

“Terms such as *special needs* and *special education* set up barriers to a shared education and socialization between children with disabilities and their nondisabled peers.”

## **Art in Institutions:** The Emergence of (Disabled) Outsiders

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In this article, we use a disability studies lens to examine ways in which the artworks of disabled people<sup>1</sup> are bonded in a common sociopolitical experience. We analyze the history surrounding institutional art and the emergence of community art centers at the time of deinstitutionalization in the late 20th century. As a result of this synchronicity, art centers were able to offer the Arts as a means of communication, as well as to assist disabled people in making smooth transitions into their communities. We suggest that the innovative communication techniques developed in these centers could be adopted within all art programs and inclusive classrooms that serve severely disabled students, particularly learners with communication impairments. The article presents the House of Artists, The Community Growth Art Center, and the Grass Roots Art and Community Effort as strong examples of art education sites that transcend traditional “outsider” stereotypes by diligently striving to understand how and what disabled people communicate in the visual arts.

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**P**eople with disabilities, especially disabilities that affect communication and other social behavior, present a pedagogical challenge for art educators. Only 40 years ago, before the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 [now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004], disabled people were denied the civil right of public education. Many people with physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities were wrongly labeled incompetent and uneducable and, therefore, relegated to permanent medical institutions. Traditional special education practices often have embraced such medicalized notions of disability (Blandy, 1991; Derby, 2011; Eisenhauer, 2007; Wexler 2009, 2012a), stemming from the ableist precept that to be able-bodied is better than being disabled (e.g., walking is better than not walking; seeing and hearing are better than blindness and deafness; talking is better than not talking). Traditional special education often has promoted clinical techniques, such as external rewards and punishment, with the chief aim of persuading disabled people to act within the sphere of normality. These have been mostly ineffective in providing personal development—particularly for learners with disabilities that affect communication, including autism, Down syndrome, deafness,<sup>2</sup> mental illness, and

cognitive disabilities. The medical model of disability ascribes pathological labels that position people as outsiders, literally and figuratively, and fails to honor disabled individuals' embodied ways of knowing.

Since the deinstitutionalization movement, in which disabled people have been restored to society, a variety of unconventional research has imparted greater understanding of disabled people. One example that remains unexamined in our field is art centers for people with disabilities, several of which have produced established artists. House of Artists in Austria; Creative Growth Art Center (CGAC) in Oakland, California; and Grass Roots Art and Community Effort (GRACE) in Hardwick, Vermont, are three examples of art centers that favor nontraditional teaching methods that allow artists to develop their own iconography with minimal restriction. What has emerged are the artists' own narratives and self-representations, bringing art and education closer to eroding the boundaries between normality and disability as these terms are defined by Western cultural standards (Wexler, 2012a).

We argue that such arts centers offer an alternative to the unexamined expectations and assumptions of the medical model of disability that drive special education practices. The following describes the trajectory of the appearance of institutional art, which was initially used to recognize patients' mental conditions, but then evolved into an affinity for the artists' unique ideas, experiences, and aesthetics.

### **The Emergence of (Disabled) Outsiders Within Institutions**

The wide spectrum of humanity subsumed under the term *outsiders* and their artistic

practices, known as *outsider art*, have captivated scholars in multiple disciplines since the early 1900s. The first examples, which tended to pathologize the artists, came from doctors in psychiatric institutions who wrote clinical studies about their patients' artwork. Jean Dubuffet, who longed for a raw, unadulterated approach to art that rejected the principles of modernism, repositioned the meaning of the inmates' work as an ideal art form. In recent decades, art critics (Cardinal, 1972, 2000, 2008; Rexer, 1998a, 1998b, 2001), art historians (Foster, 2000), art educators (Jagodzinski, 2005; Krug, 1992), and art therapists (Henley, 2012) have written compelling, intimate, and engaging responses to such marginalized artists, challenging traditional clinical discourses. Their critical language has acknowledged the destabilizing nature of the interactions with radical forms of Otherness. These authors have challenged outsider art discourses that stereotype people who exhibit atypical behaviors, which are usually related to disabilities that affect communication, mental processes, and social interaction. While not all outsider artists have been diagnosed with mental illness or have been institutionalized, the mystique of the outsider is deeply invested in ableist, clinical discourses. Writers are becoming sensitive to discourse as a power transaction that routinely represses or ignores the most interesting and recalcitrant features of the work (Cardinal, 2000).

