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# Advocating the Role of Disabled Artists from the Artistic Ecosystem to the Spectrum of Karawitan Performances

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**ABSTRACT :** This research aims to uncovering the experiences of individuals with disabilities within the spectrum of karawitan. Their contributions are highlighted through captivating performances at the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival 2022. Disabled friends successfully presented works that express and actualize their roles within society, including within the artistic ecosystem. The research aims to explore the experiences interpreted by disabled individuals from Sanggar Seni Candrika Adikara. We chose a case study as the primary approach for the qualitative method that underlies this research. The case study involved observing Sanggar Seni Candrika Adikara and engaging in dialogue with key figures involved in the intersection of the art world and disability issues in Yogyakarta and its surroundings. Our study was expanded by exploring the realms of literary and visual arts and reclaiming performing arts with a fresh discourse on self-equality. The participants' perspectives become a significant force of value that is unveiled and presented to the readership and the academic community. The articulation of the artistic experiences of our disabled friends becomes a manifestation of the creation of a new paradigm that prioritizes their needs for existence and recognition in various aspects of life.

**Keywords:** disabled friends, disabled artists, karawitan, performing arts



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## Introduction

The dynamics of the arts world are increasingly resonating with inclusivity as both a concept and discourse that provides a space for anyone to participate and collaborate. Equality in expressing oneself and creating art is increasingly materializing in Yogyakarta's various artistic areas and ecosystems. Art has become a medium capable of articulating multiple aspects, including the lived experiences of individuals. The Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival 2022 stage served as a platform for disabled friends to showcase their abilities. The physical limitations accompanying them did not hinder their ability to present gamelan compositions cohesively and harmoniously. Didik K., the coach, and founder of Sanggar Seni Candrika Adikara, successfully encouraged them to express themselves through the '*tetabuhan*' instruments they played. Their work titled '*Kurang Luwih*' manifests their identity as individuals perceived as lacking by society yet possessing abundant strengths that can be offered to the world.

Members of Panti Asuhan Bina Siwi with disabilities tutored in Sanggar Seni Candrika Adikara and for the first time showcase their abilities on the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival 2022 stage. They represented themselves as individuals capable of engaging in traditional Javanese music internationally. The passionate spirit, powerful '*tetabuhan*', and expressive facial expressions showed that the disabled members of Panti Asuhan Bina Siwi truly enjoyed their performance on the grand stage of the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival. The joy they experienced is evidence of their ability to contribute to the Indonesian cultural ecosystem—a thriving ecosystem uplifts even the slightest 'screws' around it, including marginalized individuals. The Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival successfully facilitated an opportunity for the disabled members of Panti Asuhan Bina Siwi to showcase their abilities. They were no longer seen as marginalized individuals but had a chance to receive validation based on their skills and potential. Disabled friends who actualize themselves exhibit a higher level of emotional maturity. Self-actualization means that they harness their potentials effectively. This was evident in the performance at the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival 2022, where they completed their performance despite sound system limitations.

Setyawan (2017) explains that karawitan is an art medium produced from several elements of gamelan instruments, which contain sound aesthetics and presentation aesthetics. The unity of musical elements in musical art is a paradigm for the embodiment of life, nature, and the environment. The presentation of gendhing in Javanese musical art becomes a philosophy of social function that contains character, religious, and familial aspects. Karawitan reflects that togetherness is a fundamental essence of achieving musical quality, representing that humans live together through cooperation, tolerance, empathy, and adaptation. Javanese people believe gamelan



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has an aesthetic function intertwined with social, moral, and spiritual values. The spectrum of Karawitan performance requires a high level of perseverance and subtlety of taste and sensitivity. Gamelan sounds have a place in people's hearts and are used to internalize a human being's sense of beauty. It is believed that someone who is involved in the Karawitan Performances musical instruments develop a sense of solidarity, excellency level of manners and softness in personality(Djohan, 2010). Art is recognized as a symbolic form for people to express their views on themselves and the world. Gamelan becomes a mediator function, the need to socialize and maintain inner harmony through processing aesthetic emotions (Djohan, 2010).

