

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

Community Outreach Artist-Instructors

This is a story about the power of art to enhance and sometimes transform lives told through the experiences of three Outreach artist-instructors. Each artist works with a different audience served by the Minnetonka Center for the Arts Outreach Program: adults with disabilities, seniors with memory loss and underserved children and teens.



Ruth Mason

It's just before noon and students begin to arrive to the Minnetonka Center for the Arts' Ridgedale classroom. Many have been at their jobs all morning and are looking forward to a break and some creativity to recharge after work. This is a group of adults who are attending art classes through eQuality – Pathways to Potential, which helps individuals with developmental disabilities maximize their potential and actively participate in life's opportunities including work, recreation, education and community involvement. Artist-Instructor Ruth Mason has been working with adults with disabilities for several years, providing art classes for our partners eQuality and Choice, Inc.

Inspired by an exhibit of China's terra cotta warriors, Ruth introduced a series of Asian-themed projects. One was Chinese brush painting. "It was fun because it's very process oriented and highly stylized. Different brush strokes create different shapes," says Ruth. "Everyone was able to participate in an ancient style of art." They also created warrior figures, not literally battle related, but a figure from their personal lives that made them feel safe, protected. It opened an opportunity for the students to talk about things that made them feel unsafe. "I think a lot of adults with disabilities feel unsafe when they're not respected," says Ruth. One man approached Ruth a couple weeks before, saying, "Ruth, when are we going to make our warrior figures? I'm having some issues in my life and I would really like to get going on that project."

Art is such a communicative tool. "I believe this gentleman was very frustrated with someone and wanted to express 'I'm trying to tell you what I need and you're not listening,'" says Ruth. "Often students are eager to give their artwork to a caregiver or parent as a way of saying 'See how capable I am' or returning love they've been given." Making art has its practical side, too, building essential skills. "You learn how to measure, you learn about proportion, you learn about size and scale or how to use scissors. And there's always a little more math than people think," according to Ruth.

Besides being an accomplished artist with a B.F.A. from Minneapolis College of Art and Design, with studies in theatre arts, experience in film production and a penchant for large-scale public art, Ruth brings powerful creativity and intuitive sensitivity to her outreach work. "I just



see the person first. We're all the same in terms of what we need and want," says Ruth, adding, "I think it's easy for some to see adults with disabilities as childlike, but they have a mature understanding of life." She helps everyone participate, even those with significant physical challenges, by breaking each project down to clear steps. The process of making art and building community is a priority for Ruth. "I always say if one person isn't done, then nobody is done. We're all working together," she says, adding with a laugh, "and that goes for clean up, too!"



Michèle Coppin

During one Presbyterian Homes memory care art class, an elegant and very proper fellow of 97 years was listening to Artist-Instructor Michèle Coppin talk about France and Matisse as she showed them colorful paintings she did for her thesis. All of a sudden he started speaking French! He was as startled as everyone else, saying, "I didn't know!" but spent the rest of the session happily tossing words and phrases back and forth with Michèle. It was gone again by the next class but that moment, triggered by the art, was magical.

"I find the connection between art and memory fascinating," says Michèle, who received her M.F.A. from the Pratt Institute in New York. "They tell me they don't know how to paint, but then they get into it and they can take off on their own and be extremely creative!" While Michèle loves the artwork her students produce, she knows that sometimes it's not the art that is important. "I wish someone would come in and take photos of them before the class and after, because physically they stand up a little straighter, their cheeks are rosy, they're more animated and active," she says with delight. Her art classes pull seniors

challenged by memory loss out of their isolation. While their hands are busy, they chat, help each other and share stories triggered by the sensory stimulation of the art.

Once Michèle introduced mandalas, circular art forms that in Hindu or Buddhist practice are meditative representations of the universe. She brought some patterns for them to color. It was not successful. A month later, she introduced music, encouraging the class to relax, enjoy the beautiful rhythms and let their imaginations go as they painted. One after the other, what did they create? Mandalas! It was the most natural thing in the world, but had to come from within.



