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Visual short presentation (6,4 min)

Topics: Contemporary artistic and art educational approaches to diversity and cultural changes

Keywords: Disability, Calligraphy, Material, Artwork

Beyond Binaries: When Artists with Disabilities Experiment with Ink, Brush, Water, and Xuan Paper

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This visual presentation shows artworks created from a workshop on Chinese Ink Painting and Calligraphy conducted in an American studio for artists with disabilities during the summer of 2016. This presentation considers how those artworks complicate the binaries of black and white spaces on paper. It further discusses how those artists with disabilities disrupted the binaries between “abled” and “disabled” from a Disability Studies perspective. Through the artists’ unique sensitivity of experimenting with the Chinese calligraphy materials, they challenged the label of “disabled artists” by creating new forms of embodied knowledge. This workshop exemplifies the importance for art educators to be open to new forms of experimentation. When art educators provide new materials to artists with disabilities, the way artists engage with the materials creates alternative ways of understanding both disability and the material.

For both the artists in that workshop and the presenter, painting was a living process to experiment with the brush, black ink, water, Xuan paper, and our interactions with materials. Chinese calligraphy delivers linguistic meaning, and at the same time, demonstrates the visual relationship between black strokes and white shapes emerging from the Xuan (rice) paper, and represents the rhythmic movement of calligrapher’s own body in relation to the media. Playing with the materials, artists in this workshop explored and challenged the relations of black/white, dry/wet, concentrated/diluted, and abled/disabled binaries in their artworks.