



IMAG

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InSEA ART Education VISUAL Journal IMAG intends to provide a visual platform, which, in line with the constitution of InSEA, will help foster international cooperation and understanding, and promote creative activity in art through sharing experiences, improving practices, and strengthening the position of art in all educational settings. IMAG is an international, online, Open Access and peer-reviewed e-publication for the identification, publication and dissemination of art education theories and practices through visual methods and media.

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Welcome to IMAG #8. This issue is inspired by the recent work in disability studies and the arts, still in its nascent stage in most countries. We were particularly inspired to form the call for essays of this issue based on the work of Mia Mingus, a well-known disability activist and disabled adoptee from Korea, who encourages the notion that the disability identity does not exist in isolation, but rather co-exists with other identity markers, such as sexuality, class, gender and race, as well as the social and political impacts of societies—the ubiquitous “inequalities of socioeconomic and racial structures” (Connor, 2016, p. 496). Disability activists insist on their inclusion with other marginalized and oppressed identities, since they believe that oppression is what they have most in common within the highly diverse disability category. In this issue the guest editors advocate for a less restricted discourse about disability beyond the “multi-layered establishment” of special education (p. 494). As David Connor suggests, in a democratic society alternative ideas to established practices deserve attention. The art educators and artists in this issue offer a variety of ways these ideas can take place in the classroom, the studio, the community center, or on the stage. The authors also explore how art practices can help to inform knowledge of society and its institutions, which often are based on normative values and practices.

British theatre director and playwright Paddy Masefield (1997) became disabled in middle-age. He thought, that had he woken up Black or a woman he would have felt far more comfortable. That was how little he knew about disability. How much do any of us know (as abled people) about the life experience of disability? And yet, people who identify as disabled form the largest minority group in the world (WHO, 2019). And it is likely that many others experience non-normative bodymind during their lives. Therefore, the notion that disability touches only those who are labeled as “special” is a false idea. Given Masefield’s career in theatre arts, his attention turned toward how disability is made invisible or misrepresented by the non-disabled media. Instead, he found a vibrant community that crossed the barriers of age, gender, race, and nationality.

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The authors in this issue reflect the vibrancy of an international disability arts community by shifting the art made by the disabled artist from a form of inclusive education or therapy to an important cultural contribution. As Jennifer Eisenhauer (2007) noted, disabled artists in the school have been limited by the notion of institutionalized inclusion. Even within this well-intended practice, disability remains a de-contextualized individual problem rather than part of a rich human diversity. “Inclusionism” puts disabled artists in the circumscribed position of striving to achieve the level of their non-disabled peers. And thus they are defined as lacking and inferior, which leads to their exclusion from the socioeconomic and political structures that maintain the disabled bodymind in an outdated concept of human existence.

In the first essay, “on the relationship between joy and mental illness,” Carol Zou’s visual and poetic autopathography about her post-traumatic stress disorder is the result of what she calls the intergenerational trauma of a child of parents of the Cultural Revolution in China. Her inclusion of joy in the title is appropriate considering the positive shift from tragedy narratives to memoirs and autobiographies. In this visual memoir, as with others in this collection, Zou reclaims her illness in an exploration of her embodied self. With impressionistic black and white images of nature, places, and spaces, she explores the inbetweenness of living with both mental illness and joy. Thomas G. Couser (1991) calls the flowering of autopathology “a sign of cultural health—an acknowledgement and an exploration of our condition as embodied selves” (p. 65). He notes that the majority of these narratives are written by women. Coincidentally, all but one of the articles in this issue are written by individuals who identify themselves as women.

In “The Yellow Crayon: Rhetoricity, Mental Disability, and Art Education,” Jennifer (Eisenhauer) Richardson writes a personal account of experiencing a diminished sense of self-worth within an institution. The yellow crayon becomes a metaphor and symbol for the low expectations of the “Other” by the “mentally fit” in a psychiatric

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section of an emergency room. In response to a most basic need, a pencil or pen with which to write, she was given a yellow crayon. Eisenhauer Richardson writes, “When a woman with a disability is handed a yellow crayon with which to write, an assumption is made that both a woman and a person with a mental disability has nothing to say.” The result was the use of the crayon as a creative tool and the writing of a poem of found text that expresses how people with mental disabilities are positioned as non-rhetorical, or not heard. Her images are close-ups of the creative use of a crayon, displaying the selected words, “voice,” “word,” “a lullaby breathing,” on the surface of textured paper. She asks how often we, as art educators, have offered the equivalent of a yellow crayon to students with mental disabilities.