Describing her students as resilient and courageous, Michèle reflects, "It must be scary to not know where you are most of the time or not recognize the people who are around you. Yet they have humor, they are smiling, they're friendly and sweet and so full of kindness." To ensure their enjoyment and success with their projects, Michèle shows them each tiny step, getting to eye level to make it personal and engaging. She encourages family and loved ones to get involved to enjoy the connection and memories that come up as well as make some new ones to cherish.

"We're all headed in that direction of old age," Michèle reminds us. "It benefits the whole society really to treat our older people well, with dignity and respect. Programs like these elevate the quality of life."



Geneviève Chamberland

Happy youngsters bounce into the community room of their apartment building after school. The older kids aren't as enthusiastic. As soon as they realize they're about to be trapped in

a small room with 5- and 6-year olds, their "this is going to be lame" attitude is palpable. But Artist-Instructor Geneviève Chamberland has brought a secret weapon: clay.

She bides her time as they're welcomed by a representative from Project for Pride in Living, Inc., a local nonprofit dedicated to helping Twin Cities low-income residents achieve self sufficiency. "Programs like ours expose the children to materials they rarely see," says Geneviève. "I love to bring clay into their world because it's something they rarely get to work with. It also makes their project more permanent and that permanency gives them a source of pride."

Geneviève teases and cajoles the group a little bit to get them started, sharing a sports sock filled with corn starch (which keeps clay from sticking to molds). She tells the students it is her son's dirty, stinky sock filled with toe dust. A few giggles bubble up. Soon attitudes soften to smiles as the kids start to touch and form the material. Once they're into it, you can't get the clay away from them!



Being a mom herself and not of this country (she's Canadian), Geneviève finds common ground and connection with her students. They range from ages 5 to 16. Most are refugees from Africa, many from Somalia, all are struggling financially. "I believe art helps kids realize that despite struggles – at school, in the community or with their family – they can create something beautiful. Out of the most primal material – dirt – they create something of value," says Geneviève. "There's value in their art and that means there is value in them."

Some of the students can be pretty rowdy, but Geneviève can be a pretty tough teacher. "I can also be very loving," she says. As she introduces a project, showing a demo piece that she's made herself, she considers the class, sizing up who needs a little more engagement in the experience, and gives them the biggest jobs. "They feel special being chosen for responsibility and it gets them more involved in the experience." (continued on page 6)

She makes sure they know that the class is a safe environment where they can relax and create.

Geneviève loves her Outreach work because she knows that when children feel the freedom of creating, they realize they can become winners despite present challenges. "It feels like art gives them a little pat on the back

that they will remember when it's a rough road."

Thank you to all of the talented artist-instructors and community partners who make these programs possible. Outreach is a vital aspect of the work of the Minnetonka Center for the Arts, and one of the most gratifying. If you want to support our Outreach

efforts, please see page 7 for donation information.

A depth of thanks to the Minnesota State Arts Board. This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

What makes Outreach possible?

The stories above were supported by a \$50,000 2011 and \$100,000 2012 **Arts Access Grant** from the Minnesota State Arts Board (MSAB). Last year, almost 30 exceptional instructors helped reach 1,639 people at little or no cost who otherwise would have minimal access to art.

This work proved foundational, because recently the MSAB awarded a \$142,741 **2013 Arts Learning Grant** to continue and expand our visual arts programs with these partners so we may continue to reach adults with special needs, seniors with memory loss and at-risk children and teens. Under the leadership of Holly Nelson, Adult

Program Director, and Nicole Buchholz, Children and Youth Program Director, programs are underway for 2014.

The best way to reach underserved audiences is to work through the social service organizations that already serve them. The organizations listed to the right have been exceptional partners, enabling the Minnetonka Center for the Arts to deliver quality arts programming to individuals who will benefit the most. **Thank you!** Many of these partnerships go back 20 years or more! We hope all will continue to flourish long into the future.

Exhibits Update

Exhibits at the Minnetonka Center for the Arts are always free, accessible and open to the public.

Arts of the Holidays Show & Sale

Grand Opening, November 14, 6 - 9 p.m.
November 15 - December 23

The Arts of the Holidays Show & Sale is a juried collection of unique handmade art and fine craft items selected for character and value, ideal for holiday giving. Discover original gifts in a variety of media, including pottery, glass, fiber, wood, photography, printmaking, paintings, sculpture and jewelry. Make a day of it with friends and stop for a treat in the Art Center Café. (See page 2.)

