

EXPLORING SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON VISUAL ART: THE PRODUCTION AND RECEPTION OF ARTWORKS CREATED BY BLIND ARTISTS

Ida Bagus Komang Sindu Putra*¹, Amir Ghozali²

UHN IGB Sugriwa Denpasar¹, Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta²
sinduputra85@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines visual art produced by blind artists through the lens of the sociology of art, focusing on two interrelated domains. The first concerns how artworks are produced through material strategies and community support networks. The second addresses how artworks are received and interpreted by the public, including reception biases that foreground disability as the primary narrative. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with primary data obtained from semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded and transcribed, as well as visual artifact analysis based on documentation of artworks. The data were analyzed through thematic coding to identify patterns of creative adaptation, forms of assistance and support relations, and mechanisms of legitimization through publication and exhibition. The findings indicate that artistic production integrates form memory in low-vision artists who experienced vision loss during adolescence, tactile control, and material engineering, such as the use of texture and clay to construct relief. In terms of reception, the public often perceives blind painting practices as extraordinary due to the assumption that visual art must rely on sight, leading appreciation to shift toward emotional admiration. This study highlights the need for a fair evaluative framework and curatorial mediation that redirects interpretation toward artistic decisions and production strategies, so that inclusive art does not remain a merely normative discourse, but becomes a practice that can be critically assessed and empirically grounded.

Keywords: blind artists; sociology of art; visual art production; reception; legitimacy; tactile aesthetics; material strategies; inclusive art.

INTRODUCTION

The development of contemporary art studies has emphasized that artworks do not emerge from a sterile space detached from social life. The production of art is closely intertwined with networks of collaboration, resources, institutions, and value systems that shape both the recognition and meaning of artworks. From the perspective of the sociology of art, an artwork is not regarded as an isolated individual creation, but rather as the result of cooperative processes among multiple actors who constitute the art world and enable artworks to be produced, exhibited, interpreted, and recognized (Becker, 1982).

The presence of blind artists constitutes an important case for examining how the art field operates when aesthetic norms remain strongly visually oriented. Public perception often associates blindness with the loss of the ability to produce visual art. The primary limitation, however, lies in the visual domain, while other capacities can still be developed through specific adaptive strategies (Putra & Marianto, 2024). Blind artists do not merely survive within a visually oriented art system, but actively develop working methods, techniques, and material choices that enable ideas and imagination to be translated into artistic forms. Research on artworks by blind artists should not be limited to aesthetic evaluation of final outputs. It is necessary to examine the processes

of creation, the social support structures that sustain them, and the ways in which artworks are negotiated within the social space of art.

Discussions of art and disability in Indonesia often remain confined to inspirational narratives that emphasize emotion, admiration, or sympathy. As a result, artistic quality, formal decisions, and the supporting structures that enable artworks to emerge are frequently overshadowed by narratives of limitation. In fact, representations of disability shape how the public frames the body, capacity, and difference, such that uncritical readings risk positioning disability as a marker of deficiency or an object of pity (Garland-Thomson, 1997). Blind artists are therefore more easily positioned as inspirational figures rather than as creative subjects with artistic agency.

This issue cannot be separated from the reception and legitimization of artworks within the art field. The acceptance of works by blind artists is shaped by two intersecting factors: visually dominant aesthetic standards and public prejudice. Recognition is not determined solely by formal quality, but also by social and symbolic capital operating through communities, curators, exhibition spaces, and media. Artistic works must be understood within the conditions of their social production, circulation, and consumption, as it is within these processes that meaning and symbolic value are constructed (Bourdieu, 1993). Research on visual art by blind artists should therefore extend beyond the process of creation to examine how works are published, legitimized, and interpreted by audiences, particularly when disability becomes the central narrative through which they are read.

Recent international literature indicates that studies on art and blindness have developed in more diverse directions. Li et al. (2023) show that blind visitors possess distinct motivations, barriers, and access preferences in engaging with visual art. Vizcaíno (2024) demonstrates that tactile paintings and haptic experiences can open new forms of access to modern and contemporary art for blind audiences. Potočnik et al. (2025) emphasize that engagement in visual art activities contributes to well-being, positive self-image, and empowerment among blind participants. Eardley et al. (2025) highlight the importance of co-creative audio description, while Nasser et al. (2025) show that effective accessibility requires granting blind users greater control over their aesthetic experience. Raman & Brady (2024), as well as Zhang et al. (2025), further indicate that recent scholarship increasingly positions blind individuals not only as audiences in need of access, but also as active visual creators with distinct aesthetic needs, creative strategies, and structural constraints that go beyond issues of accessibility alone.

