VISIONARY ACTIVITIES
FOR THE CLASSROOM

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ART IN ACTION

Inspired by:

- Leonard Knight’s 200 ft. Hot-Air Balloon
- Self-Portraits by Child Refugees of Cambodia
- South African Truth and Reconciliation Quilts

Behind an activist is a belief, and an action to raise awareness for this belief. Activists can use many forms to do this, such as through stories, art, films, and even bumper stickers. Activism has the power to change unfair, and unjust actions and discrimination. Teaching students about activism can introduce them to the possibility of change in their community, and can empower them to take action for what they believe in. This lesson introduces students to values and justice, and how art can be a powerful form of activism.

Objectives:

- Students will explore the power of art in social activism.
- Students will use problem-solving skills to create a work of art that communicates ideas or emotions.
- Students will discuss and analyze the purposes, values, and meanings of works of art.
- Students will create a banner that supports or challenges a personal or societal belief, value, tradition, or unjust practice or condition.

Critical Questions:

What is activism?
Do you know any activists or examples of activism?
What is your role in the community? Can you make a difference?
What are the negative and positive influences of activism on individuals and society?
How can art influence an emotional response?

ACTIVITIES:

Discuss how art can be a tool for people to fight for what they believe in. Discuss artists that have done this, and whether it was effective or not. Discuss how art techniques can emphasize the topic addressed, and how art can be an effective tool for communicating ideas and emotions.

1) Have students write down something that they support or are against on a piece of paper. Depending on the age group, this can be an unjust practice or condition, personal or societal belief, value, tradition, or practice that they would like to see changed. Have students consider a rationale for change, and develop a strategy for promoting the need for change through the use of visual art.

2) Have them think about symbols or images that might visually represent the action they are taking. Choose colors that might enhance their message or strategy. When artworks are complete, they should be displayed in the classroom or in the hallways. Students should be prepared to discuss how they used artistic elements to portray their message.
Materials:
• Large paper or canvas paper
• Paints and brushes
• Pencils and erasers

Additional Activities:

1) Follow the same lesson plan above, but instead have students create a three-dimensional piece of art. Discuss the difference in visual impact and emotional response between the 2D piece and the 3D piece.

2) Discuss modern day applications for social justice campaigns, such as an anti-bullying campaign. As a class, develop a campaign to promote the necessary change. This could include banners, logos, slogans, bumper stickers, t-shirts, public announcements, etc.

3) Discuss monumental historic events that took place as a result of social activism. For example, discuss Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and how in a time when African Americans seemed powerless to make important changes, he led Americans to take nonviolent action to advocate for the rights of all Americans. Discuss how one person can make a difference, to empower students to fight for what they believe in.
DREAM SCENES

Inspired by Dr. Marcellin Simard and Mars Tokyo

Anything can happen in your dreams. People can fly, humans can live underwater, objects can come to life. Dreams can transport you to a different world, or they can make the real world seem surreal.

As Dr. Marcellin Simard found, sometimes dreams can be so strange that you simply can’t describe them in words. He began painting his dreams as a way to vividly describe his dreams.

In this lesson, students will consider a scene or setting in a dream, and bring it to life in a miniature dream scene.

Objectives:
- Students will use the artwork of Dr. Marcellin Simard as a basis for discussing the concept of dreams.
- Students will explore their own dreams and creative capacity by developing a dream journal and miniature dream scene.
- Students will deepen their understanding of the use of visual imagery as a form of communication through the exploration of art materials.

Critical Questions:
What is a dream?
What are the different types of dreams?
Have you had a ‘big dream’ you would like to share?
Why was it so memorable and meaningful to you?

ACTIVITIES:

Dream Journals
1) Create a dream journal to record your own dreams. Select a book-making technique from the following link: www.booklyn.org/education/000240.php. When making your book, be sure to have at least 7 pages, one page for each night. Consider the size of your book, the color of the pages, the design on the cover. Perhaps you might create an interesting title for your dream journal.
2) Record your dream each morning for one week. If you cannot remember your dream, make one up! Get creative!
3) Select the most visually compelling or interesting dream recorded in your journal.

