

NEW URBAN ARTS



Invitation to midyear student exhibition. Artwork by Yolibel Gonzalez

2010 to 2011 Youth Mentorship in the Arts Program Report

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New Urban Arts
705 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903
t. (401) 751-4556
f. (401) 273-8499
www.newurbanarts.org

Mission and Vision

Our mission is to build a vital community that empowers young people as artists and leaders to develop a creative practice they can sustain throughout their lives. Our free, year-round, out-of-school programs provide young people a supportive, stable community where they build sustained mentoring relationships with artist mentors.

Community Need

The Youth Mentorship in the Arts program is an innovative response to two social problems: the need for more quality out-of-school programs for teens and the need of Providence youth for more creative learning opportunities. Teen years are a time of increased independence and potentially unsafe behavior, but also a critical time to tap young people's innate assets towards success. "It is in these hours that young people (ideally with caring adult supervision) form habits by which they will later allocate their free time, learn to conduct themselves socially, take their first jobs and formulate ideas about what constitutes a satisfying, worthwhile life" (Edna McConnell Clark Foundation).

In Providence, young people, particularly low-income youth and those in communities of color, are systematically denied access to high-quality creative learning opportunities. The City of Providence conducted an assessment finding persistent "dissatisfaction with the current state of arts education in Providence." The assessment also found that "access to arts education in Providence is uneven." Indeed, Providence public schools offer little to no arts education. The RI State Education Commissioner criticized Providence "for not providing a comprehensive program of art instruction" and failing to meet state arts requirements. The poor quality of arts learning opportunities reflects a more general critical need for quality expanded learning opportunities for high school age youth. According to RI Kids Count, only 6% of Providence public schools in 2008 were considered "high performing." This climate, along with current and continuing economic trends, puts added pressure on organizations like New Urban Arts to meet student learning needs in the arts. Meanwhile, our student enrollment and participation, which are completely voluntary, are at historic highs, indicating the practical necessity for our programs.

Project Goals and Objectives

Our long-term goal is that our students make a permanent place for creativity and imagination in their lives. Our interim goals are that students:

- 1) develop close, positive relationships with non-parental adult mentors and peers;
- 2) acquire standards-based skills and knowledge in the arts;
- 3) begin to develop their unique artistic voice;
- 4) graduate high school on a path towards postsecondary education.

Youth Mentorship in the Arts Program Activities

The Youth Mentorship in the Arts Program in the 2010-2011 school year recruited 20 artist mentors and two studio study buddies (tutors) to mentor 450 high school students from October 2010 to May 2011 in arts disciplines ranging from painting, drawing, graphic design, to filmmaking. All programs took place in our 2,000 square foot, well-equipped storefront studio and gallery space.

Mentoring relationships at New Urban Arts emphasize collaboration and youth agency; as a result, mentorships enrich the creative practices of both youth and mentors. Mentors assemble resources and initial ideas instead of lesson plans and curricula, and youth choose their mentors and may switch at any time. Princeton University Lecturer Bill Westerman, who documented New Urban Arts on behalf of ARTOGRAPHY, writes, "young people who never considered they would be artists are finding new possibilities for life through this free program that eschews regimentation, formal

attendance requirements and other aspects of 'schooling.'" *(In November 2009, New Urban Arts was one of nine arts organizations selected from over 100 applicants to participate in ARTOGRAPHY, a national Ford Foundation-funded grant and documentation program mapping exemplary artistic practice.)*

Our artist mentors undergo a rigorous selection process, conducted by students and staff, including essays, artwork and interviews. Over the ensuing year, artist mentors receive over 30 hours of professional development and training in various elements of arts education. While our focus is the creative development of young people, we also recognize that we work with youth from under-resourced communities. To that end, we also provide after-school snacks, free bus passes, daily tutoring and homework help and a strong partnership with College Visions, a college access and success program for first-generation and low-income college students.

