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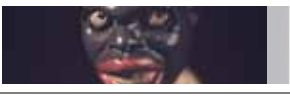










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figure 1  
Photo by Eleanor Batista-Malat,  
grade 7, October 2009.

## Editorial

# WHAT DOES SOCIAL JUSTICE ART EDUCATION LOOK LIKE?

Education for social justice is education for a society where the rights and privileges of democracy are available to all. Art education for social justice places art as a means through which these goals are achieved (Garber, 2004, p. 16).

Social justice involves a negotiated vision, which can be surprising at times. The photograph above is from a community art program called Kid's View: On Assignment, sponsored by Prairie, Inc. (<http://www.cincinnatikidsview.com/>), a Cincinnati art gallery with a strong mission of community engagement and social justice. In this program, 10 local middle-school age children participated in an after school photography class that introduced

them to four community agencies in the surrounding Northside neighborhood. One of these agencies, Visionaries and Voices (<http://www.visionariesandvoices.com/content/vv-home/>) provides art studio space, activities, and exhibitions for adults with developmental disabilities. Kid's View students learned about the work of Visionaries and Voices' artists, especially Nikki Martin, a fashion designer who created the garments modeled by other Visionary and Voices artists and staff in a fashion show.

At face value, a traditional white-clad bride in the runway strikes as conventional (Figure 1). It is tempting to interpret any fashion show as a celebration of consumer culture, and the bridal figure as the embodiment of glamour, women's wedding fantasies, and mainstream representations of marriage as a heterosexual union. However, under the surface, we find nuance. This fashion show was created and carried out by people often excluded from the creative side of the fashion industry, and, therefore, it

became empowering. Furthermore, the event took place just before the local election and had the goal of creating awareness about a levy issue supporting the city's developmental disabilities services, which was ultimately sanctioned. The photograph demonstrates that Kid's View students learned about photography, but more importantly, they also learned about the exciting affinity between art and activism, the importance of getting involved, and the possibility of making a difference.

**Transformative Education** | I am moved by the proposition that education is a vehicle of social transformation. I am first generation college-educated, of a mixed-race background, non-American from a developing country, not a native speaker of English. I taught kids who did not have shoes, let alone textbooks, and kids who lived in gated communities and came to school in chauffeured import cars. Through my personal and teaching experiences with elementary grades in both private and public schools in Brazil, as well as my current academic work in the United States, I contemplated the breath of the social gap, and witnessed the transformative power of learning. This transformative work is personal, it is based on constant and evolving reflection about our own instances of oppression and privilege, as much as that of our students.

This special issue of *Art Education* is shaped by a vision of the journal as a transformative educational vehicle that can further the education of our membership not to accomplish conformity, but to engage in "the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 2006, p. 53). This issue celebrates the unique role and potential of art in promoting a kind of critical awareness that generates understanding, discourse, and actions aimed at change. Freire affirms unequivocally that only humans "are able to achieve the complex operation of simultaneously transforming the world by their action and grasping and expressing the world's reality in their creative language" (p. 68). It follows from this proposition that art education's humanistic mission can better be fulfilled in the promotion of change, and the quest for social justice.

**Social Justice Issue** | My enthusiasm for theme of past convention dovetails with a large contingent of the organization's membership, as evidenced in the many quotes from conference attendees. An impressive line-up of contributors, working in the United States, Canada and Mexico, discusses several dimensions of social justice, including issues of race, social class, art world's hierarchies, interdisciplinary connections, and creativity. They collaborate with activist artists, present their own artwork, and transform learning spaces around them, such as their own classrooms, museums, community centers, or the streets.

The special design pays homage to the distinguished 13 contributions that comprise this issue. Capitalizing on the graphic design expertise available at my home institution, and the background of my Editorial Assistant Kelli Aquila (see guest designer statement), designing this special issue also became an educational project as it was integrated into Ms. Aquila's capstone experience in the Art Education Master's Program.

This special social justice issue expects to (1) provide written documentation of the convention's theme by serving a post-facto proceedings of selected presentations and panels, (2) carry the ideas and concerns shaping the convention to the entirety of our membership, especially those unable to attend the conference, and (3) create opportunities for continued reflection about the conference's theme.

I am extremely grateful by the support of our organization in making this issue possible and I expect it will make an impression on you. It makes a powerful statement about our field's engagement in relevant social justice work. It announces connections between creativity, art teaching, and transformation. It indicates that social justice is an important, perhaps essential, dimension of our profession. To my question of "what social justice art education looks like?" I offer this carefully crafted issue of the journal as a partial answer. Another fundamental aspect of doing social justice art education work is predicated on our ability to create and support a professional community who cares about these issues. Social justice art education can be surprising, personal, and multifaceted. Echoing the powerful shift from objects to relationships evidenced in postmodern art (Gablík, 1993), it invites a new type of professional engagement. This compelling *Art Education* issue enables us to contemplate facets of our work for change and inspires us to keep going.

—Flávia M.C. Bastos, Editor

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## COMMENTS FROM 2010 NAEA NATIONAL CONVENTION ATTENDEES:

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[This conference gave me voice!] [The art teacher can, and perhaps should, assign content-driven problems (social, or otherwise) for the student to explore. However, the art teacher should not, overtly, influence the students to take up his or her pet social, political, or religious agendas.] [I thought the theme was almost tired, but it was not terrible.] [Loved the convention theme. Such an important and relevant topic!] [I would like to see some effort to bridge the gap between theory and practice for the practicing art teacher. When is the last time you had a primary or secondary art teacher speak at a general or super session?] [Bravo to the NAEA board, Division Directors, Regional Presidents, Maryland Host Committee, and staff for creating and facilitating the important, groundbreaking 50th Annual Convention Theme, Art Education and Social Justice!] [It is important that the topics apply to all students from the privileged to the at-risk.] [This was one of the best NAEA conventions I have attended. Perhaps it was the nature of the theme that lead to deep and intriguing connections for the arts.] [Social Justice theme was not appropriate for all levels. I did not find the workshops to be practical. There was very little that I was able to use in the classroom.] [The theme, Social Justice, was timely and well-explored. I wonder how it will make a difference to the way in which art is taught in our country?] [I thought convention was completely relevant to my teaching practice as a community artist and teacher.] [As an elementary art teacher I can hear someone say, "social justice for elementary?" "You better believe it!"]