Creative Spaces and Family Engagement in Libraries

Bridget Alexander, Executive Director of Waking the Village

The Art Beast Manifesto

We believe discovering who you are is usually messy and loud.

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But quiet and methodical are just fine too.

We believe that every child needs space and materials and the quieting of adult voices to make their own sense and define their own place in the world.

We believe that art can never come from precut circles and step by step directions.

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We believe that children need to make green and blue and orange art and not be bothered with learning all the names of every color.

We believe that the best way to keep a child safe is to keep a close eye AND give them the world with all its tiny bits and sharp edges.

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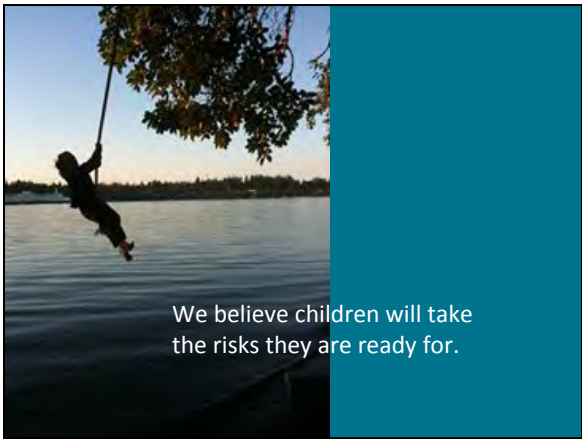
We believe that if you fill a child's life with stories and opportunities to build and play and discovery, you will not be able to hold them back from reading and science and learning.



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We believe children have an aesthetic.

We believe the look on a child's face when they are concentrated on creation is sacred.

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Poll: Challenges of Offering Arts Experiences in Libraries
The Challenges of Offering These Environments in a Library Setting
The Critical Importance of Doing So Anyway: As an institution, library has the power to reinforce or challenge the notion of what art and creativity can be.
Library also may be some families sole access point to the arts

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It took me 4 years to paint like Raphael, but a life time to paint like a child.
-Pablo Picasso

The arts are not just expressive and affective. They are deeply cognitive.

The arts develop essential thinking tools:

Pattern recognition and development

Mental representations of the observed/imagined

Symbolic and metaphorical representations

Abstraction from complexity

Cross wiring of brain areas

Arts integration improves learning

Studies consistently show :

- Greater emotional investment in classes
- Work more diligently and learn from each other
- Parents become more involved
- Teachers collaborate more
- Increased cross curricular learning
- Curriculum becomes more authentic, hands-on and project-based

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Engagement with an art trains the brain to FOCUS, improving learning

- Interest in an art form leads to sustained attention when practicing that art form.
- Engaging in art involves resolving conflicts among competing possible responses.
- The ability to resolve conflict among competing responses is also a crucial aspect of attention training.

- Literature Contains These Same Elements
- Stories Carry the Listener into a Highly Complex Cognitive Space
- Arts are a Perfect Medium to Express a Response Provided We Offer Quality Arts Experiences (and not cookie cutter crafts)

USA is experiencing a creativity crisis.

We need:

Learning that crosses subjects

Learning that teaches us to pull information from varied brain regions to form new ideas

Opportunity to practice creative activities that teach us to recruit the brains' creative networks quicker and better

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The Creativity Crisis: The Decrease in Creative Thinking Scores on the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking

"Kyung Hee Kim at the College of William & Mary discovered this after analyzing almost 300,000 Torrance scores of children and adults. Kim found creativity scores had been steadily rising, just like IQ scores, until 1990. Since then, creativity scores have consistently inched downward. "It's very clear, and the decrease is very significant," Kim says. It is the scores of younger children in America —from kindergarten through sixth grade—for whom the decline is "most serious."

The potential consequences are sweeping. The necessity of human ingenuity is undisputed. A recent IBM poll of 1,500 CEOs identified creativity as the No. 1 leadership competency of the future. "

THE DECREASE IN CREATIVE THINKING 293

IMPLICATIONS

The results indicate creative thinking is declining over time among Americans of all ages, especially in kindergarten through third grade. The decline is steady and persistent, from 1990 to present, and ranges across the various components tested by the TTCT. The decline begins in young children, which is especially concerning as it stunts abilities which are supposed to mature over a lifetime.

The decrease of creative thinking for younger children probably arises at home rather than in schools, because kindergarteners and first graders tend to be influenced more by home than school, or possibly both environments contribute to the effect. Regardless, something changed or has been changing to result in the decline of creative thinking in the United States over time, especially affecting younger children.