We observe that disabled individuals have found space to participate and actively empower themselves in artistic areas. This signifies a paradigm shift regarding disability, moving away from viewing them solely through the lens of their limitations. The new paradigm sees them as fellow human beings who need to be involved in various sectors of life, as Santoso & Apsari (2017) emphasized their social nature and potential. Our observations of this phenomenon motivate us to delve deeper into how their artistic experiences can be interpreted. We aim to open alternative pathways to understand the experiences that individuals with disabilities interpret and embody through the world of art, particularly Javanese traditional music performances. We chose an alternative approach because the definition of their identities through social institutions often reduces them to their physical and psychological limitations. Disabled individuals are limited in their meaning by the medical world, which views them as individuals with genetic disorders that need treatment or cure. We intend to highlight that individuals with disabilities can define themselves. They can articulate and express themselves through art. Irawanto et al. (2023) argue that art can be a tool to raise public awareness of disability-related issues. Art can serve as a bridge to create an understanding of disability issues in our surroundings. Through art, individuals with disabilities become subjects and central figures speaking about their experiences. The perspective of the main actors is both the starting point and strength of the research we conducted. We aim to articulate their experiences and identities differently from how the outside world defines them.

Our observations extend beyond the gamelan performances presented by individuals with disabilities. The literature review was conducted to understand the sustainability of the artistic ecosystem for individuals with disabilities in Yogyakarta. Traditional performance arts are not the only avenue, as various creative fields have recorded their contributions in this city long before that. Jogja Disability Art is an initiative providing a platform for artists with disabilities to create and regularly exhibit visual arts in various periods. One highlighted exhibition was titled "Nandur Gawe



"Suluh Sumurup" (Solider, 2022), held in 2022 and continued as "Suluh Sumurup Art Fest 2023: Gegandengan," a disabled art festival held in Taman Budaya Yogyakarta in September 2023. This foundation even engaged various community networks to organize a performance titled "Babad Wikara," addressing disability in the world of wayang (traditional Javanese puppetry). In 2023, Jogja Disability Art expanded its activities, including panel discussions covering literature, poetry readings by visually impaired friends, gallery tours for disabled individuals, and experimental music performances by disabled artists. Our literature review found that disability issues in sociocultural spaces have been examined by various parties, including Siregar et al. (2022), who discussed Disability Culture Week 2019 as a platform for showcasing the artistic skills of individuals with disabilities, and Bell & Rathgeber (2020), who spoke about the role of social media as a strengthener and unifier for individuals with disabilities in interactions that transcend physical dimensions. The art world seeks to highlight that disability is not synonymous with passivity, as Vanderhamm (2020) recounted his experience meeting a virtuoso guitarist with upper limb disability who competently played his guitar, winning prestigious competitions on a global stage. The shifting paradigm of disability is receiving serious attention from the art world.

The intersection of disability and art opens a fluid space to articulate their identities and individualities. Mumtaza (2023) notes that individuals with hearing impairments do not want to be called by the medical terminology 'tunarungu'. They prefer to be called 'teman tuli' because it signifies their identity as rich in culture through sign language communication. *Teman tuli* have the space to speak and convey their concerns. Their bodies do not limit them and need their life experiences voiced. Individuals with disabilities struggle to define themselves because, according to Hughes (2020), in his notes on the historical and sociological review of disabilities, their experiences are rarely expressed from personal and existential perspectives, leading to aspects that are often overlooked. The telling of life stories of individuals with disabilities from a first-person perspective is captured by Wong (2020) in her book titled 'Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the 21st Century.' One of its chapters positions art as a powerful medium to discuss disability issues. It recounts how world-renowned artists like Leonardo da Vinci had disabilities. Da Vinci was recognized as an artist for his artistic legacy and excellence, not for his physical and mental limitations. This narrative discusses that humans are more than just their physical bodies and should be seen differently through their work and skills.

Individuals with disabilities growing and contributing in Indonesia, especially in Yogyakarta, the main focus of our research, should be viewed as equals, capable of empowerment and competition through their artistic talents. Reading various



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supporting literature and observing the sustainability of the art ecosystem for individuals with disabilities in Yogyakarta and its surroundings provided a broad perspective for the ongoing research journey. We gained sharper insights into understanding the involvement of individuals with disabilities in Javanese traditional music. The personal nuances we captured from their experiences opened up different spaces for understanding the social and cultural issues they face. Their involvement in artistic areas is a manifestation of their self-meaning and roles. Their articulation is not limited to their roles as individuals with disabilities but extends.

