

THE ART TEACHER'S GUIDE TO EXPLORING ART AND DESIGN IN THE COMMUNITY

Ilona Szekely



BLOOMSBURY

The Art Teacher's Guide to Exploring Art and Design in the Community

ALSO AVAILABLE FROM BLOOMSBURY

Computer Science Education: Perspectives on Teaching and Learning in School,

edited by Sue Sentance, Erik Barendsen and Carsten Schulte

Education and Technology, Neil Selwyn

Mastering Primary Art and Design, Peter Gregory, Claire March, Suzy Tutchell

Mastering Primary Design and Technology, Gill Hope

Picture Pedagogy: Visual Culture Concepts to Enhance the Curriculum, Paul Duncum

Reflective Teaching in Further, Adult and Vocational Education, Margaret Gregson
and Sam Duncan with Kevin Brosnan, Jay Derrick, Gary Husband, Lawrence Nixon,

Trish Spedding, Rachel Stubley and Robin Webber-Jones

Reflective Teaching in Schools, Andrew Pollard with Pete Dudley, Steve Higgins,

Kristine Black-Hawkins, Gabrielle Cliff Hodges, Mary James, Sue Swaffield,
Mandy Swann, Mark Winterbottom, Mary Anne Wolpert and Holly Linklater

The Art Teacher's Guide to Exploring Art and Design in the Community

Ilona Szekely

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC and the Diana logo are
trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain 2022

Copyright © Ilona Szekely, 2022

Ilona Szekely has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988,
to be identified as Author of this work.

For legal purposes the Acknowledgments on p. viii constitute an extension of this copyright page.

Cover designer: Charlotte James
Cover image © David Parsell

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording,
or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Bloomsbury Publishing Plc does not have any control over, or responsibility for,
any third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given
in this book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher regret
any inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have ceased to exist,
but can accept no responsibility for any such changes.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Szekely, Ilona, author.

Title: The art teacher's guide to exploring art and design in the community / Ilona Szekely.

Description: London ; New York : Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2021010168 (print) | LCCN 2021010169 (ebook) | ISBN 9781350096295 (paperback) |

ISBN 9781350096301 (hardback) | ISBN 9781350096318 (epub) | ISBN 9781350096325 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Art—Study and teaching. | Artists and community. | Community arts projects.

Classification: LCC N350. S94 2021 (print) | LCC N350 (ebook) | DDC 707.1—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021010168>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2021010169>

ISBN:	HB:	978-1-3500-9630-1
	PB:	978-1-3500-9629-5
	ePDF:	978-1-3500-9632-5
	eBook:	978-1-3500-9631-8

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com
and sign up for our newsletters.

Contents

List of Figures vii

Acknowledgments viii

Introduction 1

Part I Art in Public Places and Alternative Museum Sites

1 Service Places 19

2 Transportation 39

3 Food and Art 59

Part II Community as Art Treasures

4 Exploring Alternative Museum Sites in your Backyard 73

5 Parks and Playgrounds as Extensions to Art Classrooms and Home Studios 89

6 Personal Connections 101

Part III Community Art Projects

7 Community Art 143

Conclusion 169

Notes 174

References 184

Index 193

Figures

- 2.1 Art Car outside 21C Art Hotel in Louisville, KY. Arillated: The 21C Pip Mobile 40
- 2.2 Underground art (Chicago, IL) 46
- 4.1 Seeing beauty in puddles 77
- 4.2 Creating Art on the School Fence (Steve Miller, Grassy Waters Elementary School) 84
- 5.1 Student-created outdoor art 90
- 6.1 Trees: Seeing the beauty and artistic possibilities in the outdoors (Kentucky Governor's Mansion) 108
- 6.2 A doorway of art possibilities (The Commons Community Center, Columbus, Indiana) 113
- 6.3 The architecture of the bus stop (Bus shelter, 9 Aro Street Xoa Hall, Wellington, New Zealand) 117
- 6.4 Art that interacts and comments on the community (Abraham Clet, Florence, Italy) 133
- 7.1 Art vending machine (Madrid, Spain) 144

Acknowledgments

This book about community would not have been possible without a community supportive of me. Emilie Tackett, my amazing daughter, enthusiastically accompanies me in my world travels. Emilie became so immersed in the subject that she was able to provide essential insights from a student's point of view.