Of special interest is the art form's unteachability that defies Dow's elements of design and principles of composition (Efland, 1990) and the Bauhaus legacy that underlies U.S. art education. As purveyors of the canon, many art educators present art as a rational discipline where "economics, safety, and measured standards take precedence" (Jagodzinski, 2005, p. 250), which compromises the spontaneous drive for personal meaning, particularly for the most mentally and physically impaired students (Jagodzinski, 2005). Student artists struggle to be the authority of their own work, but they cannot overcome this disabling tension to capture the ethical and political obligation to the public

as represented by the art teacher (Jagodzinski, 2005). Additionally, inclusion classrooms in the public schools have put new demands on teachers to skillfully accommodate children who in the past would have been institutionalized or homebound. Since mainstreaming began in the 1970s, the art room has often been the first regular classroom where disabled learners are placed; yet, the needs of disabled learners have often gone unmet. Also, an accidental product of mainstreaming has promoted disability as an issue of individuals, and the profuse labeling of disabilities has done more to disenfranchise people who identify as disabled (Derby, 2011) than it has to liberate them. Consequently, disabled learners—especially those with communication-related disabilities—remain outsiders in most art classrooms. Art educators continue to work in settings that lack clear boundaries and strategies for accommodating disabled learners—not only in terms of physical and curricular environments, but also in terms of culture.

We suggest that art education practices could benefit from a critical disability studies analysis that builds on critical literature about outsider artists by recognizing their artistic processes and contributions beyond their institutional origins. In a sentiment that applies to all disabled artists, MacGregor (1999) wrote,

To reject the art of a people (or to say it is not art, which is the same thing) is in the deepest sense to deny their reality. The long invisibility of the art of the insane was the result of a determined effort to ignore, or deny, the existence of the insane. Their sculpture, their paintings and drawings, were dismissed as valueless because the men and women who made them were understood to be either inferior human beings, or even "inhuman" human beings. Because of the label they wore, their ability to speak for themselves was taken away, and the truthfulness of all they said was denied. (p. 309)

We follow our discussion of outsider art theory with three renowned institutionalized

artists—Johann Hauser, Judith Scott, and Larry Bissonnette<sup>3</sup>—whose work exemplifies the visible contributions made by this population of artists. They began their work in community art centers that played an essential role in recognizing their artistic potential and, for Scott and Bissonnette, in easing the transition from institution to community. Art centers such as these are emerging as exemplary models with methodologies for disabled people and that lead to meritorious artistic production.

### **Studies of Art by Disabled People Before Deinstitutionalization**

#### **Foucault's Archaeology of Madness and Art**

The ableist discourses of disabled people, as well as our cultural interest in their art, have been deeply rooted in the formation of mental asylums. Foucault (1965/1988) explained in *Madness and Civilization* that mental disability<sup>4</sup> came to be understood as an affront to nature and the evolution of the human body and mind. Mental disability was deemed incompatible with reason, creativity, and productivity, and was conflated with disease and criminality, which gave rise to the asylum as a site for eliminating insane people from society (p. 260). The most important aspect of the asylum, for Foucault, was not the architectural site, but rather the relationship between the psychiatrist and patient. The psychiatrist exercised supreme authority as “Father and Judge, Family and Law” (p. 272), assuming not only patients’ agency, but also their voice (since their “gibberish” supposedly could not be understood or trusted)—a trend that persisted in outsider art and which has survived to some degree in special education. To challenge this thinking, Foucault argued that the works of van Gogh and other mad artists<sup>5</sup> demonstrated the value of mentally disabled peoples’ thoughts and perspectives; he implied that art functions as an alternative mode of expression for diverse ideas.