## 2. Methods

Our research is rooted in interpreting subjective human experiences, firmly aligning with the qualitative study perspective. The roles and behaviors of individuals intertwined with the events of their lives, as emphasized by Strauss & Corbin (2017), are central to qualitative methods. We employed a case study approach to Sanggar Seni Candrika Adikara, based on a flexible research design that allows for changes and expansions, as Lapan et al. (2011) advocated in their book titled "Qualitative Research: An Introduction to Methods and Designs." A literature review served as a valuable guide to shape our thinking landscape in understanding the phenomena in the field and formulating research strategies.

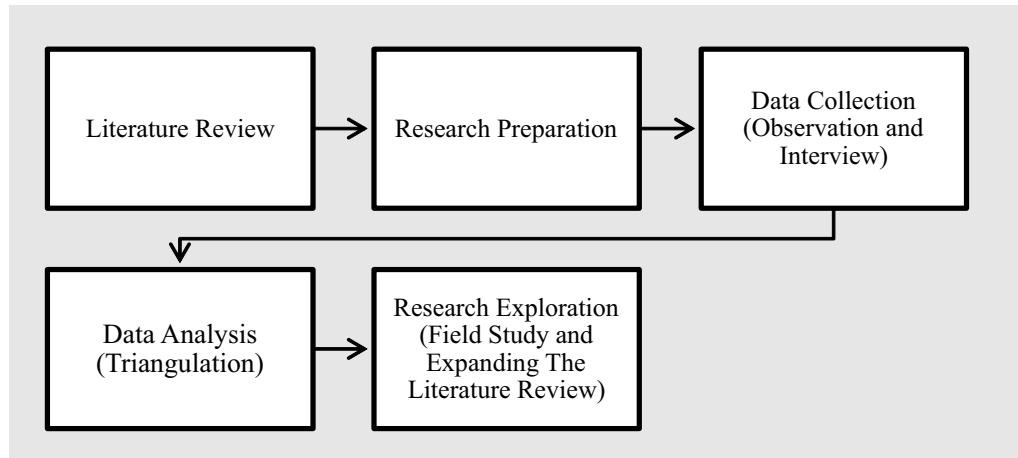
In-depth semi-structured interviews were our method of collecting the primary data needed for this research. Our interview design was semi-structured and focused on the participants' experiences from their perspective as critical actors, making the subjective perspectives of the informants a strength in the research. We interviewed a gamelan coach from Sanggar Seni Candrika Adikara and two disabled musicians who represented performers from the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival 2022. Source triangulation was the analysis stage used to compare findings and identify intersections through observation notes, literature review findings, and interview results. This comparison aimed to enhance the validity of our findings. In its application, we have undertaken several steps that constitute the roadmap of our research journey.

Research exploration was a chosen step to complement the data we had already obtained. By expanding the study more comprehensively, we saw the potential for more significant insights and discourse. We sought to broaden our ideas by exploring the realms of literary, visual, and performing arts on a broader scale as opportunities to produce speech aimed at shifting paradigms regarding disability issues articulated by disabled artists in various warm conversations and interactions with us.



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Figure. 1 Our research flow



We had a dialogue with a number of figures representing the world of disabled arts, from the fields of fine arts, literary arts, to performing arts. The results of the dialogue show connections and similarities in experiences that can be interpreted. Each area of art at least shows that individuals with disabilities have the view that the world has misunderstood them. The results of this dialogue then became a meaningful standing point in this research journey, especially in looking at the world of art through binoculars from a larger distance and on a more macro scale.

### 3. Research Finding

Our research journey started with a visit to the studio where our friends with disabilities practice gamelan. We observed the rehearsal process to capture the experiences they embody in playing gamelan. Our first encounter with our disabled friends took place in a warm atmosphere. They presented several gamelan compositions to celebrate our presence as guests in their practice session. Smiles and continuous laughter accompanied the dynamics of the ongoing rehearsal. Confidence was unquestionable, as it was evident that they were not hesitant in playing each instrument before them. One of the players even confidently and decisively played the instrument using their feet as they did not have hands to strike it, showcasing remarkable adaptability despite physical limitations.