With ample camera equipment at his sides, my husband, David, was always prepared at each research site to take and retake a trove of photos that account for the exciting visual presence of the book.

Professor George Szekely gladly shared his design, architecture, and art teacher background. Dad read and commented on everything I have written since I was a little girl, and continues to do so now as a proud colleague.

My mother, Dr. Laura, a creative designer and teacher, provides for us all and has given me everything needed to succeed in life.

In my academic career, I thank you, great teachers, especially my mentor Dr. Jane Jenson, and thank you, my nurturing colleague Dr. Julie Bucknam, for all I learned from you as a teacher and human being.

The ideas for this book came from a lifetime of travel safaris with young students who walked with me to explore and add their designs to neighborhoods. Future art teachers traveled the world with me in our university summer programs abroad. Thank you, travel partners—your creative voices about each theme enlarged in the book.

Deirdre Mikolajcik, my project editor, was helpful with suggestions always on the mark. Deirdre's kindness and support never stopped streaming.

Thanks, Ana and Jacob, my siblings, for your encouragement throughout this journey.

Introduction

Chapter Outline

Introduction: The Search for Art and Design Begins in the Backyard	3
Community-Based Art	6

In this book, I draw on professional literature and research, including personal stories of leading students of all ages on city safaris and studies of the built environment.

References in the book encompass several original writings and notes, photos, on-site sketches, and collections by students and art teachers. The material in the text closely follows a twenty-five-year career of exploring cities with children and high schoolers in the United States and leading yearly teaching-abroad programs. References in my teaching notes are about personal and original environmental observations, noting the reactions of my many students and their discoveries. Each section of the text offers a brief historical background and features examples of outstanding contemporary designers. There are practical and specific creative advice, and resources for students and art teachers, including helpful questions and discussion topics for everyone investigating the phenomenon of the city. Examples are often expansive in hopes of providing a broad brush of inspiring ideas. It is not possible to go into every small town and large city to provide examples. The hope is to afford just enough of an example so that each person can use these examples as guidance in creating their own experiences based on local knowledge and location.

Intended for art teachers, this book offers something special for all school levels: for students of any age who will be excited to gather art ideas, canvases, and materials in the community for creative projects.

The reading is to inspire teachers who wish to provide real-world encounters in their communities and who want to find interest and inspiration beyond the school building and art class.

It is a book to support future and current art teachers who want to think beyond the traditional way of approaching art by involving students in experiences and narratives of exploring the treasures of the environment.

I expect this book will be of particular interest to:

- Preservice teachers who are thinking about and planning their future classrooms;
Current teachers who are looking for ways to open up their art class doors to the community;
Graduate students continuing or returning to school who are looking to add innovation to their classroom.
- Professors of art education who are seeking to engage students in a greater sense of community awareness and idea gathering from primary sources; and
- Community arts professionals who wish to use art in engaging students with the community.

The ultimate goal in creating this book is for everyone to discover aesthetic pleasure and inspiration in the art and design that exists outside of designated art spaces such as galleries and museums. The book can open valuable discourse about what art is, where it can be found, what has artistic value, and how the many gems in a city can be preserved. For art teachers, this book hopes to serve as a valuable guide for urban field trips. The book hopes to encourage students to actively explore community spaces and built environments and to learn different methods of collecting, examining, and utilizing urban finds in a variety of memorable school art activities.

I believe this book is timely because twenty-first-century art has deep roots and presence in the community, yet school art is still mostly relegated to isolated art rooms. The book hopes to contribute to opening school doors and breaking boundaries between studying art in classes and experiencing art, of making art in—and for—the community.

Independent Artists

This book challenges students to become independent artists; to walk around their backyard and their city looking at the beauty and destruction as possibilities to reference, learn from, and be inspired by; and to challenge notions of what art is and where it can be produced. An artist who works independently collects and organizes ideas when navigating the world, whether through writing, diagramming, collecting, or taking pictures or videos on one's phone.