These studies, however, generally remain fragmented. Some focus on accessibility in aesthetic experience for blind audiences, others on empowerment through visual art practices, while still others examine blind creators within technologically assisted visual production. Empirical research that simultaneously connects artistic production, the formation of legitimacy within the art field, and biases in public reception of artworks by blind artists remains limited. This gap is particularly evident in the Indonesian context, where discussions on art and disability have yet to comprehensively address the interrelations among artistic strategies, support networks, publication practices, curatorial narratives, and audience interpretation. The case of blind artists at Yayasan Teratai Bali is therefore significant, as it provides an empirical context in which the interconnections between production, legitimacy, and reception can be directly observed within community-based art practice.

Based on this background, this study is directed toward addressing two main research questions. First, how is visual art by blind artists produced as a social practice,

including through creative adaptation strategies and community support networks? Second, how are these artworks received, interpreted, and legitimized within the social space of art, particularly in relation to public reception biases, curatorial narratives, and access mediation? This study aims to fill a gap at the intersection of the sociology of art, disability studies, and inclusive art grounded in empirical data in Indonesia, particularly in Bali, while also providing a conceptual foundation for the development of more equitable curatorial practices and exhibition accessibility.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive-interpretative qualitative design to understand the production and reception of visual art by blind artists within the context of an art community. The research was conducted at Yayasan Teratai Bali, which functions as a space for artistic production, mentorship, and the dissemination of artworks. Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in artistic practice and facilitation, ensuring that the data obtained were relevant to the research focus on production adaptation strategies, support networks, and public reception.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded and transcribed with time markers. The confidentiality of all informants was ensured through the use of coded identifiers (S1–S3). Supporting data consisted of visual artifact documentation, including photographs of artworks, which were analyzed descriptively to identify formal decisions related to adaptive artistic strategies. Data analysis was conducted through a staged thematic coding process, beginning with the identification of meaning units, followed by category development, and culminating in the formulation of thematic findings aligned with the research focus, namely production adaptation, the role of support networks, the formation of legitimacy, and patterns of public reception.

Data credibility was maintained through source and data triangulation by comparing accounts across informants and aligning interview data with visual documentation of artworks. In addition, the researcher ensured consistency in time-based citation markers and maintained an audit trail throughout the coding process so that interpretations remained traceable. When ambiguous or uncertain data emerged, verification was conducted by revisiting the available information in interview transcripts and research documentation.

Ethical procedures were carefully observed due to the involvement of participants from a vulnerable group. Prior to the interviews, the researcher explained the research objectives, forms of participation, data usage, and recording procedures to each informant. Informed consent was obtained before the interviews and recordings commenced. Participation was voluntary, and informants were given the right to decline answering specific questions or to withdraw from the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable. Informants' identities were anonymized through coded identifiers, and data were presented only to the extent relevant to the analytical objectives in order to avoid exploiting disability experiences as emotional narratives.

The researcher acted as the primary instrument in data collection, selection, and interpretation. Accordingly, the researcher acknowledged that personal background, proximity to the research context, and perspectives on art and disability could influence the interpretation of data. A reflexive stance was maintained by grounding the analysis in empirical data. Bias was minimized through this reflexive positioning, by cross-checking information across sources, and by rejecting the

framing of informants as objects of sympathy, instead positioning them as creative subjects with agency in artistic practice.

FINDINGS

Art-Making Practice as a Strategy of Visual Adaptation, Form Memory, and Social Validation

Art-making practice is understood as a strategy for coping with visual limitations in everyday life. S1 stated, “Blind people are the same as others; the only limitation is in vision. So the question is how we can compensate for that visual aspect through certain methods” (Interview S1, 2023). This statement indicates that artistic practice does not originate from an assumption of incapacity, but from the conviction that visual limitations can be addressed through specific working mechanisms. This perspective underscores that artistic practice is the result of active adaptation to bodily conditions. Becker (1982) explains that artworks emerge through processes shaped by routines, conventions, and adjustments that enable artistic practice to take place. This orientation allows for a more concrete understanding of the creative process.