ABOUT THE STUDENTS WE SERVED IN 2010 TO 2011

466 students registered for our after-school programs in the 2010-2011 school year.
257 students were active participants (meaning they attended, on average, once per month).
Our participation index was 240.*

Demographics of Enrolled Students

- Gender:
 - 36% male
 - 64% female
- Race/Ethnicity:
 - 51% Hispanic/Latino
 - 15% Multi-racial
 - 11% White/Caucasian
 - 9% African or African American
 - 10% other
 - 4% Asian/Asian American
- Sexuality:
 - 21% LGBTQQ
- 86% qualify for free/reduced lunch (a 10% jump from past years)
- Nearly all of Providence's public high schools were represented in our student body with 40% from Classical High School and 23% from Central High School.
- Class year: Seniors: 17%; Juniors 24%; Sophomores 30%; Freshmen 27%

Demographics of Active Participants 257

- Gender:
 - 38% male (rise in male students from past year's)
 - 62% female
- Race/Ethnicity:
 - 55% Hispanic/Latino
 - 19% Multi-racial
 - 13% African or African American
 - 9% White/Caucasian
 - 4% Asian/Asian American
- Sexuality:
 - 21% LGBTQQ (typical with past years, usually in the low 20s)
- 73% qualify for free/reduced lunch
- 43% from Classical High School and 26% from Central High School.
- Class year: Seniors: 17%; Juniors 24%; Sophomores 30%; Freshmen 27%
- 152 New; 105 Returning

***new definition of active participant.** In the past, to be considered an active participant, a student must have attended at least once monthly for eight or more months. Now a student must have attended on average, once per month, starting from their enrollment in our programs.

*Our participation index weighs enrollment by frequency of participation. Our programs are flexible commitment and youth can choose their level of participation.

PROGRESS TOWARD PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Year-end survey responses (74 responses)

We also collect outgoing survey response data from youth participants. The percent agreeing/strongly agreeing with each statement:

- I am more open to trying new things. 98% (58% strongly agree)
- I have developed more confidence. 88% (41% strongly agree)
- I have developed a better idea of what I want to do in the future. 82% (32% strongly agree)
- I have developed a way of creating that expresses who I am. 94% (47% strongly agree)
- I have built strong, trusting relationships with my peers and artist mentor. 89% (54% strongly agree)
- I feel New Urban Arts is a supportive and safe environment. 98% (72% strongly agree)
- 78% of students rate New Urban Arts programs "outstanding" and 19% "satisfactory"

Postsecondary transition College Enrollment

New Urban Arts invited 18 seniors to participate at its year-end Art Party and graduation Ceremony. Generally, New Urban Arts recognizes seniors at its year-end graduation ceremony who have participated actively over multiple years or enrolled in their senior year of high school and made great contributions to our community.

Twelve of our seniors were eligible to participate in our College Visions partnership based on socioeconomic and educational criteria. College Visions (CV) is a Providence-based nonprofit organization focused on college access and success. CV was founded by an alumni artist mentor, Simon Moore. Every year, 10-15 seniors participate in intensive college advising and placement. Seniors who have participated at New Urban Arts for one year at New Urban Arts are eligible to apply to participate. Since this partnership began, 98% of participants have successfully enrolled in college, the vast majority are first generation college students from low-income homes. Last year, **12 students** participated and all of them successfully enrolled in a college. These students were enrolled in schools including URI, University of Wisconsin, Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and Clark University.

We collect qualitative data in the form of open-ended responses from youth participants as well as written artists statements.

[illegible]

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valuable knoweldge, skills and experiences that artist mentors provide, one writing that "The NUA mentor staff is highly skilled" and "I just really respect what they are capable of creating ." Another student describes the importance of the **personal nature** of the instruction that mentors provide saying "My mentor inspires me to do things, as well as me trusting them with my feelings and thoughts", that artist mentors "try and get along with you as a person, and not just an artist." and that artist mentors are "are friendly, open, kind, and caring." These responses represent how students responded to the question in general:

My mentor inspires me to do things, as well as me trusting them with my feelings and thoughts.

The NUA mentor staff is highly skilled as well as positive and supportive, and I just really respect what they are capable of creating as well as what they inspire in me to create .

I enjoy having someone who isn't there to be the teacher looking down on me saying "this is good, this is bad" but there to advise and support me in my goals and methods.

Yes because my artwork improves when I am having a conversation with a mentor.