As art teachers, one of the challenges is how to nurture an artistic sense in students that ultimately does not require an art lesson or teacher. To do this, ideas need to be taken seriously in the classroom, and independence needs to be at the forefront by teaching students to pay attention through removing their electronic devices and interacting with the space.

Yet technology can also be embraced, as it is now easier and more exciting than ever to organize thoughts and ideas. Easy to handle for students, phone apps can help sketch, jot down, recall, and organize notes, save ideas, and plan for the future. The ideas are then effortless to retrieve and keep safe. Helping students to organize their thoughts is a way to prepare students for the road for acting on them, clarifying them, and understanding supplies and tools needed.

Learning Outside the Classroom

This book also asks that art teachers take a stance on the value of learning outside the classroom. This is a concept that the British government already developed in 2006, when they published a manifesto called "Learning Outside the Classroom." According to the document, "There is strong evidence that good quality learning outside the classroom adds much value to classroom learning. It can lead to a deeper understanding of the concepts that span traditional subject boundaries and which are frequently difficult to teach effectively using classroom methods alone."

The manifesto goes on to speak about the importance of the local environment around the school building providing a wealth of opportunities to enhance curriculum, and, as students get older, they can appreciate more distant and challenging environments, as they begin to understand the contrast to their own environment and places that reflect the world of commerce and technology.¹ There is also discussion of the importance of staying away for a few days, observing nature, and involvement in cultural arts festivals.

This document that held many stakeholders' signatures is powerful in enacting change to how students learn and facilitating a push for learning beyond the four walls of school. The challenge then becomes: how does this permeate into the education of all children throughout the world, and, in the meantime, how does the art teacher give students the opportunity to have these experiences?

This is an idea that educator Peter London placed a similar call to action on when in 1994 he stated in his book *Step Outside*, "It is ironic that in today's schools, which depend increasingly on expensive audiovisual equipment to bring second hand news about the outside world to the classroom there exists a fine devise that is rarely used to its full advantage—the door."² It is these documents that are the framework this book is based upon.

Introduction: The Search for Art and Design Begins in the Backyard

The rural town of Richmond, Kentucky, where I teach has a university art gallery. Forty-five minutes away in Lexington, there is a larger university museum, and there are distinguished museums in Cincinnati and Louisville that are a two-hour drive away. However, my students are future art teachers who grew up in small rural settings and have rarely, if ever, visited a gallery or a museum. From their houses, the drive to the nearest museum could take up to three or four hours. So where do art ideas come from? It is important to discuss and understand the role of any environment in forming aesthetic judgments and how a location can also provide the raw materials and inspiration for one's artistic pursuits.

Therefore, one of the initial outings as a class is not to a museum, but the local Walmart,³ an American multinational showcase of retail operations. Why Walmart? Because Walmart is the all-American store with a presence in towns that usually do not have a museum or home for traditional art collections. The people's museum, Walmart houses and displays item that most Americans come across every day. Where people shop shapes aesthetic taste, so what better way to discuss art and design than to stand before items that are familiar and comfortable, with containers and forms, labels and packaging, all designed by artists. During the maiden trip, we discuss design and aesthetics, pondering over candy wrappers and detergent boxes. We look at the visual grandeur of the cereal aisle, the latest in children's socks, pillows, and umbrellas.

Students show interest in the new forms and colors, from materials used for water bottles and the uniqueness of paddings placed under fruits to preserve and present them, to the illustrations on lunch bags. We also enjoy and assess logos, product branding art, and clever box designs. During our outing, students recount the series of aesthetic decisions they make in preparing for

school each morning—choices about clothes, colors used to paint their nails, the bags they carry to school, and so on. The Walmart trip introduces students to the first of many journeys we will take to examine the environment of the world's largest art supply store; the display of, and source for, contemporary forms and materials for the art class; and a place where we make art judgments as well as art-making plans for our school art class.

