

Harvey Finkle: Documenting Disability Rights

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Biography

Jeremy L. Johnson was born and raised in Wisconsin. He holds a BFA in Multimedia Design from the University of Wisconsin Stout as well as BA in K-12 Art Education from the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. Johnson also holds a MS in Reading from the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire and a Ph.D. in Art Education from the University of Minnesota. He is currently pursuing a Masters in Illustration and is associate professor in art education at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Johnson has taught at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels as a public arts educator. His current research focus is on providing safe spaces in which art can be taught to individuals who are blind or visually impaired in conjunction with creating museum and gallery experiences that adhere to the principles of Universal Design for Learning. Jeremy has an intense interest in promoting research-based best practices to ensure that art educators are prepared to deliver the best instruction to their students.

Biography

Amanda Newman-Godfrey, Assistant Professor of Art Education at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the U.S., teaches in the BFA, MA, and MFA programs. She has been an art educator in PreK-12

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schools, state agencies, and in higher education for 26 years. She has presented at state, national and international conferences, was recipient of the Doctoral Dissertation Grant, and was named a “Rising Star in Higher Education” by Teachers College Today magazine. She is the co-author of a book chapter on visual arts and autism, and several articles on art and disability. Her areas of art education research include preservice curriculum, ASD and art education, and differentiated instruction and assessment in higher education. She is currently the president of Moore’s Faculty Forum and serves on two not-for-profit boards, Young Audiences of New Jersey and Eastern PA and Women’s Studio Workshop.

For the Second Disability, Arts and Education Conference hosted at Moore College of Art and Design in October 2019, Jeremy Johnson and Amanda Newman-Godfrey co-curated an exhibit that featured the disability rights movement from the 1980s to 2000s. The exhibit featured the work of Philadelphia photographer Harvey Finkle. His collection is permanently installed in the Liberty Resources Center in Philadelphia, which serves as a major hub for advocacy, employment, and services for individuals with disabilities in the region. Harvey Finkle is a documentary photographer whose interests are social, economic, political, and cultural. For over 40 years, he has documented movements concerned with marginalized communities and issues of peace, justice, and human rights.

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Figure 1. Untitled

Harvey's engagement with the disability rights movement began in 1985. It was Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, traditionally the busy opening day for Christmas shopping. Disabled in Action (DIA), the local chapter of a national organization known as ADAPT, targeted a heavily tracked, commercial area in Philadelphia. They blocked the streets with their wheelchairs and bodies. No vehicle could pass. This action highlighted the lack of adequate public transportation for the disabled. Besides the scarcity, the maintenance of existing equip-

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ment required to serve the disabled was poor. For Harvey, that was the beginning of a relationship lasting to this day.

Over the years, he photographed many local and national “actions” extending far beyond Philadelphia to across the country. These actions challenged the lack of services as well as the enforcement of existing laws. New policies and programs were required, and laws needed to be enforced. Besides public transportation, issues included: curb cuts, a requirement for mobility; and accessible, affordable housing which is essential for disabled people to live in the community rather than institutional care. A common chant at ADAPT/DIA demonstrations was, “I’d rather be dead than live in a nursing home.” This chant highlights the intensity people with disabilities felt about not living in an institution. The push for housing and attendant care has made significant progress because of ADAPT /DIA actions and lobbying efforts. Harvey recalls:

Documenting this movement has been a profound experience. The determination and courage of the individuals I photographed was beyond the term bold. There is no proverbial envelope to push because, for these activists, there are no boundaries. Any nonviolent action is acceptable. The possibility of getting arrested, whether it be at city halls, state capitals, or the halls of congress, were not inhibitors of their actions. In fact, it placed them in physical danger. Also, I have seen new participants actually being transformed after an action; a surge in their feelings of self-worth is actually tangible. (Finkel, personal communication with co-curators, 2019)

Liberty Resources Center owns this collection of photographs, and proudly displays them throughout their offices and facilities in Center City, Philadelphia. Since 1980, Liberty Resources, Disabled in Action of PA, and Philly ADAPT have advocated to end institutional bias

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in long-term care through the expansion of cost-saving services and supports in integrated, community-based settings. Thomas H. Earle, CEO of Liberty Resources, Inc. and longtime collaborator with Finkle writes:

Disabled people are capable people, and resent being marginalized. They know that with available resources, they can productively perform tasks required to be self-sufficient. For decades people with disabilities have been unnecessarily placed in segregated nursing facilities and institutions isolating them from their families and communities. As a caveat, it might best be recognized that at some stage of our lives, most of us will have a disability. (Earle, personal communication with co-curators, 2019)

Throughout many years of peaceful, nonviolent civil disobedience and activism, photographer Harvey Finkle captured the images of the Independent Living movement. These powerful pictures depict and amplify the passion and perseverance of courageous activists.

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Figure 2. Untitled

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Figure 3. Untitled



Figure 4. Untitled

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Figure 5. Untitled

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Figure 6. Untitled



Figure 7. Untitled

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