The composition made specifically for the disabilities by Mr. Didik. Mr. Didik is the one who runs Candrika Adikara Art Studio in Sabdodadi Village, Bantul, Special Region of Yogyakarta. He was open to any requests that made by the disabilities, such as Fauzi who wants to have rap-like music in the middle of the composition. The composition was made by Mr. Didik's improvisations along the way, hence there wasn't any documentations of the composition at all. The disabilities practiced by ears and imitations.



**Figure 2. The artistic process of musicians with disabilities within The Spectrum of Karawitan Performances from the rehearsal process to the performance stage.**



We found in this encounter that they communicate and articulate feelings using different interpretive mediums. The sound of gamelan compositions conveys things that cannot be expressed through their voices and limited speech. The emotional expression on each face depicts emotions that cannot be directly verbalized or represented solely through text or words. Conversations with the coach and composer of the composition titled 'Kurang Luwih,' performed at the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival in 2022, were warm and provided further understanding of their process while engaging with gamelan art. Mr. Didik shared that the training sessions were conducted with a playful and pleasant atmosphere. The environment created supported meaningful practices for them. We also observed that friends with disabilities practice through imitation. They mimic the sounds and rhythms demonstrated by the coach to grasp the tunes that need to be played. Mr. Didik always strives to create an enjoyable training atmosphere, involving the players in contributing their ideas to develop the compositions he creates. As a result, the produced work culminates refined



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sensibilities that emphasize spontaneity and improvisation, detached from preconceived concepts.

We had the opportunity to talk with two disabled musicians involved in the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival. Mr. Didik directly guided them during the rehearsal process until the performance stage. Subekti, a person with low vision, and Atib, a person with intellectual disabilities, shared that gamelan fosters a sense of mutual ownership among them. Togetherness and a strong sense of kinship bind them to become more cohesive through gamelan. We also heard stories about how the players are always involved in the creative process of creating work. In the creation process and rehearsal procession, Mr. Didik invited the musicians to discuss and provide space for Fauzi (intellectual disability) to express his passion for rap music. In the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival performance, he sang his vocal rap improvisation to bring a new dimension to Mr. Didik's composition. This represents a syncretic approach in the intercultural process that involves various cultural musical backgrounds coming together in a piece. They reinterpret gamelan art without being bound by prevailing conventions. This presentation of their work serves as a mean for them to find their identity and existence. Their methods and interpretations aim to convey that friends with disabilities are equal and should be considered in the art ecosystem.

#### 4. Discussion

Based on the field research, we observed that friends with disabilities understand well the narratives contained in these compositions. The description in the piece also builds high self-confidence in the Panti Asuhan Bina Siwi disabled friends. Abraham Maslow, in his book 'Music in the Human Experience' (2011), outlines several stages to achieve self-actualization as the highest stage of human needs. The fulfillment of the need for self-confidence in the Panti Asuhan Bina Siwi disabilities through the 'Kurang Luwih' narrative culminates in a confident manifestation in their performance.

The rehearsal process is filled with experiences of various kinds. These experiences fulfill the need for new knowledge and understanding for disabilities. Friends with disabilities, as dynamic social beings, have the right and obligation to meet these needs to progress toward a better life. New experiences and knowledge will lead friends with disabilities to the growth stage. As the second highest stage in Maslow's pyramid, the need for growth is an experience of beauty, such as the beauty of the 'Kurang Luwih' composition and the collaborative process that builds a sense of solidarity.

The art interprets experienced and meaningful moments, surprisingly rich with mysteries that, at the very least, can convey what they cannot express through a



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conscious arrangement of words. Art functions as a powerful catalyst in voicing and amplifying their position amidst conditions that have not entirely favored them. We then questioned what they truly need and how society should come to understand, reaching a stage of comprehension that they offer a significant value to the world.

Sometime later, we contemplated the necessity for further narratives mediated by individuals who have engaged with disabilities in the performing arts, particularly from the perspective of academics who possess a richness of viewpoints to enhance the sharpness of our research lens. We chose an explorative step, adapting the concept of multi-site exploration from Saukko (2003) to discover connections and resonances among various artistic realms or situations we explored. Multiple ways we took to dive even deeper to the art ecosystem was by exploring puppetry story "Babad Wikara", Suluh Sumurup Art Fest, Jogja International Disability Biennale, and Gandana Experimental Music.