The creative process becomes evident when ideas and imagination are translated into forms accessible to the public. S1 explained, “We look for ways to express our ideas and imagination so that they can take a tangible form” (Interview S1, 2023). This statement highlights that artworks are produced through a process of methodological exploration. Visual art functions as an experimental space in which internal ideas are transformed into objects that can be presented to an audience. This point is crucial because the process of creation does not stop at the level of ideas, but progresses toward a more structured conceptual development.

The act of painting does not occur spontaneously, but rather through a process of deliberate conceptual incubation. S2 emphasized, “I cannot work spontaneously; I have to think it through first before I start painting. The idea must be fully formed conceptually” (Interview S2, 2023). This explanation demonstrates that artistic production requires conceptual planning prior to its realization in an artistic medium. Such a structured approach distinguishes these practices from common assumptions that works by blind artists are merely surprising outcomes. The need for well-developed concepts is closely related to visual experiences that remain stored in memory.

The role of form memory as a form of visual perception is particularly evident in artists who did not experience blindness from birth. S2 stated, “For example, when imagining a barong, the image is still there in my mind. I was not blind from birth. Those who are blind from birth do not know shapes or colors, so it is more difficult to express them” (Interview S2, 2023). This finding shows that prior visual experience continues to function as a source of representation in artistic production. Such experiences are not entirely lost, but are reactivated as a basis for constructing visual models that are translated into artistic media. This role of form memory provides a foundation for another dimension of artistic practice, namely the development of bodily and emotional sensitivity.

Bodily and emotional sensitivity generates deeper meaning within the creative process. S2 explained, “Painting is one way for me to train patience and calmness. It really relies on touch; that feeling has to be strong. Painting develops sensitivity, patience, emotional control—it is almost like therapy” (Interview S2, 2023). This account demonstrates that art-making does not only produce artworks, but also shapes how the body operates through touch, focus, and emotional regulation. The working habitus formed through this process supports the continuity of artistic practice over

time. This personal dimension is closely intertwined with the broader social conditions faced by blind artists.

The social dimension becomes more apparent when artistic practice is linked to experiences of stigma. S1 stated, “We want to eliminate those stigmas, to show that despite our limitations, we are capable” (Interview S1, 2023). This statement indicates that artworks function as a medium of social representation. Stigma can be understood as a symbolic barrier to legitimacy, as the body of the artist is often interpreted through assumptions of incapacity before the artwork itself is evaluated. Garland-Thomson (1997) emphasizes that representations of disability shape how the public understands bodies and capacities. In this context, artistic practice becomes a means of challenging socially constructed perceptions that undermine the capabilities of blind individuals.

Social validation becomes even more explicit when S1 stated, “There has to be something we can show so that people truly believe us, and one of those things is our artwork” (Interview S1, 2023). This statement suggests that artworks are positioned as forms of social evidence. They are not produced merely as completed objects, but as means of establishing public trust in the capacity of their creators. This function situates artworks within the arena of recognition, a social space where artistic ability cannot be asserted solely through discourse, but must be demonstrated through visible, exhibited, and acknowledged outcomes.



Figure 1. *Gapura*, a painting by a blind artist. Source: research documentation, 2025.

The artwork *Gapura* provides a concrete illustration of the intersection between form memory, artistic planning, and the need for social validation. Visual experiences prior to vision loss are reworked into a coherent structure, allowing the artwork to remain recognizable to the public. The presence of this work affirms the creative capacity of blind artists while simultaneously challenging social assumptions that question their artistic abilities.

From a sociological perspective, this practice reveals a broader significance. Artworks function as instruments of social legitimacy as well as forms of resistance against stigma. Visual art becomes an arena in which social positions are negotiated and recognition is pursued through tangible artistic outcomes. (Bourdieu, 1993) emphasizes that artworks are shaped not only by their processes of production, but also by the conditions of circulation and interpretation that determine their symbolic value. In this sense, the artistic practice of blind artists carries a dual function: as creative production and as symbolic action that opens new possibilities for the recognition of disabled artists’ creative capacities.

