

Reflections and activities from
ARTE Y VECINDARIO

Summer 2022 Artist Residency Program



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South Providence Library on Prairie Ave. Providence, RI



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...and where are you from?

Introduction

Almost every interaction of a foreigner somehow touches home. From fast encounters with taxi drivers to chit-chat in the park, the sound of a foreign accent is closely followed by the question: *where are you from?*

The question jumps on a search for the place where that person *really* belongs, disregarding the way that person may locate their own identity and bypassing the present moment altogether, as if being somewhere physically is not proof enough of someone's belonging. The subtle transgression to the local fabric must be explained; *"there must be somewhere else"* and that somewhere is anchored in the past. A strong headed "r" or brilliantly open "a" denotes dissonance. *"Clearly not from here"* – perhaps as long as the question is asked.

It seems like the feeling of belonging to a place cannot be an individual experience. Like a change of address, it must be approved by other people, or remain a moot point. Language becomes a passport as everyone on the streets presents themselves as experts on migratory designations upon accents that show up in a casual greeting. Accents are perfectly sufficient proof as they are often (although not always, you are to be aware) unmaskable. Who'd believe that a non-English speaker is a US-national? What are the consequences of such disbelief? And what is

revealed by the strict exclusivity?

Many –if not all– countries host different cultures and languages within their borders; perhaps established for reverence to bureaucracy. Those born into that "official" language enjoy unquestionable belonging –and access to the benefits of that hegemonizing culture. For everyone else, access can be challenged and revoked; "first things first".

Against this background, children go to school every day, adults show up to a work-interview and people form lines to get a piece of paper approved and stamped. The "official" language and its implications arise in each one of these circumstances, regardless of the language that is spoken at home. With this background, in collaboration with the Community Libraries of Providence, we have developed an invitation exclusively for Spanish-speaking local artists. Dressed as artist residencies, three libraries hosted and bestowed artists with financial and logistical support to begin creative processes open to the residents of each neighbourhood. Results can be seen in the following pages.

hernán darío jourdan
Founder
Ministry of Future Access (MFA)





Mobile Murals

By Alfonso D. Acevedo

According to the initial plan, during the first two weeks of the residency we worked on connecting, planning, and coordinating the residency structure with the Knight Memorial Library staff and hernán jourdan.

The support I received from the Library staff was great. Resources like space and support to spread the news about this offering to regular patrons were vital from the first day. The project was held among the many other events that the Library hosts regularly, which increased visibility to the novelty of having art and painting as part of the activities offered to the community.

On May 24 and 25 we initiated recruiting efforts as well as advertising online and with flyers at the Library. The invitation was also sent to the schools of the area both in English and Spanish languages, and I published it too through the online and printed edition of America News and my personal social media...



“The first objective was making sure that people understood the importance of executing a project in community.”

- Alfonso D. Acevedo

The last week of May and the first one of June people started arriving to the Library asking about the “Arte y Vecindario” program. During this week we also planned out the ideas for the four murals we would paint:

MOBILE MURAL #1

Based on the ideas offered by the first participants emerged the importance of children recreational activities, depicted through a geometric painting of kids playing around the sun against a marine-blue space. This mural was finished during the last week of May (gatherings took place on May 31st and June 1st) and the second week of June (8th and 9th). The first objective was making sure that people understood the importance of executing a project in community. And that they began communicating more with each other.

MOBILE MURAL #2

In the search for integration we discussed with the participants the importance of knowing the neighbourhood; contemplating the surroundings and identifying what makes up pleasant experiences; with whom we share the area where we live; and the pleasure of painting what’s around us to then show it to residents from nearby neighbourhoods.

This inspired us to paint the building in front of the Library, which has a particular architecture. The candy store on the first floor and the residential structure on top of it give it a special touch, and helped drawing amateurs work more confidently on their lines and geometry. In this mural geometry comes back as a main tool for working through drawing and painting.

We dedicated June 15, 16, 21 and 22 to this project, towards the last gatherings the number of participants growing as summer vacation got started along with the farmer’s market on Wednesdays, all of which results in a very vibrant ambient.



From left to right:
Cheryl Space (CLP Director)
hernán darío jourdan (MFA Founder)
Acevedo (Artist-in-Residency 2022)
Gale Yallop (Knight Memorial Library Manager)



Here and in the following pages: local participants of Mobile Murals



MOBILE MURAL #3

The gatherings on the 21st and 22nd we also began a third mural reflecting the different ethnic groups that are present in the Elmwood area. Students drew themselves and worked on their faces in a gigantic scale.

MOBILE MURAL #4

Here's a vision of the continent, planet Earth and children riding a bicycle through the space as if reaching for the moon. Somewhat surrealistic and with a great vision of magic realism.

