She dreams of attending university as she is a firm believer in lifelong learning and wants to ensure that others realise their own abilities. In 2022, Jaspreet received the *Goh Chok Tong Enable Awards (UBS Promise)* for her advocacy work with the disabled community in Singapore.

### **Claire Teo, Artist & Scriptwriter**

Claire Teo is an actor and artist-educator whose practice uses performing and literary arts as a medium to bridge communities. Her versatility allows her to take on various roles as actor, singer, director, writer, and access consultant. She has spearheaded many disability-led and informed projects that have become milestones in the disability arts scene, including: *Welcome To My World 2023: Cha Cham Bo! Taking Flight, Light To Night Festival 2025: Through The Looking Glass, MONSTRESS: The reclaiming of Medea and Medusa 2025, Scenes of A Climate Era - Esplanade Studios Production 2025*. She will be representing Singapore at the World Expo 2025 in Osaka with an exciting repertoire of opera, classical crossover, musical theatre and folk pieces. Claire also teaches drama and singing in mainstream and special needs contexts, and has supported youths who have faced adverse childhood experiences at a girl's residence. Her work integrates stage performance with educational practice and community outreach, using the arts to promote self-discovery, resilience and practical skills development.

**Zhuo Zihao,  
Artist & Movement Consultant**  
Zihao is a highly accomplished dance artist with 23 years of industry experience and was awarded the Young Artist Award (Dance) in 2012. A founding member of The Human Expression (T.H.E) Dance Company, Zihao has created multiple notable creations including the *Being*, which earned recognition as one of the *Best of The Year* pieces by Straits Time Life!, and *Felt. Sense* (2013), a collaboration with Bani Haykal. He has also produced dance episodes for the National Arts Council and most recently starred in the collaborative dance film *Half* by award-winning Royston Tan.

**Chong Li-Chuan,  
Artist & Sound Designer**  
Li-Chuan is a Singaporean composer and sound artist who is passionate about philosophy, culture, and the arts. He began his career as a composer and sound designer in the 1990s through collaborations with artists and performers working in various fields, including theatre, dance, filmmaking, and design. His creative output includes music composition, sound design, field recording, soundscape composition, site-specific art, installations, free improvisation, and collaborative work exploring different modes of expression and the poetics of sound. Li-Chuan has worked on projects in London, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Singapore.

Monochrome image of participants during the performance workshop. Participants stretch their hands high up in the air.



**Claire:**

We are everything and nothing,  
Full of contradictions, free from expectations.  
We don't have to fit into your boxes,  
And we're done letting others define us.

So let's let go of the labels. Let's make room to simply be human.  
In the rush and the noise, maybe we can create a space—a pause—  
Where we can listen, support, and truly find one another.  
You, you, you.  
And me.  
No names, no categories.  
Just a moment to simply... be.



## What does 'normal' mean?

*Performing Normal* is a year-long series by artists Alecia Neo, Claire Teo, Germaine Goh, Jaspreet Kaur Sekhon, Chong Li-Chuan, and Zhuo Zihao. The project explores how embracing caring practices can serve as a powerful approach to challenging ableism and the pressure to conform to societal norms.

This book enters the collaborative process of these artists through personal insights and reflections, along with vivid documentation of past participatory workshops and performances.

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