

ADAM ROY COHOON

Toronto visual artist **Adam Roy Cohoon**, an active member of the accessibility advocacy community, is creating a film about the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame.

Cohoon began his advocacy as a youth, growing up in Kincardine, Ontario. Following his move as a young adult to Toronto, he soon became a vocal advocate for change in his new hometown. As part of his activism, he regularly speaks in public about accessibility issues, and he serves on committees as an advocate for people with disabilities at several Toronto organizations, including Citizens With Disabilities – Ontario, Vibrant Healthcare’s Anne Johnston Health Station, Walk Toronto and TTC riders.



One day in 2016, Cohoon discovered the Canadian Disability Hall of Fame by accident during a visit to Metro Hall. Moved and motivated by what he saw, he soon began work on a short Super 8 film about the exhibit, with the goal of raising awareness and encouraging more people to discover it for themselves. The yet-to-be titled film is scheduled to debut in January 2020.

We caught up to Adam late this past summer to ask him about his art and advocacy, and how they intersect with the hall.

When did you begin exploring your artistic side and working in the visual arts?

It was back around 2001. I was a little bit of a geek, a tech person, and had signed up for all the CBC newsletters. Through one of them, I learned of their ZED Project, which was about promoting digital online storytelling. The best entries were shown late at night on television. I started watching some of those videos and got inspired.

So I decided to do a little video about my local community called Life Blooked. The pitch for the video was to mount a camera on the back of my wheelchair and go around my neighbourhood. This was before they had small GoPro cameras, so I duct taped a tripod with my camera to my wheelchair and got my producer to push the buttons as I drove around. That’s how I first got into it.

Is there a connection between your work as an artist and your activism?

My feeling is that the way accessibility issues are typically communicated works well for more academic audiences,

but it doesn’t necessarily work for regular people. I believe that if you can find a creative way to tell a story about some of this stuff, through a medium where it’s not a straightforward lecture, then more people are going to get it.

How did you become aware of the Disability Hall of Fame?

The story is that my Walk Toronto committee meetings

are held at Metro Hall, and on one occasion about three years ago, I arrived early for the meeting. So I was wandering around the main floor killing time, and a security guy saw me. He said, “Excuse me, are you looking for the Disability Hall of Fame?” And, you know, so I wouldn’t be pinched for loitering, I said, “Sure.” I thought that if there was anything to it, I might have something to do for the next 45 minutes.

What was your reaction?

I found that I knew most of the athletes inducted into the hall, but I didn’t know the stories of a lot of the other people — and that got me curious about them... It worked to inspire me and made me realize that there is a hole in the disability community in terms of knowing our history. I am definitely going to do work in this area, for example through oral histories, to collect and curate more of the history. Not in a scholarly form, because we do okay at that, but in a form that reaches regular people and is easily digestible in the 21st Century wired era.

Do you have any final thoughts that you want to share?

I just want everybody that reads this article to think about what they can do, with their own words and through the media channels they’re connected to, to help spread the word about the Hall of Fame. Even if you enlighten only one person, it will be worth it.

Want to get in touch with Adam Roy Cohoon? You can reach him at arcohoon@gmail.com or through Twitter [@ARC23](https://twitter.com/ARC23). Also, you can view a collection of his short films at www.youtube.com/ARC23.