### **The Evolution of Outsider Art**

The first major initiative to systematically analyze the art of mentally disabled people began with *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922/1995), authored by German psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn, an intern at Heidelberg University’s psychiatric hospital. Although Prinzhorn’s project began for diagnostic purposes, as an art historian, his interest in the art of his patients appeared to be more subjective than clinical—more as “*artwork* than as *scientific document*” (Cardinal, 2008, p. 3, emphasis original). Heidelberg University hired the art historian-psychiatrist to expand its collection, now known as the Prinzhorn Collection, of over 5,000 artworks by about 450 patients of psychiatric institutions. The work of institutionalized people opened a window for Prinzhorn to straddle the artists’ clinical and artistic manifestations. He theorized that “the will to form,” symbolize, and pictorialize order is instinctual and not compromised by cognition (Rhodes, 2000, p. 61). Therefore, “these images seemed to be more purely manifest” and “provided rare access to that psyche” (pp. 61, 62). We conjecture that the Prinzhorn Collection was the start of a prodigious interest in the art of institutionalized disabled people. Audiences rejected clinical perspectives by assuming a spectator position of the pioneering, mysterious *Art Brut* and later outsider art, which Cardinal (2008) said continues to thrill audiences.

The term *Art Brut* was coined by Jean Dubuffet for his collection of *brut*, or raw, work of asylum inmates and others on the fringe of society. Dubuffet established the “Collection de l’art brut” in Lausanne, Switzerland, in which Bissonnette and Scott have been included and for which Cardinal’s (1972) *Outsider Art* was composed as a study. Dubuffet positioned the asylum inmate as a radical version of the Romantic genius, “unscathed by artistic culture” and free to derive material from within to reinvent art “solely by means of the artist’s own impulses” (as cited in Foster, 2000, p. 12). Dubuffet found in these spontaneous, socially and culturally unrestrained works a “truer” art, “an upsurge of

innovation and resourcefulness, a breakthrough into unsuspected worlds that will make [them] think twice about the so-called 'primitive' character of these works, as the pontiffs of the constituted art forms would have us regard it" (as cited in Thévoz, 1976, p. 7). Before the outsider movement from which Dubuffet's collection directly draws—and before audiences' acquired taste for this peculiar artwork—Dubuffet made the case for a departure from the accepted codes of the art world, its conditioned responses, and homogeneous frame of reference.

Outsider art has been a contested label among art historians who have argued about which works embody authenticity. In 1972, Roger Cardinal coined the term *outsider art* for the title of his book, solving the need for an Anglophone version of Art Brut for the sake of British readers. The term has stuck, albeit with changing meanings (Cardinal, 2008, para. 3).

[I]t is easy to see the rather ghastly attraction of defining an art which is strange and unsettling in terms of its producers being eccentrics, weirdos, dropouts, recalcitrants, lunatics, convicts, hermits, misfits, and so forth. But I must insist that, despite the evidence that certain aberrant life-styles and deviant beliefs do contribute to the nourishing of an Outsider approach to art, there is a better way of handling the issue of definition: namely, by underlining the anti-conventional nature of the artmaking itself, its idiosyncrasy, its often unworldly distance from artistic norms. Let me repeat that Outsider Art earns its name not because of its association with a lurid case-history or a sensational biography, but because it thrills its audience as a challenging visual experience. (Cardinal, 2008, para. 5)

If true, how is it challenging and why is it thrilling? Perhaps, on one hand, audiences are enamored by the spectacle of an exotic Other. On the other hand, audiences are intrigued, both with "the tremendous power and beauty of the images themselves, which in their profound

strangeness and integrity possess pictorial presence sufficient to compel attention" (MacGregor, 1999, p. 309) and with the resonance of fully present artists who intentionally communicate lived experiences and internal states of being through their artworks.

### **Deinstitutionalization and Its Effect on Arts Programs for Disabled People**

Cardinal's broad inclusion of noninstitutionalized people under the outsider umbrella was undoubtedly influenced by the deinstitutionalization of mentally disabled people that occurred in the latter half of the 20th century. In the course of deinstitutionalization, some institutions and institutional art programs evolved to reinvent the ways in which artists work and how they are defined. An early example was the House of Artists in Klosterneuburg, Austria, which Johann Feilacher restructured from Leo Navratil's 1954 Gugging program at the *Heil und Pflegeanstalt Gugging* [Sanatorium and Care Home] (Figure 1) that was founded on the principles of Prinzhorn ("History of the House of Artists," n.d.). House of Artists has been separate from the general psychiatric ward and its rigid schedule, focusing not on "preparing patients to re-enter society... but rather offering patients a new social identity" (Navratil, 1994, p. 210). Residents have been treated first and foremost as artists, not as mental patients, and the merits of their artwork have been emphasized while their mental illnesses have been regarded as private matters (Maclagan, 2009). The familial style of caretaking and personal freedom has enabled artists such as internationally acclaimed Johann Hauser to become successful and relatively autonomous given their conditions.

