

Spring 2013

## CorpoReality

Sophia Rose Klafter  
Bard College, sk2948@bard.edu

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A man in a white t-shirt and plaid shorts is shaving in a bathroom. He is standing on a white mat, looking into a large mirror. The bathroom features a wooden vanity with a marble countertop, a sink, and a faucet. A can of Gillette shaving foam is on the counter. The background has light-colored wood paneling and heavy, draped curtains.

CorpoReality

Sophie Klafter







# CorpoReality

Sophie Klafter

May 2013

Adviser: Tim Davis

I have my mother's light eyes, my great grandmother's round nose, and my grandfather's gift of gab. From my father, I have inherited the rare neuromuscular disorder, Charcot Marie Tooth disease, which he was born with.

Because of this, I have had to view things other people took for granted from a different perspective. Since childhood, I have had to be sharply observant of my surroundings—details such as little grooves in the pavement or uneven brick on the sidewalk could make the difference between a pleasant outing and a catastrophic fall.

This need to develop an acute awareness of my surroundings, compounded with my unique physicality, eventually evolved into the desire to document the natural variations of the human body. Photography was the obvious medium, and I realized then that I had the perfect subject for my photographic journey—myself. Consequently, I spent several years creating a series of self portraits—offering the viewer a most personal glimpse into my life via pictures of my short overweight body and my misshapen feet and legs. As photography grew from hobby into passion, I began to feel a strong sense of responsibility to bring attention to the reality of living in an “imperfect” body, and started photographing other subjects in addition to myself.

While it was certainly my own situation that initially attracted me to people who have faced challenges due to their physical appearance and/or functionality, the more interaction I had with the people I photographed, the more I realized that what I was trying to get at was more complicated than my initial aim. My attraction to these people's physicality began to feel scientific and insincere. My original approach appeared as though I was viewing them in the way most others saw them, simply externally. I wanted to break through this boundary and recognize them for who they really were and what they had to offer the world.

It is somewhat natural to define things by their exterior; people tend to react most to the information that is in front of them. But it presents a major problem when this tendency carries over to how we view others. When people view the bodies of those who are physically different, the information in front of them can be so foreign to their notions of normality that they are unable to move past the external and see who these people truly are. People with disabilities are immediately and consistently viewed as something different and “other” in our society, and not as human beings with much more to them than their appearances. It is this societal trend that I sought to challenge in my work.

With this project, I not only wanted to create portraits of disabled people functioning out in the world; I also wanted their life stories. I wanted to go into their homes, meet their families hold their possessions and hear their stories of perseverance. I wanted to truly capture their spirit and what it was like for them to go through life in an atypical body. I wanted others to experience their corpoReality.

I never imagined where this project would take me and how rich my interactions with my subjects would become. Each person in these photographs has led me through their unique and powerful journey and I am profoundly grateful to them. Each one has showed me how their challenges have changed, shaped and inspired them. Many have told me that they believe that there is a karmic reason that were given this body, and one woman even expressed that she would truly miss her body in her next life. These people have lived their lives to the fullest, and not one of them takes their time here on earth for granted. They are the strongest, most courageous, and most beautiful human beings that I have ever met.







Samantha



Mark and Catherine



Josh

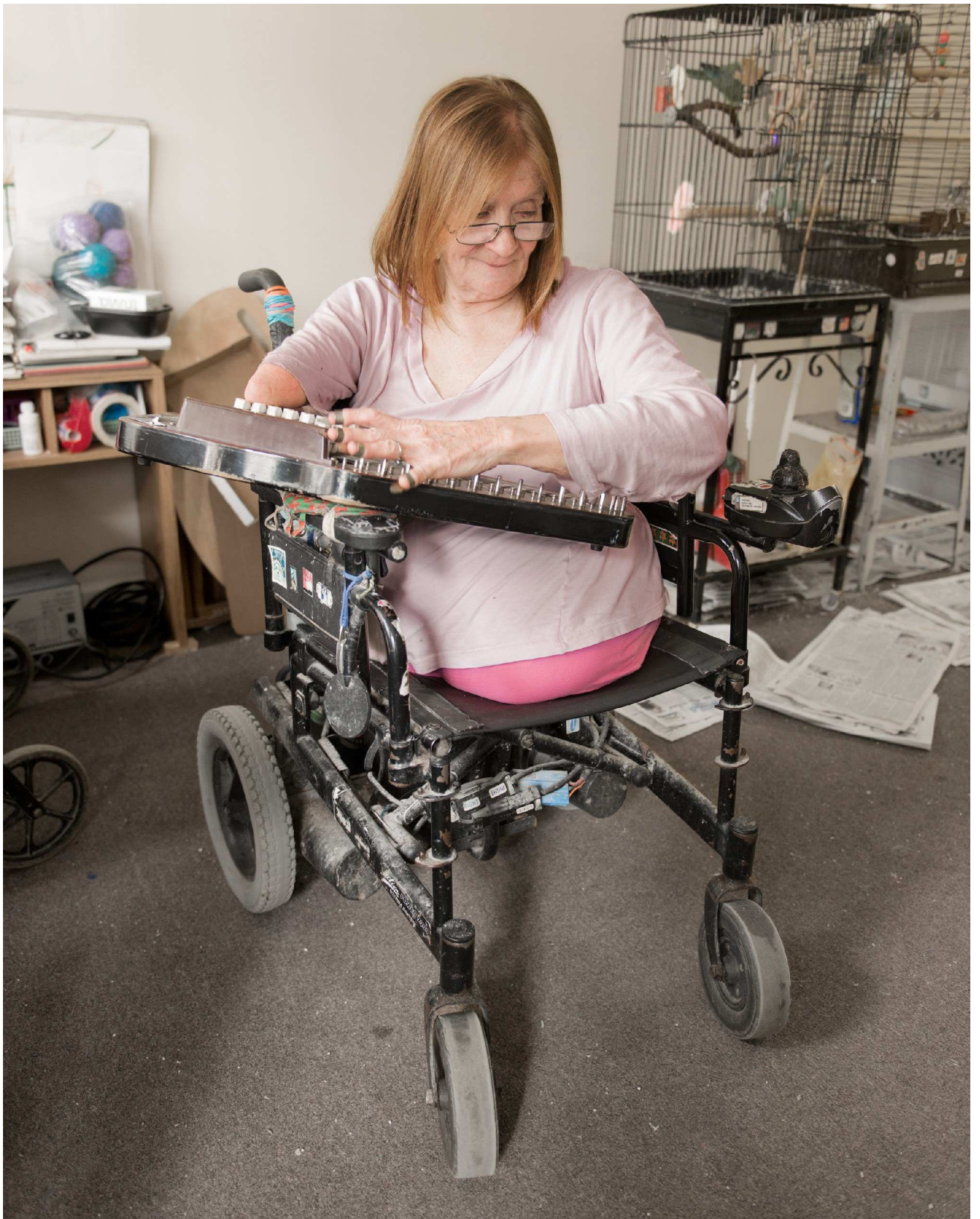




Jeff



Sarah



Sarah



Rob





Lena



Zach



Jim



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SEMPER FI

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MARINE CORPS

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THE EIGHTH  
DAY  
GOD CREATED  
MARINES

INVACARE

Geri





Jeff and Sophie



Heather



Kathy



Sophie