Yes, I really do like working with an artist mentor, because they are friendly, open, kind, and caring.

Yes, because they are people that not only teach whatever it is they're teaching, but also try and get along with you as a person, and not just an artist.

[illegible]

New Urban Arts is a great place to express yourself and to BE yourself. The people here are very non-judgmental and are very kind. It is a safe environment to learn more about art and grow in your abilities. For me it is a home away from home.

New Urban Arts is, has been, and will always be another home to me. I have people here I trust and love being around, I have discovered art and how I can be represented through art. I have learned how to work with others in a productive and fun way. Most importantly I have learned more about myself, as a person in our society, here [more] than anywhere else I've been.

It means life and rebirth to artists who are born to use their voice through their art.

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Challenges

While working on our building project in the fall and winter of 2010, we concurrently faced challenges in managing growth and participation in our core-after school program, which has historically been open enrollment and allows ongoing youth registration throughout the year. These open policies allow us to be as inclusive and accessible as possible, especially to our city's most underserved youth. In the first few months of the 2010-11 school year, we experienced a surge in enrollment compared to similar periods in past years.

High attendance and participation is generally a positive indicator for teen after-school programs. However, ongoing formal and informal feedback from our youth participants and staff and artist mentors in focus groups and youth advisory council and staff/artist mentor meetings was that the space at New Urban Arts felt increasingly unsafe, was missing its normal positive "vibe", and that too many newer youth participants had not been appropriately oriented and "normed" into the culture at our studio. Too many youth were participating in New Urban Arts solely as a hang-out space (we offer free snacks, free riptiks and have several computers with internet access so New Urban Arts is naturally an attractive general social space) and not as part of a continuum of their participation in our programs. (a highly engaged and regular youth participant at New Urban Arts will, on any given day participate in the studio as a social space, for arts mentoring, for homework help, to do independent artwork and more. We encourage all of these types of participation, but not one to the exclusion of the others). "They don't know what New Urban Arts is" was a common refrain we heard from our returning and older youth, who gradually drifted to other programs, came less frequently or stopped all together.

The surge in attendance was accompanied by an increase in incident reports of missing items and thefts (iphones, cell phones left unwatched on tables, normally rare occurrences, spiked early in the year) in addition to all of the anecdotal feedback all confirmed what we were seeing and young people were failing to make a deep connection with the community of New Urban Arts ("we're not just the mall", was one insightful observation) and that we had work to do to keep us from mission/values creep.

In the December 2010 to January 2011, after several staff, youth and artist planning conversations, to address the more immediate issue of safety, both physical and personal, we instituted new short-term measures including a daily student attendance cap of 50 students and enforcing a 10:1 adult to youth ratio at any given time (we never had daily figures reach this high). In addition, our staff and youth leaders organized several arts community building events (spirit week, studio challenge day, karaoke parties) throughout the winter and spring to make clearer the values and norms of the programs and our space without resorting to ham-handedly posting "the rules" on the walls (which tend to be ignored). Our attendance figures normalized in the spring and the feedback we received from youth and artist mentors was that New Urban Arts was gradually achieving a healthier sense of normalcy, but that these new strict restrictions and headcounts were making the space feel overly institutional and less "creative".



Studio Challenge Day, January 2011

While we had put in some stopgap measures to address safety, we realized that as our programs had grown we had much more complex work to do to “name” our work and be more visible about it in order to continue to serve youth well without losing the sense of youth empowerment, spontaneity and healthy risk that makes our art studio effective. We knew that as a growing and evolving organization, we would have to formalize many procedures that had been in the past informal and we wanted to do this thoughtfully without stifling our programs or as one student said, make New Urban Arts “less creative.”

