

## REVIEW ARTICLE

**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE ARTISTIC FIELD**

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**ABSTRACT**

According to statistic reports the number of disabled people in the world is still increasing. Nowadays it's estimated that one for six citizens in European Union is disabled. New laws are established to improve the social attitude towards the sick and the disabled. The perception of people with disabilities is widely dominated by their limitations that often take priority. Completely different social attitudes concern artists. They are admired.

**The aim** of the paper is to discuss the extent to which the disabled people can contribute to the culture and to reflect on the importance of art for the rehabilitation process as well as for the social integration of artists with disabilities.

**The conclusion** that it implies is, that the art for ages well serves the integration and rehabilitation cause.

**KEY WORDS:** disabled people, rehabilitation, social attitudes, social integration

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**INTRODUCTION**

According to statistic reports the number of disabled people in the world is still increasing. Nowadays it's estimated that one for six citizens in European Union is disabled. New laws are established to improve the social attitude towards the sick and the disabled. The central idea of the law is integration. International, European and national institutions are occupied with disability issue, which proves that it is an important public problem. Throughout the course of history the arts reflected social phenomena. The same is about disability. The arts portray disabled persons and supply disabled artists with means of expression. Artistic activities allows to met the need of achievement and to gain recognition, the same way as career does.

**THE AIM**

The perception of people with disabilities is widely dominated by their limitations that often take priority. Imperfection is considered to be the most important quality and its significance is overestimated, whereas it essentially pertains to the limited aspect of life. However, there are still potential and abilities that people with disabilities can share with others. Numerous artistic talents constitute a part of the mentioned variety of possibilities. The aim of the paper is to discuss the extent to which the disabled people can contribute to the culture and to reflect on the importance of art for the rehabilitation process as well as for the social integration of artists with disabilities.

**REVIEW AND DISCUSSION****FINE ARTS**

Fine arts and disability coincide in two ways. People with disabilities create art, but they are also the main charac-

ters of the works of art. While analysing the portrayals of people with disabilities in the visual art, it can be observed that there exist many different reasons why artists take up this theme. Disability can be an intrinsic quality of the one portrayed. References to disabilities are present in the religious art when the healing scenes are illustrated in the pieces of art or when depicting of a visible disability serves as an allegory to express moralizing messages.

The fifteenth-century painter, Fra Filippo Lippi, in one of his paintings depicted angels have the faces of children with Down syndrome. This probably has to do with the fact in the artist's biography. He grew up in a shelter where he met such children. The students of Lippi, Giovanni Bellini and Andrea Mantegna, painting the Madonna and Child, introduced little Jesus as a child with Down syndrome [1].

The collection of the Vienna Graphic Museum (Graphische Sammlung Albertina) contains a sixteenth-century drawing by Hieronim Bosch entitled "The Cripples". It presents thirty-one characters who are physically deformed in various ways. Many are equipped with different types of sticks and supports. The drawing resembles notes that the artist made inspired by current observation, to later find use in painting compositions. Bosch could meet and watch his models in his hometown. They probably came in crowds to festivities organized by the local brotherhood of mercy and wealthy citizens [2].

The Habsburg court painter, Diego Velazquez (17th century), portrayed the royal family and other people around the monarch. He also made portraits of two dwarfs who belonged to the court [3].

Impressionist Edouard Manet took a portrait of a mistress of the French poet, Baudelaire, in a situation where she was physically disabled after a stroke. He met with the accusation that he was an ugliness painter. He wanted to

offer the work to Baudlaire, but the poet did not accept it. The portrait until the end of Manet life remained in his studio and is now in museum collections [4].

Toulouse Lautrec (19th century), one of the most famous impressionists, suffered from skeletal system disease. Because of her, he was short, had a deformed figure and walked with a cane. Such information about the artist is conveyed by his self-portraits [5].

The remarkable Brazilian sculptor Antonio Francisco Lisboa (around 1730-1814), commonly known as Aleijadinho ("little cripple"), suffered a disability as a result of his leprosy. The disease deprived him of some of his foot and fingers. Still, he worked creatively. He attached a chisel to his stump and carved figures of saints. This is also the reason why his eighteenth-century works; dozens of human figures, life-size made of stone; give great admiration in addition to artistic value. They can be seen at the shrine in Congonhas do Campo, Brazil. The sanctuary is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List [6].