Technical and Material Strategies in Visual Art Production

Technical strategies and material selection constitute essential components in the production process of artworks by blind artists. S2 explained that the media used are not limited to a single type, but are adapted to specific working needs. He stated, “I can work on canvas, I can also use paper; currently I am developing new techniques using materials that can be attached” (Interview S2, 2023). This statement indicates that the choice of medium is not neutral, but directly related to how artists establish control over form. Media are selected not merely based on availability, but on their capacity to support the creative process in the absence of direct visual verification.

Differences in material characteristics become evident when artists work on paper versus canvas. S2 explained, “Working on paper is actually easier for me because I can apply stronger pressure, so the lines and textures can be made more detailed” (Interview S2, 2023). This suggests that paper offers advantages in the formation of lines and details, as manual pressure produces marks that can be more easily re-perceived through touch. In this context, lines do not function solely as visual elements, but also as tactile markers that help artists maintain spatial orientation during the drawing process.

The need for tactile orientation is particularly evident at the initial stage of production. S2 explained that work on paper typically begins with sketching to stabilize form and enable lines to be perceived through touch. He stated, “Sketches are made so that the lines, details, and angles can be felt, while the quality of the paper must also be considered because if it is too weak, the surface can be punctured under pressure” (Interview S2, 2023). This finding indicates that drawing for blind artists requires careful attention to the durability of the medium. Paper functions not only as a surface, but as a working field that supports the tactile readability of form. Attention to material strategy and tactile orientation thus becomes as important as color, which requires a different set of working strategies.

Color introduces a distinct division of labor within the creative process. S2 stated, “The color concept comes from me, but I ask a sighted assistant to help with mixing the colors” (Interview S2, 2023). He further explained that when working with crayons or colored pencils, he simply names the required color and asks others to retrieve it, whereas in painting, assistance is needed during the mixing stage. This indicates that technical support operates at an operational level, while aesthetic decisions remain under the control of the artist. Assistance does not diminish artistic agency, but enables the realization of the artist’s conceptual intentions. This practice underscores that visual art production takes place through cooperative processes while maintaining the artist as the central decision-maker. Color orientation, therefore, is integrated with tactile dominance as the primary means of controlling spatial positioning during the coloring process.

The dominance of touch as a mode of orientation is particularly evident during the coloring stage. S2 explained, “When coloring, I use both hands. One hand touches the surface to locate the position. Using only a brush is difficult, except in certain parts” (Interview S2, 2023). This statement highlights that the body functions as the primary orientation tool in artistic production. Touch is not merely supplementary, but a fundamental mechanism for maintaining direction and controlling working areas. Painting with fingers or through direct contact with the medium is not simply a substitute for brushes, but a strategy that provides stronger control over the formation of shapes.



Figure 2. Painting and coloring using fingers as a tactile orientation strategy to determine working areas. Source: research documentation, 2025.

Figure 2 illustrates the use of fingers as a tactile orientation strategy in the coloring process. Direct contact between the hand and the surface reinforces the role of the body as the primary instrument for determining spatial areas. Through tactile perception, blind artists are able to sense boundaries and directional forms, allowing for more precise control in color application. This technique is not merely a replacement for the brush, but a mechanism that enhances control over color distribution and spatial composition. The documentation demonstrates that finger-based techniques are part of a broader creative strategy that integrates the body as the central axis of orientation in visual art production. These tactile strategies are further developed through experimentation with attachable materials, expanding the possibilities of form construction prior to coloring.

The use of attachable materials marks a significant development in production strategies. S2 explained, “Recently I have been using clay, applying it onto the canvas and then painting over it” (Interview S2, 2023). He added that the community is actively experimenting with attachable materials as part of developing new techniques. This indicates that materials do not merely produce visual effects, but also transform the way the medium operates. Clay is treated as a constructive device that allows form to be built before coloring, thereby introducing a new dimension to the creative process. Differences between works produced with and without clay become significant, as tactile experience directly influences the quality of form and coloring.

S2 further clarified this distinction: “Without clay, the surface is completely flat, so the result tends to be more abstract. With clay, the form is constructed first and then colored” (Interview S2, 2023). This demonstrates that clay functions as a means of creating relief, enabling forms to be both seen and felt. The previously flat canvas surface is transformed into a tactile field with structural depth. Clay is not merely an ornamental addition, but an integral component of the production logic. This use of attachable materials illustrates how blind artists actively modify media to align with their bodily needs.