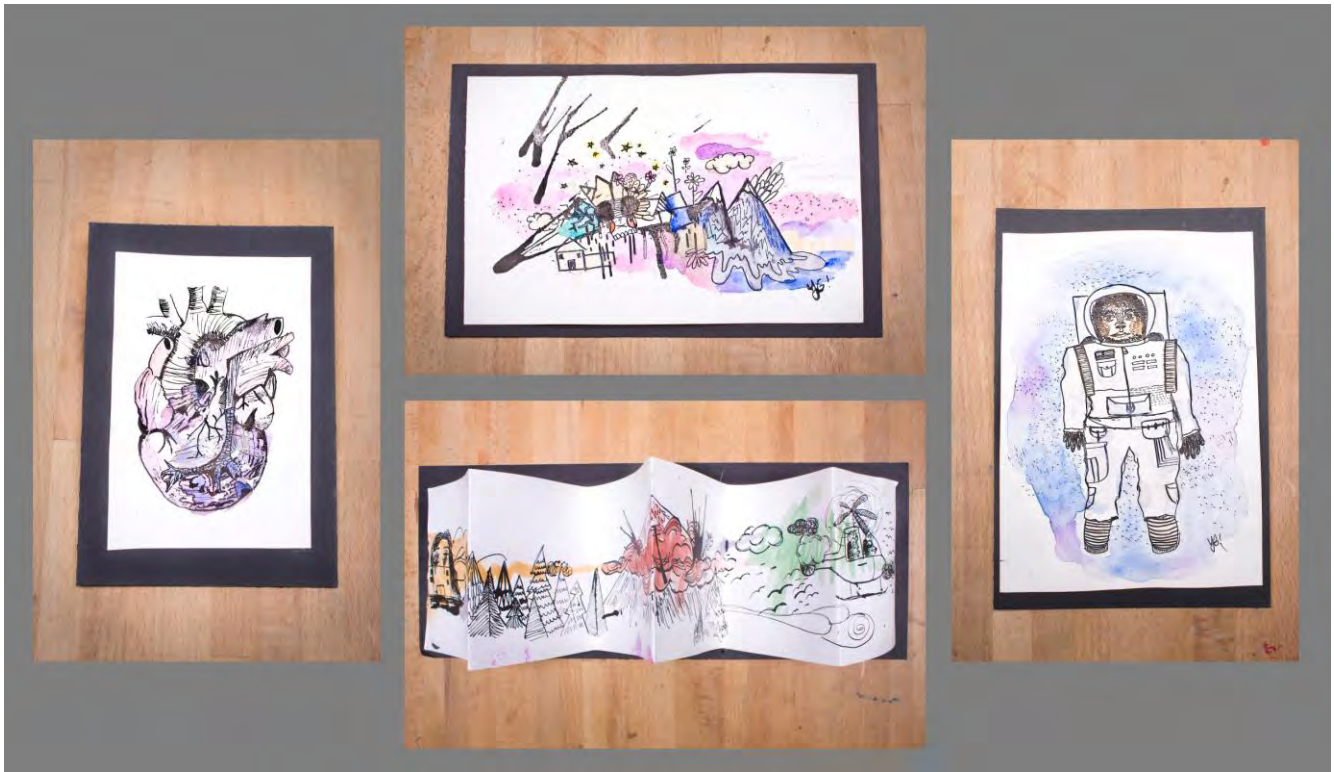
Program improvements for 2011-12

In March of 2011, we launched a “program design committee” comprised of key stakeholders in our organization as well as several outside advisors and experts from the arts, after-school, social services and education fields. This committee included a social worker at the Providence Children’s Museum, a case manager from John Hope Settlement House (and a New Urban Arts parent), the youth programs manager at the Institute for Nonviolence. We were fortunate to be able to assemble this team of volunteer experts, who because of their interest in New Urban Arts, willingly gave their time to help us. This group, under the leadership of our program director Sarah Meyer, has helped us develop, for the 2011-12 school year, new formal policies and procedures to help ensure that New Urban Arts is a safe space without resorting to punitive, proscriptive adult-driven strategies that 1- don’t work at managing youth behavior as most research finds 2-serve to disenfranchise youth and 3-would compromise New Urban Arts’ values, mission and unique way of working.