Miniature Dream Scenes
1) Show the miniature theaters of the 13th Dimension created by Mars Tokyo. Discuss the different elements of her theater scenes: characters, environment, action.
2) Create a miniature dream scene from the dream you selected from your journal!
Materials:
- Small box with at least one opening for viewing
- Magazines, Contact Paper, decorative paper
- Scissors
- Glue Stick
- Hot Glue Gun and Hot Glue Sticks
- Small found objects and embellishments such as miniature animals and people, trees, rocks, toys, beads, etc
- Wire or string

Additional Activities:

1) Reflect on the meaning of dreams and how scientists study dreams. Write personal summaries and analyses of memorable, vivid dreams. How are dreams studied or recorded? Do you believe in dream theory? Do you think dreams can be interpreted? What’s happening to you, physically, during a dream?

2) How do different cultures and societies interpret dreams? Analyze these theories and write a response challenging or supporting these theories.

3) Read the article “Mysteries of the Brain and the Science of Sleep, Brought to Life in a Barn” and related lesson plan

4) Read the article “New Clues to Why We Dream” and related lesson plan:
POWER FIGURES

Inspired by Vanessa German

The idea of Minkisi (singular Nkisi), often referred to as “power figures,” originated from what is now known as The Democratic Republic of Congo. These figures are believed to have special powers to heal and protect those with misfortune or illness. They are even believed to punish or bring justice upon a criminal. The power within these figures is thought to depend on their “ingredients” or bishimba.

Power Figure artists will add specific adornments to each sculpture, to serve as these ingredients, each piece holding a symbolic meaning. Common ingredients are feathers, rocks, beads, nails, and shells. Once completed by the artist, a ritual specialist, also known as a nganga, activates the figure. Viewers of the art may then continue to add adornments seeking help or solutions. As items are added, the piece as a whole gains visual and magical power.

Objectives:

- Students will learn the history of African Power Figures and use the Power Figures of Vanessa German as inspiration to create their own power figure.
- Students will discuss community and global concerns in need of attention or healing.
- Students will discuss symbolism and identify symbolic meanings within power figures.

Critical Questions:

What is symbolism?
What are some examples of modern-day symbols and their meanings?
What are some concerns for populations or events in the community and around the world?

ACTIVITIES:

2D Power Figures

Grades K-5

1) Review African Power Figures. Discuss the Power Figures of Vanessa German. Discuss possible meanings behind specific power ingredients in her work. For example, Vanessa indicated that the birds represent liberty, beads represent prayers, keys represent forgiveness, and the saltshakers “rid us of the salt within.” Discuss possible meanings behind each figure as a whole.

2) Discuss common or modern-day concerns for populations or events in the community and around the world. Select one theme to develop into your own power figure.

3) Design your power figure on paper. Transfer this design onto cardboard or chipboard. Cut out the outline of the figure. Adorn with ingredients that will provide necessary power to your figure. Remember to think carefully about what your ingredients represent. Seal with varnish or mod podge if needed.
Materials:
- Power Ingredients/Embellishments, beads, shells, tiles, flowers, sticks, rocks, raffia, yarn, fabric scraps, feathers, keys, spoons, playing cards, small bottles, gems, etc
- Magazines
- Scissors
- Heavy Cardboard or Chipboard
- Craft glue or Hot Glue Gun
- Brushes
- Mod Podge or Varnish
- Paint
- Paper
- Pencil

3D Power Figures
*Grades 6-12*

1) Review African Power Figures. Discuss the Power Figures of Vanessa German. Discuss possible meanings behind specific power ingredients in her work. For example, Vanessa indicated that the birds represent liberty, beads represent prayers, keys represent forgiveness, and the saltshakers “rid us of the salt within.” Discuss possible meanings behind each figure as a whole.

2) Discuss common or modern-day concerns for populations or events in the community and around the world. Select one theme to develop into your own power figure.

3) Sketch a 2D power figure on paper. Use the basic idea of inserting a wooden spoon (head) into a bottle (body) for a figure form to create a 3D power figure. Students may use their creativity to come up with alternate figure forms. Roll out clay into thin sheets, and add to your form to create the shape/coverage that you wish. Press ingredients and embellishments into the clay to adorn. You may choose to paint detail when the clay is dry. Remember to think carefully about what your ingredients represent and how they add power to your figure.

