

# The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education

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to promote the use of theoretical concepts from the social sciences—which include, but are not limited to, anthropology, sociology, and political science—to study visual culture and the teaching of art; to inform art educators about theory and practice in the social sciences, thus acting as a liaison between social scientists and art educators; to encourage research into the social context of visual culture and teaching art; and to develop socially relevant programs for use in the teaching of art.

The theme for volume 18 will be *Community-Based Art Education*. October 15, 1997 is the deadline for submission of articles, images, and reviews of books, video/films, performance/action pieces, and exhibitions. Images and visual research may be submitted. Membership is not a precondition for submittance. Please send black and white or color images no larger than 8" x 10" in either photographic, original, digital, or slide form. Original manuscripts, including an abstract, should be prepared according to the APA (4th ed.) style. Please place your name on a separate paper to help facilitate anonymous review. Please send images and/or four paper copies to:

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### On The Cover

*Prisoners* 1996 By: Robert Bersson  
(Front top) Mixed Media, 8.5" wide x 17" height

*Vessels of Reciprocity* 1996 By: Drea Howenstein  
(Front bottom) Sassafras prunings & boats, 55' high x 35' oval x 15' height

*Global Unity/Peace Angels* 1996 By: Kim Finley-Stansbury  
(Back) Digital IRIS print of mixed media (oil pastels, graphite, & colored pencils) collage,  
7" wide x 9.75" height

See pages 144 - 146 for artists' statements concerning their artwork.

# Editorial

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Karen T. Keifer-Boyd

## Invisible in Plain Sight

The group of six articles in this volume explore the theme “invisible in plain sight.” The authors examine the structures that enable or disable cultural visibility. They question: Who creates the visions of the world? Whose views are pre-empted?

Emme argues that cultural invisibility happens to anyone who does not contribute images to the world or who does not vigorously critique pictures. He discusses the photographic work of Jo Spence and Judith Golden who expose the invisibility of those considered plain (i.e., old and female). “Invisibility in plain sight” in some instances may concern perceptions and biases against plainness. My recent professional sojourn from my former home beneath the canopy of Douglas Fir in the forests of the Northwest to the open plains of West Texas, has made me acutely aware of how one's invisibility or visibility within one's environment affects one's culture. The canopy of the Northwest blocks the sun, and I have discovered, frightens some people who are accustomed to a “plain” view. The trees and mountains hide what lies beyond or beneath them, and the people who inhabit these private spaces are the most xenophobic and reticent people that I have ever encountered. In West Texas there is no place to hide. The open expanse and plain terrain exposes everything and everyone to open scrutiny. Name places reflect

this, with towns such as *Plainview*. These people who live in plain view are the most open and friendly that I have met. Several authors, in this volume, ask readers to re-examine institutionalized structures that devalue the aesthetics of “plain” folk in other respects.

Morris concurs with Emme in her study of developing and implementing a six-week curriculum that exposed denigrating Appalachian Mountain Culture stereotypes and supplanted them with images that children created after they had investigated their West Virginia Mountain Cultural history of oppression and rebellion. Morris’s article will be useful reading in undergraduate pre-service curriculum courses as an example of social reconstruction pedagogy. It utilizes both Sleeter (1989) and Banks’ (1993) conceptions of multicultural education as foundations for developing curriculum. The issues that Deniston, Desai, and Check raise encourage us to re-evaluate notions of excellence, racism, and histories and compliment Morris’ article on social reconstructive pedagogy.

In *Living the Discourses*, Deniston, Desai, and Check explore the invisibility of elderly women’s art due to an aesthetic preference for originality. They also discuss racism as an institutionalized system, and the invisibility of discourse concerning homosexual worldviews embedded in gay and lesbian art. Cultural, political, and economic systems elevate some images above others. Deniston criticizes the perpetuation of value systems that esteem originality and denigrate the handwork of elderly women. Desai recognizes the invisibility of racism since literary sources and discourse often equate racism with stereotyping, prejudice, and ethnicity. Desai disagrees with these definitions and concludes that racism is a socio-cultural construct rooted in historical events. She argues that racism is institutionalized to such a degree that without careful scrutiny it becomes accepted practice due to its invisibility. Check posits that most histories of art exclude certain types of life experiences in their portrayals of art. He provides examples of the invisibility of gay and lesbian perspectives. He argues that the specific vision of the world by a gay artist may provide an understanding of the individual artist’s intent, as well as an analysis of humanity’s interwoven similarities and differences.

