

## The Contemporary Art Exhibition Designed for Children

### Statement

Elementary school children do not know enough about contemporary art. Many public schools in the state of New York do not teach children about modern day artists and this negatively affects their conception of art. The curriculum of art education should be restructured to include teachings of present-day art. This will make art more accessible for children and help demystify common beliefs about contemporary art.

### Arguments

The first order is to clarify what contemporary art is and clear some confusion about it. Many art educators in public schools are either unaware or perplexed by modern day art. Julia Marshall and David M. Donahue, authors of *Art-Centered Learning Across the Curriculum: Integrating Contemporary Art in the Secondary School Classroom*, state "What makes contemporary art difficult and off-putting for many viewers, and the questions this art raises, are what make it ideal for authentic integrative inquiry," (Marshall 4). The speculative nature of contemporary art is akin to the nature of children; they are curious and absorb information like a sponge. If children are exposed to contemporary art, they would have a better understanding of how the art world works and broaden their cultural horizons. Accessibility plays a key role in this problem. There are not many television programs or movies that involve artistic activities, such as Bob Ross's *The Joy of Painting*. Children are taught mostly about art history and taken to museums instead of galleries. They tend to have a very limited concept of present-day art.

In some countries, such as Japan, they expose children to visual art at an early age to teach about the country's past. The art education system in the United States is flawed. *Studio Thinking: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education* by Lois Hetland, Ellen Winner, Shirley Veenema, and Kimberly M. Sheridan is a book about the benefits of visual arts. To quote the book, "All too often the arts have been considered a luxury in our schools... With mandated, standardized tests in mathematics, reading, and language arts administered each year, the focus of schools shifted to raising test scores in these areas," (Hetland 1). The education system is based on improving test scores in academic subjects. When schools need to perform budget cuts, the arts, be it visual, theater, or music, are usually the first to go. Children who come from low-income families, communities, and school districts suffer from lack of a proper art education. For schools that do not provide adequate visual arts education, they could integrate art into academic subjects. As an example, children can learn how to do arithmetic via painting. Art does not have to be confined to just drawing, painting, and sculpture. Contemporary art consists of a vast amount of different mediums. Children could find virtually any way they want to create whatever they want and learn whichever way they want.

Art education is crucial for a child's development. Art making improves fine motor skills. Art provides a language of self-expression. It can also be used as a visual encyclopedia for teaching. Sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz said "Art does not solve problems, but makes us

aware of their existence.” Art can teach children about real world issues at a young age. It improves their cultural awareness and critical thinking. Gigi Antoni said “DALI [Dallas Arts Learning Initiative] was created on one unabashedly idealistic, yet meticulously researched, premise -- that students flourish when creativity drives learning.” There are plenty of studies that show a direct positive correlation between academics and involvement in art activities. Children learn more effectively if they are involved in an activity as opposed to if they are watching and copying the teacher’s lessons.

## **Counterargument**

To some, art education isn’t valuable. In Oklahoma, they recently cut art funding due to their staggering debt. In her article “The Anti-Art Education Stance,” Nicole Kirchner states “If a child never learns addition, they will never be able to survive in society today. If your child never learns to paint, though, they will be absolutely fine.” She also goes on to say the primary reason for art being removed from schools is due to budgeting and costs. The biggest enemy of arts education is funding and money. Since there are a plethora of music, theater, and visual arts programs for children outside of school, art education is deemed as unnecessary in many schools.

## **Introduction**

My thesis will focus on using art to teach art. I propose an exhibition that will have artworks created by me that are intended to show the following issue: contemporary art is not taught enough at schools. The exhibition will have tables with blank paper and art coloring pages. Children and adults can draw whatever they like on this paper and then hang their work on the Art Tree, a wooden sculpture that will display these pages on its branches. There will be a video piece that shows interviews with educators, children, and artists. There will be a game that serves as a teaching mechanism for contemporary art. It will feature interactive stages that explore through different art movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Creating an interactive show would allow children to collaborate and share their own notions of art while learning about it. The exhibition will illustrate ways to make contemporary art more accessible.

## **Cultural Statement**

The thesis project is heavily involved in the present-day art world. It will tie in with the history of art education by hopefully changing the way or shining some light on how art is presently taught in the United States. By observing how art education is taught in other nations throughout the world and by including collaborative art projects in the exhibition, I plan to make contemporary art understandable for children. Children will also learn more about their own culture and cultures around the world. Knowledge of art lends itself to knowledge of culture.

## **Motivation**

When I was a junior during my undergraduate studies, (I majored in Studio Art), I created a video for a digital art project. I interviewed my cousin’s nine year old daughter and asked her how she perceives art, what she likes about art, and which artists she knows. The results surprised me: the most recent artist she could name was Jasper Johns. I wondered how much

children in the United States knew about contemporary art. I worked in a museum the following summer, essentially as a counselor for kids attending summer art camp. The program focused on teaching the children about art by using its museum space. However; the children seemed more interested in building their lighthouse papier-mâché sculptures than learning about the artworks in the museum. I tried to figure out a way to make art education enjoyable with a firm emphasis on present-day works.

### **Artistic Strength**

My idea itself is to create an art show educating contemporary art using artwork. Creating interactive works, such as providing for coloring activities for children or a video game where the player walks around a virtual art gallery, would create a forum for learning and discussion of current day art.

### **Originality**

I am not sure if there have been many art exhibitions that focus on teaching contemporary art to children. The artwork and interviews will be original. I hope for children to become interested in contemporary art instead of just doodling on iPads and building stick houses. I wish in schools children will learn about writing, history, and science through artistic activities and projects. I want to make a virtual reality experience that teaches art.

### **Potential Impact**

If everything worked out perfectly, my thesis project would get kids to ask their parents to take them to Chelsea for gallery hopping. It would also demystify common misconceptions about contemporary art and improve the quality of art education by integrating academics into art. Contemporary art will be readily available to students and children, regardless of family background, income, and location in New York. It will hopefully inspire game developers to create educational games using virtual reality.

### **Interesting Findings**

<http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/music-arts/the-importance-of-art-in-child-development/>  
<http://www.artseveryday.org/StudentsAndFamilies/detail.aspx?id=230>  
<http://www.nyc-arts.org/>  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8a\\_rN6Ne10](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8a_rN6Ne10)  
<http://ezproxy.library.nyu.edu:2128/artbibliographies/docview/1559844574/8052C631BB2A4368PQ/1?accountid=12768>  
<http://www.urbanarts.org/>  
<http://www.pbs.org/art21/>

### **Techniques and Media**

I may include video editing, game design, and interdisciplinary art for my project. I could create an interactive game where children walk around a gallery space and interact with artworks

in the game to learn about contemporary art. The game itself will use Unity and the Oculus Rift. There will be projections of interviews with children, teachers, and artists alike discussing how to teach contemporary art to children.

### **Contribution to Digital Media**

There are several contemporary artists out there that make fascinating work using digital media, such as Rafael Rozendaal, Corey Archangel, and Miltos Manetas. I hope that my project gets children interested in digital art. This could possibly lead children to other interests. If a child wants to create 3D printed objects for his art, eventually this hobby could become a job for a 3D modeler or engineer. The virtual reality experience could take edutainment games to a new level.

### **References**

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