In general, the Spanish-speaking community arrived slowly and African, Asian and English-speaking diversity was dominant. I consider this a good start to offer the Hispanic community this option, while this may take time if the Library so desires this could continue growing next year and solidify participation from this community in other programs also.

As the first residency of this kind, I found great joy in seeing that albeit acceptance was slow, Elmwood residents did receive the initiative with great enthusiasm, and having established connections with people that before I didn't know made me feel very satisfied.







Note from the Library

Knight Memorial Community Library

The Knight Memorial Library would like to thank Mr. Alfonso for allowing us to be part of this experience. Mr. Alfonso has dedicated his time to help continue a community art workshop series in engaging patrons of all ages to participate in the making of the murals. Mr. Alfonso took a personal interest in teaching, guiding, and assisting participants on the project. One of the murals Mr. Alfonso painted on the Candy Store across the library, the owner Mrs. Theresa on the day of the exhibition, thanked Mr. Alfonso for featuring her store on the mural.

On behalf of the Knight Memorial Library staff,

Thank you.





Photo by Payton Chung

Events
\$20

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
Our hearts go out to all those affected by the tragic event in Colorado on June 12.
IF/THEN
MAY 17-21, 2017

PPAC
DROP
OFF
ONLY

PPAC
Square

Intersections

On the institutionalization of a term – reflections after five years of activity in Providence.

By **hernán darío jourdan**

What about talking “community” feels like a cardboard box? As if the word itself is more important than the actual people in it, or what it feels to engage with it. The weight this term currently carries and its emphasis across cultural institutions seems secured with indisputable reverence. **But what does it mean to talk about community?**

Perhaps the labour of an organizer or civic artist is making people care about a topic enough to fuel quorum (availability to approach an issue) and catalyse consequences (in order to accomplish a goal and make transformation inevitable). This implies other people taking interest for something and the arising of hope (or expectations, at least) that something “can be done” to improve our quality of life –understanding, of course, that our lives are connected by one common thread. Otherwise, why would anybody suddenly take interest in a matter that has been foreign to them so far? And yet, as an artist who immigrated from a country in South America whose ethnic and social imaginaries were established looking at “white and European”¹ standards, my experience in Providence has brought an abundance of confusion from my part towards the local imaginary; inaccurate assumptions from third parties about my own belonging; and a positioning of identity that i could share with a handful of people only. In fact, i’d say that most meaningful exchanges with others has been grounded on dialogue about the large

differences that shaped our upbringings.

Considering this, and committed to the labour of facilitating creative processes and learning that encourages participation from neighbours in different parts of the city, i have distanced myself of my own subjectivity so as to make room for the interests and needs of Providence’ residents. My belief was that community work necessitates porosity in order to generate cultural initiatives in accordance with the territory .

Many if not all of the processes by which grants are assigned (both on a regional and national level) allocate 30% of the score to the question of how each project intends to serve an identified “community”. What’s not clear in the process is who gets to decide what community is and what isn’t. Do my group of friends and chosen family qualify as “community” according to institutional standards? What i found seemed to underscore the need for demographic terminology in order to define the concept; associating it in the process with ethnic groups and parts of the population historically and geographically marginalized. I won’t argue that people from the same district may be affected by the same phenomenon, but the capacity and way to respond each person and family feels comfortable with depends on their particular values and life experiences. It would be imprecise to assume common preferences and simply wrong to think that unique solutions

will serve the entire population addressed.

I started talking (and thinking) in terms of “community” since i arrived in Providence, almost a decade ago now. Before this i had my own group of friends; chosen family and/or assigned by birth; and circles of people with whom i shared spaces and similar dreams by virtue of attending the same cultural centres, neighbourhood associations or so-called “third spaces”. But i never referred to any of these using the word “community”; its Spanish translation “comunidad” is loaded still with a foreign air, to me it feels too formal of a term to refer to something too intimate. **When I actually use the term “comunidad” it’s as though i’m referring to the façade of a building to which i don’t have access, so i can’t precise what’s inside,** and what’s truly important for the people who inhabit it. Through this distance i establish respect; the open space intentionally empty meant for that group of people to define their own values. This implies that talking “comunidad” is a reference to a group of people to which i don’t belong. Perhaps coherently, i have heard the English “community” a lot when validating financial decisions –especially when equitable and just distribution of resources is being declared.

I feel the disconnect happens when, declared throughout the planning or grant making processes, an institution ignores its own positionality.

¹“La agonía de la Argentina blanca” - Ezequiel Adamovsky:
<https://www.revistaanfibia.com/migracion-racismo-poder-la-agonia-de-la-argentina-blanca/>



Applications calling to define which and how any one art-project serves a community can easily become unexpected invitations for the imagination. I want to take a moment to reflect upon the implications of this question. While not trying to deny the intention that the institution may have for serving specific sectors of the population, in the **grant making competitive process the question co-opts artists the ability to define “community” according to their own terms, and instead forces adherence to institutional standards.** But what are these? Who defines them? How much transparency is the information presented with? The institution has the funds, and members of the panel evaluating proposals have the ability to approve or reject experiences of community that are not aligned with their vision –and distribute funds accordingly. This dynamic places the institution in a position of power over the artists who apply for funds. Are there communities that are more important than

others?