A formal final report is forthcoming in the next week for our board and staff with long-term implications and recommendations for major areas including staffing and support services. At the same time, thanks to their work we are implementing/piloting the following recommendations immediately:

- We have added a new permanent program staff position in our budget in a Program Coordinator position (these had previously had only been only two program staff positions):
 - Director of Programs-curates all of New Urban Art's arts and youth programs (1FTE)
 - Program Coordinator—day-to-day management of youth programs, focus on youth engagement and participation and youth progress towards goals (.75 FTE)
 - Studio Manager-care for facility, manage art studio resources and support youth engagement and participation (.5 FTE)
- A longer two-day pre-service retreat for all of our incoming artist mentors (increased from a one-day retreat) and added emphasis on the stages of adolescent development;
- Increasing support for artist mentors earlier in the year from our Arts Mentoring Fellows. (Artist mentors previously met monthly throughout the year with ongoing 1:1 coaching meetings with Fellows, they requested additionally more frequent small-group meetings earlier in the school year).
- A dedicated New Urban Arts senior advising group to both keep our seniors as a visible presence and role models for our younger and newer students ("elders") while providing these veteran students unique and special services appropriate to their needs;
- For all staff and volunteers that work directly with young people, we are increasing the professional development and training we provide, both in-house through longer orientation and planning periods. We're also leveraging outside resources to access nationally recognized high-quality youth development and after-school training, particularly the BEST training which is provided in a joint collaboration of the Providence After School Alliance, the Rhode Island After-School Plus Alliance and RIDE's 21st Century program, emphasizing topics such as adolescent development, communication and conflict resolution (feedback from staff and artist mentors was that while our training is very strong in artmaking and mentoring, it needed more enhancement in adolescent and youth development).
- An extended open house month before the official start of our school year programs, thus allowing our returning students to come in and establish a culture and give our staff more time to prepare and plan and recruit and train new students and artist mentors.
- We are also piloting set points of entry for youth, two orientations early in the year with ongoing scheduled new student orientations throughout the year—we hope this will keep our programs accessible while giving our staff room to manage new student induction. It was clear from staff feedback that the crush of ongoing daily new student enrollment and registration was draining and distracting them for the work of managing programs for students who had already signed up.
- While we have already increased our program staff for the current year, this year we will explore year the possibility of an in-house caseworker position potentially ranging from retainer, part-time, full-time or in an advisory, consulting or training role.

ARTIST STATEMENTS AND ARTWORK



YOU WERE NOT SUPPOSED TO SEE THESE PAINTINGS, THEY WERE NOT MEANT TO BE SEEN... OR SO I THOUGHT.

Last year, I spent half the year wandering from mentor to mentor until I stuck with Adrienne, a former watercolor mentor here in the studio. I began to do watercolor with Adrienne, and if you wondered where I was, I was probably at the watercolor table last year. To my surprise I still watercolor today.

Usually I'm feeling a certain way when I paint. I remember being focused when I did my paintings, but I was also very sad when I made all of these.

I didn't sit down with a certain idea in mind. I start off with something and

I usually build it up. It just comes to me right then and there. The only one I did where I had a clear vision of what I wanted was the heart piece. That one, unlike the others, is a reflection of the way I left felt. After I'm finished painting, they usually end up on the ground or who knows where else. It didn't really matter to me what happened when they were done.

Back to my surprises, to my even bigger surprise, I made NUA history, me, Yoli made history. I can't believe it. I made it on a gallery postcard for the second time in a row (I came to find out I'm the only student that made it on the flyer twice). I'm still surprised.

Back to my first sentence, you were NOT supposed to see these paintings. I'd like to take the time to give a very special thanks to Kedrin and Jess for finding my paintings and keeping them, and for making the Yoli folder, much more convenient storage, than the, uh, floor. Without you two, none of this would have been possible. I love you guys.

Yolibel Gonzalez



Art To Me Is 90 % Seeing

Art to me is 90 percent seeing and knowing what you see. Any monkey can look into a mirror until it shatters, but then what? They probably learned nothing, saw little, and will never understand what they saw.