While it is important to attend museums and talk about the art regally hanging on the walls, for our Walmartists, many of the formal art places are far removed from accessible opportunities and experiences. In the stores and on the streets of our town, students need to walk with a vision, curiosity, and awareness of the many art possibilities percolating. Students need to begin to understand what catches their senses and interests, which means paying attention to, and learning from, the shapes and forms that comprise our streets, our stores, and homes. Every man-made environment elicits important discussions because these are places that were designed and created to be visually appealing, to enjoy and learn from, and, occasionally, to even take home with us. Unlike museums, the local environment also provides opportunities as a giant canvas for artists and school art students to reformulate and contribute to.

Part of every excursion recorded in this book depicts my preservice and graduate students' love for exploration, visual adventures, and finding hidden gems that they can bring back to class to use in their art. From boxes, plastic and paper containers, to twist ties, apple crates, and cardboard trays, students learn that they can often load up on the best art finds for free. We flock to the items that are not thought of as art or not always considered as having aesthetic value, and we make a home for them in the art room. Whether from the store, or the sidewalk, everything is discussed as a special find.

It may be difficult to arrange for a long-distance museum trip for a class, but there are many opportunities to be found circling the school, excavating the school yard, and exploring adjacent neighborhoods on rural and urban safari. It is not difficult for a class to visit stores and the observations and discussions are easily transferrable to the art room. On many occasions, I simply unload items in class from weekend "shopping" trips and invite students to the grand opening. Who does not like packages and shopping bags being opened in class? Students are regularly invited to share their findings as the art class becomes a welcoming place for students' environmental treasure hunting. Having aesthetic experiences in nature, on the street, in stores, and in public buildings also lends courage to students when they then enter museums because they have built up an aesthetic vocabulary to judge, compare, and discuss other forms of art.

How Everyday Places Form Visual Impressions

This book does not focus on traditional galleries and museums, but everyday places where art and design linger while viewers often pass by, paying little attention to the aesthetics in our backyards. This book asks the viewer to look with new eyes at places that are seen every day because all the spaces we enter and all the places we pass through leave visual impressions. When we walk into a Starbucks or the supermarket, we pick up not only drinks and food, but scores of comfortably recognizable symbols based on visual prompts.

Having the discussions in our small town prepares my students and me for a study-abroad trip and new visual experiences far from home. Within a few days of touring with students in Spain, they were in a McDonalds. When I asked why McDonalds when there are so many fantastic and inexpensive local eateries in Spain, the response was, “It feels like being home.” The feelings of comfort and home are well understood by advertisers and marketers who often aim to purvey a sense of the familiar with all the comforts of safety and security. Yet what happens when the visual is not comfortable? The answer to this question is perhaps best illustrated in the papers students wrote about their trip to a museum in Spain. For many, it was their first visit to any museum. Overwhelmingly, the response was, “I felt so uncomfortable when I first walked in. It seemed like a place that I didn’t belong.” While it’s important for students to have these first experiences and push their comfort levels, it is also valuable for them to start a search for art with what makes them feel comfortable. Art teachers need to appreciate where students feel comfortable and meet them where they are. There is always room for growth in visual appreciation and understanding, but this growth is not something that will occur, or only occur, just by being in a formal gallery or museum.

Art and Its Audience in the Community

Art lives in all places, and the community is the largest museum. In the many small and large facets of our environment, there are so many things that are not discussed as art or not yet considered art. But walking down a street we pass the works of architects, sculptors, and landscaping artists, among others, which makes each outing an interesting opportunity for study. When we walk by a store there are window displays to consider, and inside there are packaging designs and visions for branding items. As art teachers, one of our biggest jobs is helping students learn how to visually navigate the world around them, to learn from and be inspired by the possibilities in everything. Our goals should be for students to consider each chair or street sign as having a visual story, possessing color, shape, symmetry, and made by a designer. No matter how big or small, every city or town where our students reside has playful colors, forms, and visual elements worth exploring.