We delved into world related to traditional arts in Yogyakarta involving academics and formally educated artists. One such instance is "Babad Wikara," a wayang (puppetry) story highlighting disabled characters to deconstruct the stigma and stereotypes surrounding disability. We had the opportunity to meet its creator. This puppeteer is also a lecturer in the Wayang Study Program at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta, known as Ki Hariyanto.

During the interview session, Hariyanto shared that in 2022, his team at Jogja Disability Art aimed to present a wayang story addressing Majapahit's political issues. However, Hariyanto offered a different discourse, as he perceived that the prominent wayang characters with disabilities in the puppetry community had a relevant narrative with a powerful impact that deserved attention. Among these characters was Sukrasana, a giant with physical disabilities but extraordinary abilities, such as relocating Taman Sriwedari from the celestial realm to Earth. Sukrasana had a genetic disorder, yet the wonders he could accomplish were undeniable. Hariyanto also narrated that in the Ramayana story, the Dravida people were not an inferior race; they were individuals who were overlooked as people with disabilities at that time. This illustrates how the issue of disability has been present in wayang narratives since ancient times. As Ladau (2021) notes in his book, disability is the world's most significant minority, with over 1 billion people striving to make the world a better and more inclusive place.

Hariyanto also recounted that in the Surakarta Kraton (royal palace), a disabled gamelan player held a significant and respected instrumentalist position in the hierarchy, surpassing non-disabled gamelan players. Since ancient times, the involvement of disabled individuals as equals, even within the palace environment,



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has taken place and can open our eyes to realities that have long been overlooked. Hariyanto not only shared stories about wayang narratives; he acknowledged the skill of the gamelan instructor from Sanggar Seni Candrika Adikara. The instructor was adept at instructing friends with disabilities and convincing them to practice until they performed on the Yogyakarta Gamelan Festival 2022 stage. By reinterpreting existing conventions of karawitan, he observed that friends with disabilities had their own way of presenting a performance, magically breaking down the walls of our pride as individuals who consider themselves 'normal'. For Hariyanto, people with disabilities do not perform to evoke pity or become a spectacle that makes everyone cry with emotion. That's not what they need. Through a dialogue session with Hariyanto, we reinterpreted that they want to be narrated as equal human beings deserving of recognition in a society that considers itself normal. Stigmas circulating in a community must be deconstructed to avoid falling into shallow and erroneous interpretations.

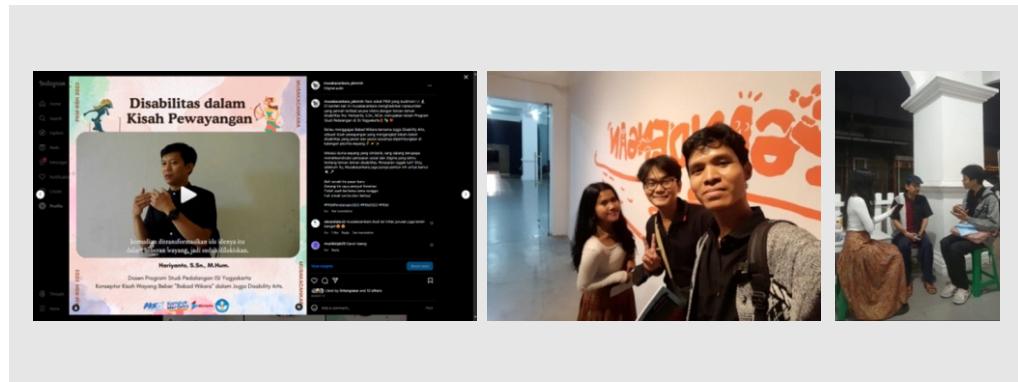
The exploration of the phenomenon of disabilities in the art ecosystem continued with the hosting of the 'Suluh Sumurup Art Fest 2023: Gegandengan,' a disabled arts festival held at Taman Budaya Yogyakarta from September 14 to 22, 2023. We took the opportunity to directly observe this art festival to gain insight into the sustainability of the artistic world for friends with disabilities through a broader perspective. Suluh Sumurup manifested as a multidisciplinary arts festival featuring visual art exhibitions and various activities such as literary discussions, sign language workshops, and experimental music performances.