Efforts to encourage creativity should begin in preschool or before. Harrington, Block, and Block's (1987) longitudinal study found children whose parents provided psychological safety and freedom developed creative potential in adolescence more fully than other children, seven to 11 years after implementing Rogers' preschool child-rearing practices. Rogers (1954) based those practices on three internal psychological conditions theoretically required for creativity: internal

Reflective abstraction alone is insufficient for generating creativity (Arlin, 1977). Problem finding is necessary for generating new ideas (Arlin, 1977; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976) and provides a starting point for creative products (Chand & Runco, 1992). Creativity is motivated by problem finding. Runco and Okuda (1988) found adolescents provide more creative responses to their self-generated problems than to presented problems. Schools and homes need to encourage and teach problem finding, instead of just providing problems for students to solve, if the decline of creative thinking is to be reversed.

Also lost in the rush to provide ever more stimuli and opportunities to children is time for adults to listen to their children. Parents and teachers must personally provide receptive, accepting, and engaged psychological support to encourage creativity. A child needs meaningful interactions and collaborations to be creative (Piaget, 1961; Vygotsky, 1990). Many creative scientists and writers report collaboration promotes creativity (John-Steiner, 2000). Homes and schools should provide opportunities for students to develop teamwork skills (Shorrocks-Taylor & Jenkins, 2000; Torrance, 1978), methods for fairly evaluating peer and self performance, and mechanisms to accept and incorporate criticism (Strom & Strom, 2002). Parents and teachers should make themselves personally available in those roles,

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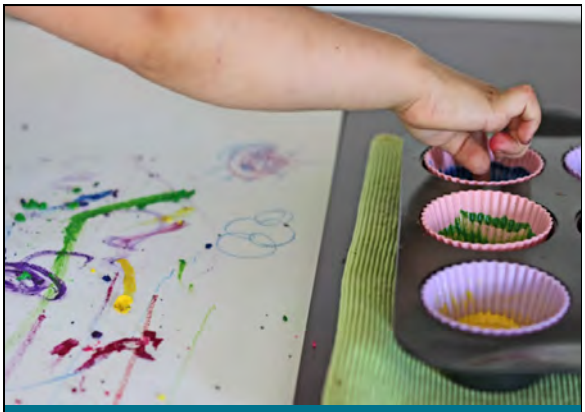
"Instructions for living a life.
Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it."
- Mary Oliver

Think of setting up an art experience in the same way you would think of setting up a science experiment.

Encourage tinkering.
Invite inventiveness.



Use Familiar Mediums in a New Way: Melted Crayon Exploration

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Spend lots of time in the space where science meets art- and resist the urge to explain everything!

Introduce new ways of manipulating mediums.

Embrace the broadest definition of art and creativity.

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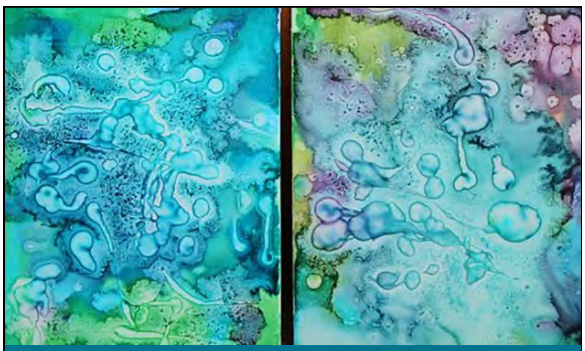

Embrace Abstraction: Watercolors with Lemon Juice

Present art constantly as a form of exploration and playfulness- not replication.
Oobleck and food dye bouncing on plastic wrap stretch over a speaker.

Sometimes art answers: "What if?"
Alka seltzer tablet, vinegar and paint trapped in a film canister

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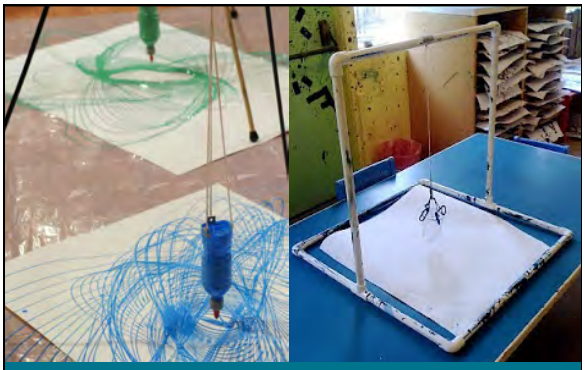
Offer art processes that are completely irresistible.