Materials:
- Power Ingredients/Embellishments, beads, shells, tiles, flowers, sticks, rocks, raffia, yarn, fabric scraps, feathers, keys, spoons, playing cards, small bottles, gems, etc
- Glass bottle
- Wooden Spoon
- Self-hardening Clay
- Craft glue or Hot Glue Gun
- Brushes
- Paint
- Paper
- Pencil
FAMILY TAPESTRIES

Inspired by Esther Krinitz

Many ancient cultures have relied on storytelling to preserve their family history. It is said that today, in modern-day America, few of us can even remember the names of our great-grandparents. In this lesson plan, students will think about their own Family History, and what stories they should preserve.

This project is inspired by Esther Krinitz, and her embroidered tapestries. Esther created these tapestries to tell her daughters about her story of surviving the Holocaust. By using cloth and embroidery, she has ensured that her story will be preserved, and easily shared with others.

Objectives:

- Students will learn about the life and artwork of Esther Krinitz
- Students will conduct family interviews to learn more about their family history.
- Students will transform an important family story or event into an image.
- Students use their auditory and visual/kinesthetic abilities to interpret, organize, and represent a story in original artwork.

Critical Questions:
What are some ways that other cultures record their history?
Why is it important to record family history?
What do you think of when you hear the term “personal culture” and how does that tie into your Family History?
What elements are important when considering Family History?
What are the advantages of using art to tell Family History?

ACTIVITIES:

Discuss how family stories are tales about people, places, and events related to the members of our immediate family or their ancestors.

1) Gather Family Stories:
   a. Conduct interviews with family members. Ask them about important life events, people, and favorite memories
   b. Collect any artifacts or photos that might help in your creative process

2) Choose one story or event from the interviews that you feel is most important or interesting, and use it to write a complete short story.
   a. Consider environment, characters, and actions.

3) Transform this written story into a Family Tapestry!
   a. Think about how you might simply convey your story into an image that will help the viewer have a better understanding of your history!
b. Sketch out a design on paper.
c. Transform this sketch into a tapestry:
   • Grades K-5: Paint Tapestry on Canvas Paper
   • Grades 6-8: Felt Tapestry (all felt)
   • Grades 9-12: Fabric Tapestry (fabric scraps and felt)
d. Share your final tapestries with the class. Discuss similarities and differences in the class stories.

Materials Grades K-5:
   • Paint
   • Markers
   • Canvas Paper or Cardstock

Materials Grades 6-8:
   • Large Felt Piece for background
   • Felt pieces in assorted colors
   • Scissors
   • Fabric Glue
   • Markers for tracing shapes

Materials Grades 9-12:
   • Felt and Fabric scraps
   • Embroidery floss and thread
   • Needles
   • Scissors
   • Small Embellishments (optional)
   • Cotton Stuffing (optional)

Additional Activities:
1) Ask students what they would need to record their own personal history. For example: receipts, photos, school records, recipes, artifacts, etc. Remind students that what may seem boring now, might be very interesting in 25 years!
   a. Create a personal timeline using images to start recording your own personal history. Start from the very first memory you have, and continue working chronologically.
   b. Create a time capsule, and fill it with artifacts that would help tell your story in the future.
2) Watch Ancestors episode, “Records at Risk,” to discuss the importance of recording history http://www.byub.org/ancestors/records/risk/
3) Write a mini-biography to record your personal history.
FOUND-OBJECT SELF-PORTRAIT

Inspired by Gregory Warmack, also known as Mr. Imagination

Mr. Imagination was faced with many obstacles in life, including economic impoverishment, gunshot wounds leading to a coma, and a house fire that destroyed the majority of his artwork. However, he used his creativity as a tool to overcome this adversity, from which he gained a new perspective on his life. Through this process, he became a messenger, an artist, and an inspiration to others.

With a little creativity, found objects can become works of art, bringing new purpose to common items, and opening the artist and viewer to new perspectives.

This workshop encourages students to apply their creativity by transforming found objects into self-portraits that tell their own stories, allowing them to explore new perspectives on their unique identities.

Objectives:
• Students will use sculptures of the visionary artist “Mr. Imagination” as a basis for discussing how creativity can open doors to new perspectives.
• Students will explore their own creative capacity by developing a visionary self-portrait using found objects and unconventional materials.
• Students will deepen their understanding of the creative process through additional activities back in the classroom.