In the third visual essay, “Archiving Spaces: Walking, Murmuring, and Writing with Artist Nicole Storm,” Min Gu follows Nicole Storm during her daily routine at the Creative Growth Art Center in Oakland California. Her routine comprises collecting and “archiving” incidental studio materials left on tables and desks, such as studio handouts, email printouts, napkins, and nametags. Storm’s artwork is a collection of such memorabilia, which narrates her interests and attachments, especially to the staff at Creative Growth. Gu writes, “As such, Nicole’s art practice constitutes archival performance,” or the “archive as artwork.” In her images, Gu shows Storm’s artworks, and her journey around the art center. More importantly, the images unveil Storm’s archival practice. Gu’s visual recounting of Nicole’s process also becomes an archival performance, and an archival encounter for the reader.

G.H. Greer’s visual essay, “Clear Margins: A Portrait of Allies—A dialogue and a Map,” explores the intersection between a visible and invisible disability; between a mother with cancer and a child with depression. The mother/child relationship, which has at times been fraught with divergent needs, is described through their dialogue. The non-fictional dialogue with Greer’s mother and author Anne Bishop, creates an additional dialogue between Greer’s “reality at

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the time” and their “aspirational self.” Greer writes, “By employing dialogue between reality and aspiration, and creating the conditions for serendipity, the author aims to move beyond the binaries of giving and receiving when it comes to care, inclusion, and conflicting needs.” Greer begins by unpacking the intent of Universal Design: what is good for some is good for all, and asks if the needs of some are, in fact, good for others. Their relationship with their mother becomes the entry point to examine such issues. Their phrenological illustrations of themselves and their mother depict the images that illustrated mental traits in nineteenth-century pseudoscience. By replacing the diagram’s labels with word associations, they use visual play as a form of resistance, create serendipitous poetry, and eventually step away from medicalized stigma.

In “not the epitome of normalcy,” Karen Keifer-Boyd describes a moment during her five years in Lubbock Texas in which she spotted the unusual appearance of a cloud in the perpetual blue sky. Her photograph of the cloud hovering over the landscape later became a visual narrative for the “White abled-bodied hetero-male [as] the epitome of normalcy in which all others are judged as lesser, as abnormal.” The constant arid climate and homogenous life forms of the desert become metaphors for enforced sameness at her University. The relief of sudden canyons that appear in a flat landscape is a reminder of diversity and difference, hidden within the University out of fear of marginalization.

“IMAGINE a Place Photographed by Those who Cannot See” by Noemí Peña Sánchez, is based on an exhibition and seminar with the Faculty of Fine Arts in Complutense University of Madrid. The project explores how both sighted and visually impaired people work together in a photographic interpretation of imagined places. The photographic narratives of the visually impaired were inspired by memories of places they had been, which were then interpreted by sighted people as a sensorial rather than visual representation. The dialogue that followed was then documented through the author’s camera. The images depict both the visual and tangible sources of

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inspiration for the memories, and moments of the dialogue between the participants. Peña Sánchez writes, “The author’s interest lies in creating connections between time and what is visible through the camera.”

“Seeing and Seeing Through: Negotiating the Intersection of Feminism and Disability,” by Alexandra Allen, is a narrative autobiography that investigates feminism and disability as it intersects with the male gaze. Allen parses out the definition of the stare and the gaze based on Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s (1997) study in which “the gaze sexualizes the female form, whereby the stare is a way of looking at the disabled as a ‘grotesque spectacle” (p. 285). Allen experienced the stare as a woman with mental disabilities and the male gaze as an objectification of her body as a young model. She visualizes these intersecting identities in a three-dimensional art work that describes the shifting context of social norms in which the female body is fetishized as either sexual or deviant.

In the final visual essay, “An Interview with Visual Artist and Body Positivity Activist Viola Thiele on Visible Hidden Disabilities,” Nina Stuhldreher examines how “fatness,” although in plain sight nevertheless resists the category of disability. Viola Thiele is a visual artist and activist in Germany who challenges “fat shaming” by performing as a “fat person,” and thus insisting that her audience sees the world through her eyes. Stuhldreher writes, “This potential change of perspectives shows the productively disruptive power that disability studies can have, and should actually come with a trigger warning for art educators.” In their interview, Thiele describes how her visible anomaly gives others permission to judge her and draw conclusions about her life. Her performance group “Mosh Mosh” which she calls “an electro-glam-fem-trash-performance duo” enables her to turn body shaming into a positive experience.

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