Fortunately, the art experience can be had in any community setting. As art teachers and future art teachers, we acknowledge the importance of taking students on visual adventures to explore art in the community. These may include sidewalk explorations to examine hidden alcoves or what may be stickered or colorfully plastered on the canvases of buildings. Each find of interest needs to be talked about, claimed, and acknowledged as art. The city safaris or adventures described in this text also need to be shared and sometimes collected in photos or sketches. Each step, walk, or skip through urban settings—looking up and bending down—broadens students’ appreciation and interest in seeking what art can be. Dissecting and peeling away elements of the man-made art world that envelops everyone is the project of street-art detectives. Nothing stays the same over time, and these walks can change based on the season or over the years. It is fruitful to note and discuss these changes with students in creating and developing their understanding of the environment.

Community-Based Art

Art Safaris in Neighborhoods

This volume will illustrate what can be referred to as art safaris in the school and around the school's neighborhood. These are not expensive field trips that require buses, yet they can yield valuable results. Chapters will offer examples and suggestions of what to look for and include interesting visual finds uncovered by students. For example, elementary students elevated sidewalk cracks and sewer grates to the level of outdoor arts. High school students documented street writing, such as signs, and collected samples of graffiti.

Sculpture was studied in the form of neighborhood playgrounds and furthered in students' own playground designs. Design art was referenced in the context of local bus shelters, outdoor furnishings like benches, bike racks, and handmade signs in a neighborhood that say, "Slow Down Children at Play." Every community has its distinct flavors and interesting art examples to be brought into the conversation. This book provides many lessons inspired by neighborhood art safaris that led to student-built community art.

Teaching Art to Diverse Communities of Secondary School Students

As a visual detective, a walk around town offers wonderful clues to the diversity in a community. This book was written in large part to encourage us to learn more about where we live and what our town communicates. For example, in many American towns there are clues such as signage and changes in architecture (ramps, curbs) to help people with physical disabilities navigate the space. Students are capable consultants who continue thinking of new and better ways to use art to help navigate a town's culture and community. There is open and hidden signage that illustrates the need to address human rights and social justice concerns. Students can be moved to engage in art that deals with values and the quest for human respect. By using primary and secondary school student observations and finds in the community as the basis for art classes, learning is not just teacher led but is centered around the idea that art is a personal quest for, and representation of, values and responsibility and that this relationship to art is key to how artists interact with their environment. Our students in an art class are as diverse as the communities they come from. Art is an important link between people and voices that can be exercised through community-based art learning.

Incorporating Community Studies into an Art Curriculum

One of the first classroom lessons in kindergarten is traditionally a community study. Where do you live? An apartment or a house? What type of neighborhood, town, and city are you part of? Diagram your neighborhood and your trip home from school. What are some of the things you see?

But the idea of closely examining the community tends to fall away in later years of schooling. Yet we are always part of a larger group, and bigger questions need to be observed and be asked: how can we begin to participate in our community and have a voice and impact? What can we say about where we live and the daily impact it has on us? The art room, the school center for innovation, and the home for visual communicators, planners, builders, futurists, concerned citizens, and so on, can be the center piece of the continuation of our earliest learning.

Starting Here and Now: Launching Community-Based Art

According to Richard Florida, economist and social scientist who wrote the book *The Creative Class*, the new workforce is comprised of jobs that are constantly being redefined, and so creativity is becoming more valuable in today's global society.⁴ Florida included creative jobs that go well beyond that of fine artists, writing that engineers and doctors also need to exercise creative thinking to go beyond the prescribed tool or job in order to move the field forward. Problem-solving has been debated as a critical factor in twenty-first-century job growth. Employers are beginning to see creativity as a channel to both self-expression and job satisfaction. In this new world of needing to think creatively, it is vital for art teachers to open the art room to the outside world. We need to move beyond developing projects that are only for art sake and that use the influence of students' background and community, so that they can see the impact they can have on their space.

