

Shortlisted images

This is Gender 2025

GENDER & DISABILITY

Imogen Bakelmun , curator



WHEN THE MOUNTAIN WON'T MOVE, HEALTHCARE MUST

Banawe, Ifugao, Philippines. 2023.

Gina C. Meneses

As dusk falls amid the steep slopes of the Banaue Rice Terraces, a woman receives care. Her masked face glowing with the quiet relief that help has come at last, reaching her through the gentle hands of a health worker. In a place where wheelchair access is near impossible, this image captures the quiet dignity of care that travels across mountains.

Here, policy becomes practice: bringing healthcare to those who cannot reach it. In doing so, it affirms that disability does not mean invisibility. With its painterly light and powerful stillness, the image speaks to the themes of access, equity, and the everyday grace of being seen.

Curator's note

The dramatic use of light imbues this image with an almost painterly quality, elevating the everyday into the sublime. Visually arresting, the work powerfully reflects key themes of the competition- access, care, health, and respect- rendered through a lens of intimate realism.

Gina C. Meneses is a freelance copywriter for health and wellness brands. She is also a hobbyist photographer and hopes to spend a summer in Antarctica someday. Woman, no. AA491.



VERA GAILIS

Haifa, Israel. 2025.

Vera Gailis

A Sudanese woman stands facing the camera, draped in a translucent plastic veil and holding a bouquet of white flowers. Her stance and attire evoke a bridal aesthetic — but the materials and context disrupt any sense of celebration. The veil suggests not just ceremony, but also containment, displacement, or medical control.

This image is part of *The House is Black*, a performative photography project exploring the intersection of gender, disability, and migration through the lived experience of Hawa, a Sudanese asylum seeker and single mother in Tel Aviv. Inspired by Feroz Farrokhzad’s 1963 film of the same name, which documented life in a leper colony, the series uses poetic and symbolic language to foreground often-unseen realities. Working collaboratively with the artist, Hawa becomes both subject and storyteller. The project challenges dominant portrayals of refugee women, shifting the focus from passive victimhood to the complex labour of caregiving, survival, and resistance. It draws attention to invisible disabilities — both the physical toll of care work and the emotional burden of displacement — and demands a deeper reckoning with how gender, health, and migration intersect.

Curator’s note

Notes from the judges: The plastic veil introduces a haunting tension — suggestive of quarantine, medical control, or displacement. Laden with symbolism, the image evokes potent questions around visibility, gendered care, and the lived experiences of disabled refugees.

Vera Gailis is a photographer, curator, and cultural initiator exploring themes of immigration, gender, and identity through performative and documentary photography. Her work bridges personal narratives with broader social issues, often engaging communities in the creative process. Woman, it’s complicated. AA676



RESILIENCE, BEAUTY, AND REPRESENTATION IN KIBERA FASHION WEEK

Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya. 2024.

Anwar Sadat Swaka

Julie strides down the runway in denim at Kibera Fashion Week, her gaze steady, her presence commanding. The image captures more than a model in motion, it reflects a moment of quiet defiance and collective possibility. Julie’s work in Kibera challenges both global beauty standards and the reductive narratives often imposed on her community. By confronting ableism, gender norms, and aesthetic conformity, she opens space for a self-defined future rooted in dignity and visibility.

Growing up with vitiligo, Julie faced societal pressures to hide her skin. “Uniformity was expected,” she says, “but I chose self-love.” She channelled this commitment into founding the Royal Patches Foundation, a platform that empowers people with vitiligo, albinism, and other unique skin conditions. In doing so, she transforms difference into pride, and the runway into a platform for social change.

Curator’s note

Julie’s forward motion is filled with intent. Her stride is poised yet powerful, emblematic of a broader movement toward self-definition and beauty without condition. The image exudes momentum, not only of the body, but of a vision taking shape.



Anwar Sadat Swaka is a Nairobi-based documentary photographer and visual storyteller based in Nairobi, Kenya. He focuses on reframing narratives about urban spaces and communities, particularly Kibera, by capturing their beauty, resilience, and vibrancy. His storytelling aims to challenge stereotypes and highlight dignity, hope, and transformation. Largely self-taught, Anwar refined his skills through training at The VII Academy and Reuters Digital Journalism programs. His work has earned awards from UNFPA, Global Health 50/50, and the UN Aligned Photo Award, and has been featured in The Guardian Magazine, The Lancet, and exhibitions at UCL.

Man, no. AA494

THE PAST IN YOUR HANDS

London, England. 2024.

Jaime Prada

A pair of hands, delicate and expressive, reach out from the darkness to touch the face of an ancient Egyptian sculpture. The blind woman engages in a rare moment of multisensory access during a touch tour at the British Museum. All else in the photograph is shadowed, drawing attention to her hands as tools of perception, memory, and connection.

