

“An Archaeology of Disability” research station opens to previews

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David Gissen, Jennifer Stager, Mantha Zarmakoupi for Biennale Architettura 2021: “How will we live together?”
by Hashim Sarkis (MIT)

The accessibility of historic architecture not only determines who can experience the past, but it also informs how we think about disabled people as part of history. This installation presents an experiment in the historic reconstruction of the Acropolis in Athens. Our reconstructions recover ideas about impairment at one of the most canonical, influential, and notoriously *inaccessible* historic architectural sites.

The elements we reconstruct include an enormous ramp from the fifth century BCE that once connected the Acropolis to the Agora below; a gallery of paintings at the top of the ramp; and a small stone seat, described by an ancient visitor to the site, that offered rest. These elements vanished long ago, and none have any precisely known physical, visual, or material quality. We use contemporary ideas about impairment, access, and disability aesthetics to reconstruct them into a variety of physical forms as valid as any other. Disability emerges as a form of historical inquiry, archaeology, and reconstruction—informed by the experience of collective human difference.

David Gissen works at the intersection of architecture, history, and experimental design. He is Professor of Architecture and Urban History at the Parsons School of Design and the New School University.

Jennifer Stager specializes in the art and architecture of the ancient Mediterranean and its afterlives. She is an Assistant Professor, History of Art at Johns Hopkins University.

Mantha Zarmakoupi explores ancient art, architecture and urbanism. She is Morris Russell and Josephine Chidsey Williams Assistant Professor in Roman Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania.

“An Archaeology of Disability” is on view from 22.05.2021-21.11.2021, Venice, Arsenale
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