

## AN INFINITE CANVAS TO PROMOTE SOCIAL INCLUSION



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Frida Kahlo once said: “Feet, why do I need them for if I have wings to fly.” For the renowned Mexican artist, her lower extremities were never useful in discovering the world. Nor to interpret it. However, she had art. Art allowed her to express her emotions and raised her to the cusp of Latin American surrealism, going down in history as one of the most influential women and painter in our region.

Frida is not the only one. **Of the more than one billion people in the world who live with some type of disability**, more and more people find a vehicle of expression and social inclusion through creative and cultural industries, an ecosystem that makes over US\$124 billion a year in Latin America and the Caribbean.

“Art is fundamental for social inclusion since it is part of popular culture, which builds the narrative of who we are,” explains Juan Pablo Salazar, IDB Social Sector consultant on disability issues.

### THE DEVELOPMENT IN CATALINA'S EYES

**Catalina Muñoz**, a 23-year-old Colombian woman, discovered a new form of expression and a professional career in painting. She was born with Silver-Russell syndrome, a congenital disease that causes growth disorders and since the age of



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seven she suffers from Chiari malformation, restricting her mobility and putting her life at risk from a very young age.

Cata, as her family calls her, has not let her disability to become her only label. Since 2014, **she discovered that she had an innate talent for painting which she demonstrates in her exhibits.** “Catalina has allowed us to connect to her world through her paintings. Everyone has a similar aesthetic and reflects their joy,” explains her sister and psychologist, Lucero Muñoz.

**Catalina made her first exhibition in 2017**, a collection of portraits of artists, family and recreations of famous works, which she named **Connecting Worlds**. “All her works have one thing in common: big eyes, which allows to express everything she feels,” says Lucero.

Her collection includes interpretations of Leonardo Da Vinci and Vincent Van Gogh. However, **who she identifies the most is with Frida Kahlo**. Not only because Frida used a corset to hold her back just like her, but also because she never let disability limit her creativity.

“Creative industries have a democratizing role since, in the eyes of art consumers, a work of art is no different because it is made by a person with or without a disability. It also has the capacity to show a different worldview, which may not find a space in other productive sectors,” says Trinidad Zaldívar, head of the IDB's Creativity and Culture Unit.

**In Colombia, the creative industries, which include visual arts, generated exports worth more than 900 million dollars.** However, to Catalina, the return on investment is much greater: it is a life project. “Cata is much more than her disability. She is a student of art history, she is an artist and she is an inspiration,” says her sister Lucero.

## **A NEW FORM OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION**

**The value of art for social inclusion has not only materialize in this side of the world. In Asia-Pacific, where technology has allowed artists to express emotions in other forms beyond words, the creative and cultural industries represent the largest source of income (34%) and jobs (40%), according to Unesco.**



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Such is the case of **Kento Dai**, a 20-year-old Japanese man with a physical and intellectual disability, which causes him to have limited mobility and ability to speak. In search of a professional career, he began taking art classes at **Studio COOCA in Hiratsuka, just south of Tokyo**. There, as part of his therapy, Kento developed a new computer-assisted drawing style. "I find it somewhat entertaining and exciting, and I hope it allows me to become a famous painter," he says.

Studio COOCA works to deliver tools so that people with different disabilities can play an active role in society, and find work within the cultural and creative industries. "We have many people with disabilities who have started drawing as part of their therapy," explains Sekine Shonei, a Studio COOCA professor. "What I enjoy most is working with my students and how I can connect with them through their art," says Shonei.