Such material experimentation indicates that blind artists do not simply adapt to existing media, but actively reconstruct them. S2 explained, “Clay can be shaped, attached, colored, and even reinforced with adhesive so that the structure remains stable” (Interview S2, 2023). This practice demonstrates that visual art production extends beyond the use of available tools to include material engineering that enables precise control of form. From a sociological perspective, this is significant because artistic capacity depends not only on individual talent, but also on the ability to

organize the body, materials, techniques, and technical assistance into a coherent system of practice. These technical strategies are further extended into collective practices that expand the social function of materials.

These technical and material strategies are closely connected to collective practices within the community. S2 stated, “In workshops, I shape the clay first, and then other participants color the forms that have been created” (Interview S2, 2023). This indicates that the same material can function not only in individual production, but also in collaborative settings that enable broader participation. Materials thus serve a dual function: technically, as tools for production, and socially, as media through which artworks can be produced, understood, and shared within a wider social context.



Figure 3. Comparison between early series works (left) and later series using clay texture and coffee grounds (right). Source: research documentation, 2025.

Figure 3 demonstrates a significant difference between early works that relied on flat canvas surfaces and later works that utilize attachable materials such as clay and coffee grounds. Early works tend to appear more abstract due to the absence of clear tactile structures. In contrast, later works exhibit constructed reliefs that are subsequently enhanced with textured materials. This transformation highlights that attachable materials are not merely visual additions, but devices that fundamentally alter the logic of visual art production. The resulting textures allow forms to be both perceived visually and tactually, thereby expanding the aesthetic experience. This documentation illustrates how material experimentation enables blind artists to exercise greater control over the medium while opening new possibilities in artistic strategies.

Material experimentation ultimately demonstrates that blind artists do not merely adapt to available media, but actively engineer materials to align with bodily needs. Clay and coffee grounds become part of a creative habitus in which bodily experience serves as the foundation for production strategies. This material engineering underscores that artistic capacity depends on the ability to organize body, technique, and materials into a coherent system of practice. At the same time, textured artworks open new arenas of recognition, enabling broader engagement through both touch and sight. Attachable materials thus function dually as technical strategies that provide control to the artist and as social media that strengthen the legitimacy of artworks within the art community.

Publication, Exhibition, and the Formation of Legitimacy in the Art Field

Publication and exhibition constitute crucial stages following the completion of artworks. S2 stated, “Only through exhibitions, because during exhibitions we also conduct live painting; without that, people do not fully believe what they see on social

media” (Interview S2, 2023). This statement underscores that artworks must enter public space in order to gain trust. Exhibitions function as arenas of validation, demonstrating that the works genuinely emerge from the artistic processes of blind artists. Such validation becomes essential because the public often retains skepticism regarding the capacity of blind individuals to produce visual art. The need for a space of validation is closely linked to the role of the community as a social structure that sustains artistic practice.

The community serves as a platform where diverse artistic interests converge within a shared commitment. S1 and S2 explained, “Forming a community provides a space to gather and share the same commitment, even if the artistic interests and works differ” (Interview S1 and S2, 2023). This indicates that the community functions as a social infrastructure for artistic production. Through the community, art-making is not an isolated individual effort, but a collective activity supported by shared space, mutual exchange, and collective orientation. The importance of the community becomes even more evident when artistic activities extend outward to engage with the broader public.

This outward orientation is clearly reflected in S2’s explanation of the distinction between the foundation space and public activity spaces. S2 stated, “Most of our activities take place outside; the foundation is mainly for creating and experimenting” (Interview S2, 2023). This highlights a functional division of space: the foundation serves as a site of production, training, and experimentation, while external activities constitute spaces of public engagement. This division demonstrates that artworks by blind artists move from internal production toward social circulation. The transition from experimental space to public space positions exhibitions as key arenas for the formation of recognition.