In eighth grade, my daughter did a community study at her school. It completely shifted the way she thought about where we lived. Her eyes were opened to where she lived. She went to the local water and sewage treatment plants, took a tour of the bus station, went to the local courthouses, and eventually picked a project where she impacted the community by looking at immigration. She began by conducting interviews with various community members. Then, as part of her project, she designed shirts that were sold to raise money for the Kentucky Refugee Ministries. Realizing that even at her age she can make a difference, I believe the project was not only empowering, but it also brought her closer to a completely different aspect of her community that she had not been part of.

Creating projects such as these where students are empowered to be part of their community can be pivotal. It allows for participation and voice. Adding a mural to a local building, creating sidewalk art, installing work at a local store, or creating a rain barrel for a community garden, all of these activities bring students closer to their neighborhood and use art to make a positive impact.

The Goals and Intentions of This Book

This book is intended to be a supportive guide for those preparing to be and who are current art instructors dedicated to art teaching through community involvement and building environmental

awareness. It is a lively road map for teachers of all age-groups from elementary to adolescents heading to cities and towns as a means to learn about art, with the overall goal to inspire new ways of seeing, appreciating, thinking about, and making art. While on occasion the text refers to elementary and secondary age students, it is because almost a decade was spent by the author teaching various age-groups, and this is the target audience for those preparing to be or who are already in the classroom setting. The book suggests art classes based on out-of-class experiences. Each section maps some of the starting roots or places to study and explore in the man-made community. Rewards for those willing to go beyond the art room, to teach art and enlarge their art class with community experiences, are highlighted throughout.

The book aligns school art with contemporary art thinking about community, society, and the larger world as the subject and theme of artists, and how students can interact and be a part of the new and exciting art world of installations, street art, and environmental art. Art teachers can use this book to lead singular projects of looking at street space, community landmarks, or historic neighborhoods, to endow the entire class with a community perspective, starting where most contemporary art starts—in the real world. This book is for those who are preparing to teach art and those that are already in the classroom. The only thing this volume will ask of the art teacher is to guide their students' attention and thinking about art beyond school desks and walls and instead to bask in the community as a rich art source. If you are not yet teaching the hope is that you are able to use this book as “food for thought” as you navigate how the artists in your class can utilize and be part of the larger community of artists. This book provides various size and types of examples for one to try on, add to, and even move past. It might feel as though the examples are broad at times but this is meant for you as the educator to find a way for ideas to fit in where you are located and come up with more examples of your own. Not all ideas are given the same treatment so that new ways of thinking about a subject can be interjected. For example, the hotel section might look at more cosmetic ideas, while other sections might bring in a stronger tie to the community. The text itself is not United States specific but is based more in the United States. That said, all of these examples need to be shifted to the place where you, the reader, are, so use these moments of inspiration and make the story your own. In reality it is you who will create the site-specific narrative. This book is there to spark ideas and fuel your passion for the subject which can be done anywhere around the world.

This book is divided into three sections.

Section 1 Art in Public Places and Alternative Museum Sites

Section 2 Community as Art Treasures

(Taking a look at the visual treasures the community has to offer but that are not considered traditional art destinations.)

Section 3 Community Art Projects

- This book hopes to encourage and equip students with twenty-first-century skills needed to be consumers of visual experiences
- This book hopes to support and promote independent artists to not entirely rely on their classroom interaction for creative ideas and insight. When in the grocery store or walking

down the street, from a small town to a large city, artists should have an understanding that even the simplest sightings and finds have artistic value; a place might be seen or experienced numerous times, yet something different can always be found.

- This book asks art teachers and students to take a more in-depth look at the environment and search for visual meaning and inspiration for classroom art.
- This book invites the reader to think about the artistic innovation that can exist in everything from small everyday objects to park benches, playgrounds, and airports. Students' community finds contribute to visual resources and experiences and become teachable moments in the art room.
- This book asks art teachers to consider alternatives to the same general "desk-top art" lessons taught for the past seventy-five years. The art world is changing, and students have to become the next generation of designers and builders, innovators, and futurists. While traditional art and the places where art is seen and conceived are still important, we need to prepare artists of the twenty-first century to look for answers frequently beyond art museums and art classes.

