

Ain't No Stoppin' Da Bus: Travelling Art Workshops for Peace

Introduction:

Last year's sub-prime mortgage crisis undermined the nation's economy. Renewed economic growth, even if achieved, will be no cure-all for chronically impoverished and homeless communities. These unstable communities are of primary concern because they often experience the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual hardships that result from hunger, prostitution, untreated health problems, criminal violence and social alienation. The opportunity to participate in creative art workshops can provide relief from these strains; art creates a medium for community collaboration and an outlet for individual and communal expression. During the summer of 2010 we will use Projects for Peace funding to conduct a series of creative art workshops in San Francisco and Portland. These workshops will serve homeless and impoverished communities and incorporate interdisciplinary approaches to music, poetry and visual art.

Students Involved:

Shire Brown expects his BA in English and has worked closely with poet David Mason and Daehler Fellow Bonnie Nadzam. He is applying to graduate MFA programs for fall 2010. Jody Joyner expects her BA in Studio Art. She specializes in sculpture and print-making and has received three grants from CC to pursue individual projects and attend art conferences. Eddie Hazera, a junior biology major, has studied Indonesian music and instruments from the brass and strings families, has played in jazz groups and concert bands, and has formally studied composition.

Logistics:

We will begin our project in Sisters, Oregon at our friend Raman Ellis' house. Raman has a fully-functioning short school bus that he has offered to lend us for the summer. At his house, we will spend two weeks (June 13th-26th) renovating the bus, getting it serviced by professional mechanics, and turning it into a mobile interdisciplinary art space complete with murals, texts and 3-D installations covering the interior and exterior of the bus. Our Art Bus will also serve the pragmatic purpose of providing us with living quarters during our travels, and therefore during this time we will install locks to ensure our personal safety. Furthermore, during this preparation period we will accumulate any of the artistic mediums (e.g., musical instruments, paints, canvases, CDs, books of poetry, etc.) essential for the implementation of our project.

We expect to leave Sisters, Oregon on June 27th and will spend eight weeks carrying out our project. The first 3 ½ weeks (June 28th – July 20th) will be spent in San Francisco where we will collaborate with SOMCAN (South of Market Community Action Network) and Larkin Street. SOMCAN is dedicated to collective action aimed at achieving social justice for impoverished people living in San Francisco. It has an impressive track record including the preservation of 360 low-income housing units originally slated for demolition and establishing the only Filipino bilingual program in San Francisco. Larkin Street has been focusing on helping vulnerable youth move beyond life on the streets for over 25 years. We have established contacts with both Angelica Cabande, the organizational director at SOMCAN, and Peter Carpou, the manager at Larkin Street. Following our time in San Francisco we will rest at Raman's house for one week (July 21th -27th) and prepare for our next venture by resupplying and reflecting on our experiences.

With new ideas for improvement we will drive the Art Bus to Portland, Oregon on July 28th where we will carry out our second 3 ½ week program (July 29th – August 20th). The organizations we will partner with in Portland have much in common with the ones in San Francisco: for 17 years the Maybelle Clark MacDonald Center has been helping the forgotten peoples of Portland suffering from drug addiction, poverty and chronic illness. Outside-In has been engaging the homeless youth and reintegrating them into society for 40 years; only 20% of youth return to the streets after being helped by Outside-In. We have established contacts with both Heather Brown, the youth department director at Outside-In, and Marylee King, the director at Maybelle Clark MacDonald Center. Although the four mentioned organizations are well-established and effective, they all lack artistic activities; it is our hope that our efforts will contribute to their success by incorporating an artistic component.

Considering the achievements of other philanthropic art projects, the potential for our artistic venture to succeed is great. New York City's Art Start has been conducting locally-oriented art programs with homeless youth for 18 years and has produced numerous publications; New Bedford's artMOBILE has travelled regionally for 12 years providing artistic opportunities to school children and hosting frequent art shows. These separate approaches to altruistic art programs have been successful and we are excited to integrate the two and incorporate these ideas into organizations and cities where they are absent.

Programming:

The first few days in each city will be spent acquainting ourselves with our new surroundings and participating in a variety of activities; we will meet with the leaders of the two organizations and make our presence and plans known to the targeted communities through (1) personally volunteering with the organizations (i.e., working on the “front lines”), (2) printing articles in the street newspaper published and sold by the homeless community (“Street Sheet” in San Francisco and “Street Roots” in Portland), (3) distributing flyers, and (4), if there are any open spaces and left-over food, sleeping in homeless shelters and eating at soup-kitchens in order to make a meek but earnest attempt at understanding the lives of the individuals we hope to serve.

Following this introductory phase, we will stage an interactive performance in the Art Bus where we will present our poetry, art and music. After the show we will hold an informal discussion with the community to better understand how we can best serve them. We will begin by explaining why we believe art can foster peace and be immensely valuable to people in all walks of life. We will discuss how art builds community through artistic collaboration and is a positive outlet for individual and community expression. Subsequent deliberations will focus on any issues that the whole community or individual members are interested in expressing. In addition, we will discuss potential collaborative art projects to bring together alienated groups within this demographic (e.g., children and adults, men and women, different ethnicities). Finally, we will explain what techniques and mediums we know as trained artists that we could offer as aids in developing collaborative projects and communicating pressing issues.