If the grown ups want to play too, you know you are on the right track.



It's all about the invitation. The space and supplies can be simple.

Don't overthink what the kids need to do.

Present the offering and step back.

Paint squeezed into a balloon. Balloon filled with water and frozen overnight.

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Art is a form of self expression.

Art experiences should not invite sameness.
Art should not require an instruction sheet.
Art should not have a deadline.
Art should encourage creativity not conformity.

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Warning Sign One: Paper plates, cups, lunch sacks or Costco bulk items are involved.

Warning Sign Two: The primary act of creating is gluing stuff onto things.

Warning Sign Three: The primary motivation to create is to decorate for the holiday.

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And now for a brief rant about

HANDPRINTS

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This is art.

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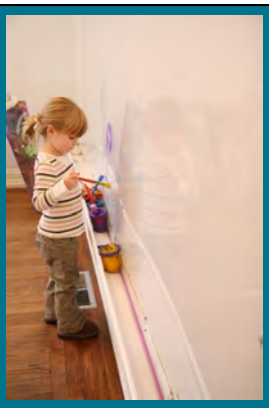
It has bothered me all my life that I do not paint like everybody else.
-Henri Matisse

Art is not a team sport.

Most often, artistic creation is solitary.
Group art WILL leave some kids feeling rushed and compared.



The most popular space at Art Beast is the empty canvas.

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Artists claiming their own space.

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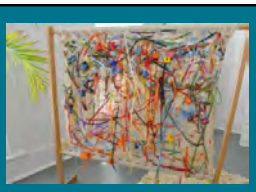

The best collaborative art processes allow children to add elements over time or add an individually created element to a group art piece.

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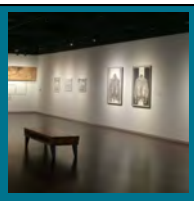
Poll: Who Gets to Make the Decisions About Arts Programming in Your Library?

a) The administrators for the library system in our area
b) The administrators of our individual library
c) Contract artists and teachers
d) The library staff that work with most directly and most often with the children
e) Others not listed here

Challenges for Integrating the Arts into Your Library:

Finding a Space for Creativity and Art



If you want to bring people into your branch, creating a space to DO art is probably more meaningful than a place to display art.

Hang art on your walls, but fill your rooms and floor space with a space for community interaction and creativity.

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The Learn and Play Space in the Children's Department at the Monroe County Public Library
YES. This would be awesome.

But absolutely not mandatory.
In fact, the $50,000+ to build that could buy a LOT of cool art supplies.

A room, a few tables and a stash of tarps will get you VERY far.

Don't have a room? A 12 by 12 foot square of open floor with a tarp on it and a few card tables can become a magical space.

Challenges for Integrating the Arts into Your Library:

Finding a Time/Attracting Families

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Lessons Learned:

- Kids and caregivers want to build a relationship with a teacher, librarian or artist.

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- Kids and caregivers want to build a relationship with one another.

Lessons Learned:

- Kids and caregivers want to build a relationship with a teacher, librarian or artist.
- Kids and caregivers want to build a relationship with one another.
- A series offered in a consistent time for a long duration (6 months at least) will do much better than a short term series or one time event.

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Lessons Learned:

- Kids and caregivers want to build a relationship with a teacher, librarian or artist.
- Kids and caregivers want to build a relationship with one another.
- A series offered in a consistent time for a long duration (6 months at least) will do much better than a short term series or one time event.
- Caregivers are more concerned with age range than topic. A class titled "Baby and Me" or "Toddler Time" will do better than a class titled "Storybook Art (0 to 3)"

Challenges for Integrating the Arts into Your Library:

Themes

The Problem with Themes:

- Forces library staff to put theme before art experiences.
- Inspires a bunch of one time events/workshops that don't build a library community .
- They tend to be driven by a short term grant. This leads to a burst of funding that results in short term planning of Summer events and Big Reads instead of the long term planning that makes a library a community hub.
- Results in high pay for contract artists instead of developing your existing and invested library staff.

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Creating a Meaningful Art Space in Any Library

"Why do you try to understand art? Do you try to understand the song of a bird?"
Pablo Picasso

Offer a range of supplies.

Include "adult" art supplies.
Offer supplies that artists work with.

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Artists don't use these supplies so why do we give them to children?