Around the time of Cardinal's book release, a number of important events regarding deinstitutionalization unfolded. The infamous Willowbrook asylum in Staten Island, New York—misleadingly called a State School—was scandalized by the revelation of the young reporter Geraldo Rivera. In 1972, Rivera entered the institution with a stolen key and filmed the mistreatment of 50 developmentally disabled

children under the supervision of a single attendant.<sup>6</sup> A few years before, Burton Blatt and Fred Kaplan's hidden camera revealed similar treatment of inmates at five state institutions. "Kaplan's grainy photographs taken secretly of residents, many naked and sitting on bare floors, eerily echoed the disturbing photos of emaciated and benumbed survivors of Nazi concentration camps" (Shapiro, 1994, p. 161).

Many institutions across the country soon closed while various outpatient centers opened, including Creative Growth Art Center (CGAC) in Oakland, California—the oldest art center in the world for disabled artists. In 1975, a similar center, Grass Roots Art and Community Effort (GRACE), opened in the Northeast Kingdom in Vermont. Among the excellent artists who emerged from both centers, Judith Scott and Larry Bissonnette became the most praised and documented. Many of the first generation of artists entered CGAC and GRACE with the label *mental retardation*, a catchall label common in institutions. They chose instead to label themselves *artists*,

their personalities trumping their former institutionalized identities. Their artworks are relics of anonymity and nonbeing-ness; unexpected internal lives were revealed as they became proficient in their craft (J. DeStaeblar, personal communication, July 2012).

Scott and Bissonnette came to CGAC and GRACE respectively in the early years of the programs. Both were confined in public institutions in the 1940s and 1950s, their diagnoses of mental illness indicating that they and individuals like them were not responsive to social and educational stimulation that, subsequently, were not provided. In middle age, Bissonnette and Scott were removed from institutionalization by their siblings, who led them to GRACE and CGAC, where they received attention from the art world as outsider artists.

In the following paragraphs we analyze the identity transformations of Hauser, Scott, and Bissonnette, each of whom has become legendary inside and outside of the rarefied field of outsider art. We examine how their identities were constructed according to medical misconceptions, institutionalization, and misrepresentation in the mid-20th century and how they have been reconstructed through deinstitutionalization and participation within art communities. This is in light of the transformation of the disabled identity from within disabled populations—in this case people with mental illness, autism, and Down syndrome—rather than from the narratives given to them by experts. Medical experts and scholars have attempted plausible theories for disabilities that, without communication with the subject, can only be conjectured. For example, Simon Baron-Cohen's *theory of mind* hypothesis elucidated the "terrible triad"<sup>7</sup> of impairments that wrongly presumes that people with autism are incapable of empathy. Baron-Cohen's theory of mind becomes problematic when confronted by symbolic works such as Scott's or narratives such as Bissonnette's and Hauser's, which suggests that we should remain skeptical of experts' theories—particularly when



Figure 1. The House of Artists (Gugging) building, Austria.

we recognize aspects of our own embodied knowledge in such encoded forms.

With the exception of Bissonnette's facilitated communication in middle age, all three artists were unable to communicate through speech and writing, to varying degrees. Unlike the purist position of the early collectors of alternative art and the fear of contamination as a result, the artists benefited from their audiences, but never to the extent that their work was driven by success. What audiences did alter in Hauser, Scott, and Bissonnette, we argue, is a change in their status, identity, and loss of anonymity (Rhodes, 2000).

