

Super Human Rights

The Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) presents Super Human: Revolution of the Species (5 November – 5 December 2009), a suite of events addressing, amongst other issues, what it means to live with a disability in today's society. Arts Access Australia, the national organisation for arts and disability, has sponsored acclaimed UK artist Dr Ju Gosling (aka ju90) to deliver a keynote address at the Super Human symposium (23 – 24 November 2009 Melbourne).

Gosling's address is set to highlight a frequently overlooked issue: that many disabled people today are in the best position to provide an account of the ways in which society is (and isn't) equipped to deal with bodies supported by technologies. As Gosling notes, "... we must not assume that augmented humans will necessarily gain, rather than lose, social status as a result of their augmentations, nor that society as a whole will be prepared to make changes to accommodate them on an equal basis - however much augmented humans may otherwise have to offer".

The use of augmenting technologies for different types of bodies has various results. Issues related to functional impairment and the use of prostheses to extend ability are not the same as those raised by the use of prostheses to achieve a type of 'super-functionality', or to question what bodies are and could be.

Also delivering a keynote address is Associate Professor Junichi Ushiba, from Keio University (Japan). Drawing upon his background in neuroscience, Ushiba has developed a direct Brain-Machine Interface (BMI) into the virtual world of *Second Life* for those with mobility restrictions. The use of this technology has the potential to change forever the rehabilitative landscape by offering people with disability the chance to do more than return to a 'normal' body.

Brad Nunn was left with physical and neurological 'deficits' after suffering a brain haemorrhage in his late-20's. Since then, his work has focused on augmentation - and in particular the compensatory augmentation of the so-called 'disabled' body in contrast with the enhancing augmentation of the 'normal' body. Nunn's work, *Machine Gun Walker*, represents this tension in a fantastical walker that Mad Max would be proud to call his own. Nunn is a featured artist in the Super Human exhibition (5 November – 5 December 2009), which provides engaging context to the Super Human suite of events.

Continuing its commitment to providing equitable access to its events, ANAT has also sponsored the attendance of a media artist with paraplegia, Daniel Kotja, in the Super Human curating masterclass (25-26 November). Daniel's work is based on the premise that "interactive new media art and contemporary technology offers incredible possibilities to the senses...the situation of paraplegia becomes a host to unending possibilities when explored through interactivity".

ANAT invited Arts Access Australia to partner on the symposium and to provide advice on optimising access to all Super Human events. With the Cultural Ministers' Council releasing its *National Arts and Disability Strategy*, the Super Human events are the first international opportunity to highlight the diverse and compelling contribution artists with disabilities make to Australian culture, as well as to cutting-edge technological and ethical debates that we will all benefit from.

Media inquiries to Amanda Matulick on 08 8231 9037 or amanda@anat.org.au or Gareth Wreford on 0419 201 338 or ed@artsaccessaustralia.org

Further information:

www.superhuman.org.au

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