The function of exhibitions becomes more evident when linked to the community’s social objectives. S2 stated, “Our goal is to reach beyond our immediate environment and introduce disability to the wider community” (Interview S2, 2023). This statement indicates that exhibitions and publications are understood as tools of social outreach. Artworks function as media through which the public encounters both the experiences and capacities of persons with disabilities. Exhibitions therefore serve a dual function: an artistic function, in which works are presented as artistic outputs, and a social function, in which works contribute to expanding public understanding of disability. Legitimacy is thus shaped not only by the intrinsic qualities of artworks, but also by the expansion of the interpretive space through which the public understands their producers.

The role of social networks is evident in the organization of exhibitions and publications. S2 noted, “We also have many volunteers outside the community who support our activities” (Interview S2, 2023). This indicates that artworks do not circulate into public space independently. Social networks sustain exhibitions, publications, and community activities. The presence of volunteers demonstrates that recognition is grounded in relational structures that extend the reach of the community. Such support does not diminish the agency of artists, but rather reveals that artworks operate within a social domain involving multiple actors.

Community agency becomes particularly evident in how members position themselves within the art field. S2 stated, “We try to organize everything ourselves from the beginning, rather than being organized by others. That makes a difference” (Interview S2, 2023). This marks a significant shift in position. The community is no longer merely a participant invited into existing frameworks, but takes on the role of organizing its own activities. Legitimacy, therefore, involves not only what is exhibited, but also who controls the narrative, the structure of events, and the

presentation of artworks in public space. Artistic and organizational capacities operate in tandem, particularly as artworks begin to engage with issues of value and pricing.

The value of artworks becomes apparent when they are positioned as objects of exchange. S2 stated, “Completing a painting is a source of pride; art is very difficult to value in monetary terms” (Interview S2, 2023). He explained that pricing is determined by materials, level of difficulty, and duration of production. S3 added, “During exhibitions we were unsure how to price the works, so we asked others for help, and they assigned relatively high prices” (Interview S3, 2023). These accounts demonstrate that the value of artworks does not emerge automatically from the artist, but is negotiated through the interaction between artistic experience, public perception, and external evaluation. Price is therefore not merely a market issue, but also a matter of legitimacy.

From a sociological perspective, publication, exhibition, community, volunteer networks, and processes of valuation together constitute a system of legitimacy formation. Becker (1982) shows that artworks are produced and circulate through collective labor supported by networks, conventions, and role distribution. The findings of this study illustrate this clearly: the foundation functions as a site of production and experimentation, the community as a platform of shared commitment, volunteers extend social support, exhibitions serve as arenas of validation, and publications enable artworks to be interpreted by the public. Bourdieu (1993) further emphasizes that legitimacy depends on circulation, interpretation, and recognition, which together produce symbolic value. Artworks by blind artists cannot rely solely on completion; they must enter social spaces where they are trusted, displayed, evaluated, and recognized. Publication and exhibition thus become central mechanisms in the formation of legitimacy within the art field.

Public Reception, Ocularcentrism, and Inspiration Porn

Public reception of artworks by blind artists unfolds within a space shaped by persistent prejudice. S1 stated, “When vision is absent, people tend to assume that blind individuals are no longer capable of doing anything” (Interview S1, 2023). This statement indicates that before the artwork is interpreted as an artwork, the body of its creator is first read through assumptions of incapacity. Such a perspective positions vision as the dominant standard for evaluating artistic capacity. As a consequence, artworks by blind artists must overcome a burden of validation not experienced by non-disabled artists. This condition gives rise to a pattern of reception centered on public astonishment.

S1 further noted, “People often cannot imagine how someone who cannot see at all is still able to express their imagination” (Interview S1, 2023). This highlights that public attention is directed first toward the bodily condition of the artist rather than toward the medium, technique, or conceptual aspects of the work. While astonishment may generate attention, it simultaneously displaces the basis of evaluation. The artwork is received as an extraordinary event rather than as an object of artistic assessment. This situation calls for a critical examination of how admiration operates within public reception.

S2 stated, “Without exhibitions, people do not fully believe what they see on social media” (Interview S2, 2023). This indicates that artworks by blind artists must undergo an additional layer of verification in order to be considered legitimate. This burden of validation is not only related to artistic quality, but also to public assumptions about the possibility of blind individuals producing visual art. Although visibility increases through astonishment and admiration, such visibility does not

necessarily translate into stable legitimacy. This phenomenon can be understood through the concept of inspiration porn.