I’d like to pause here and slip a reminder that demographic classifications aren’t monolithic, that not all latinxs people feel, think or speak alike –and the same can be expected of any other ethnic designation employed by the prevalent government called United States of America in its efforts to bureaucratize operability.

The painful process by which an intermediary suspends its own subjectivity for the benefit of a “community” previously established based on a variable such as ethnicity, language or culture, ails a struggle and generates another one. Who is affected by this struggle? the intermediary? the projected “community”? or the institution and those acting on its behalf? whom is disconnected from whom?

Over time, i’ve discovered that the broader the

answer, perhaps formulated to score higher, the larger the distance between the artist and the people designated as beneficiaries. Borrowing demographic denominations used to define communities on bureaucratic floors, **we begin talking about relationships that do not actually exist outside of an abstract imaginary.** On the other hand, institutions that lack connections to marginalized communities race towards the appropriation of terms removed from strictly white identities (such as BIPOC; LGBTQ+; etc.) but their commitment and the quality of those relationships remain opaque.

I would like to offer that **recognizing institutional power means acknowledging that the need for addressing demographic statistics responds to the interest of institutions and not necessarily individual artists’.** To support the practice of each artist is an end of its own. Requiring applicants to



crop a sector of the population is an invitation for racialization that serves the interest of the institution and its survival more than it occupies the artist's cause per se, and it constitutes an imposition of language from the institution's side. Through this approach financial support is limited to projects that can be convincing about serving broad sectors of the population –as if every project worth of support should be immediately available for its effective consumption, and “fix” a problem perceived in those marginalized peoples.

In different occasions i've been confronted over the desk of a given institution with the conundrum: “we don't know what else to do, how to get the community engaged” – immediately positioning such “community” outside of that office, and hoping to see the problem solved by a group of thirty or forty people who show up at the doors of that institution, ignoring completely the

person across the desk. I've also been asked in different ways: “how will you serve the community?”. Maybe i'm wrong, but it's not my job to answer this question in my role as an artist: **i am the community; i do not wish to become a sterile intermediary.** I am the final cause in the conundrum, and it is the institution on its search for an answer that has come to me. To make me responsible for the apparition of a small crowd to justify their doings is laying the burden of an expectation that my labor as artist cannot guarantee to fulfil –nor does it align with all of the reasons why i'm committed to artmaking. I don't intend to compete with Netflix or Instagram; doing so goes against the power of aesthetics for (de)activating civic action. Of course the presence of an audience is a manifestation of interest (and it matters for completing the artistic process) but the artist in their role cannot guarantee that the people surrounding their time and place will appreciate their labor.

If the objective is simply mustering a crowd, a visit to Broad St. on a Saturday evening will be enough for understanding what's most appealing. **But the artist must be occupied on the art in the first place.** How many painters were recognized –posthumously? How many classic musicians drop their hats by their feet in the corner of a frenzy city and don't get a crowd to stop and appreciate their craft? Is their art less valuable because of this? Who is responsible for appreciating art?

That's what “community” has of a cardboard box: it's just the container of something. The best journeys happen when the artist is joined in their creative process –the itinerary falls under the artists' purview as it engages poetic and artistic labor. The best care a society can offer to its artists (and itself) is nourishing and enjoying the gifts of this journey, take off with a unique imaginative experience. It is there where the true labor of an artist begins.



Creation & Celebration

By Festum Teatro

PLACE: We knew that at the end of the theatre workshop we offered to children at the Mount Pleasant Community Library we had to gather reflections of the workshop experience; this was a task that hernán had asked us to do from the very beginning, for the purpose of this publication. But today I wonder in which ways our experiences could possibly add something of value if written on a piece of paper – nobody reads those things. And if someone was interested in doing so, how could we add something to their lives? In which ways can I offer something that we haven't said before? We always make a point in sharing the experiences we are having with those who join us in the process, so that they can also be on a journey, and so that they understand too where is it that we mean to arrive.

So I'm urged, by impulse, to begin with what's first – of course – “the workshop”, how about if we try to talk about what a “workshop” means, but without going to its definition. Let's try to conceive the “workshop” through questions, that invite the reader to follow us through a few reflections on the way *we* think of a workshop – a theatre workshop.

What prevails in a workshop?