This book asks art teachers and students to observe and teach about the strong relationship between people, art, and the environment. When community art lessons are neglected and young artists find it difficult to see art beyond art classroom projects, people in the future will suffer. This book asks students to regularly take walks out of the art room, using the finds and resources of where students live.

What Life-Changing Experiences Derive from the Study of Environments for Students? What Visual Breakthroughs Can Occur?

A visual earthquake might happen over time, subtly, or not at all. For a student walking into the grocery store and seeing the possibilities of finding treasure or bringing into class a well-designed packaging to share is an accomplishment. While seemingly minor, we are empowering students to see the world as the largest art supply store and resource for art ideas. The effects are on students' art making, their perception of more open art boundaries, and seeing art everywhere, influencing how art students learn to see the impact of art in the world.

What Is so Interesting about Community Spaces?

Community space allows for communication between groups of people who would not always interact with one another. From intimate spaces in courtyards to larger town squares, no matter the size, a shared sense of community can be created. Even something as simple as the type and availability of outdoor seating allows for different interactions and experiences. For example, bean bag chairs on the grass are going to create a laid-back atmosphere, while chairs and tables are more formal and create the possibility for exciting groupings. Community spaces are attractive because people create purposeful ways to interact with each other, these include

areas that foster visual meaning from murals, and street art, to public sculptures and interest in landscaping.

What Ideas and Inspiration Can Students Derive from Environmental Studies?

From understanding the environment, students can learn about space and interactions between themselves and the world. Students can begin to understand building and design elements, styles, use of different materials, and how art adds to a community. Inspirations are endless: finding patterns, qualities of lines, color combinations, variations in open and closed spaces, outdoor changes in light, and visual elements. Taking note of their finds, students bring a wealth of interests, knowledge, and surprises back to classroom art practice.

What Does It Mean to Be Connected to a Neighborhood, a Community, Visually?

A neighborhood is connected visually to a broader community through passages, pathways, and other types of visual changes and elements. A community putting in a playground, mural, large outdoor sculpture, and painted electrical boxes has the potential to involve and affect the larger community. Groups of people cross and congregate in spaces differently and identify a part of town by structural symbols, plazas, and other landmarks. In Lexington, KY, we have a park with sculptures of racehorses. That area in the city has become defined by the corner park and its cast horses. People take pictures with the horses for every occasion, and they congregate around them.

How Does the Environment Change over Time?

Every time I take a walk downtown, there are alterations, renovations, and significant changes. My husband, a photographer, often documents the same areas as it changes through the seasons, through wear, weathering, or as new things are added or demolished. Some of these are subtle and others severe in their effect on the street and neighborhood. By knowing the intricate details of our community, we recognize, document, and discuss changes. It is easy not to be aware of changes, but recognition and awareness are a part of being an artist. A valuable lesson in the art room is to teach students to be informed, critical, and aware in their seeing, to look for details, which others may pass over.

A neighborhood exists as a portrait of its population, sense of design, and value. Changing the way a room is painted or remodeled, or a house renovated, creates aesthetic shifts in a street or in the community. On a larger scale, a city is a collective form of art and design based on the different people who live in it. The space shifts as people and neighborhoods change during a different time of day, traffic changes, or population shifts. Influx of new people, or more people, for example, creates unique needs for places to sit, lights in dark alleys, or community spaces to play and learn. A city evolves and grows based on its population's use of space. When you look at your city or town, you can learn about its history and collect evidence of different changes.

Communities exist at the physical level, as well as on a social scale. Art students can study their neighborhood and community's different aspects to understand and plan for change. It is suitable for a student to understand their town and be able to reference other places they have been to, or wish to go, both physically and in their imagination. Art classes can continuously envision making changes, playing with models for future cities in nearby neighborhoods, or distant planets.

How Does One Prepare Individuals and Secondary School Art Classes to Study and Engage with Community Art?

Preparing to engage with the community can be as simple as getting out of the art room and beyond the school doors. One can go fact-finding, mapping, or photographing without a single purpose. Often the experience itself is what triggers ideas, so don't be overprepared. Another starting point can be listing or sketching some goals to look for. It is valuable to take object collection bags and idea collection surfaces like sketchbooks and cameras to document the outdoor safari and to make plans on how the experience, the finds, and elevated thoughts could be followed up in the classroom.