### **Artists With Disabilities That Affect Communication**

#### **Johann Hauser and Gugging/House of Artists**

As a child, Johann Hauser attended a school for intellectually disabled children and never learned to write or count (Artspace, 2013). At age 17, he was admitted to a psychiatric hospital and then transferred to Gugging, where he began to draw. The clinicians at the House of Artists, who have tended to eschew the art therapy model of intervening in the artist's process (Rhodes, 2000, p. 92), have trusted instead in the artists' autonomy to procure intrinsic motivation and, hence, therapeutic benefit. Unlike Prinzhorn, Navratil actively encouraged his patients' artmaking, albeit in an unregimented manner with no pressure or designated work time (Navratil, 1994). Art and writing were to be intrinsic responses to personal experiences in order to create a natural environment where patients could affirm "their identity *as artists* after years of institutionalization" (p. 210, emphasis original).

In addition to finding a comfortable medium of expression, Gugging artists have routinely shown their work and interacted with the public. Hauser's experience of being supported and praised undoubtedly contributed to his success as the most renowned artist of the House, and although he often drew without prompting, he was most productive when he was able to

share his in-progress work and when he was praised (Rhodes, 2000). The manic work for which Hauser was routinely praised—and which fetches top dollar—consisted mainly of fantastic imagery, such as elaborate war machines (Figure 2); ominous demons; and humans with wild hairdos, exposed genitalia, and flamboyant garments. However, his depressed style of simple geometric figures and patterns (Navratil, 1978)—which occasionally appeared in the backgrounds of his manic work—was also endorsed, as evidenced by the selection of Hauser's trademark four-pointed blue star (see Figure 2) as the House's official sign ("History of the House of Artists," n.d.). This gesture recognized that the shapes, lines, colors, and white space that were consistently woven through Hauser's oeuvre denoted a single, complex person rather than separate "split" persons or entities such as "manic/depressed" or "normal/crazy." In addition to emotional support, the nonprofit structure of the House allowed Hauser to purchase acquisitions and contribute toward his own studio upkeep (Navratil, 1994, p. 209), thus adding a tangible dimension to his autonomy.

House of Artists' current director, Feilacher, understands that while not all mentally disabled people are able to live independently, their artwork is culturally significant, perhaps even sustainable. To this end, House of Artists offers an open studio where the general public may share the experience of Gugging artists and an onsite museum where they may view and study the work of Gugging artists.

#### **Judith Scott and Creative Growth Art Center**

Until late in the 19th century, mental institutions rarely provided artmaking opportunities, although needlework was offered to women as handiwork (MacGregor, 1999). When artmaking appeared in institutions and mentally disabled people became recognized as artists, many of their early fabric works were relabeled and found their way into the Prinzhorn collection. However, they were the last to emerge