Critical Questions:
What is Visionary Art?
Do you know anyone that might be considered a Visionary Artist?
What is “found-object” art?
What types of found or recycled objects could you use to make an art piece?

ACTIVITY:
Using Mr. Imagination’s story and his artwork as inspiration, explore your own creativity by creating a self-portrait out of found objects. Students may be encouraged to collect 2-5 found objects (per student) to bring with them to the class/workshop.

Materials:
A variety of found objects including, but not limited to, bottle caps, paintbrushes, buttons, telephone wire, paperclips, containers, hardware, and small discarded household items. In addition, various collage materials will be provided, including glue, air-dry clay, scissors, yarn, paint, sequins, beads, recycled magazines, tape, and scraps of wood.
Follow-up Activities:

1) Divide the students into groups of 5-6. Use this time to discuss the creative process, using the following guiding questions. Questions should be open-ended to promote responses that go beyond “yes” or “no.”
   - What did you observe about using the various objects?
   - What did you enjoy about using the various objects?
   - What did you learn from the process of transforming found objects into art?
   - How did different objects enlighten you to new perspectives about yourself?
   - What surprised you?
   - What would you title your portrait?

2) Have students individually write an artist statement about their final piece.

3) As a group, discuss other situations when creative thinking might set you apart, opening doors to new possibilities. Examples can include other creative fields such as engineering, teaching, science, medicine, video-game developing, etc.

4) If possible, bring in a professional that can speak to the class about how their creative thinking has opened doors.

Introduce students to found object innovators outside of the art field, and brainstorm additional innovative ideas as a class.

Students may then follow up with research projects based on an individual or career that is enhanced by creative thinking. Research projects can be shared with the class to emphasize how vital creativity is in so many situations.
Native American folklore and legends have been passed on to new generations to keep cultural beliefs alive, and to help new generations understand the origins and ways of life. Many legends are not entirely believed, but are also never proven false. In a sense, Legends are a way to explain the mysteries of the world in a way that makes some sort of sense.

Legends are often such compelling stories that artists have turned them into works of art, giving the viewer an added dimension of understanding. Often, these artworks are the only surviving records of what cultures believed in.

Judy Tallwing shares her culture’s legends, stories, and beliefs in her paintings using symbolic imagery. *Corn Maiden* tells the story of how the Creator gave this maiden the gift of knowledge for growing corn, introducing corn to the community. Beside her stands the Spirit of Water and the Spirit of Earth.

**Objectives:**
- Students will learn the history and elements of legends.
- Students will explore their own creativity by developing a legend of their own, or expanding on a previous legend.
- Students will explore the use of visual art to represent legendary tales.

**Critical Questions:**
What is a legend?
Where do legends come from? Why were they created?
Do you know of a legend? Do you think it still holds true today? Can you prove or disprove it?
Sample “made-up” legends:
Why you should not swim in deep water at night
Why the eagle has sharp claws
How the Turkey got it’s name
The legend of the monkey and the crocodile
The legend of the Banyan Tree

ACTIVITIES:

Discuss how a legend is meant to explain something, a way of life, a personal trait or to warn you of consequences for your actions. You should think of a simple, example to get students brainstorming. For example, you could ask how the squirrel got his bushy tail, or how rice came to be.

1) Chose an existing legend or write your own legend. If creating your own, be sure to consider the qualities of a legend mentioned above. Another option might be to select objects from a bag, and write something based on that chosen object.
2) Create a piece of artwork to add a deeper dimension to your legend, and to pass on to future generations.

Materials:
• Pencil and erasers
• Paper
• Marker or Paint

Additional Activities:

1) Have students respond to their classmates’ pictures by writing their own legend based on what they see. Compare the original artist’s legend with the new legend, and discuss how art can evoke different responses from different viewers.

2) Have students research interesting or significant legends from different cultures. Have them prove or disprove the legend, and present their findings with the class. Be sure to encourage students to present information in an interesting and creative way, in order to help others remember and pass on the legend!

3) The Iroquois have a legend about the “faceless doll.” It seems that the first cornhusk doll was made to be the companion for a little Indian girl. Have students make their own cornhusk doll, and write their own legend about it.

