

Resisting Normal:

Poetic Response to the History of Disability and Its Impact on Our Lives

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Background

Multi-year project purpose (2012-present)

- To explore archives and primary sources of key moments in disability history, such as Eugenics, the Nazi T-4 Project, institutionalization and deinstitutionalization, and the disability rights movement
- To trace historical legacy to current societal attitudes and systems and reflect upon impact on lived experiences
- To consider marginality as possible creative “site of resistance” (b. hooks, 1991) in light of this research
- To document artistic expression (broadly defined) of people with disabilities and spend time with artists with disabilities
- To collaborate with visual artists and community advocates to respond creatively to history via creation of poems and illustrated broadsides to share with greater community

Description of research sites

Willowbrook State School archives

Bernard J. Carabello collection, handwritten lists of children’s belongings, photographs and news clippings, Rivera exposé, private tour led by daughter of former resident

With an Eye to the Past digital archives at Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities; Minnesota Historical Society archives

Photographs, historical timeline, legal documents organized by institutional site and decade

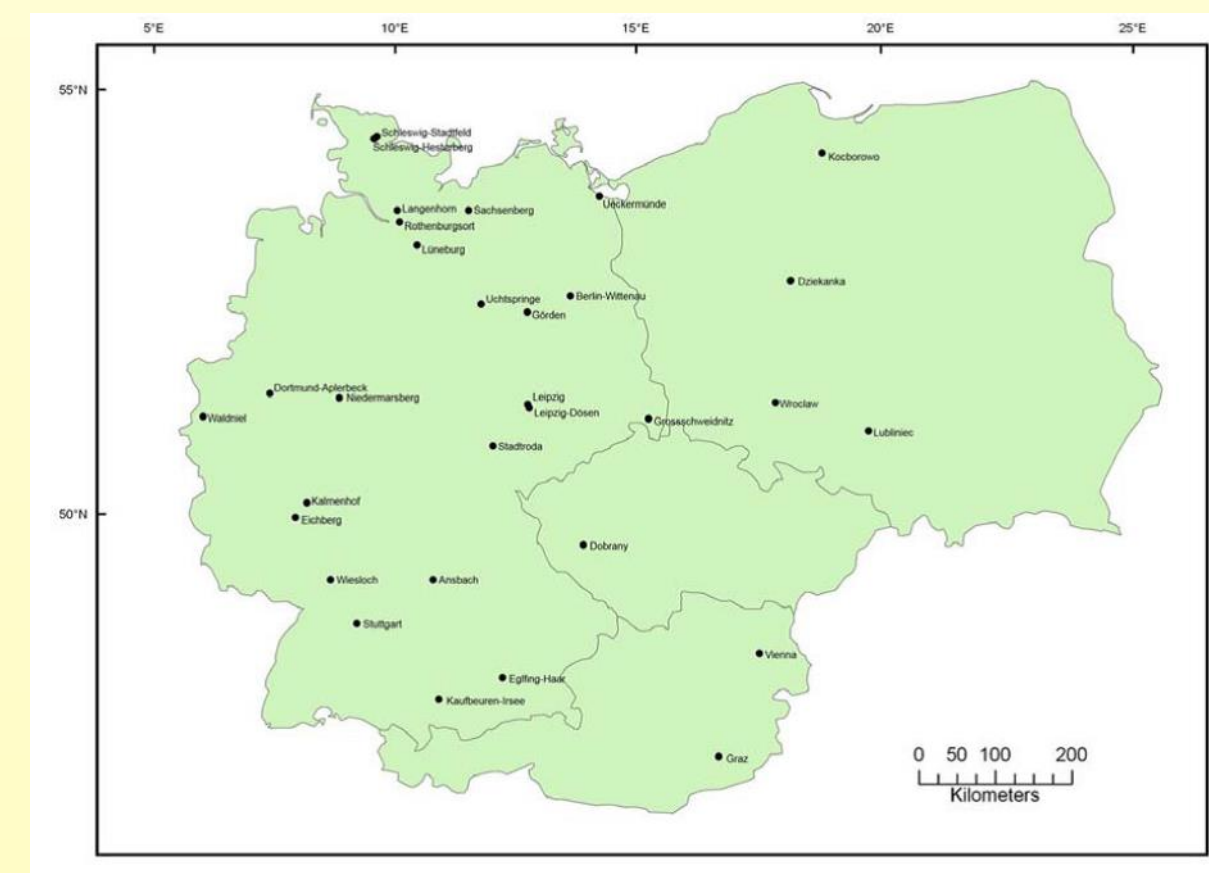
U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum archives