We could say that people attend a workshop, initially, because they would like to learn something, because they are interested in the topic that the workshop will address, to meet other people with common interests towards that topic, or simply as a distraction or leisure – reasons may be infinite, what matters is the fact that some people gather in the same space. We'll understand this space as a physical space, as the Mount Pleasant Library, and in this case attended by children born in the US with Latin

American parents. Upon this fact of being gathered in the same space, the question of *what prevails in a workshop* begins to take relevance.

Yes, we have established that a workshop entails a gathering of people, but there are also many other occasions for us to gather in the same space that's not precisely a workshop; such as a sports event, a party, a celebration... and of course, by impulse I'm moved to say that in a workshop someone is teaching something. So in a workshop there's someone who teaches and others who learn? I am not so sure of this, at least in what we do we don't feel like we are teaching something, for the same reason that theatre cannot be taught. One could teach certain exercises, techniques focused on the body and the voice of those who aspire to be performers, but not *how* to make theatre. And so, if in our workshops nothing is actually taught – then why do the workshop? How transcendent is it? If transcendent at all.

If it's not about someone who teaches and others who learn – then what is it? a place that is shared? As I approach this idea of sharing I ask again: share what? My experience? Does my experience prevail at the time of giving a workshop? And what happens with the experiences of the kids who are taking the workshop? Perhaps, there isn't one thing that should prevail. Perhaps, these experiences get interwoven, but before offering a conclusion, let's go a little further.

If it is about sharing an experience, why should children care about my experience in theatre? Why would they care about my “feats” in the art-world. They could be perfectly fine spending their summers without a theatre workshop. Then why the workshop? Why is it important?



Workshop at Mount Pleasant Library

“We often take for granted so many things that we cease to observe with sensibility the surroundings that we inhabit.”

- Festum Teatro

If we think of the workshop as a place in which human processes take place, where people assist to a gathering and they assist each other with experiences within one same space, then that would be its importance: the meeting, in which people help each other through the experiences that have allowed them to inhabit a world, a family, a reality, a city, a country, a context.

Here I think we have arrived—dear reader—to a tentative answer to the question on whether in a workshop something should prevail or not, and my answer is—tentative answer—that yes. **What must prevail in a workshop is the context.**

The context? Why the context? Let me share what I understand is useful if we talk about the relevance of context in a theatre workshop.

Talking about context is immediately talking about place. Place that is understood from different points of view, one place can be many places at the same time, like a very big sphere that contains many smaller spheres, and each one of these, while don't define a person, are helpful in determining how that person perceives themselves and the world around them. **Their experience of the world depends on the quality of these spheres.**

Let's try to be more precise and inquire deeper into what kind of context would be the most welcoming to those children who attended the workshops.

These children are between the ages of 5 and 12, most of them were born in the US and others have arrived here not too long ago. All of them have Latin American parents; most families made up of a father and a mother. Parents who are busy, in the majority, doing works without any kind of social security because of their migratory status. Inhabitants of Rhode Island, most of them living in the city of Providence, where about 24,3% identify as Latin American.

See, dear reader, how we have approached—roughly—the first big sphere here, in an attempt to place children in a concrete space that will allow us to approach the workshop in a more sensitive way? Thanks to the context, I can trace an initial route of what the needs of the children attending our workshops would be.

And now, what to do with this general sphere? Well, according to the administrative fabric—needed in order to make free workshops in a public library—this first sphere is addressed

in different ways, all of them inevitable. Some people need to transform this sphere into numbers, so that physical and economic resources –in this case public resources– and people are able to get organized and execute workshops in a library –also public. It’s necessary too that other people transform this first sphere into statistics, so that the needs of this community can be better understood. It may be necessary too that other people transform this first sphere into numbers that measure the impact that this kind of project can have in the city. All these needs depend on whom is reading the context. Such is the bureaucratic fabric, but how do we approach this sphere?

Children born in the US to Latin American parents are children who for the most part can communicate in Spanish and English, verbally and some through writing also.

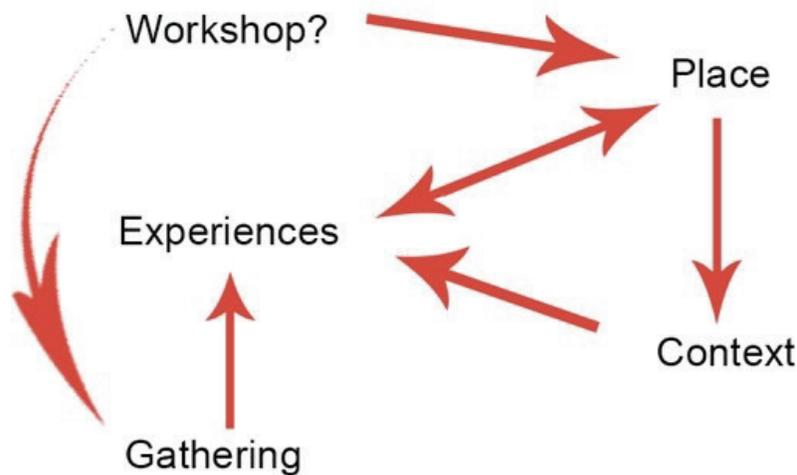
Children whose parents, because of their migration status, keep jobs of long hours to compensate for the lack of social security they are forced into. So these are children who spend little time with their parents. Children who attend schools where all subjects are taught in English, but are on vacation and the least they want to do is keep showing up to a place where they have to study and “learn” things.