Visit the website below for the full legend and cornhusk doll-making instructions.
http://themessagetree.com/wordpress/?p=95
RELEVANT ARTIST BIOS and ESSAYS

VANESSA GERMAN

Vanessa German is an “odd ball” award-winning multidisciplinary artist based in the Homewood community of Pittsburgh, PA. The third of five children, Vanessa was born in Wisconsin and raised in Los Angeles where she got her stomp and holler on the mean streets of mid-city LA. Her mama is a renowned fiber artist who raised her children to make things and create their own stories and entertainment. “We grew up with the ingredients to make ‘stuff’ . . . and most importantly, fully realized faith in our imaginations. This is how we stayed alive—making our ideas leave our bodies through our hands, becoming tangible—and righteous enough for us to keep wanting to do it.”

Vanessa creates “contemporary power figures,” as she defines them, made of everyday objects transformed into an iconography of astonishing metaphors. Vanessa believes her power figures are “alive by sight, and the adventure that sight incites in every piece” has its own meaning. Her visual works have been shown in galleries and museums throughout the country and was recently acquired by The Progressive Collection, one of the preeminent corporate contemporary art collections in the nation, and The David C. Driscoll collection, Franciscan University Collection. Her sculptures will be represented in “African American Art 1950-Present,” produced by the Driscoll Center and the Smithsonian Institution.

Vanessa’s visual and performance work contend with the power and fragility of the human spirit. She grew up surrounded by Africans, Koreans, white folks, Mexican folks, strange folks, gay folks, sights, sounds, and scents according the ever-fabled melting pot. She also grew up at the foot of AIDS and gang violence, churches, co-ops, street vendors, house fires, and street music, from hip hop to meringue, every facet still found fibrous and illuminated in her story. Writer Graham Shearing observes, “She is a witness to what she finds and declares it loudly and passionately, and, for a shy woman, also fearlessly. She intuitively transforms her findings, her evidences, into her work.”

Vanessa has pioneered a performance style called “Spoken Word Opera,” which brings all of the drama and theatricality of traditional opera to intimate performances and contemporary themes through a dynamic hybrid of spoken word poetry, hip hop, storytelling, music and movement. Recent performances include TEDx Harvard, TEDx MIT, and TEDx Pittsburgh. Vanessa has written and performed in four evening-length performance works. As a member of the inaugural 2009/2010 class of fellows at the August Wilson Center of African American Culture, she created “root,” a spoken word opera. Vanessa is the subject of the documentary film *Tar Baby Jane*.

MR. IMAGINATION aka GREGORY WARMACK

Gregory Warmack was born in Chicago in 1948, the third of nine children who gave church concerts together as The Warmack Singers. As a child, he suffered from seizures, but they stopped at the age of 14. An inveterate collector of rocks, beads, trinkets, and myriad cast-off objects, Warmack started making and selling jewelry in his late teens. He also carved bits of bark, wood, and stone into faces that resembled African tribal masks or Egyptian kings. In 1978,
a week after having a premonition that someone was going to kill him, Warmack was shot twice while selling his jewelry on the street. He went into a coma and had an out-of-body experience that changed him forever. Reflecting that change, he renamed himself “Mr. Imagination.” “Mr. I” began using new and different types of recycled materials in his art, most notably the bottle caps he is still best known for today. In 2001, Mr. Imagination left Chicago for Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, “to put down some roots and grow some vines.” He continues to work and teach in Bethlehem, where he has continued his lifelong commitment to children and community in a series of outdoor embedded concrete sculptures, or “grottoes,” as he calls them. His work has been exhibition across the United States and featured in the Smithsonian. “Years ago my great aunt predicted I was going to be a minister, and in a way she was right,” Warmack said. “I think every artist is a minister and a messenger in a way.”

LEONARD KNIGHT

Leonard Knight was born on a 32-acre farm in Vermont in 1931, the youngest of six children. He attended a one-room grammar school and dropped out of high school after the tenth grade. Knight was drafted and sent to Korea when he was 20. After the war he returned to Vermont, where he worked as a mechanic and started painting cars. At 35, while visiting his sister in San Diego, Knight converted to evangelical Christianity. A few years later, he saw a hot air balloon in flight, and decided that it was the perfect way to spread the Lord’s Word. He spent the next decade living in his truck and building a hot air balloon nearly 300 feet high and trying, unsuccessfully, to launch it. Knight finally gave up on the project in 1985 because the balloon had so much dry rot. He was living in the desert near Niland, California. Knight says he had half a bag of cement that he intended to use to make a monument to his failed project. A passerby told him about another bag of cement at the dump, and that was the beginning of Salvation Mountain, a totally manmade adobe mountain covered in a patchwork of brightly covered paint. The words “GOD IS LOVE” dominate his creation, which is a work in progress that sometimes absorbs 100 gallons of paint in a day and a half.