For twelve years, under the pencil of a young Polish artist, Mariusz Kędzierski, come out beautiful portraits and still lifes. The cartoonist was born without hands, but his works are characterized by great precision [7].

The contemporary portraitist of disabled people is American, Riva Lehrer. She was born with spina bifida, the consequences of which persist in spite of repeated surgical treatment. The artist paints mainly people with visible disabilities. Her intention is to show the beauty of the person which retains despite her disability. In the portraits of the painter, models are equipped with orthopedic equipment; sticks, dentures, carts. The artist refers to realistic performances, cares for details so that the heroes of her works are real, without pathos and retouching. This painting expresses the trend to present disabled people as having a certain offer for the world and not associated only with acts of mercy [8].

In sacred art, in frescoes and paintings, the motif of miraculous healings by Christ is repeated. The lame, the blind, the paralytics, the lepers were healed, so they became the heroes of the paintings. Paintings on this subject decorate, for example, the walls of the Brancacci Chapel in Florence. "Healing the lame and resurrecting Tabita" was presented on one of the frescoes by Masolino da Panicale (14 / 15th century). On the seventeenth-century canvas by Poussin, "Jesus heals a blind man in Jericho." On the canvas by Bartholomeus Breenbergh (17th century) we see a scene where "Jesus heals the deaf". Such work brought gospel content to people who could not read, while providing instruction on how to behave towards people with disabilities [9].

## MUSIC

Ludwig van Beethoven was the most famous musician affected by disability in history. When he was thirty, he began to deaf. Deafness continued and around fifty Beethoven heard nothing. Aware of the problem, he couldn't accept it so much that he attempted suicide. He moved away from people, but did not stop creating. Compositions, from the period when hearing problems became the most serious,

are considered to be the most perfect musical literature of all time. There is Symphony No. 9 among them. It's final cantata - "Ode to Joy" - became the anthem of the European Union [10].

It is known about Frederic Chopin that he had health problems since childhood. He was also physically weak. Chopin's disability is a fact. It's cause remains debatable. Researchers put forward various hypotheses. There was a proposal to recognize cystic fibrosis in the composer. Despite numerous nuisances, Chopin spent his life creating music literature and giving concerts [11].

The whole world knows Andrea Bocelli and is impressed by his beautiful voice and excellent workshop. One of the greatest tenors in history is blind. Initially, he was educated in playing instruments. However, the voice discovered much later, turned out to be the most perfect instrument. His great career began with a concert for the Pope in 1994. Since this event, Andrea Bocelli is still present on the biggest stages of the world [12].

The singer Monika Kuszyńska, suffered a spinal cord injury in a car accident. She moves in a wheelchair. Former vocalist of the band Varius Manx in a new disability situation, writes, composes and more and more often returns to the stage [13].

Mieczysław Kosz, a Polish jazzman, lost his sight as a twelve-year-old. He is considered one of the largest representatives of this genre in the country. Although he died prematurely, he had a significant impact on the so-called Polish jazz school [14].

In the world of jazz music, another blind performer and composer - Ray Charles - made a significant contribution. Before he got to the concert halls, he played in New York bars to earn his living [15].

## LITERATURE

Many literary works deal with the topic of disability. The most famous collection of Andersen's fairy tales contains the story titled "The Cripple". The hero is a boy, a gardener's son, who could not walk. He lay in bed, did some housework, but had a lot of free time and then read. In the books he found answers to the dilemmas tormenting busy parents. The disabled son found explanations in the books that brought them relief. The atmosphere at home has therefore become more joyful. The message of this fairy tale is complex. It can read content related to disability, but it can also be a metaphor for any difficult life situation, the effects of which eventually turn out to be positive. Unusual circumstances of life allow to see things imperceptible to people leading average existence [16].

According to the novel by Gaston Leroux, the well-known musical 'Phantom of the Opera' was created. The plot of the novel has been used many times in musical films and theater performances. Depending on the director's artistic intention, the title hero remained a representative of the ghost world, or turned out to be a physically disfigured man, but with the gift of a beautiful voice. The visual defect meant that he ran away and hid

from people. His disability was therefore socially conditioned [17].