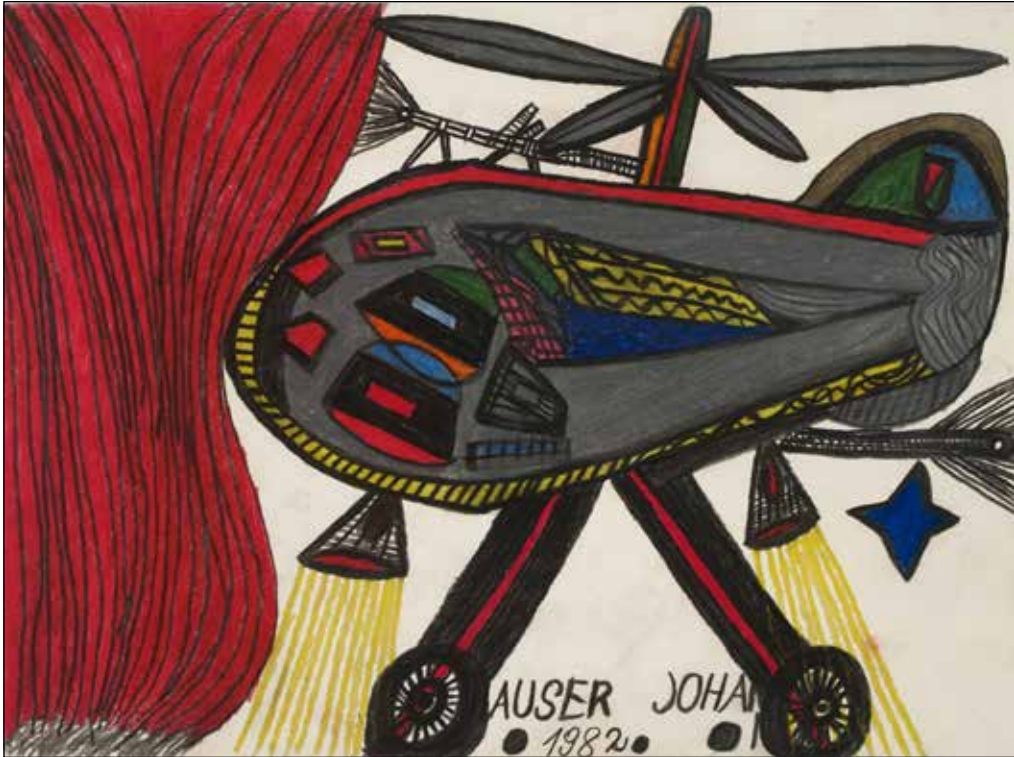


Figure 2. *Hubschrauber und Feuer (Helicopter and Fire)*, 1982, by Johann Hauser.



Figure 3. Judith Scott working.



from obscurity, as MacGregor (1995) noted, and not one female artist was in Prinzhorn's study of "Schizophrenic Masters." Many works were attempts at autobiographies and narratives. One of the earliest examples was made by Adelaide Hall, a lace maker with severe mental illness. In her atypical structural and detailed works, narratives were encoded—although fragmented and disconnected—within the fibers and three-dimensional figures made of cloth.

Scott continued the tradition of "women art," weaving metaphorical and literal cocoons within which she hid personal items. Studio director Jordan DeStabler habitually watched her eye materials and props in the studio, such as a pile of magazines, which would disappear, presumably into her sculptures (personal communication, July 2012). In the disappearance of the objects, there was both a hiding and turning "inside out" (Smith, as cited in di Maria, 2011, p. 2). Her work has been described as powerful—nearly sacred, "a black hole imploding inwards [having] so much power they make you want to be quiet" (Tal R., as cited in di Maria, 2011, p. 12). Scott's fiber sculptures came into being without influence or precedent, the hallmark of outsider art (Figure 3).

MacGregor (1999) compared Scott's protected and sheltered work to the silk worm's spinning the cocoon from its head that then becoming a separate "body" filled with plants, soil, and sand. The beginnings of the cocoon-like structures have been interpreted as instinctual as the silk worm spinning for the survival of its species (Figure 4).

Following this metaphor, Scott's later works became the size of her body. She patted them lovingly as a way of saying goodbye when they were removed from the Center. Her compulsion to create life-sized works may have been her way of reclaiming the loss of her twin and the link to the past. Observers have correlated them to birthing, the giver and taker of maternal love, and rebirth from institutionalization (MacGregor, 1999).

MacGregor (1999) traced the protective wrapping and blanketing with string and fibers to early memories of Scott's mother's knitting and embroidery, abruptly lost at 7 years old with her first confinement in the Ohio Asylum for the Education of Idiotic and Imbecilic Youth. After her transfer to the Gallipolis Developmental Center in Ohio, an incident occurred that foreshadowed an inclination toward cloth and fibers. Because her work in arts and crafts was limited to stuffing her pockets with "stolen" papers and ripping pieces of clothing to shreds,<sup>8</sup> Scott was evaluated as talentless. Her earliest days at CGAC were also unproductive until she found fiber arts. Her first significant work was made from a bundle of willow branches wrapped in soaked rags of deep blues, greens, purples, and reds that became her signature colors. The evolution of her work—her sense of design and color, her sculptural instinct in considering all views of the object—is the development of an intelligent artist, unlike the unintentional repetition and variation often seen in obsessive art (MacGregor, 1999).



Figure 4. [Untitled], by Judith Scott.

### Larry Bissonnette and Grass Roots Art and Community Center

Bissonnette was diagnosed at different times as mentally retarded, clinically insane, schizophrenic, and autistic. At 8 years old, he was locked up in the now-defunct Brandon Training School (BTS) in Vermont,<sup>9</sup> which Bissonnette described as a “nasty residential school better for growing vegetables rather than people,” remarking that “nothing ‘apartheids’ you like the insensitive world of institutional existence” (Biklen & Rossetti, 2005).