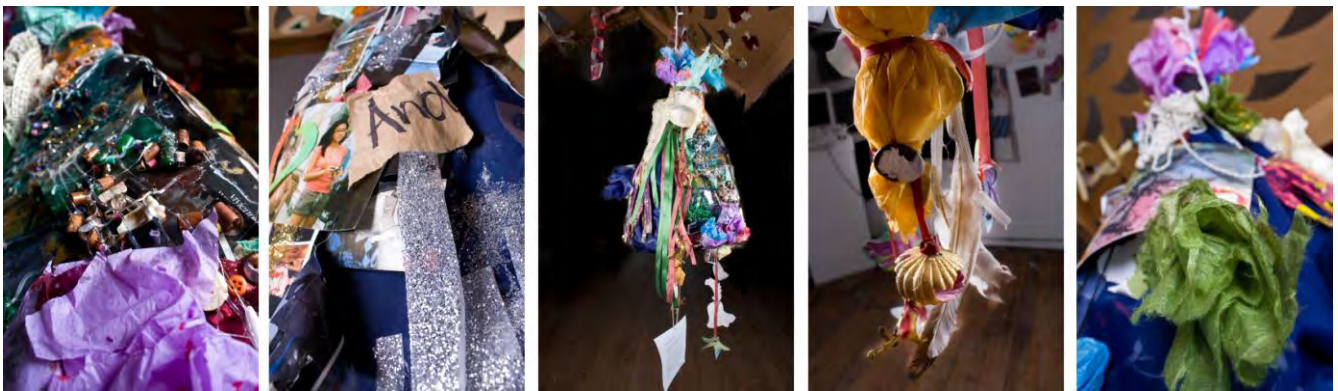
When I look into the world, I don't just recognize basic objects because I see them everyday. That kind of thinking is why people don't see. My Chemistry teacher once told me that the reason I could never get more than a B in her class was because I was too familiar with the material and that familiarity led to contempt and I would always just assume I know the material because I have grown up around Chemistry, my grandfather being a Chemistry professor.

This principle is applicable to real life. When someone looks at their hand and freaks out when trying to draw it, it is because they don't draw taking into consideration the fact that a hand is a thing that isn't just four sticks

and a sausage, when it is actually twelve sticks (finger bones), a palm, and two sausages (thumb bones). Basically, instead of drawing out what you assume that hand looks like, draw exactly what you see, taking into thought what is underneath, like bones, muscle, and tendons.

If anyone wishes to have more information and talk about how all this applies to Physics and the world, feel free to talk to me.

Jacques Achille



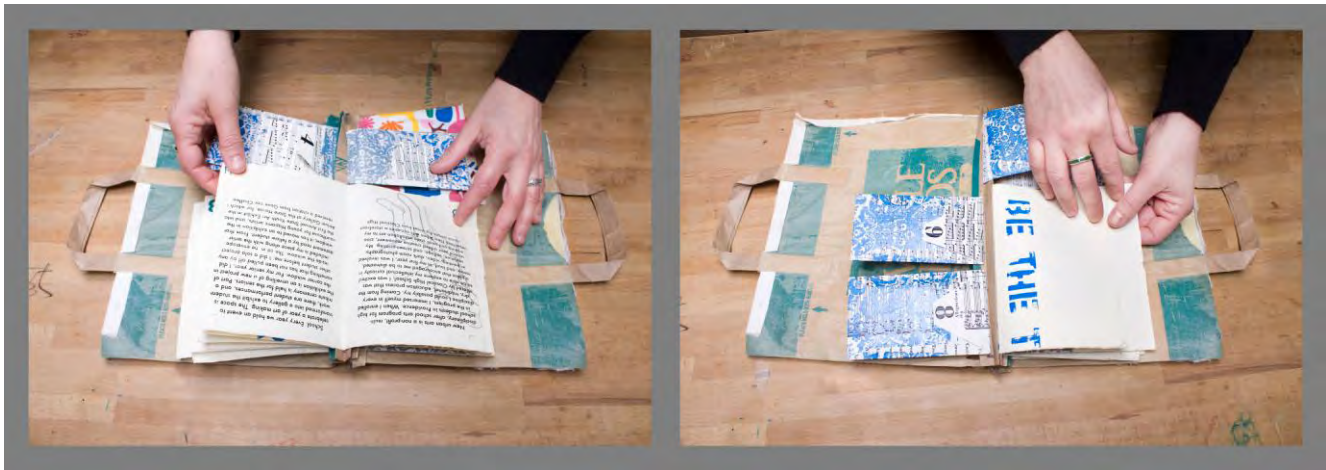
STUDIO THROW UP

The materials that I used in my project were fabric, glitter, paper, lights and just random things found in the studio that just stood out to me. They screamed “Noel take me and making amazing artwork!”