ESTHER NISENTHAL KRINITZ

Esther Nisenthal Krinitz grew up in the exquisite countryside of rural Poland. Her talents as a seamstress were evident by age eight when she sewed and embroidered a festival folk costume that earned the amazed admiration of the village professional seamstress.

Esther was just twelve years old when Nazis arrived on horseback at her rural homeland and began occupying her village for the next three years. One fateful day in October 1942, Esther, her family, and all the other Jews in their Polish village were suddenly ordered to leave their homes by ten o’clock or be shot and to report immediately to the nearby train station. The night before the train’s departure, 15-year old Esther decided she would not go but would instead take her 13-year old sister, Mania, and look for work among Polish farmers. The next morning’s black clouds and birds confirmed omens of her fears. Esther and Mania would become the only members of their family to survive the Holocaust.

After being turned away by friends and neighbors too frightened to take the two sisters in, Esther and Mania made their way to another village where they were not known. Pretending to be Polish Catholic farm girls who had been separated from their family, the sisters found work and stayed in the village until liberating Russian troops arrived in 1944. After the war ended,
Esther and Mania made their way to a displaced persons camp in Germany where Esther met and married Max Krinitz. She wore the one communal wedding dress shared in turn by brides. In June 1949, Esther, Max and their infant daughter, Bernice, immigrated to the United States.

Esther Krinitz first began her series of fabric pictures in 1977 at the age of 50. The first two depicted the beauty and happiness of her rural childhood home and were presented as gifts for her two adult daughters, Bernice and Helene. Although trained as a dressmaker and highly skilled in needlework, Esther had no training in art and no conception of herself as an artist. Yet, her first embroidered pictures were so well received by her family and friends and so personally satisfying that she would later create 34 other pieces, unveiling a sequential narrative series of increasing complexity. With the addition of text, Esther’s art became an exquisite embroidered testimony to her true story of survival.

After a long illness, Esther Krinitz died in 2001 at the age of 74, beloved by all who knew her.

MARCELLIN LUC SIMARD, M.D.

Dr. Marcellin Simard was born in Chicoutimi, Quebec, Canada on August 17, 1951. He was the youngest of twenty children born to Marie Alice Gaudreault and Albert Simard. His father Albert was a businessman who owned a gas station along with several small general stores in which his mother, Marie Alice, also worked.

An imaginative and inquisitive child, Simard felt different from his peers and siblings and was "a handful for his parents." His first memory of making art was as an energetic eight-year old. "It felt, and continues to feel, as imperative a thing to do as much as eating and sleeping." Little Marcellin even made himself a life-like sculpture of Frankenstein. He also worked several odd jobs and carried bales of hay for $1 an hour, which "... gave me great respect for manual labor." Drawn to the supernatural, by age fifteen, Simard was in high demand for reading people’s tarot cards. He studied psychology and then medicine and eventually became a world-renowned cardiologist. While working in Guam as a cardiologist, the Governor there awarded Dr. Simard highest honors and all the benefits of a local native. It was also in Guam where he had an accident that broke his leg and left him unconscious for 21 days, but the experience only acted to intensify his paintings.

Marcellin’s lifelong psychic abilities and frequent lucid dreams have aided him in faithfully recording his experiences through his drawings over the past 35 years. "It is easier for me to draw my dreams and feelings than to write them down. An image, painting, or drawing can tell so much more than a whole page of words. Channeling my dreams onto canvas works well, as space, color and feelings have no boundaries." With his 14-year old daughter, Simard co-authored and illustrated a dream journal book entitled, "Tell Me Your Dreams."

"Everything comes from inside of me like a secret message to you, the viewer. I hope you see something new and positive, something unique you have never observed before."