Foam Sheets
Glitter
Art Kits
Precut felt
Paper Plates
Stickers
Rubber Stamps
Precut Paper Shapes
Construction Paper

Great Art Supplies for Kids

Paint: Watercolor, Acrylic, Tempera
Good Crayons: Stick and Block
Good Chalk
Clay
Fabric
Wool Roving
Yarn
Wire
Wood
Mud
IKEA Tidbits
Mosaic Elements
Doughs
PVC Pipe and Fittings
Wood
ANYTHING from Nature

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An environment that invites creativity does not need to be well-stocked or organized.
It needs to be inviting.

It needs to tempt.
It needs to beckon.

This space did not look like this once it went into use.

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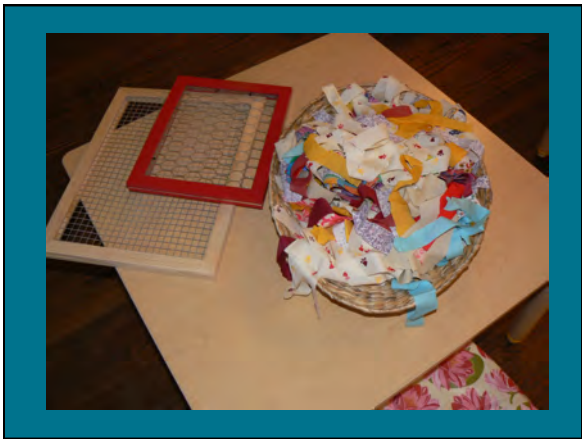

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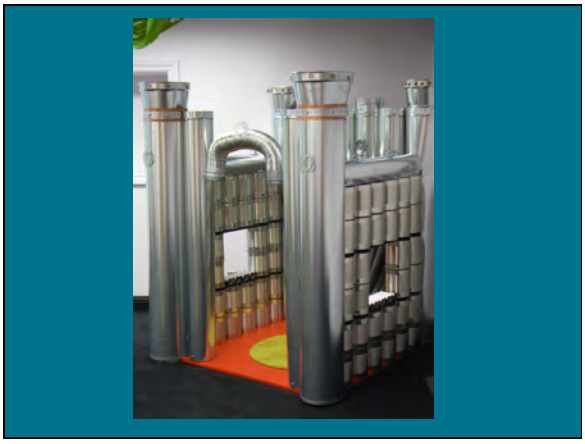

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Keep it simple. Put stuff out on a small table. Step back.

Mortar and pestle and chalk
White paper and two jars of watercolor
A block of clay
Sticks and yarn
A box top, marbles and two colors of paint
Tray of baking soda, a jar of dyed vinegar, a dropper
Paint Lab: qtips, combs, sponge, scrubs…
Burlap and yarn with plastic needles

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Center instruction on mediums not look-alike crafts.

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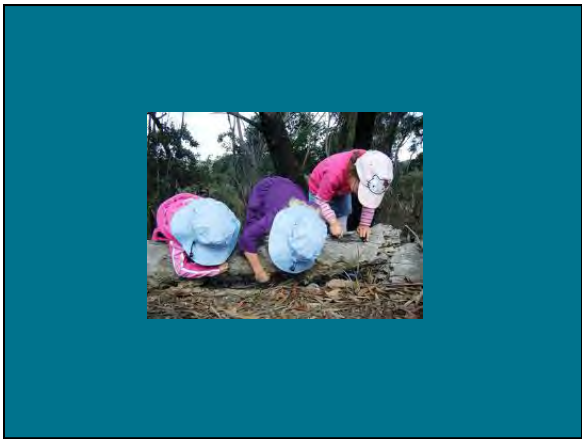

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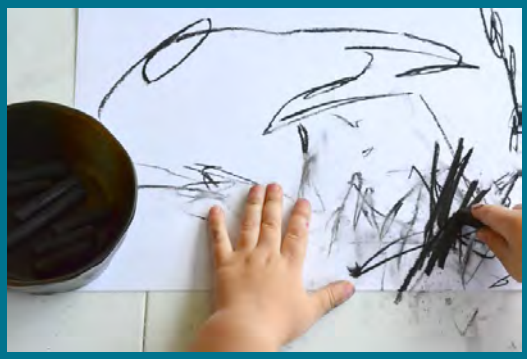

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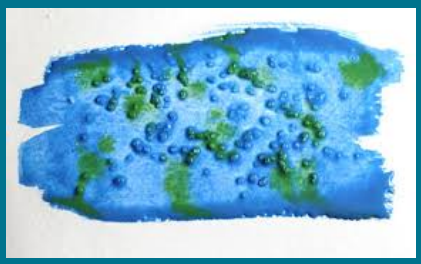