Do you see, dear reader, how we try to materialize this first sphere into a work-route that allows us to approach the kids and their families in a way that is conscious of their situation? That’s why I mentioned place, the primary place being determined by the territory they inhabit, but other places include family, the relationship they have with parents, with the school, with the library, with the places where they live their daily lives. We often take for granted so many things that we cease to observe with sensibility the surroundings that we inhabit.

I hope you have followed me so far, in this attempt to weave together through questions and deductions the ideas that occupy me when setting out to talk about what we have not said. And now, what to do with this final thread, how can I exemplify what I’m trying to communicate? What to do with these three words that we have arrived to:

Gathering – Place – Experiences

I would like to do so by sharing some anecdotes that the children left us with, perhaps in them you can extract, dear reader, what for us must prevail in a workshop conducted by us...



“Gathering between people in the same place where they assist to each other with experiences”



Working on the masks

The mask that doesn't let us breathe

Just three sessions shy of finishing the workshop, I told my partner Yessica as a joke: “imagine now if kids ask us to do a unicorn, an elephant and a rhino”. I said this for the extensive amount of time it takes to create horns on a mask. The base is always easier, apply some gesso on the children's face and voilà –but horns take much longer. Just a few days, this happened:

–Which animal would you like to do?– Yessica asked Allison.

–A unicorn.

–And you, Betsy? –she is five years old.

–I want an elephant.

–Ok... Isbeth? –now all I need is she asks for a rhino, I thought –a bunny. I want a bunny.

Thank you, Isbeth, for not wanting a rhino.

Finally masks were shaped but we didn't have a lot of time for Betsy, Isbeth and Allison to paint them, add decoration and play with them on. So we took them home to place the horns and ears ourselves so that in our next session –second to last– they could paint them. The three girls got very excited when they saw them, and after one hour of work, Betsy looked around at her sisters about to be done with theirs, and lamented: –why did I have to ask for an elephant! These ears are too big!– I had

to help her finish painting.

At the beginning when every kid started wearing their masks, it was a challenge getting them to wear the masks for long periods of time, it isn't easy to have one on, specially if we consider that some of these masks had holes too small for their eyes, or bumps on the inside that rubbed against their skin. With time we fixed this by adding cotton to the masks' interior, but they would still get sweaty and start to itch. When kids played they easily forgot about this, but we did have to explain that wearing mask sometimes is just like wearing a new pair of shoes. At the beginning it feels weird, but then you forget you even have them on. However, Isbeth, Alison and Betsy didn't have this time to adapt so on the



day of the presentation, Betsy approached Yessica in secret.

–Hey.

–Yes?

–I can't breathe –Betsy said pointing to her nose. We were two hours into the final event.

–Alright –Yessica said and brought the mask a bit higher– Is this better? We just need to do one more game, then you can take it off.

–Okay –Betsy said– I can take it.

In you I can't believe in

I wish to thank Yadira and her husband Carlos, friends who were key in this workshop and who occasionally even joined us for some sessions. The day we were going to apply gesso on the faces of Isbeth, Betsy and Allison, Yadira was with us and she was going to help us apply the material as Yessica was with other kids doing a musical rehearsal.

When I approached Betsy and explained the process that we were going to do with gesso, she interrupted me and looking into my eyes, she said: "I don't believe in you". "Ok" I said, but to me it was completely unexpected, so I asked her back: "And in Yadira? Do you believe in her?" –"yes". So it was Yadira who helped Betsy in doing her mask. Thank you, Yadira, had you not been there that day, I don't know what would I've done.

Spanish spoken here

Before playing we always liked to stir up kids attention and their playing spirits with some quick moves standing up in a circle, but this time Gaby, who is 10 years old, said to us:

–I learnt a game in summer camp, can we play it?

–You want to teach us a game? –asks Yessica.

–Yes.

–Okay –and then to the rest of the kids– let's listen to Gaby now who's going to teach us a game.

By saying this, we thought Gaby was going to explain the game to the other kids in English, since that is the language they have been using to communicate with each other. But Gaby started explaining in Spanish: "se llama ninja, y tienen que tocar a su compañero con la mano, pero no es fuerte" –he said trying to remember the necessary words –"y colocan la mano así, no así". "Suave, you mean?" –said Yessica. "Yes! Suave". That afternoon we all played ninja, a game that Gaby taught us.