In a world built for the sighted, access to culture is often conditional. This image captures a moment where that norm is interrupted: where the act of touching is not prohibited, but essential. In most museum settings, disabled visitors encounter barriers- architectural, institutional, and conceptual- that limit the ability to engage with art and history. Here, touch becomes an act of reclamation.

The photograph challenges us to consider who public spaces are designed for, and how ableist assumptions shape cultural participation. Even as this sculpture has survived millennia, access to its presence remains a rare exception rather than a right. What does it mean when the most basic form of engagement- touch- is seen as extraordinary?

Curator's note

The hands dominate the frame, contorted yet graceful, resembling tree branches reaching through darkness. The visual emphasis on her hands-her tools for navigation-transforms the image into a powerful meditation on touch, accessibility, and embodied knowledge.

Jaime is a genderqueer Spanish-Scottish artist based in London. In their pictures, Jaime celebrates queer and Mediterranean cultures, exploring human sensitivity and bucolic landscapes. Their work is highly informed by their disability, which curates their use of light and attention to detail. Through their pictures, Jaime engages in difficult conversations about trauma, mental health and chronic pain. Jaime is also a Human Rights activist and lawyer working in the heritage and media industries.

Non-binary, yes. AA854



THE AIR IS NOT FOR US

Batumi, Georgia. 2025.

Tekle Gulordava

A figure confronts the camera head-on, their gaze unwavering. Over their head, a clear plastic bag, at once suffocating and delicate, like a veil fashioned from constraint. The play of shadow distorts the body behind them, casting an echo of their form that is both haunting and poetic.

The image straddles discomfort and beauty. Its high-fashion sensibility, aestheticised, composed, precise, is interrupted by the deeply visceral sensation of breathlessness. For many disabled people, particularly those whose embodiment defies normative expectations, occupying public space can feel like this: a struggle for air, a negotiation of visibility and safety, a performance of palatability. As Tekle explains, ‘I live between two worlds — one that belongs to them, and one where I can truly exist. In daylight, I wear a face they accept; in solitude, I breathe freely within four walls. My truth lingers in the shadows, unseen.’

The work speaks powerfully to the limits placed on self-expression in a world that demands gender and physical conformity. It insists that identity- whether gendered, disabled, or both- cannot and should not be neatly packaged. It evokes the claustrophobia of enforced silence while simultaneously asserting the right to be seen, heard, and self-determined. More than a portrait, this is a visual protest: against ableist architectures, against gender policing, and against the cultural tendency to romanticise struggle while ignoring its systemic roots. It invites the viewer not just to look, but to reckon with their gaze, with their complicity, and with their power.



Curator's note

The image straddles discomfort and beauty. A plastic bag, simultaneously suffocating and veil-like, envelops the subject in a harsh yet elegant gesture. Its fashion editorial sensibility contrasts with the painful reality it evokes: the alienation and fragility of existing in public space while disabled.

Tekle is a photographer and footballer whose work explores themes of identity, mental health, and social issues. Using self-portraiture, Tekle expresses complex emotions such as pain, love, and fear. Their projects focus on marginalized voices and aim to challenge societal norms, fostering inclusion and empowerment. non-binary, yes. AA591

ACCESSIBLE BEACH

Pensacola, Florida, USA. 2025.

Jordiana Carroll

A couple sit quietly in the shallow waters of the sea. One remains in a wheelchair, the other rests on the sand beside them. Captured with the intimacy of a home photograph, the image frames a tender, almost meditative moment: two figures gazing outward toward the open horizon.

This beach, the only one accessible by wheelchair, is a three-hour drive from their home. The sheer distance underscores how limited public accessibility often is, even for something as simple and universal as reaching the shore. As we witness this private moment of connection between land, water, and body, we are reminded that access to public space is not evenly distributed, but hard-won for many.

The photograph asks viewers to reflect on the invisible structures that define who can participate in public life.

Curator's note

The image's raw, unpolished aesthetic — reminiscent of a family snapshot — heightens its emotional weight. We are spectators to a moment of intimacy and quiet resistance, where the sea becomes both a site of freedom and a reminder of systemic exclusion.



Jordiana is a Black, Queer, Genderfluid, Neurodivergent artist. For the past 20 years they have guided meditation, ceremony, libation, and healing with BLM, Headspace, Dignity and Power Now, Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, and most recently Familia TQLM. In the past 2 years, they've started organizing healing retreats, developing pre-colonial spiritual informed curriculum, and adapting to a more digital based healing art practice.

Non-binary, it's complicated. AA411

RUBY

Syracuse, New York, USA. 2025.