Anderson finds that social change may be evident in the absence of an image. He discusses how the murals that Japanese and North American children painted fifty years after the bombing of Hiroshima

and Nagasaki do not depict “the bomb,” but he argues that “the bomb” pervades the murals. Perhaps the events of *Chernobyl* and *Three Mile Island* make the threat of nuclear power plant accidents far more real to children than nuclear weapons. However, when I showed prints of the two murals (reproduced in this journal) to my husband and asked him to guess which one the children from the United States had painted, his reading of the images indicated that the invisible “bomb” was clearly present. In the United States children’s mural, North American children are flying over the Pacific with gifts. This seemed to him a re-enactment of the bombing sortie itself. The mural includes a setting sun over Japan, and this seemed like a reference to the bombing as well. In the early days of atomic power, nuclear fission was often referred to as “unleashing the power of the sun.” Of course none of the participants intended that the mural’s peace flights were analogous to a destructive bombing strike. But the viewer who juxtaposes the mural’s imagery with the events at Hiroshima and Nagasaki can readily visualize the invisible bombs in the image of children flying over the Pacific in formation. Although Anderson discusses the “copy cat” aspect of the Japanese children’s imagery, it seems that the inspiration derived from Faith Ringold’s *Tar Beach* and her quilt motif is a similar form of selective imitation. Anderson and his Japanese colleagues also found similarities between themselves as they tried to define their differences.

In order to analyze how cartoons present the female gender Green surveyed television toons that pre-school children watch. She finds that the infant, shrew, eccentric, maternal, frump, vamp, and twin dominate as role models and she argues that these stereotypes limit children from imagining other possibilities. Invisible are female roles of intelligence and self-assertion. When a character, such as *The Little Mermaid*, does seem intelligent and inventive, she also tends to typify the Madison Avenue / Playboy image of beauty. The repertoire of female characters seems to have become, like our congress, more conservative. During the early 1980s characters such as Punkie Brewster, very plain but very assertive and in control, began to appear in cartoons for young children. According to Green, however, TV toons seem to have reverted to stereotypical representations of females. Green cites research that posits that children do not easily distinguish between reality and fantasy. Thus television portrayals may severely limit conceptions of possibilities for females in the real world.

jagodzinski in his article, *Perception of Non-Perception*, argues that

illusion is the separation between belief and knowledge. *Trompe l'oeil* works by delaying knowledge so that belief supersedes. He presents five lessons in his article. The first two lessons concern *trompe l'oeil*, as symbolically holding both a power to deceive and to make us feel whole. These lessons concern the public's high regard and need for art that presents believable illusions. jagodzinski examines the psychological foundations of this need. The last three lessons build upon the first two but emphasize illusionism, film, and aesthetics in relationship to morality.

The journal concludes with a book review and *On the Cover* which presents stories by the three artists featured on the cover of this journal. In *Vessels of Reciprocity* Drea Howenstein rededicates Herr's Island to life by commemorating the spirits of the animals that were once killed and prepared for consumption on this island. The second story by Bob Bersson concerns the invisibility and visibility of prisoners. The final story by Kim Finley-Stansbury involves visions of unity through a cross-cultural art exchange. Together, the eight authors and three artists in this volume make visible the invisible.

Hopefully you will find connections or contradictions to your own beliefs as you read volume 17. Write your comments or visually respond as you read this journal and send these to KarenKB@ttu.edu so that I can place them on a *Caucus for Social Theory in Art Education* (CSTAE) Website. Send an email in the fall of 1997 to find out the URL website address. I plan to initiate monthly real-time virtual chats using either a WebBoard or virtual site as well as place the text and images sent by CSTAE members in the website.



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- Banks, J. A. (1993). Multicultural education: Development, dimensions, and challenge. *Phi Delta Kappa*, 74(1), 22-28.
- Sleeter, C. E. (1989). Multicultural education as a form of resistance to oppression. *Journal of Education*, 171(3), 51-71.