

Art History and Disability
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Art history has not been as engaged with disability studies as much as have other areas of the humanities and liberal arts. Disability studies scholars have written about artwork featuring disabled subjects and the work of disabled artists, engaging varying degrees of art historical methodology, whereas art historians have analyzed images by and about disabled people with limited awareness with disability studies. This special issue aims to encourage more interdisciplinary work between the fields and was inspired by three conference panels at the Southeast College Art Conference: *Visualizing Disability: Representations of Disability in Art and Visual Culture* (2011), *Disability and Performance: Bodies on Display* (2012), and *Photographing the Body* (2013).

For art historian W.J.T. Mitchell (2005), a work of art is an object that asks us to look at it. Not only that, we may judge or evaluate it, as well as respond to it emotionally, and it often includes representations of the human form. For these reasons it is imperative that issues central to art history and disability studies related to looking/staring/gazing, expectations and stereotypes, and conformity and difference be considered. Both disability studies and art history are inherently interdisciplinary, and the scholars' approaches in this issue reflect this, drawing on aesthetic theory, psychoanalysis, semiotics, sociology, phenomenology, and reception theory. They bring together the work of disability studies scholars like Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Lennard J. Davis, Tobin Siebers, David Hevey, and Ann Millett-Gallant with the work of scholars more associated with art history and visual culture such as Abigail Solomon-Godeau, José Esteban Muñoz, Linda Nochlin, John Berger, John Tagg, and Susan Sontag. The works under consideration here range from a sixteenth-century portrait to a twenty-first century graphic novel, with two essays examining photographic images relating to disability. The essays address both works representing individuals with disability and work by artists with disability. They contextualize understanding of disability historically, as well as in terms of medicine, literature, and visual culture. All of these essays demonstrate the rich rewards of the type of sustained close looking which characterizes art history at its best. And as the essays dealing with more contemporary works attest, there is a clear interest in contemporary art in the exploration of representation of disability. This interest may also reflect a growing awareness of issues related to disability in present-day scholarship, society, and visual culture.

In this issue, Sara Newman analyzes a sixteenth-century portrait of a woman with facial disfigurement by Quentin Matsys, *A Grotesque Old Woman*, in a variety of historical and art historical frameworks. Newman contrasts contemporary definitions of disability according to the social model, with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European medical, religious, and municipal models. Using an art historical methodology of comparing this portrait with other conventional forms of portraiture from similar social and cultural contexts, Newman discusses how the status of citizens whose bodies deviate from the "norm" varies according to time and place.

Nina Heindl examines *Acme Novelty Library*, a graphic novel by comic artist Chris Ware, discussing how the novel represents a disabled female character through the relationship between image and text. She compares the novel to sculptural and performative representations of female amputees, specifically in the work of Marc Quinn and the performance of Aimee Mullins in Matthew Barney's film *Cremaster 3* (2002). Heindl also engages aesthetics of perception to argue that the viewer/reader constructs the meanings of the representations, how one perceives disability in representations depends on context and formal qualities, as well as the subjective experiences the viewer/reader brings to the exchange. Heindl's argument demonstrates that how disability is constructed socially and politically relates to how it is perceived visually and textually.

Timothy Hiles analyzes photographs of disabled people by Gary Winogrand, Elliot Erwitt, Robert Frank, and Diane Arbus against a historical background of the American Civil Rights Movement and an increasing awareness of cultural diversity. He asserts that these images stereotyped disabled individuals as outside their communities and articulated their exclusion from the "norm," while, in some cases, claiming to show empathy for these "others." Hiles's argument demonstrates how visual and artistic representation both reflects and contributes to the social construction of disability.

Amanda Cachia focuses on the work of two dwarf photographers, Ricardo Gil and Laura Swanson, and how they frame the dwarf subject. She contextualizes their portraits and self-portraits in a history of photographic representations of individuals of short stature, specifically by Diane Arbus, Arthur Fellig (or "Weegee"), Mary Ellen Mark, Bruce Davidson, Garry Winogrand, and Joel Peter-Witkin. Discussing strategies of revealing and concealing the body and analyzing dynamics of the gaze/stare, Cachia argues that Gil's and Swanson's photographs showcase more dimensional aspects of dwarf subjectivity and an embodied perspective of a dwarf.

It has been such a pleasure to work with these innovative and insightful scholars, and we are grateful to the editors of the *Review of Disability Studies* for giving us this opportunity to expand the dialogue between art history and disability studies.

References

Mitchell, W.J.T. (2005) *What do pictures want? The lives and loves of images*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.