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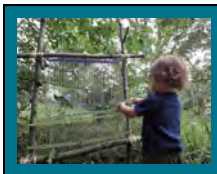

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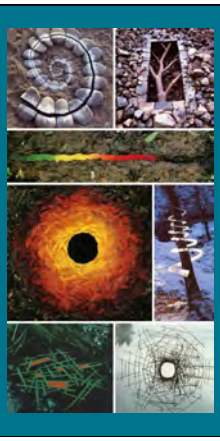

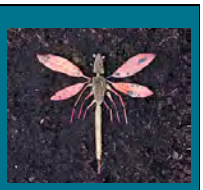

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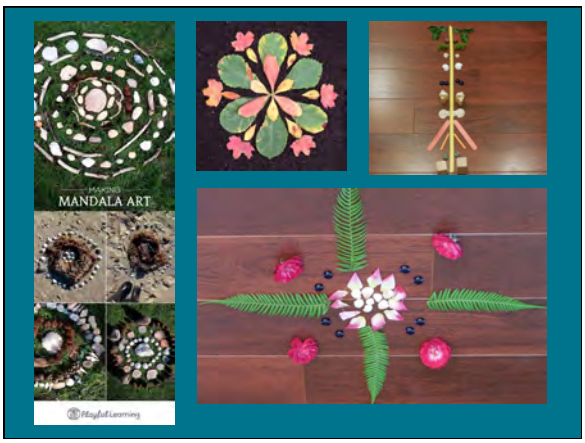

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Expand your definition of what art is.

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The constant arranging that children do is ART.

Creating order from chaos.
Giving meaning to a jumble of supplies.
Using something in a new way.

Let the children lead.

Let them have weird ideas.
Let them follow inspirations.
Let them chase crazy notions.

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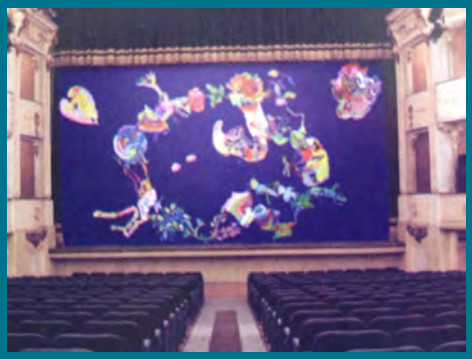

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Let it get loud, messy and wild.

Art can get gross motor.

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Survey: What changes to your space or routines would be an affordable and simple way to integrate more arts programming?

a) Dedicate a space to art
b) Dedicate budget to weekly sessions rather than one time event
c) Set up an arts supply cabinet that story time leaders can access
d) Start a pinterest board for library staff to gather ideas
e) Dedicate an hour a week to arts programming for one age group
f) Uplift quality of arts and crafts that children engage in at library events or workshops

When my daughter was about seven years old, she asked me one day what I did at work. I told her I worked at the college- that my job was to teach people how to draw. She stared back at me, incredulous, and said, "You mean they forget?"
-Howard Ikemoto

5 Children's Books and Connected Arts:

Dave the Potter + Clay Work

Hungry Caterpillar + Balloon Art

Chicken Sunday + Hats

When Sophie Gets Angry + Calm Down Jars or Anger Art

Tom Sawyer + Fence Board Art

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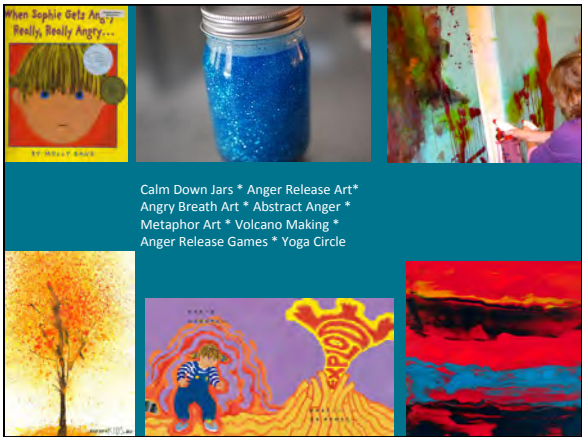