Student Show

January 30 - February 20
Opening Reception, January 30, 6 - 8 p.m.

This show demonstrates the creativity, skill and inspiration that happen in the Minnetonka Center for the Arts' studios and includes a wide variety of art created by students of all ability levels. For some artists, this is their first show, and for others, it's another step in the journey from student to professional artist. It is an opportunity for our students to see their work – and have it seen by others – in a professional gallery setting. The Student Show reminds us of the power, potential and importance of the visual arts and the joy of the artistic process.

CALL FOR ENTRIES

The Student Show

Entries must be delivered with tags to the **Laura H. Miles Gallery on January 21, 9 a.m. - 7 p.m.**

The Call for Entries a) will be mailed to all 2013 students, b) may be picked up at the Art Center, c) can be found at minnetonkaarts.org on the Exhibits page, or d) will be mailed to you if you call 952-473-7361, x. 16, to request. It contains complete instructions and artwork tags needed for submission.

CONTEMPLATING OUTSIDE: small works

Carey Netherton

January 20 - February 20
Art Wall, Studio Hallway
Artist presentation, February 6 at 7 p.m.

Sculpture Studio Manager Carey Netherton will be exhibiting the result of his 2013 Artist Initiative Grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board. The project included researching and designing maquettes (small models) for potential large-scale outdoor public sculptures. This exhibit features a glimpse of possible future large-scale outdoor public sculptures. Carey will offer a presentation about the project on February 6 at 7 p.m.

Suburbs

Paintings by Scott Lloyd Anderson

February 24 - March 24
On the Art Wall, Studio Hallway

Plein-air painter Scott Lloyd Anderson turns his artist's eye to the unidealized suburban landscapes around us in this exhibit of recent work.

Society of Minnesota Sculptors Exhibit

March 6 - April 17
Opening reception, March 6, 6 - 8 p.m.

Some of our region's finest sculptors exhibit their latest creations in this juried exhibit.

CALL FOR ENTRIES

The Figure Show

April 10 - May 8
Go to the Exhibits page at minnetonkaarts.org to find the complete Call for Entries.

Minnetonka Center for the Arts Outreach Artist- Instructors

These artists served the 2011 and 2012 MSAB Arts Access Grant Outreach Projects.

Mark Balma

YWCA Youth Programs

Traudi Bestler

Presbyterian Homes

Donna Bruni

Lyngblomsten

Elsbeth Carlstrom

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners
YWCA Youth Programs

Krissy Catt

YWCA Youth Programs
Project for Pride in Living
Presbyterian Homes
Lyngblomsten

Geneviève Chamberland

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners
YWCA Youth Programs
Project for Pride in Living
St. David's Center

Michèle Coppin

Presbyterian Homes

Meagan Daus

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners

Jeff Deitering

Hammer Residences
ReStart

Nicola Demonte

Presbyterian Homes

Jack Evert

Presbyterian Homes

Carly Frederick

YWCA Youth Programs
Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners

Stephanie Frey

Project for Pride in Living

Shannon Ingham

Presbyterian Homes
Choice, Inc.

Marissa Johnston

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners
St. David's Center

Beth Joselyn

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners
YWCA Youth Programs
Project for Pride in Living
St. David's Center

Andy Juelich

YWCA Youth Programs

Gail Katz-James

St. David's Center

Ruth Mason

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners
YWCA Youth Programs
St. David's Center
eQuality
Choices, Inc.

Zach Morin

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners

Judd Nelson

St. David's Center

Lindsey Reis

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners
YWCA Youth Programs
Project for Pride in Living
St. David's Center

Adam Setala

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners
Presbyterian Homes

Brad Skolnick

Interfaith Outreach & Community Partners
YWCA Youth Programs
Project for Pride in Living

Jean Yang

St. David's Center

Julia Zimmerman

Project for Pride in Living
St. David's Center
YWCA Youth Programs
Opportunity Partners

To all of the artists who have taught Outreach classes, thank you for sharing your gifts and talents. Your dedication is exemplary and deeply appreciated. Our apologies if any names were missed!