For the following two weeks we will conduct a series of daily workshops scheduled during the morning, afternoon, and evening (attempting to reach as many individuals as possible). These workshops will be conducted in a variety of places and catered to ideas developed in the discussion. The beginning of the workshops will resemble the introductory phase by informally presenting our own art and discussing the various techniques we use to express anxiety, depression, happiness, and a wide array of other intangible emotions that expand far outside imposed linguistic boundaries. Following this, we will allow community members to freely experiment with the available mediums. These workshops will meet three to four times during our second week building on previous meetings and encouraging the expressive and collaborative pursuits of community members. In the final meetings of the various workshops, plans will be made to develop focus groups for certain community members that are particularly interested in a specific artistic medium or approach (e.g., visual, musical, experimental). In these focus groups we will help the community members develop presentable pieces over a period of a week to be displayed or performed at a final presentation. This final art show will be conducted in/on/with the Art Bus and will be open to the public giving the participating members a sense of accomplishment and personal/communal value. Soon after tying up any loose ends and bidding farewell to our new friends and family, we will depart for Raman’s house.

There is a serious potential to leave an artistic void in these communities after we depart. There are a number of ways in which we will address this concern and attempt to foster a lasting community of artists. We will leave a collection of artistic supplies for the community members for both artistic inspiration (e.g., CDs, books of poetry, fiction, and paintings, etc.) and artistic creation (e.g., inexpensive instruments, notebooks, writing utensils, acrylics, canvases, etc.). However, the supplies for artistic creation will eventually become depleted or damaged without additional funding; we will remedy this by teaching the aesthetic and merits of mediums that require no economic resources (e.g., found object art, trash-percussion, and other inexpensive materials). Furthermore, although it will be difficult without funding, we hope to encourage all of the organizations we work with to develop art programs for the demographic they are serving after we are gone. In addition, we will encourage the organizations to arrange for some sort of gallery/art space and performance space. We will also create an artistic network where the community members can continue to have meetings and focus groups to support their artistic endeavors. These groups could function in similar ways as Alcoholics Anonymous does, creating a stable support community comprised of people dealing with serious issues. Finally, we will create a website where the people we have served can develop a virtual community by using computers available at the respective organizations (i.e. Larkin Street, Outside-In, etc.) and public libraries. This website will allow anyone involved with the Art Bus to post their work and see what other people affected by the Art Bus are creating.

Conclusion:

We acknowledge that the Art Bus will not remedy the economic situation of the individuals and communities we intend to work with nor will it erase the systemic evils that have adversely affected them. However, our project has the capacity to improve the immediate lives of people by fostering creative expression and constructive cooperation within disadvantaged communities.

Budget for Ain't No Stoppin' Da Bus

\$2,100 US – Food

Based on the USDA Liberal Food Plan, we estimate that food will cost \$10 per person per day. Therefore it will cost \$2100 to feed three people for 10 weeks.

\$390 US – Gas

The Art Bus gets about 10mpg, diesel costs around \$3 per gallon, and we have around 1300 miles to travel.

\$300 US – Art Bus Renovations

This includes paint supplies for painting the bus, money for minor renovations, purchasing locks and adding safety features to the bus.

\$250 US – Tune-Up for the Art Bus

Although the Art Bus is in good condition, we want to get the bus serviced and have any minor mechanical fixes taken care of before we depart from Raman's house.

\$500 US – Insurance for the Art Bus

We are still seeking quotes for the lowest price. Ideally the coverage would be limited to the 2.5 months that the bus would be in our possession but such specificity is unlikely.

\$300 US – Two Licenses to legally drive the Art Bus

\$900 US – Three round-trip plane tickets from Colorado Springs to Portland

(As of Jan. 30, 2010, Travelocity lists the costs for an early June to mid-August roundtrip ticket in the range of \$300)

\$300 US – Miscellaneous

This category includes such things as printing fees for producing our flyers, any extended parking fees for the Art Bus, inner-city public transportation, and various unexpected incidentals.

\$1,985 US – Supplies for musical creation and inspiration

This includes inexpensive musical instruments, electronic music-making devices and accompanying amplification systems. In addition, we will be purchasing recordings and the necessary equipment to play the recordings for musical inspiration.

\$1,985 US – Supplies for visual art creation and inspiration

This includes visual art books, canvases, paper, sketchbooks, paints, acrylics, clay, watercolors, various lighting systems, glue, scissors, colored pencils, paintbrushes, inexpensive cameras and numerous other supplies associated with creating visual art.

\$990 US – Supplies for literary art creation and inspiration

This includes journals, notebooks, typewriters, composition books and writing utensils. We also hope to purchase numerous books of poetry and fiction creating a mini-library at each organization.

Total: \$10,000 US*

* We feel confident that our budget, as outlined above, will cover all the costs that we will encounter during our project. In the case of an emergency, we are willing to use personal funds and would probably be capable of contributing around \$300 each (potentially adding an additional \$1000 to our available budget). We have not received any additional funding for this project.