After leaving BTS, Bissonnette was transferred to the Vermont Psychiatric Hospital until his sister, Sally, placed him in a residential program for developmentally disabled people. When deinstitutionalized services were cut in Vermont, he went to live with Sally. While at BTS, Bissonnette’s salvation came by breaking into the art room in the middle of the night to make functional artwork such as hand-sewn curtains

from found material, which were so impressive that they were hung in the institution. The preponderance of his paintings at GRACE has been narratives reminiscent of the emptiness and desolation of BTS. His paintings of unpopulated rooms have suggested the arrestment of time in unending isolation (Figure 5).

*Wretches and Jabberers* (2012), a documentary by Gerardine Wurzburg, has brought Bissonnette into public view. Wurzburg and his “partner in crime,” Tracy Thresher, have been on a global quest to change the way people perceive autism. Episodic scenes of empathy and humor between Bissonnette and Thresher have remade the label of autism that claims that people with the label cannot feel compassion, do not have a sense of humor (Asperger, 1944) or do not desire to communicate (Kanner, 1943). They learned to “speak” by typing through the contested method of facilitated communication (FC), suspect because it is thought that the



Figure 5. Larry Bissonnette working.

facilitator's touch might influence the typist's hand.<sup>10</sup> Bissonnette (2014) described typing as being "like a powerful lightning storm knocking outmoded power grids, like people experiencing a religious conversion" (para 4). At a presentation with the director and cast at Times Talks (2011) in New York, Bissonnette responded to a question from the audience about the unreliability of FC: "It is a lip service to our intelligence to find issue with FC because people's learning to communicate starts with a massive paradigm shift in how people who don't speak are seen in our society." FC and the pictorial expression of art were Bissonnette's redemption from institutional totalization, a reclaiming of identity and control of its representation (Figure 6).

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The history of institutionalization, deinstitutionalization, and—finally—the inclusion of young people with disabilities, warrant reflection about social justice, our values, and how

we collectively define them (Bérubé, 1998). The visual messages of Hauser, Scott, and Bissonnette demonstrate the need for our field to broaden its definition of valid communication beyond traditional speech and writing. The communicative behavior of disabled people—which can include bodily tics, atypical gestures, compulsive rituals, and verbal perseveration—may seem foreign and incomprehensible in social settings while the artworks of such people articulate thoughtful, intentional, and valuable lived experiences and ideas about the importance of our social connection to others.

Research in the past several decades has continued to inform labels and practices that set up roadblocks for new discoveries made by activists and allies of disabled people, including family, caseworkers, nonprofessional acquaintances, and disabled people themselves. Experts in disability-related fields have a stake in protecting the worldview they created and, therefore,



Figure 6. Larry Bissonnette working.

have tended to ignore or fail to recognize evidence (Crossley, 1997, p. 164) of the potential for disabled people to function more independently and contribute to society. The progress in institutional art that we discussed demonstrates the importance of paying attention to how and what disabled people communicate. The innovative techniques developed in the art centers that enabled communication with linguistically impaired artists need to be formalized into art programs and all-inclusive art classrooms in which disabled children learn. House of Artists, CGAC, and GRACE provide strong examples of art education programs that move beyond the traditional stereotyping of disabled artists as outsiders by diligently striving to understand and value how and what they communicate.

Successful art centers respond to ableist attitudes and practices through their teaching strategies. CGAC recognizes that most medical and teaching professionals carry ableist attitudes that reflect the medical model of disability. CGAC constructs an environment that alters nondisabled professionals' perspectives through social interaction that engenders mutuality and friendship. In contrast, the mainstreamed and special classrooms of public schools often reinforce the inaccessibility—both physically and mentally—of the curriculum, events, and socialization for children with disabilities. Terms such as *special needs* and *special education* set up barriers to a shared education and socialization between children with disabilities and their nondisabled peers (Derby, 2011). *Special* and other euphemisms prevent the placement of *disability*—a term representing a large minority with strengths and weaknesses—on the same continuum as *ability* and they inhibit students with disabilities from acknowledging and responding to authentic differences regarding corporeal and sociocultural understanding.