Md Zobayer Hossain Joati

Ruby Kaftan, 20, poses confidently in her bedroom wearing her favourite blue princess dress. Her hands on her hip, she radiates self-assurance and agency. A writer, illustrator, and fashion designer, Ruby uses creativity to shape a world that reflects her identity on her own terms.

Surrounded by artwork, affirming messages, and soft pink walls, her space becomes a sanctuary, one that centres joy, expression, and self-determined femininity. This portrait celebrates disabled girlhood not as limitation, but as imagination, pride, and possibility.

Curator’s note

Confident and poised, the subject adopts a superhero stance that radiates self-determination. Her gaze is direct, her world self-contained. The image is imbued with whimsy and defiance-a playful yet empowering portrait of disabled girlhood and agency.



Md Zobayer Hossain Joati, also known as Zobayer Joti, is a Bangladeshi Photographer based in Syracuse, New York. His work concentrates on various social crises, gender equality, cultural norms, and underrepresented communities that comprise intimate human stories investigating social and cultural challenges and their emotional dimensions.

Man, no. AA930

ACOMPañAMIENTO Y CARiÑO

Mexico City, Mexico. 2025.

JENNY BAUTISTA MEDIA

In cinematic black and white, Isa and Tavo are caught in a moment of uninhibited embrace. Wearing only their underwear, they hold each other closely, their faces pressed together in quiet intimacy. Unaware of the camera's gaze, they exist entirely within their own world, a space of trust, tenderness, and mutual care.

Both Isa and Tavo live with disabilities. Together, they share the labour of caregiving, supporting each other's bodies and lives in ways often overlooked by dominant narratives. Their relationship has faced hurdles, from family members, from societal expectations, but they remain cocooned in their connection, defending their right to live with love, passion, and dignity.

In a world where disabled people and older adults are often desexualized or judged for expressing affection, this photograph offers a radical alternative: intimacy as resistance. Shared caregiving is framed not as burden, but as an act of solidarity and love. Here, the boundaries between carer and partner collapse into a mutual, deeply human connection. The image reminds us that autonomy, desire, and tenderness are not bound by ability or age but are fundamental to the human experience.

Curator's note

The unguarded nature of the embrace, captured in rich monochrome, elevates the photograph beyond voyeurism. It is a portrait of trust, resilience, and quiet defiance, an assertion that love, intimacy, and care belong to all bodies.



Jenny Bautista Media is a student, photographer and activist from Mexico City. Jenny acquired a disability at age 20 due to a car accident. She is a member of the Movement of People with Disabilities and the collective Mexicans with Disabilities.

Woman, yes. AA559

IF FISHES COULD TALK

Osogbo, Nigeria. 2023.

David Olayide

A male subject poses against the backdrop of a textured wall, his face obscured by a vibrant red fabric. He cradles a fragile blue balloon in one hand, while an arm, delicate and feminine, extends behind him, reaching outward. The scene radiates a quiet tension between concealment and yearning, invoking the silent struggles of disabled individuals navigating emotional repression and societal barriers.

From David's larger project, "If Fishes Could Talk", this image engages with the intersections of gender and disability, addressing themes of invisibility, emotional suppression, and resilience. The veiled face represents how disabled individuals, particularly men, are often overlooked, expected to embody stoic strength despite profound internal battles. In many cultural contexts, particularly in Africa, disability is framed as a limitation, compounding rigid expectations around masculinity that discourage vulnerability and emotional expression. The red fabric (from the traditional African women's head tie), soft and engulfing, signals how the subject's identity is often subsumed beneath social stereotypes. He is seen not as a complex individual with emotions, desires, and agency, but primarily through the lens of his disability. The extended arm hints at unseen care networks — family, community, caregivers — whose contributions are frequently unacknowledged, especially in relation to masculine identity. It evokes the gendered dynamics of care, where women's labour shapes the lives of disabled men even as masculinity denies dependency.

The balloon, delicate and fragile, acts as a metaphor for the tension between autonomy and reliance, freedom and fragility. It destabilises traditional associations of masculinity with physical power, suggesting instead that strength may be found in adaptation, emotional openness, and the acceptance of support. By layering these visual and symbolic elements, the work challenges entrenched narratives about disability and masculinity. It offers a counter-vision where resilience is reimagined through vulnerability, interconnectedness, and the dignity of being fully seen.



Curator's note

Surreal and playful, the image raises questions. What adorns their head? How many figures are present? The balloon element introduces a sense of levity and escape. The work thoughtfully addresses the complexities of masculinity and disability, rendering them both visible and open to reinterpretation.

David Olayide is a lens-based artist from Nigeria, whose works explore gender, perception, cultural identity, and environmental sustainability, inviting viewers into transformative dialogue with the world around them. Man, no. AA907

EVERYDAY I LIVE

Italy, Milan. 2025.

