

Looking forward

By **LISA WILTON**
Calgary Sun

Michelle Decottignies is used to getting surprised reactions.

The producer and artistic director of the second annual Disability Arts Festival says people are often astonished to find out the festival exists.

"A lot of people are surprised that people with disabilities can be this creative," says Decottignies, who is also artistic director of Stage Left Productions. "They are really impressed by the level of work."

Presented by the Calgary Scope Society and One Yellow Rabbit, *A Second Look at Disability Culture* — Another Disability Arts Festival features work by performers and playwrights from Calgary, Toronto and Ottawa.

The festival introduces audiences

to disability culture and allows performers with disabilities to use art as a way to explore the problems and prejudices they face every day.

One of the most personal works at this year's festival is **Alex Bulmer's** *Smudge*. The show was inspired by the Toronto-based playwright's own experiences when she lost her sight.

"It's a staged reading," says Decottignies. "It's about a woman who is going blind, and it's the process she goes through to come to terms with losing her vision as an adult."

The festival kicked off last night with a pay-what-you-can preview of the Disability Action Hall's *As I Am*, a big hit at last year's festival.

Set in the lab of an evil scientist, *As I Am* deals with historical attitudes toward disabled people.

"We take four people and turn them into animals and freaks and lab

rats," explains Decottignies. "We put masks on them and they become these attitudes. It makes the audience think about their stereotypes."

The festival's official opening tonight sees performances of *As I Am* and Bulmer's *Smudge*.

Disability video screenings will be held tomorrow, while Friday's gala fundraiser and cabaret features *As I Am*, scenes from One Yellow Rabbit's *Dream Machine*, stand-up comic **Alan Shain's** one-man show, *Still Waiting for that Special Bus*, a silent auction and dance.

Saturday is the Short New Works day with showings of four pieces starting at 2 p.m. with a closing night celebration at 7 p.m.

The Festival takes place at the Big Secret Theatre in the Arts Centre. Tickets available at the door.

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