The drum

From the very first class Sergio liked to play the drum. First we practiced with a happy drum, a big and heavy instrument that we had sent to us from Colombia, but we knew that we had to get a drum that he could carry. The one we found didn't quite cut it for us (the cloth was too loose and the sound wasn't strong nor bright) but we decided to give it a try. The second Sergio saw the drum we had for him, he opened his eyes and smiled, and jumped forward to grab it. From that moment he took an interest in always learning the same rhythms I was playing on the happy drum, and at the end of the workshop he was the one in charge of marking the beginning of a song –a call to all the other kids and a count-down that establishes the rhythm to play.

A few days after the presentation, we ran into Sergio's mother Francis, who is also a friend of Yessica. She told us that Sergio didn't let go of the drum at home, that sometimes he would sit down on his own to play the drum and even when he was watching his show on the iPad he was also playing the drum, without peeking. Francis said she believed the drum was something that helped him relax.

Books to read for free

A mother and her daughters were surprised when Yessica told them that in the library they could borrow books they wanted –and as many as they wanted– for free!



A Tentative Conclusion

In our workshops it is important to respect the interest of the kids, for us what they desire, want, abstain from, what they like and what they don't like is important, we understand all this as real needs of a human being. We don't think of ourselves as the ones who should say NO to what a child wants to do in the workshop. Of course, there are limits around this, as long as the decisions they make don't affect other kids, the space, ourselves, or folks joining us in the process, it will be okay. We do this because we believe that's what listening is about: letting be. Let the kid be. We believe that there are enough places already –more than what I think necessary– in which children receive lots of NO; “Study this, sit down like that, enter here but not here, dress like this and you will read that, I don't care if you don't like it you have to learn it, you have to socialize, you have to learn this, this is not what I taught you, compete, you have to be the best, an example, well-behaved, don't go up there you are going to fall”. And this is specially alarming because there aren't a lot of incentives for being creative today, and a theatre workshop is a space for being creative. Our labor, the one we chose for our lives, has to do with this: if there isn't listening, there is no creativity, if there isn't celebration, there isn't creation either. A theatre workshop is a very valuable opportunity, in which we commit to respecting ourselves as human beings regardless of the age we have.

Numbers

Numbers: since we like them so much.

Amount of sessions: 14

Kids that responded to the call: 12 at the beginning, then 9.

Places where we hung posters to promote the workshop: 15

Families that attended the final event: 10

People who saw the final parade we did: many

Purchased instruments: does a PVC pipe count as a musical instrument?

All-nighters finishing gesso masks: can't remember any more

Number of Ubers taken to get to the library: that was expensive

Times that it was worth it: ALL OF THEM, ABSOLUTELY ALL OF THEM

Number of times children said No to me: MANY

Number of times they didn't want to do anything: Not many, but there were some

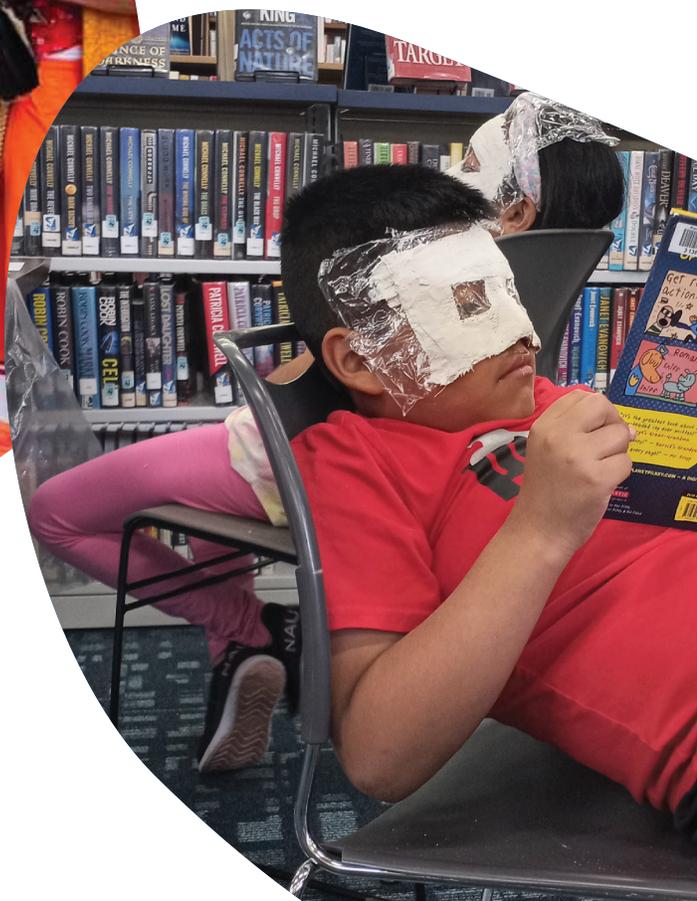
Special Thanks

If there's someone who teaches, those are the kids, and there's lots to learn if they are listened to with sensibility.