Over the past 30 years, Dr. Simard has worked as an interventional cardiologist and currently lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, along with his life partner, Will, of 28 years. Simard counts Will and their three kids as the major influences in his life. His all-time favorite memory of storytelling is during family dinners at home, where each shares a recent dream or makes one up.
JUDY TALLWING

Apache elder Judy Tallwing was born Judy Browning in Glendale, Arizona, the daughter of Ruby Browning and Archer Donoho. Judy holds vivid childhood memories of living in the desert with her parents and seven half brothers and sisters, helping to hunt rattlesnakes, and selling rocks by the roadside. From their five-acre home in Washington State, Judy, like many Native American children, attended both Catholic girls’ school and Indian School. Tallwing now has six children, 23 grandchildren, and seven great grandchildren.

Judy started making art as far back as she can remember. “We didn’t call it art, we called it making things to sell along the road to help the family survive. I used to watch my Grandmother, Grandfather, and my Mother all doing various forms of what I now know is art, to sell, and I wanted to help.” Her first thing that sold was a bee sitting on a flower, painted on a rock. It sold for .25 cents.

In her youth, Judy did a little bit of everything, from running her own construction and leather production companies to being the executive director of a domestic violence victims program and running an animal rescue for 13 years. “I think an ‘aha moment’ for me was realizing I could go to college, even without much other schooling.” Starting college at age 32 changed her life; she now holds both an AA and BA degree.

Judy always painted or created some form of art. “I love trying to bring the stories I’ve heard to life and to add the spiritual aspects of the stories through the medicine of different elements of nature. Each thing that lives on the earth has its own energy and I try to put those energies together to create a healing.” Judy travels to power places on the earth and brings back tiny fragments from those places to put in ever painting or sculpture that calls for them, including copper, silver, turquoise, garnet, prayer ashes, and minute crystal prayer beads.

Judy believes that stories are the most important way we pass on our histories and they’re our most powerful teaching tools. “Stories can be used to guide us; to help us heal; to make us laugh. I’ve been telling stories all my life, whether it was from a stage, in front of a campfire, on canvas or to a room of kids…I want to do as my grandfather said—make the world a bit better because Creator let me be here for a while.”

MARS TOKYO aka SALLY MERICLE

Sally Diane Mericle was born in Baltimore, Maryland, to William Mericle, an Italian American metallurgical engineer, and Virginia Mericle, a housewife. Raised primarily in Peoria, Illinois, Sally was a child savant at drawing precise figures as early as age two. Her art making was much encouraged by her mother and many others in her early life. She has since produced her work under her preferred art name, Mars Tokyo, which she says came to her in a dream. Some of Sally’s key memories from childhood include exploring the woods behind her house, drawing rolls and rolls of tiny figures on adding machine tape, and sewing miniature fashions for her Barbie dolls. Later at Bradley University, Sally concentrated on general studies while pursuing her art on her own. “I am 100 percent self-taught as an artist” she proclaims. Sally was able to make a living also as a self-taught graphic designer and college teacher for nine years. In 1995, she traveled to China to attend and present at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women.
Sally was diagnosed with major depression following a suicide attempt at age 21 and has battled depression for decades. She says she keeps diaries, in part, as a way to express herself, especially after undergoing electroconvulsive therapy treatments in 2007. Sally wishes viewers of her work to know, "My stories presented in my 'theaters' are ones of personal rejection, alienation, and pain. They often reflect a life dealing with major depression. But throughout them, there is also a great beauty and hope, because there is that in life." Sally's favorite funny storyteller is local performance artist Joe Wall who also constructed the illuminated display base for her theaters. She has been happily married to a local reporter for 26 years, and together they have one son. Sally's best advice is, "Even if everyone tells you to give up, you should keep doing what you love—especially making art. Don't ever stop."
In 1995, just as our American Visionary Art Museum was opening here in Baltimore, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), on the other side of the world in South Africa, began instituting a revolutionary and fiercely creative system for communal healing, implemented through the power of truthfully storytelling.

What was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's noble aim? Its aim was to formally and humanely address the factual record of violent human rights abuse that occurred under state-sanctioned apartheid upon its citizens of color and to offer a new way forward as one unified people.