Escaping from people was also a frequent behavior of another, very famous literary hero - Quasimodo, the bell ringer of Notre-Dame. His story, originally written by Victor Hugo in the novel "Cathedral of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Paris", has been told in various ways for years, i.a. in animated film and musical. Quasimodo, as can be inferred from the literary description, had large scoliosis and profound speech defects resulting from anatomical facial-skull defects, including the articulatory apparatus. Because of this, he became a laughing stock in medieval Paris. External ugliness caused Quasimodo numerous psychological suffering and effectively concealed the positive qualities of his personality [18].

Disability in literature also appears in the context of its creators. There are also people with disabilities among poets and writers. Halina Poświatowska, a Polish poet and writer "Generations of the modern day" lived a little over thirty years, struggling with heart disease and the resulting limitations. Personal experiences have undoubtedly influenced the choice and presentation of the subjects of poems. Poświatowska's work was inspired by thoughts on the imperfections of the body, as well as the fragility and beauty of life [19].

Grzegorz Ciechowski, leader of the rock band Republika and soloist bearing the stage name Obywatel G.C. struggled with limitations resulting from a heart defect. He is mentioned in the group of literature creators because he was a Polish philologist by education, and his works, have also a poetic value, apart from music [20].

American writer Hellen Keller lost her sight and hearing as a result of a disease she had in early childhood. Her biography entitled "The History of My Life" turned out to be a great publishing success. The achieved influence allowed the author to buy a house. Based on the book, the play was created, and later the film, "The Miracle Worker" - which also won the recognition of readers and viewers [21].

## FILM

It has been happening for years that movies, whose characters are people with disabilities, often become cinema hits and win prestigious awards.

The title hero of the movie "Rain Man" suffered from autism. Dustin Hoffman, who played his part, received an Oscar for this [22].

Al Pacino's acting creations is the role of a blind American army officer. This soldier is the main character in the movie "Scent of a Woman". Al Pacino was also honored with an Oscar for this role [23].

The life of a person with intellectual disability is the story from the next film "Forrest Gump". This film has won several awards from the American Film Academy [24].

The Oscar winner is the film "My Left Foot" showing the story of the Irish painter Christa Brown, who was born with cerebral palsy. He painted and wrote with his foot [25].

The film "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly" tells the

true fate of the editor of the popular magazine, who in the aftermath of a stroke, had a closure syndrome. The editor dictated his memories to the secretary, communicating with her blinks of one eye. The only such a move could make. A book was created that became the basis of the film script. The film has received many prestigious awards [26].

"Circus of Butterflies" is a story about a disabled artist, played by the well-known motivational speaker, Nick Vujici. Vujicic is a person with a congenital absence of limbs [27].

Polish cinematography also includes excellent productions raising the subject of disability. The film "You want to live" is a biography of a young Man, who only in adulthood gained the opportunity to communicate with the world. In turn, the life of the already mentioned, blind musician, Mieczysław Kosz, was told in the film "Ikar. The legend of Mietek Kosz." Both films have won recognition and many awards [28, 29].

The theme of disability has been manifested in art and literature for centuries. It can often be read from the biographical information about the artists, that it was the illness or disability that significantly formed their artistic statements. The disability motive inspires creativity or serves it in a different, special way. The fate of the heroes of artistic works, experienced by imperfections, move and arouse admiration. First of all, when it turns out that people take actions more than usual and achieve success. People with disabilities who, despite their dysfunctions, join the mainstream of ordinary life, develop their talents, and also exceed commonly known limits of human capabilities.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. People with disabilities are present in many different fields of art; they are either artists themselves or they constitute the source of inspiration for artistic creation.
2. Their achievements are often outstanding and pieces of art with the motive of disability gain remarkable recognition.
3. Art protects against the social participation restriction that is not the result of the biological conditions.
4. Artistic potential poses an impulse for an active engagement of people with disabilities in the social interaction.
5. Artistic activity enables people with disabilities to achieve personal fulfilment.
6. Artistic output is increasingly becoming the source of income for people with disabilities, what leads to the improvement of their financial living conditions.
7. Art allows to look beyond the disability and makes the genius of a person with disability prevail over their health limitation.

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**Conflict of interest**

*Author declares no conflict of interest.*

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