We attended a literary discussion titled 'Diskusi Imajiner antara Kopi, Sastra dan Disabilitas,' moderated by FX. Rudy Gunawan on September 17. The speaker was Irwan Dwi Kustanto, a blind poet who shared his creative process as a literary figure over the years. We also witnessed the poetry reading session, where visually impaired friends presented their works. The poems recited by friends with disabilities showcased their resilience as visually impaired individuals, sharing everyday experiences that resonated with the lyrics. One line from a poem stood out, 'All time is night for the blind.' The recurring theme of coffee in their recitation reflected the symbolic significance of this beverage in navigating the world as a blind person where everything appears to be black. We slowly immersed ourselves in their experiences, attempting to empathize with the lives rarely captured through their eyes. Irwan emphasized that the imagination of a blind person can transcend spatial and temporal limitations beyond the imagination of sighted individuals. He also stated that constraints should be turned into strengths, sharpening other senses and providing alternative ways to articulate the depth of life experiences.



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**Figure 3. Our Research Exploration began with dialogue with Hariyanto, S.Sn, M.Hum, visiting disabled artist's art exhibition, and conversation with Irwan Dwi Kustanto**



Continuing our exploration, we interviewed Irwan Dwi Kustanto to delve further into the world of literature among people with disabilities. In the interview, Irwan conveyed that art is the most delicate medium for him and his disabled friends. They choose art to address more issues related to the disabled community, avoiding institutional and political voices. Irwan firmly expressed gratitude for the sympathy and empathy shown by society. However, he emphasized that disabled friends need facilities and infrastructure to support their daily lives. According to Irwan, visually impaired individuals are not blind; they become blind due to public facilities that shape them. If public facilities can reach adequate availability and quality, the issue of visual impairment will be on the right track.

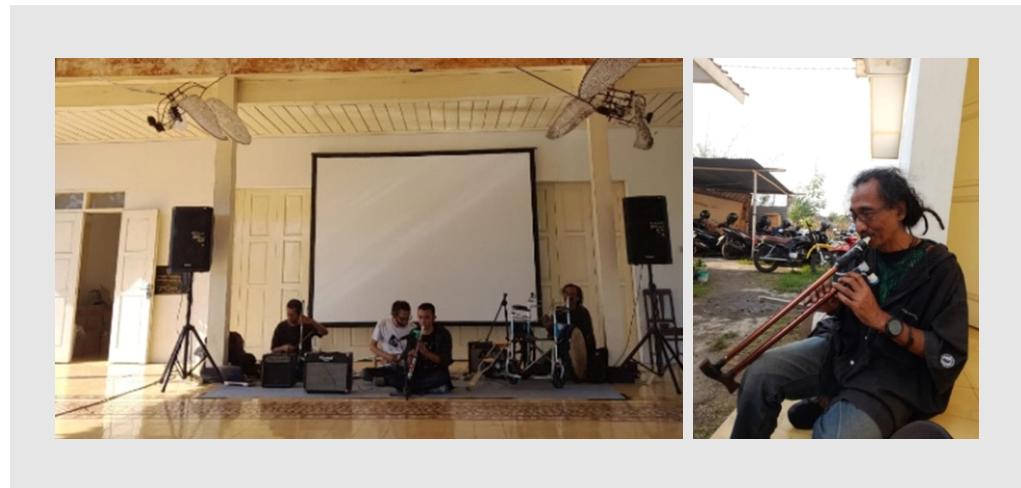
The conversation with Irwan Dwi Kustanto reinforced the notion that individuals with disabilities should not be reduced to the definition of their physical limitations. Alice Wong (2020), in her book 'Disability Visibility,' also conveys that Leonardo Da Vinci, a maestro, was recognized not for his physical body but for his talent, brilliance, and legacy. Da Vinci is known for his extraordinary thinking, with his works as a window into his remarkable mental dimensions. This reminds us that human beings are more than just their physical bodies. Humans transcend mere facial features, and art is not always about beauty but about making people feel something and realize that appearance is a meaningful artistic expression like the friends with disabilities from Panti Asuhan Bina Siwi Art Studio.