Onsite and digital archives of photographs, legal documents, and oral histories of T-4 euthanasia program

Creative Growth Center studios

Spent two weeks among artists, such as Dan Miller, Alice Wong, Gerone Spurill, Paulino Martin, and William Tyler

Sampling of images



Source: Lutz Kaeberl
Map of locations of about 30 ‘special children’s wards’ in the territories of Germany, Austria, Poland and the Czech Republic (current boundaries). (L. Kaeberl)



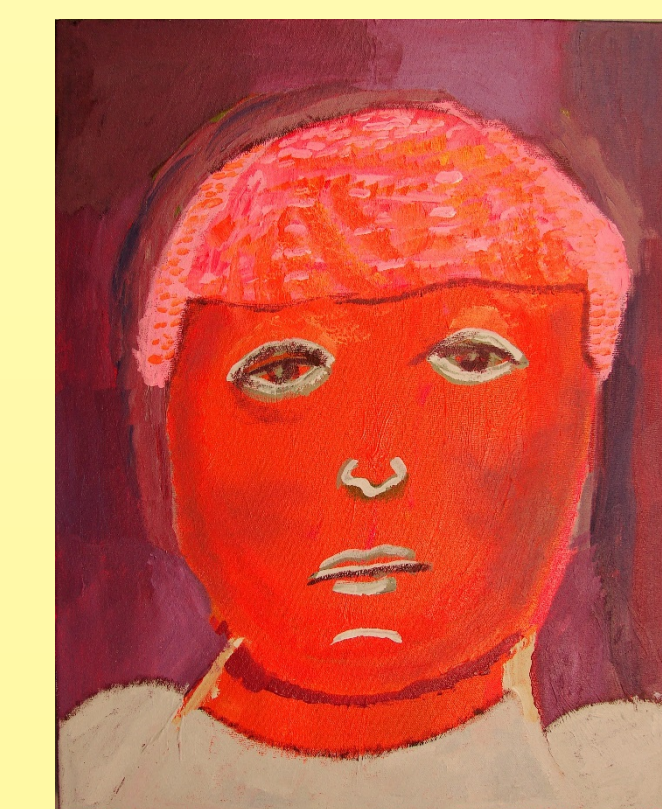
Dan Miller. Untitled, (canary yellow light bulb shapes with black ink of words like “electric,” “pole,” “wood,” “no,” etc.), 2012, acrylic and ink on paper (30 x 44.5 in. on paper)



Green day room, Cambridge State School, where James Falvey lived. Photo: Kent Anderson, courtesy of the artist



Painting of J. M. Falvey by Samuel Lynn



Painting of H. H. Ellwanger by Mike Kastner



Alice Wong. Untitled, (yellow and pink overlay of Buddha-like figure), 2014, acrylic on paper (4 x 6 in. on paper)



Women’s ward at Fergus Falls State Hospital, circa 1900, around the same time Hannah H. Ellwanger lived there.

Work Cited

hooks, b. (1991). “Homeplace: A site of resistance.” *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics*. London: Turnaround, 41-50.

Community collaboration

Participants

Two advocates at Advocating Change Together (ACT), 3 ACT staff, 2 ACT’s Remembering With Dignity (RWD) Project* artists, poet, her son, and photographer Wing Young Huie

Collaborative Project

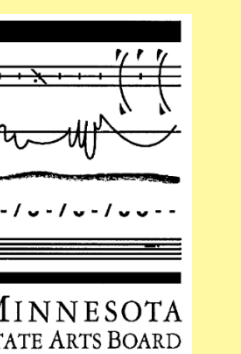
- Collaborators met to write poems in hand-lettered text on broadsides. Graphics were based on portraits of people who lived at Fergus Falls and Cambridge institutions.
- Photographs, family histories, medical records, images of local geography were used to stitch together movable blocks of text by poet and others.
- Additional broadside depicted poet’s son’s poem to demonstrate voices of people both past and present.
- Photographer Wing Young Huie donated gallery space for multi-media presentation and interactive community discussion of “what is normal?” with poems, paintings, and broadsides by advocates, poet, and her son.

*ACT’s RWD Project: advocate-run project to place proper headstones at 13,000+ gravesites where people were buried as numbers on Minnesota state hospital institutional grounds.

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