So to all the kids thank you so much for reminding us how fragile is the world we live in.

And to the parents, who took the kids to each and every session. We know you sacrificed days to rest, postponed cleaning the house and went to bed much later those days to make it possible for the kids to come to the library. Thank you so much for trusting us.





Note from the Library

Mount Pleasant

I was first aware of John and Yessica's talents during the Summer of 2021 when they hosted a theatrical and musical workshop at Mt. Pleasant Community Library. Still, we did not officially meet until months later when they performed at the library's Hispanic & Latinx Heritage Month event in October of that year. Their presence and their energy made the event so much better. Therefore, I was beyond excited when I discovered they were interested in being our artists in residence for Arte y Vecindario! My excitement came from already knowing that their background in theater, their colorful costumes, and musical abilities would be able to translate into a workshop that families could participate in, learn from, and enjoy.

In our initial meeting, John and Yessica came prepared with their ideas for the workshop and how they wanted it to conclude with a celebration of what the participants created. Their logic makes sense since they called their workshop "CREACIÓN Y CELEBRACIÓN." They even created a hand-drawn map of the neighborhood near Mt. Pleasant Community Library so they could become more familiarized with the area. They also put in the footwork and went to local businesses to introduce themselves and promote the workshop, which was also an excellent advertisement for the library.

Once the workshops began, and John and Yessica got their dedicated group, it was fantastic

to witness. Over time, the kids loosened up and became more comfortable with the activities and each other. They played theatrical games to make the kids feel more relaxed and in the moment. They expressed themselves artistically by first drawing an animal they liked or felt a connection to. Then they took it further by creating and decorating a mask to reflect the animal they initially drew. But honestly, one of the best parts was hearing the natural progression of the kids learning the instruments over those months. It was beautiful to hear how good they got!

After all the time and energy the kids and their families put in, it was fantastic to see everything put together and come to life in the final celebration. There were so many aspects of the final celebration that I enjoyed. From the parade street performance to viewing the completed masks and costumes to seeing how excited the families were to see their kids perform. John and Yessica were great and patient with the kids, especially when it came to instill them words of encouragement. It was amazing that Yessica's last speech to the kids was to let them know how powerful they are and to continue to create. I genuinely hope they took those words to heart. I appreciate John and Yessica for being willing and able to cultivate the children's artistic and musical abilities in such a short amount of time. They truly impacted their lives and made such a positive imprint at Mt. Pleasant Community Library.





Quikuchá

By hernán darío jourdan

Each residency has served different artists, so the support the library has provided to each one of them has also been different. Prior to the first showing in the month of August, “Quikuchá” had been growing for a while and the fundamental resources had been secured, but there were still some pieces needed (logistical and material) in order to share it with other people. In this sense, the opportunity of bringing the project to the library of South Providence was immensely helpful to try out ideas and formats for doing so.

We began with a movie-screening series called “Comiendo Cine” (“Eating Cinema”), showing films related to migration and serving food that somehow related to the places or peoples involved in each movie. At the end of each projection, members of the audience were invited to share a journey of their own through the creation of a small map on a blank postcard. Instead of defaulting straight to conversation, **the abstractive exercise of drawing returned the processing and closing of each gathering to the subjectivity of each person, allowing for a creative experience to interpret the film just watched according to each person’s life story.** This being said, there were moments where talking felt needed right away and we allowed ourselves to improvise in order to restore the balance between what “the room needs” and the objectives of the workshop. The objectives, namely, focused on the traveling of stories by way of movies and postcards, between people that do not know each other. A film is based on this premise, just like a short story: they both offer a narrative to an unknown audience—in this workshop the audience is given a chance to “kick the ball back” and share a story of their own with another person, also unknown to them (postcards are eventually sent to folks who have manifested willingness to receive them; initially they are acquaintances of the workshop instructor but as the project grows, these pool of participants also expands).

The movie-series culminated with a form of support perhaps atypical for the library, but it made perfect sense for Quikuchá to close the gatherings with a screening by the water, aboard the sail boat that is meant to take this project to other ports. At the Edgewood Yacht Club (EYC) a group of 20 people were invited to watch short-films made by the instructor, engage with the map-postcard making activity, and additionally a 4x5 film camera was brought to the site to photograph people using a specific part of planet Earth projected on their bodies for only light. Sharing time outdoors, in a setting somewhat foreign to many people was, according to one participant, “a beautiful way of coming together” where personal stories intertwined with contemplating art in a collective setting. It was thanks to the library that this project could acquire the necessary resources to actually make this happen and attempt a first offering of how Quikuchá can keep growing in following encounters. The residency provided a unique space for testing approaches and articulating the project with the participation of others, allowing this project to take a bold first step in manifesting itself publicly.