Anastasia Shik

A young girl lies in bed, her breathing apparatus and elaborate floral headdress entwined in a dreamlike display. Bathed in multicoloured light, a gesture towards the LGBTQ+ community to which she proudly identifies, she gazes away from the camera, her expression distant and absorbed, as if looking beyond our reach. The image evokes the tragic serenity of Ophelia drifting downriver, its stillness edged with ambiguity.

This striking portrait confronts the viewer's gaze and assumptions. By blending classical motifs with lived experience, the work offers a haunting and poetic meditation on chronic illness, femininity, and the act of being seen.

Curator's note

At first glance, the subject seems to be in repose or perhaps deceased. Then, the breathing apparatus becomes apparent. The use of florals and her pose reference classical imagery of Ophelia, blending gender identity and chronic illness into a layered, poetic reflection.

Anastasia is an amateur photographer whose history of abuse and neglect shapes their creative pursuits.

PNS, PNS. AA634



CRICKET IS MY EMOTIONS

Hathazari, Chattogram, Bangladesh. 2024.

Ziaul Huque

Jisad, a disabled cricketer born with a leg impairment, poses with his cricket bat, wicket, and crutch. His head tilted upward and a broad smile across his face, he radiates a spirit of determination and pride.

Cricket has been Jisad's passion since childhood — a love that brings him to life. Refusing to let his disability define him, he moves through the world with dignity and resilience. This portrait centres his joy, not his diagnosis, capturing an image of disabled life that is rarely foregrounded: one of passion, agency, and interiority.

Curator's note

A beautifully realised image, its tonal palette, composition, and depth of field all contribute to its quiet power. The subject's passion is foregrounded, a rare instance of disabled representation that prioritises joy, interest, and interiority over diagnosis or deficit.



Ziaul Huque is an amateur photographer from Chattogram, Bangladesh.
PNS, PNS. AA296

FILL ME IN SANDWICH COUNTER

Bath, UK. 2023.

Milly Aburrow

Dressed in a bright pink sandwich shirt and hat, Milly prepares a sandwich in this surreal, playful installation. Plastic cheese, bread, salad, and meat are laid out before her, evoking both childhood imagination and a deeper commentary on exclusion.

Fill Me In draws from the artist's personal experience of left-side Cerebral Palsy and reflects on the barriers disabled people face in the hospitality industry. Through the lens of childhood play — where disability and limitation were momentarily suspended — the work reimagines food preparation as a space of confidence and creativity. By recreating a mock environment where mistakes carry no consequence, the piece critiques the lack of real-world accommodations while also celebrating the resilience found in imagination.

Curator's note

“Fill Me In” is deceptively whimsical, but its pastel palette conceals sharp critique. By reconstructing the experience of food preparation with toy-like materials, the artist exposes the surreal absurdity of inaccessible work environments. The piece operates on multiple registers — childhood memory, critique of labour norms, and sensory engagement — inviting us to reimagine professional spaces where disabled people are not an afterthought.

Milly Aburrow (b. 2001, Chichester, UK) is a 2023 graduate of Bath Spa University with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art. Her installations allow her to revisit lived experiences and reclaim agency as a creative practitioner. By stepping into a fictionalised service industry role, Aburrow explores the limitations and inaccessibility of certain professions within her personal life as a disabled artist, using these simulations to challenge societal perceptions and reimagine alternative narratives.

Woman, yes. AA493



HEALING POWER OF HORSES

Kurdistan Region of Iraq. 2017.

Claire Thomas

Salam Khalil, a Yazidi man, beams with joy as he interacts with a horse during a session at the Horses for Hope equine therapy project in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Though unable to walk, Salam's radiant expression and open posture reveal a moment of unfiltered joy and connection — one that redefines what inclusive, therapeutic care can look like.

This image underscores the power of intentionally designed spaces where disability is not a limitation but a starting point for reimagined forms of participation. Horses for Hope offers more than physical therapy; it cultivates dignity, belonging, and emotional restoration in a context where disability is often met with exclusion. Here, care is enacted not only by trained professionals but by peers, animals, and community members alike. The presence of men participating in this circle of care also gently challenges prevailing gender roles, expanding how we understand caregiving and emotional support. As a visual statement, the photograph insists on the centrality of both gender and disability in the creation of equitable and empowering environments.

Curator's note

Salam's joy is magnetic. The image hums with mutual care — between man and horse, between those standing by. His smile becomes a site of resistance and renewal, a quiet but powerful testament to what is possible when healing is made accessible, collective, and kind.



Claire Thomas is an award-winning photojournalist and fine art photographer from Wales, UK, currently based in Egypt. Her photojournalism work focuses on political and military conflicts, human rights, and humanitarian and environmental crises.

Woman, no. AA168