The term inspiration porn refers to representations of disability that position disabled individuals as sources of inspiration for non-disabled audiences (Bevier, 2024). Ordinary activities are framed as extraordinary solely because they are performed by disabled persons. In this context, inspiration porn emerges when artworks by blind artists are more readily positioned as sources of emotional response rather than as objects of serious artistic interpretation. Appreciation is directed toward the fact that the work is produced by a blind artist, rather than toward artistic decisions, medium, or technique. The artist shifts from being a creative subject to an object of admiration. This shift has critical implications for legitimacy.

When artworks are valued primarily because their creators are perceived as “capable despite being blind,” recognition is grounded in emotional response rather than artistic quality. Such recognition is fragile because it does not provide a basis for evaluating artworks through equivalent frameworks of art criticism. Bourdieu (1993) argues that legitimacy is constructed through processes of interpretation, circulation, and recognition that generate symbolic value. When attention is centered on the body of the creator, artworks risk being denied recognition as works with autonomous artistic value. Inspiration porn may generate visibility, but that visibility does not necessarily translate into legitimacy. Recognition tends to align more closely with sympathy or moral admiration than with aesthetic authority. This condition also affects how artworks are valued.

S2 stated, “Completing a painting is a source of pride; art is very difficult to value in monetary terms” (Interview S2, 2023). S3 added, “During exhibitions, we were unsure how to assign prices, so we asked others for help, and they set relatively high prices” (Interview S3, 2023). These accounts indicate that the value of artworks is not yet fully determined by established artistic criteria. When interpreted through the logic of inspiration porn, valuation becomes susceptible to bias. It may be undervalued as a therapeutic activity or overvalued due to emotional sentimentality. Both tendencies are problematic because they obscure the artistic basis of evaluation. In this context, curatorial mediation becomes crucial in reshaping interpretation.

Without mediation, public interpretation remains confined to the logic of “extraordinary because of blindness.” Appropriate mediation can redirect attention toward artistic aspects: how the work is produced, why certain techniques are chosen, how materials construct relief, and how conceptual frameworks operate within production. Exhibitions must therefore function not only as spaces of display, but also as sites of public education. Exhibition narratives, process documentation, and modes of presentation should guide audiences from sympathy toward analytical appreciation. Such efforts are essential to ensure that artworks by blind artists are not reduced to objects of emotion, but are recognized as works defined by medium, technique, and artistic value.

From a sociological perspective, public reception constitutes a critical arena in which the value of artworks is formed. Garland-Thomson (1997) demonstrates that representations of disability shape how bodies are interpreted, while Bourdieu (1993) emphasizes that legitimacy depends on social circulation and interpretation. The findings of this study show that although artworks by blind artists have entered public space through exhibitions and publications, their reception remains constrained by visually centered norms and the logic of inspiration porn. Ocularcentrism reinforces this bias by positioning vision as the dominant standard for evaluating art. As long as this visual dominance remains unchallenged, the reception of artworks by blind artists

will continue to be framed as anomalous rather than as legitimate artistic practice. The central issue is not merely whether artworks are seen, but how they are interpreted and on what basis they are recognized. As long as interpretation remains grounded in admiration for disability, artistic legitimacy will remain unstable.

Sociological Synthesis: Production, Legitimacy, and Reception within the Art Ecosystem

This study affirms that the visual art practices of blind artists cannot be reduced to individual capacity alone. Artworks emerge as social processes that unfold through production, legitimacy, and reception. Production reveals adaptation to visual limitations, the use of form memory, the incubation of conceptual ideas, and the formation of bodily and emotional habitus. Legitimacy refers to the ways in which artworks are brought into public space through communities, exhibitions, publications, and support networks. Reception reveals how artworks encounter audiences who continue to operate within visually centered norms, resulting in evaluations often shaped by both appreciation and doubt.

Becker (1982) argues that art is the outcome of collective labor within an art world. In the context of this study, such collective labor is evident in the ways artists organize the body, memory, media, materials, technical assistance, community, volunteers, and exhibition spaces. Artistic capacity does not arise solely from talent or personal perseverance. Networks of practice make artistic production possible. These findings shift interpretation away from individualistic narratives toward an understanding of artworks by blind artists as the result of concrete social organization.