Reflections

By Cheryl Space



At the closing celebrations for the artists in residency, I was struck by the power of a shared creative experience to create a palpable feeling of belonging.

At the Knight Memorial Library, with colorful murals flapping gently in the breeze on the front lawn, a woman walking by with two children literally stopped in her tracks and exclaimed, “that’s my store!” Theresa Snead, owner of the Alphabet Ice Cream and Candy4Pennies on Elmwood Avenue, saw her vibrant storefronts depicted on one of the four murals on display. Alfonso D. Acevedo, the artist, explained that twenty people had worked together to paint the mural and that it would be hanging in the library for all visitors to see and experience. Theresa agreed to a photo and then eagerly jumped on her phone to share the news, telling one person,

“it made my spirit feel good.”

When I arrived at the Mt. Pleasant Library, children in colorful vests wearing fantastical animal masks and carrying instruments were being gathered together by Yessica and John of Festum Teatro. Their parents were hovering nearby, cameras at the ready, to follow the parade down Academy Avenue. I was struck by the warmth, the connection, and the community that had been created at the library, which carried all the way through the event, right down to the shared meal and illustrated thank you notes the children created for the library staff. I was completely drawn into the creativity and focus of the young artists; it was remarkable.

The stories, the music, the boats, the stars, the movie projected on a screen gently flapping in

the breeze, and the rolling of the dock created a magical conclusion to the film series curated and shared by hernán - and a fitting launch to next adventures! I felt transported, and at the same time mesmerized, by the photos created by projecting images of meaningful places onto the faces and necks of participants.

I was a witness to the essential role a public library and its staff can play in providing infrastructure --space, time, and financial support-- for artists and neighbours who share a language to build relationships, develop trust, share culture, and express their creativity together in community. It is crucial that we find a way to continue to support this important work.

Knight Memorial Library
Photo by Providence Preservation Society



Biographies



Cheryl Space

Cheryl Space has been the Library Director of the Community Libraries of Providence (CLPVD) since June, 2018. Cheryl has her Master of Library and Information Science degree from the University of South Carolina and has been a librarian for 28 years, mainly focusing on children and families. Being the director of CLPVD is a dream come true - every day brings fresh opportunities to think creatively, connect with staff and partners, try out new ideas, and feel proud of the amazing CLPVD staff who work hard to deliver meaningful, relevant, and welcoming programs and spaces to the people of Providence.



hernán darío jourdan

An Argentinean-born artist, hernán is a scholarship recipient of the Japanese Ministry of Education, where he has completed film & video studies at the School of Tokyo Visual Arts (2008) and since then developed projects in Argentina, Chile, United States, Canada & France.

Through video, performances and writing he explores the wealth of hybrid identities –understanding ourselves as social agents that reproduce tendencies; individuals with the capacity to question them; and cosmic beings sensible to change. For his writing across American geographies he's been awarded the 2021 MacColl Johnson Fellowship. Know more at <http://americano.site/>



Alfonso Acevedo

Acevedo is an active painter, poet and professional photographer. Also is an Editor/Founder of America News New England (RI, MA, CT), a Rhode Island based newspaper in Spanish since 1992 to present.

Acevedo attended EPA (Escuela Popular de Arte/School of Art and folk music). He studied Fine Arts and music at Fine Arts Institute of Medellin, Colombia (1973-1979). Acevedo was a Choir member at Fine Arts Institute (1973-77) and Chorus Director of his classmates when he attend High School (1976-77). Also studied Public Administration (1984-87).

He came to Rhode Island in 1987 and since 1988 has reached to the Adams Memorial Library to offer voluntary services.

Part of Acevedo's work exhibits: 1988-1990 Collectives exhibits in RISD Museum. 1990 Solo Exhibit at Adams Memorial Public Library. 1996 "Colors of Colombia", First Solo Exhibit at RI Foundation Gallery. 1998 Collective First exhibit at Atrium Gallery at State Administration Building. 2001 Solo Exhibit at OEA's in Washington D.C. 2001 Adams Memorial Public Library solo exhibit. 2021-22 Colective exhibit at Real Pro Art Gallery. Plus Several invitations for collective exhibits in RI, CT, FL and MA.



Festum Teatro

We believe theater can help people discover in themselves talents they thought were hidden, we believe that playing with children and adults in any one neighborhood we can create permanent bonds between people. The creation of a parade, the elaboration of masks, a theater class, they can all awake in the individual the pleasure and joy of sharing space with neighbors. Theater leads to leisure, but the most important thing theater has taught us is the sense of agency within the same community we inhabit.

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Booklet designed by Ian Carlo Vicente García

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