In terms of educating disabled learners, all three centers actively encourage disabled artists to explore their own experiences as a means of strengthening their identity, both as individu-

als and as participants in artists' communities. Art educators should foster development of artistic identities of disabled learners, which requires devoted attention to recognizing and honoring such identities in learners' artwork. A critical difference between the practices of art centers and the artistic methodologies of *special art education* is recognition of the merits of disabled artists' work on its own terms rather than treating it as a device for diagnosis or normalization. Because of restrictive state standards, assumptions about what *special art* represents and formalist preferences of art teachers, the art of disabled learners is often considered talentless. Students with disabilities are rarely encouraged to find their own symbols and metaphors that are carriers of emotion and internal conflict. Assumptions are made about the lack of their internal life that precludes the making of personalized art. It is significant to note that for each of the three artists we discussed, this identity took years to develop. Scott's and Bissonnette's work required exposure to a variety of tactile materials that they utilized in nontraditional ways. The common art education strategy of adapting traditional media in hopes of having disabled learners replicate traditional forms needs to be reconsidered. Patience is also important, and establishing long-term goals is advantageous to short-term, project specific objectives.

Finally, art centers educate audiences by promoting the work of disabled artists as valuable artifacts that represent meaningful experiences and ideas. This involves setting up direct interaction with the artists, such as House of Artists' open studios, and it involves professionals working with the artists to devise written artists' statements that accurately discuss the meaning of the work. By advocating for disabled artists to share the value of their work, general public audiences become more knowledgeable about the insights that being disabled engenders, as well as the common experiences, thoughts, and desires that disabled and nondisabled people share.

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## AUTHOR NOTE

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 We use terms such as "disabled people" alongside terms such as "people with disabilities" because, despite APA's insistence upon the latter, person-first language is contentious. Many Disability Studies scholars object to person-first language because: (1) it disenfranchises the disability community by constructing disability as an individual pathology rather than a sociocultural issue; (2) such language is awkward, to some extent reinforcing the presumed awkwardness of disability; (3) the political correctness of the term implies that the problem of ableist oppression has been resolved; and (4) it denies the agency of disabled people to reclaim the term "disabled" (similar to queer, Black, etc.).
- 2 We acknowledge the term d/Deaf, in which "Big D" Deaf, refers to the Deaf community and cultural identity, and "small d" deaf refers to those who do not strongly identify or associate with the Deaf community. Deafness, furthermore, is not always considered to be a disability. Here, we use "deafness" to refer to the sensory condition of being deaf or hard of hearing.
- 3 Hauser died in 1996. Scott died in 2005. Bissonnette continues to work as an artist and activist.

- 4 Many people were institutionalized for insanity for reasons that would not qualify as mental illness by today's standards. These included deafness, autism, unruliness, speech impairments, menstrual conditions, overexertion, cognitive disabilities, religious expression, and sexual deviance, or for mental disorders that can now be treated without institutionalization.
- 5 These are some of the best-known visual artists who produced what we call *mad art*. In addition, there have been many nonvisual modern artists with mental disability—as well as modern masters—who are not immediately thought of as mad artists, including Picasso and Pollock.
- 6 Rivera's film was followed by Jack Fisher's (Meskell & Fisher, 1997) award-winning documentary, *Unforgotten: Twenty-Five Years After Willowbrook*.
- 7 The "terrible triad" of impairment is traditionally defined as three overarching deficits of autism: social interaction, communication, and play (or imagination) (Sacks, 1996).
- 8 For these transgressions, Scott was treated with behavior modification techniques that became popular in the 1960s. At CGAC, she was known to "steal" materials, personal items, and magazines for her sculptures.
- 9 After 10 years, Bissonnette was transferred to the Vermont Psychiatric Hospital in Waterbury. His sister Sally witnessed the uninhabitable conditions at both facilities and moved him to a residential program for the developmentally disabled.
- 10 In facilitated communication, the facilitator touches the arm, shoulder, or wrist of the typist because autists have explained that initiation of an action is one of their most frustrating problems. The desire to take action is in the mind, but the mind cannot command the body to follow through. This has been one of the reasons that autists do not do well when tested by external assessors without their assistants. There have also been problems about the tests themselves, such as unfamiliarity with testing and lack of preparation, lack of confidence, and test anxiety (Biklen & Cardinal, 1997).