Successful production does not automatically generate legitimacy. The findings show that artworks by blind artists still have to undergo a more demanding process of validation than those of non-disabled artists. Exhibitions and live painting become important not merely for displaying final results; they also serve to convince the public of the authenticity of the creative process. Bourdieu (1993) emphasizes that artistic legitimacy is determined by circulation, interpretation, and recognition, all of which produce symbolic value. An artwork is therefore recognized as legitimate only when it enters the social arena.

Stigma functions as a symbolic barrier that interferes with legitimacy. The artist's body is read first through assumptions of incapacity. Garland-Thomson (1997) argues that disability is always mediated by social representations of the body, normality, and capacity. Stigma thus shapes the initial conditions of reception. Artworks by blind artists are often situated within moral and emotional frames before they enter an equivalent space of artistic evaluation, thereby delaying artistic recognition.

Public reception becomes a decisive arena because it is there that artworks risk being reduced to objects of admiration. Visually centered modes of perception render the act of blind painting as something astonishing. The concept of inspiration porn helps explain this situation. Artworks are more readily positioned as sources of emotional response and admiration than as objects of serious artistic interpretation. Its critical effect on legitimacy becomes evident when visibility increases, while recognition remains fragile.

The problem of legitimacy extends into the problem of valuation. Informants expressed uncertainty in determining the prices of artworks. Works by blind artists continue to circulate within an evaluative field that remains unstable. Valuation may become biased. It may be undervalued because it is framed as therapeutic activity, or overvalued because it is burdened with emotional sentiment. Artistic legitimacy and

economic valuation are therefore closely intertwined, making price an indicator of the fragile social position of blind artists.

Curatorial mediation becomes crucial in this context. The findings show that artworks by blind artists cannot simply be exhibited. Curatorial narratives must direct public interpretation toward artistic processes, material strategies, formal decisions, and production contexts. Sandahl (2018) argues that disability art and culture must be understood through its processes of making and presentation as cultural practice. Curation and access mediation thus function as bridges that move audiences from admiration toward more complex forms of artistic appreciation, thereby providing legitimacy with a stronger foundation.

This synthesis demonstrates that the visual art of blind artists constitutes an arena in which artistic capacity, social stigma, support networks, and struggles for recognition converge. Production, legitimacy, and reception are not three separate stages, but a single social continuum that mutually shapes each dimension. Artworks become the result of adaptation and artistic labor. Exhibitions and communities function as channels of circulation and validation. Public reception becomes the space in which artistic value is either reinforced or diminished. Inclusive art, therefore, must be understood as a struggle to build the social conditions through which artworks can be produced, interpreted, and legitimized more equitably.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that visual art created by blind artists constitutes a social practice shaped by the relationship between production strategies, mechanisms of legitimacy, and patterns of reception. Its principal theoretical contribution to the sociology of art lies in demonstrating that artistic barriers in the context of visual disability are located not only in access to media or exhibition spaces, but also in representations of the body and in the ways the public frames creative capacity. These findings extend sociological interpretations of art by showing that disability stigma may function as a symbolic barrier that simultaneously affects the production, recognition, and evaluation of artworks.

The practical implications of this study call for more concrete measures from curators, museums, art communities, and policy makers. Curators need to develop exhibition narratives that emphasize artistic processes, material strategies, and formal decisions, rather than foregrounding the artist's disability identity alone. Museums and exhibition spaces should provide forms of access mediation that enable audiences to understand artworks through process documentation, guided tactile engagement, and interpretive frameworks that move beyond admiration. Policy makers and cultural institutions should support inclusive exhibition programs, disability-informed curatorial training, and funding schemes that enable blind artists to produce, exhibit, and market their works on a sustainable basis.

This study is limited by its focus on a specific community context, the small number of informants, and the empirical experience centered primarily on artistic practices at Yayasan Teratai Bali. The findings therefore cannot be generalized to all contexts of disability art in Indonesia. Future research should expand the range of sites, compare different forms of disability, examine the roles of curators and audiences in greater depth, and investigate how the valuation of artworks is shaped within the art market. Such directions are important if the academic community is to advance the study of inclusive art beyond normative discourse toward approaches that are operational, measurable, and relevant to both policy transformation and curatorial practice.

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