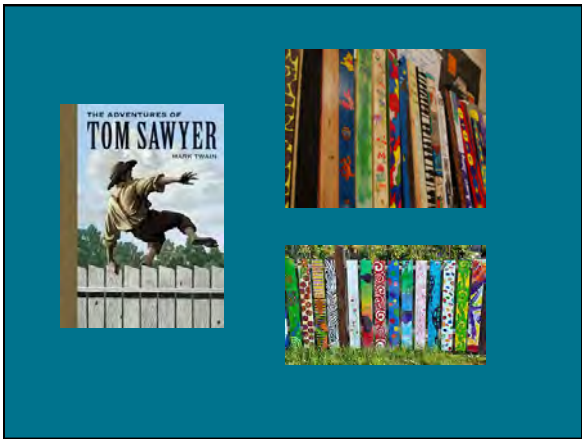

Profile of a Great Library Arts Space:
Crete Library Art Studio

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Crete library offers youth art exploration

October 14, 2013 12:00 am • For The Times
CRETE | The Crete Public Library's Art Studio explores different art mediums and lets participants make unique works of art to take home.

Recently the group's project was to paint patterns on small tree branches and a second project was painting patterns on canvas.

Each participant chose his tree branch, colors and patterns to make an exclusive art piece to take home. The canvas paintings will be completed this month and displayed on the second floor for the community to view.

Process oriented art projects @ Lisle Library
The Youth Services Department at Lisle Library District (in Lisle, IL) focuses on process oriented art in our programs. It's about the process, not the product! Great art projects for toddlers and preschoolers.

http://www.pinterest.com/lislelibrary/process-oriented-art-projects-lisle-library/

Profile of Powerful Arts Programs
Centered in Libraries:
NY Library Partnership

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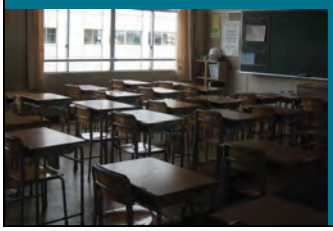
Uptown
'Project Art' program turns New York Public Libaries into studios for young students uptown Adarsh Alphons seeks to remedy gap in art education in schools, shortage of youth programming in libraries. Program offers classes at Hamilton Grange branch with plans for large-scale expansion.
BY Laignee Barron
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
Friday, July 19, 2013, 9:24 PM

Read more:
http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/uptown/artist-bold-stroke-inspiration-article-1.1404105#ixzz33WbcvvaG

One enterprising artist is painting over two public funding crises in one stroke.
Adarsh Alphons wants to remedy the gap in art classes and public education, while simultaneously helping to restore youth programming to libraries, where budget cuts have eliminated thousands of hours of programming.
Alphons' organization, Project Art, is turning the library into a studio where low-income uptowners ages 5 to 18 learn to prime a canvas, mix a color palette and sculpt a masterpiece.
Project Art temporarily moved to the Hamilton Grange Library last fall when its former studios became a liability with leaking bathrooms and faulty sinks.
"We urgently needed space, and libraries are unable to provide as much programming as they used to," Alphons said.
A libary spokeswoman called the partnership a "win-win situation" that works to the benefit of Harlem residents.
"The New York Public Library has experienced budget cuts over the past five years, which has made it difficult for the staff to offer the same types of programs they have offered in the past," said Amy Geduldig, the organization's public relations manager. "Programs like ProjectArt help provide us with programs and resources that are important to the people we serve."
Alphons, 30, plans to expand the program to other branches in Harlem, including Countee Cullen.

Read more:
http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/uptown/artist-bold-stroke-inspiration-article-1.1404105#ixzz33WbvmWAU

The Problem: The Void
The arts opportunity gap is widest for children in high-poverty schools. This is absolutely an equity issue and a civil rights issue-just as is access to AP courses and other educational opportunities. Nearly four million elementary school students do not get any visual arts instruction at school during their formative learning years.



The Solution:
Public Libraries Partnership
ProjectArt collaborates with public institutions (libraries) that are strategically located to bring access to arts directly to underserved communities. This is particularly effective for communities on the lower socioeconomic scale.

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Chat: What are some great activities or programs you have seen?

Excellent Internet Resources for Art Inspiration:
Pinterest: Search Process Art
Teacher Tom
Red Ted Art
Play at Home Mom
Magic Onions
Artful Parent
Tinkerlab
Make Zine and the Makers Movement
Child's Play Music
Bev Bos
Project Art (New York Library Project)

Contact Information:

Bridget Alexander
Executive Director of Waking the Village
bridget@wakingthevillage.org

www.artbeaststudio.com

www.littlehousesfestival.com

www.wakingthevillage.org

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