How Does the Model for Community-Based Art Education Change?

The way people have interacted with the community has changed over time, as has community-based art education. Today, postmodern views on the arts explore connections between individual expression and looking at social and political issues. Today, many programs are about engaging young people in activities ranging from urban planning to poetry about people and places in their neighborhoods. Today's concerned art teachers often explore with students how we use our environment to become a deep space to share with others. In my teaching, I have worked with art students to solve the current problems of the environment, and social issues, including transportation, the need for trees, and outdoor spaces for social needs by considering art and design as part of the solution. Art teaching needs to seriously stress and focus on involving young students in changing their community through art and contribute to significant world issues through creative design solutions. As the world's needs change and acute answers for survival are needed, art classes are in the best position to engage freethinkers and imaginative builders of a new world that our students can help to shape.

First Steps: Getting to Know Your School Building

Some schools house thought-provoking and historic works of art. In the history of art education, the Picture Study Movement (1890–1920) emphasized the importance of surrounding students with historic masterpieces and paintings with moral messages, which most often presented as reproductions in the form of large prints. The care and concern for distinguished architecture and interiors in school buildings was seen as uplifting. Historic artworks in school hallways were intended to convey an important message of taste-shaping moral life lessons in early art education.

In the Cincinnati Public Schools, from 1903 to 1974, the City's Art League and a program that collected pennies from school children entitled "Pennies from School Children" helped

to reinforce the belief that fine art should be part of the schools. As part of this belief, “schools underwrote paintings, decorative fountains, stained glass windows, mosaic walls, and extraordinary architectural ornaments to express support and respect for public education.”⁵ In 1995, the Art League reformed to preserve, restore, and enhance historic works in the public schools.⁶

At the turn of the century, from the 1890s to 1910, the New York City public schools responded to the arrival of immigrants by becoming “a grand social work agency, charged with a secondary task of Americanizing children and parents.”⁷ The architecture of the New York City public schools was designed to be exemplary structures, of the Romanesque Revival, Collegiate Gothic, Art Deco, Modern, and Post-Modern styles. The city of New York also has a large collection of more than 1,500 works of art from the early twentieth century, including such works as Tiffany stained glass and grand murals stemming from the New Deal, which were commissioned because of the Percent for Art program that ensured that 1 percent of all building budgets went toward the purchase of art.⁸

There is a history of architecture, art, and design in most school buildings. Therefore, schools serve as a good place to start studies of different stylistic and historic periods in art and learn about the artists. Art walks around school buildings can also be a comfortable place to commence studies about the environment. As students learn to take pride in learning about and guiding others through their school building, they can also visit other notable schools in the district as they become school guides and experts with knowledge that can be applied to architecture walks in their neighborhoods. As the art teacher leads students through school buildings, students can practice observation, self-discovery, and use the language of design arts. Students can learn about space and light, indoor streets, notable building details such as gargoyles, and other distinctive architectural features that come to the fore from a student's personal curiosity and sighting.

Experiences Inside an Art Museum and Community Settings

Art museums themselves are also beginning to acknowledge the importance of art outside the space and trying to bring in a broader section of society. While once only for adults, art museums are working hard to become community spaces for children and adolescents. Trying to bridge the gap, by providing events like museum slumber parties, teen nights at the museum with bands, and yoga with art, museums are establishing themselves as community centers. Collections are also on the move, going beyond museum walls into courtyards, down the street, and throughout the city. The Speed Museum in Louisville, KY, created a series of art billboards that connect advertising and the community back to the museum. According to Julien Robson, the curator of the Billboard project,

Museums can be seen as just mausoleums and we need to keep looking at how does the museum change and alter itself in relation to the way that society needs us to, he says. You know, how do we make ourselves continually relevant and new for our community?⁹

Museums have also become more active in connecting with local schools to bring their collections, through Trunk Shows, for example, into classrooms.