The process was very hard because I’ve tried making this chandelier about

four times. Until I got it perfect. The idea came from a friend of mine. She showed me this website all about chandeliers and I just wanted to make one. The one thing I like most about my piece is that I put love and effort into making it. Anyone can just put tons of art junk and lights together and say it's a chandelier but only a true artist can put love and effort into their piece and fall in love with it from start to end. I give a shout out to the mentors who have given me advice on my project!

Noel Puello



You're Actions Speak So Loud I Can't Hear A Word You Are Saying

OR THE GREAT BIG BEAUTIFUL UNKNOWN

OR A SUPPLEMENT WITH INTENT

IN MANY WAYS, THIS YEAR PUT ME OUT INTO THE NEW AND UNCOMFORTABLE. IT WASN'T ENTIRELY NEW, SURE, BEING CHAIR OF THE STUDENT TEAM ADVISORY BOARD IS UNLIKE ANYTHING I'VE EVER TRIED, BUT THE ROLE EXISTED WITHIN THE COMFORT ZONE OF NEW URBAN ARTS.

But it's different once you're out of high school.

While I was in school, New Urban Arts counted as an extra-curricular and

came off as valid and impressive. But this year, when people hear that I've graduated high school, they ask

'What school do you go to?'

And I'm forced to answer with an awkward

'CCRI, sort of, not really, I take classes in Arabic and Russian...'

And then, in a slightly embarrassed way, I explain that I'm the chair of a youth advisory board at a local after school art studio and that I'm in the midst of a self-designed curriculum in organic farming and sustainable living practices.

In some ways, this plan was my way of proving to the academic world that I can educate myself without desks and textbooks.

In other ways, it was my easy way out of confronting the great big beautiful (and oh-so-scary) unknown.

High school was scary.

College seems as though it would be even more so.

So, part of the reason I wanted a huge project like this book was to help cope with the idea of heading into that great big unknown called college life. It helped me hash out this year in a way that I wouldn't have without it. It forced me to reflect on what I did this year and what made it important and relevant to my potential future in the academic world

This book is also my way of making this year feel valid. An essay submitted online is forgettable; it blends into the background of text and html, but a book takes up space. You're forced to give it space on your desk and interact with it.

Shout outs-

Caitlin Cali for helping screen print and keeping me sane and motivated.

Emmy Bright for being the book binding go-to guru.

Andrew Oesch-Mesh for encouraging me to mail ants and lope.

Carolina 'CJ' Jimenez



I go here on Monday and Tuesday to work with the sewing group, which is also called the fashion group. Sam is the mentor for this group. We do a lot of different things that involve cutting pieces of fabric and sewing them together to create a piece of art or "fashion". Because everything we do is considered to be a masterpiece of art.

I usually like to make things that are useful for us. The materials I like to work with are fabric because of all the different patterns and colors they provide us, ribbons because they add the final touches and yarn because of all the different colors.

I cut out different pieces of old shirts to make my scarf. I used pink ribbon to make my book look fancy and for my pillow sheet I used different colors of yarn. My favorite piece of art is my pillow sheet because it took me a lot of time and because my uncle's wife was the one who show me how to make it.

Nancy Hernandez

Gallery Attendance and Exhibitions

In addition to our core youth programs, New Urban Arts presented **21** events ranging from small art workshops (nine artists in our alumni artist mentor leadership institute) to major galley openings of student work such as the 354 people that attended our 2011 Art Party, our year-end celebration of student work).

1,776 in total gallery attendance and participation, this is a dip in a high of 2,100 from a few years ago. This decrease has largely been driven by our non-participation in the Providence Neighborhood Performing Arts series grant program which enabled us in the past to put on a major public presentation at Armory Park. As a general focus though, we are moving away from larger public presentation to smaller and more intimate participatory, community events like zine swaps, conversations on creative practice and other various hands-on art workshops led by youth and artists.



Midyear makings, opening night February 18, 2011 at New Urban Arts



Midyear makings, opening night February 18, 2011 at New Urban Arts