Our exploration continued with opening the collective art exhibition from the Jogja Biennale 2023, titled 'Sabo Sawah:' at Balai Budaya Karang Kitri, Panggunharjo, Bantul, Special Region of Yogyakarta. The show featured artworks from children of various schools as well as collaborative paintings and crafts from disabled children nurtured through Jogja Disability Art. At the exhibition opening, we witnessed a performance by the Gandana ensemble, a group of musicians playing experimental instruments designed for people with disabilities. The experimental music performance by Gandana presented meditative and minimalist sounds, captivating



the audience. Mr. Nanang, the instrument maker, experimented by creating percussion from a wheelchair, imitating guitar and bass using crutches, and producing flute and rebab sounds with walking aids, resulting in unique sounds.

**Figure 4. Experimental Music for Disabilities by the Gandana Ensemble and Mr. Nanang as the craftsman of Experimental Musical Instrument.**



We had the opportunity to interview Mr. Nanang directly, the luthier who produces experimental musical instruments using mobility aids for friends with disabilities. Mr. Nanang mentioned that within the last year, friends from Jogja Disability Art came to his workshop and challenged him to create musical instruments representing disability conditions. He accepted the challenge and proposed the concept of 'musyawarah bunyi' as an alternative term for 'jamming' or 'improvisation'. Something that familiar in conventional music. The performance and instruments did not demand stable tones and frequency like Western instruments. According to him, with the authenticity and material capabilities of disability aids, the produced sound can engage in a 'musyawarah' with each other, respecting and providing space for alternating sounds, accompanied by the recitation of Javanese mantras that attract the audience's attention. Disability experimental music discussed alternative avenues for addressing disability issues through the 'musyawarah bunyi' medium, with 'Gandana' as an acronym for *Ganda Guna*, illustrating the dual function of disability aids as music and their life support.

Our experiences shared during direct engagement with the interpretations by friends with disabilities and those involved with them contributed to creating an increasingly open space to discuss the contributions with disabilities as empowered individuals. Their growth and artistic creation journey resonates strongly, especially when viewed in the context of the broader art ecosystem. The continuity of the art world in Yogyakarta positions them as active participants in the arts, enabling them to voice their concerns and interpretations of the world around them. Performing arts,



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visual arts, and literature are powerful catalysts in expressing their identities and existence. Art becomes an effective medium to combat inequality through subtle and non-confrontational means.

We observed that disabled musicians articulate themselves not through verbal expressions but through expressions and emotions displayed while playing their instruments. We realized that friends with disabilities need to be narrated. They require our assistance in retelling their stories with an approach centered on their perspectives and self-views as the main characters. The paradigm that has defined them based solely on their limitations prompts us to choose an alternative path, offering a different narrative and definition. Examining the art ecosystem enriches our perspective on the artistic world experienced by friends with disabilities, following the multi-site concept adapted from Paula Saukko's book. Our exploration and expansion of the study into visual arts, literature, and performing arts led us to reconsider gamelan art with a fresh perspective. Through research findings and content production on social media, we promote discourse that equality and self-fulfillment for friends with disabilities can be achieved through artistic creation and engagement.

## 5. Conclusion

We observe that friends with disabilities from Panti Asuhan Bina Siwi engage in the arts to narrate and actualize themselves and enhance self-confidence and a sense of productive togetherness. The artistic experiences of friends with disabilities serve as a valuable means to explore aspects of their identity beyond what is visible and to process emotions based on the beauty experienced during the creative process. Communication has also improved and become more directed among friends. During our visits, friends with disabilities are open and brave in initiating conversations. The increase in self-confidence is shaped through musical activities that contribute to the knowledge and vocabulary of each individual. The high self-confidence of disabled musicians is also constructed by the coach, where all opinions are taken seriously.

We believe that marginalized friends with disabilities have a wealth of potential to advance if provided with adequate facilities, just like non-disabled friends in general. Through prescriptive treatments, such as gamelan rehearsals infused with tailored humor, they can effectively grasp the intentions and meanings of compositions. They know their perfection and have the right to be considered equal, regardless of their physical or mental limitations. We hope that the discourse we initiate can influence the field of music research in Indonesia, creating a comfortable space for marginalized friends with disabilities to express themselves. As the nation's future generation, we hope that more voices will be raised to narrate the potential and experiences of friends



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with disabilities in academic spaces, fostering open discussions for the advancement of research and the increasingly inclusive artistic ecosystem in Indonesia.

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