The new South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was determined to avoid the wheel of bloody retribution in response to the racist crimes sanctioned under the former Apartheid Republic of South Africa government. They bravely set course on a new way to heal and unite all the populations of South Africa, one that also guaranteed gay rights as civil rights. They offered a very controversial approach that suspended punishment when the perpetrators of brutal crimes would humbly reveal the full measure of their acts and truthfully respond to the questions asked by the grieving loved ones of those they had tortured or killed. This revolutionary societal healing system was devoted to people-to-people sharing through truthful stories. Forgiveness was seen as a mutual act of "Ubuntu" - a system wholly contrasted with vengeance and punishment, whose ultimate goal lay in restoring human dignity and shared concern for all parties as inextricably interrelated parts of the one web of life.

The TRC was chaired by our Visionary Museum's respected, dear friend, Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the recipient of our highest Grand Visionary Award. We believe the Truth and Reconciliation movement constitutes humanity's highest and most compassionate creative act to date.

Treasured within our national museum's permanent collection are these true stories, expressed in sewn and embroidered quilted panels that were solicited under the TRC to enable illiterate women to record their factual, personal testimonies expressive of "the worse day of their lives under Apartheid." Thousands of these painful cloth remembrances were captured in this manner, often accompanied by verbal testimonies also carefully recorded. In this way, the true story of suffering was never minimized, but preserved as a permanent record of a shared tragic past that must never be repeated.

Today the Truth and Reconciliation model of establishing a dignified public forum for addressing past and grievous wrongs has now been successfully adopted by several other countries and villages. Seeking a way to transcend blame, the TRC endures as astonishment in civility, much like the act of the Pennsylvania Amish community who stunned the world by immediately reaching out with compassion to the family of the man who senselessly killed their innocent school children, knowing that they too were suffering. Both the Amish community and the revolutionary South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission were committed to revolutionary acts of kindness and forgiveness in the light of truth, in lieu of responding to injury in ways that further perpetuate hardship and alienation. If that isn't human creativity at its best, we don't know what is.
"WHAT I SEE WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES"

Self-Portrait Banners created by Children Rescued through FRIENDS-INTERNATIONAL & Documentary Film by Leslie Hope featuring True Life Testimonies Spoken by The Children

The ultimate price of war is paid for by the children it leaves behind. UNICEF estimates that 35% of Cambodia's 15,000+ prostitutes are children under 16. Many other children are engaged in forced labor, organized begging rings, and other exploitive practices. Filmmaker and actor, Leslie Hope, visited Phnom Penh, Cambodia for her first time in 2003. This is what she found:

"Once the richest country in Southeast Asia, it is now one of the poorest, with an average annual income below $300. Today, more than 20,000 children live and work on the streets of Phnom Penh, many abandoned by their families through poverty, death, and despair and the enduring ravages of war. The illegal sex trade is a burgeoning industry, one that shamefully continues to attract adult pedophile global tourists -children as young as three and four years old have been bought and sold. HIV/AIDS remains a fast-growing health problem, as is drug addiction."

FRIENDS INTERNATIONAL, also known by Mith Samlanh from the Khmer word for "FRIENDS," was established in 1994, to provide safe haven and to help meet the long-term needs of Cambodia's rescued street children. Now a respected and acclaimed international organization serving 60,000 children where needed worldwide, FRIENDS INTERNATIONAL offers street living and working kids shelter, food, remedial education, vocational training, job placement and counseling, and perhaps for the first time in their lives, a safe place to call home. Hope recalls:

"While visiting one of the FRIENDS Training Centers, I was approached by a young boy who seemed no older than my ten year-old son. He made clear to me that he was sexually available. Obviously operating from a former instinct for survival, while finally in a place where he no longer needed to do that, he continued a habit that had been learned at an enormous cost. His gesture to me was both so very disturbing and moving that I felt compelled to do something. I wanted to help make a world where children needn't sacrifice themselves for the price of a meal. With the cooperation of Sebastien Marot, the founder of FRIENDS, and with the support and help of the staff and children, I returned to Cambodia the following year to make this short documentary. Originally conceived as a fund-raising tool for FRIENDS, the project bloomed into something far bigger. The children became my heroes."

Leslie Hope's film, structured around the kids making over 100 life-sized self-portrait banners, was inspired by her simple question, "What do you see when you close your eyes?" By asking the courageous children of Mith Samlanh/FRIENDS the simplest of questions, "I was able to hear and film their most extraordinary and truthful answers."

To gift your personal support to the important work of Friends International Cambodia, please visit their website and learn more: friends-international.org/wherewework/cambodia.asp