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# **Social Practice Artist and Disability Inclusion**

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# Social Practice Artists and Disability Inclusion

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## Abstract

The power of the “image” has been well documented over the course of history. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, visual culture, image is further empowered as it both sustains and subverts cultural norms and meanings. Socially engaged or social practice artists are an important yet diverse group who are creating and displaying image to disrupt injustice, truncated rights, devaluation, and inequality. Typically, these artists define a social problem and a desired outcome that will result from the creation and dissemination of their imagery. Because this contemporary-relevant strategy is becoming increasingly powerful as image and visuality are omnipotent in all aspects of advanced economies, this study is being conducted. The inquiry focuses on social practice artists who are engaged in a collective effort to shift the characterization of disabled populations from devalued and stigmatized to included and fully participatory in all aspects of intellectual, civic, productive, recreational, spiritual, and social life. The study examines the work of social practice artists, the genesis of their work, their processes and the outcomes of their products. Using a life history methodology, 23 artists will be interviewed specifically to chronicle their entry into socially engaged art, to explore their thinking and to ascertain their methodological growth. The study will reveal depth of understanding of social practice art as a set of creative processes that can be taught and invoked for broad and current social change.



## References

- [1] Brody, L. (n.d.). Opulent Mobility. Retrieved from <http://www.opulentmobility.com>
- [2] Markotic, N. (2016). Introduction
- [3] Ellis, K. (2015). “Enfreaking popular music

# Overview

- What is social practice art?
- What are the goals of participating social practice artists?
- How was participation measured in this study?
- A. Laura Brody and her work with Opulent Mobility

# Social Practice Art

Socially engaged or social practice artists are an important yet diverse group who are creating and displaying images to disrupt injustice, and reverse truncated rights, devaluation, and inequality.

# Goals of Social Practice Artists

- Typically, these artists define a social problem and a desired outcome that will result from the creation and dissemination of their imagery.

# Design of Inquiry

- The inquiry focuses on social practice artists who are engaged in a collective effort to shift the characterization of disabled populations from devalued and stigmatized to fully participatory in all aspects of intellectual, civic, productive, recreational, spiritual, and social life.

# The Study

- The study examines the work of social practice artists, the genesis of their work, their processes and the outcomes of their products. Using a life history methodology, 23 artists were interviewed by class members to chronicle their entry into socially engaged art, to explore their thinking, and to ascertain their methodological growth.



# A. Laura Brody

- Laura Brody is a professional costume maker and designer who developed Opulent Mobility as a series of artworks and built this work into a juried group exhibit.
- She became involved with adaptive technology when her boyfriend had a stroke. She noted everything that existed was “ugly” and knew she wanted to “dress” devices using her background in costume making.
- Her exhibits grew into collaborations and a yearly event was born.

## A. Laura Brody (b)

- A. Laura Brody “dresses up” adaptive technology in order to start a conversation about choice and desirability in disability and mainstream cultures. Her pieces are not meant to be used or sold. But she has promoted the reproduction of her work, developing and disseminating instructions on how to recreate them.
- She supports others manipulating her designs for their own use.
- She sells the idea, not the product.
- Many of her works are inspired by historical figures, events, or time periods.

## A. Laura Brody (c)

- Brody's main goal is to involve people in disability culture by proposing a new idea that stimulates conversation.
- She does not make a piece with a particular goal in mind; rather she makes the art for herself.
- In sharing, social change occurs.
- It's hard to measure her success since she doesn't have particular goals in mind, but
- she notes progress as interest in the field and her work increases.
- For example, she has started to have people recommend spaces for her or contact her when they see an antique wheelchair.

## A. Laura Brody (c)

- Brody's work can provoke social change because it allows a device user to take pride in the object.
- Even if she doesn't create the device, her work may inspire users to create their own object and thus identity.
- If unique design became a trend, then social change would occur.
- People creating their own wheelchairs would shift the meaning of devices and "bust" negative stereotypes.
- Observers might then become interested in what the wheelchair is about, not why an individual is using it.

# The Kali Walker

- Kali is the Hindu goddess of time and empowerment, and a renowned slayer of demons.
- Disability and aging are demonized in our culture as tragedy, weakness, and something to be feared.
- Kali in her walker represents a different truth—that time catches up to us all, and that strength and ferocity are not measured by physical ability.



# Driven: The Edwardian Cyborg Wheelchair

- Why should mobility devices not inspire desire?  
*Driven* (2009, refurbished 2013) is the first of A. Laura Brody's Opulent Mobility series, devoted to re-imagining mobility.
- *Driven* began as an electric wheelchair donated by a chair-using friend and a dream of re-making wheelchairs as thrones.



# Artist's Statement

- We are all buried treasure.
- My works draw from the history of art: the flowing shapes of Art Nouveau, the embellishments of the Victorians and the line quality of Klimt and Schiele.
- These sculptures are conceived with a commitment to social justice and are inspired by the spirit of scientific discovery. They are meant to encourage conversation and to inspire radical rethinking of the meanings of disability and adaptive aids.

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Please contact me with any question at  
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