New Urban Arts

Is an arts studio and gallery for high school students and artists in Providence, RI. New Urban Arts’ free, year-round out-of-school programs have promoted sustained mentoring relationships between urban high school students and trained artist mentors who, together, engage in youth leadership, risk taking, collaboration, and self-directed learning.

We believe that all young people, no matter their place in society, should have the opportunity to become more creative and independent thinkers. As a nationally recognized community arts studio, 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.

NUA is a place where I can be an artist around other artists. To be completely honest, I don’t know what I would do with my time, not to mention how I would get through the stress of high school. NUA has definitely become a shelter for all the years I’ve been here.

—Brianna Brooks, student

Youth Mentorship in the Arts

Youth Mentorship in the Arts is New Urban Arts’ core program. Artistic mentors work with high school students after school five days a week, for four hours a day. Our long-term goal for the program is that our students make a permanent place for creativity and imagination in their lives. Our interim goals are that students:
- develop close, positive relationships with non-parental adult mentors and peers
- acquire skills and knowledge in the arts
- begin to develop their unique artistic voice
- graduate high school with a plan for postsecondary success

A Brief History

Founded in 1997 by four college and 10 high school students, New Urban Arts has grown to receive local and national recognition for our innovative approach to arts education. Over the years, we’ve served over 2,500 high school students and 150 artists. In 2009, The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities awarded us the Coming Up Talented Award, the nation’s highest honor for out-of-school arts programs. In 2011, we purchased and renovated our new home at 705 Westminster Street, only 0.6 mi from our previous home at 743 Westminster.

Core Values

CONNECTION: authentic experiences and bonds fuel us. We believe that everyone needs a mentor—someone to trust, to share honestly with, and to enable us to be accountable to ourselves. We need spaces where we can be ourselves, to have our own ideas and vision. Art-making connects us and builds community.

VOICE: young people prevail. The diverse voices of young people drive the direction of our programs and our organization.

INCLUSION: everyone is equal footing. We believe everyone is ready to inspire or be inspired, that all of us have something to teach or to learn.

LEADERSHIP: the baton is yours for the taking. We believe everyone can lead a project and that with direction and support passionate people can achieve our goals. The same person can be a supportive follower and a visionary. The link on our job descriptions is always wet; roles and responsibilities evolve here.

RISK: a push into new and positive directions. We find beauty in mistakes or failure. It is hard to dare when fear of screwing up, letting down, or reprisal looms. You can’t grow if you don’t dare.
New Urban Arts is a safe space for me. It's a family, it's shelter, it's love. Everything you need you can find here. Whether its inspiration, art, support, you can find it here. It's like a big happy family that is full of extremely talented artists. What more can you ask for?

—Sidi Wes, student

2013-14 People

Artist Mentors
Alexandra Agiero
Alexandra Apkarian
Alison Rutsh
Amanda Alba
Cara Adams
Chris Hamption
Dalila Williams
Elizabeth Maroney
Ferreti Curi
Jacques Smith
John McGarry
Justin Malinelli
Karina Esperanza Yanez
Kevin Gonsalves
Maria Canale
Mike Esp
Mimi Czernowski
Morgan Street
Rachel Cremin
Sydney Peak
Thao-Mai Nguyen
Todd Stong
Tom Van Buskirk
Victoria Ruiz

Studio Team Advisory Board (STAB)
Alexandra Maporga
Agnieszka Coburn-Sanderson
Axl Loza
Claire Pela
Dianna Wedge
Jody Barric
Katherine Salazar
Katie O’Connell
Lalade Ashamu
Max Binder
Victoria Hetherington

Studio Assistants
Austin O’Gaffa
Saron Vorgasaang

Staff
Ashley Panagias
Daniel Schieffel
Elia Gurna
Emily Ustach
Rob Pecchia
Tamar Kaplans

Arts Mentoring Fellows
Beth Nixon
Rick Benjamin

Interns
Lauren Alman
Rachel Ships
Queen Shabazz

Sandra Olson Award

Winners
Prvidence Pizza Company
Derek Schultheier
Teal Butterworth
Austin O’Gaffa
Julia Guadagnoli

Board of Directors
Susan Smolchan (Chair)
Brown University
Heather Kilmartin (Vice Chair)
Procession Winter
Craig Lamp (Treasurer)
RBS Citizens Bank
Terry Schultheier (Secretary)
The RISD Museum of Art
Tom Fitzgerald (Treasurer)
Bank Rhode Island
Jane Anderson
Design Agency
Douglas Best
Rhode Island Office of the Auditor General
Teal Butterworth
Brown University Division of Abatement
Vermont Clouer
Rhode Island School of Design
Demitri Bilej
Rhode Island Arts Learning Network/RI Arts Passport
Sara Smith
Miquel Arctic and Urban Coastal Dance
Michael Tanaka
Independent writer and producer
Letitia Tejada O’Neill
Steak, Jerkoffs & Mitchell
Randolph Viala
Comprehensive Community Action

* New Urban Arts Youth Alumni, or Former Artist Mentor

Letter from Executive Director

“In 2012, the White House Council for Community Solutions found that too many young people are disconnected from their communities and lack the means to make successful transitions to adulthood. Given opportunities to develop their creative potential, young people will be more likely to develop the critical learning and life skills they need to become active contributors to their communities.” – Collective Action for Youth, An Agenda for Progress Through Creative Youth Development, National Summit on Creative Youth Development 2014

Last Fall, just as I was starting at New Urban Arts our lovely friends at the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts reached out to me to let me know that Governor Chafee would be visiting some of the fabulous youth arts programs in Rhode Island, including New Urban Arts. It was a wonderful visit.

The governor asked one of our students, “So why do you come here?” And the student answered, “Because everyone here is so nice.”

A place like New Urban Arts has immeasurable impact – and a lot of that impact has to do with “being nice.” The culture of kindness, radical acceptance and empathy that we create here has lasting and long term effects and actively creates a counterpart to accepted competitive societal norms. In the Race to the Top, too many young people are being left behind. This phrase begs the questions: What place are we defining when we say “top”? Why are we racing? And if we all have to be racing to win, who loses?

New Urban Arts has spent the last year turning outward – reaching out in the community. As executive director, I joined the Providence Children and Youth Cabinet and Arts Allies – to connect with other people and organizations wanting to improve the quality of schooling for Providence Youth. As I have met with and connected with the Providence Youth Arts Collaborative, the Mayor’s Office and the Department of Arts Culture and Tourism I have learned that there are lots of nice people here and that we can work together, step by step, to reach the common goal of improving life for young people in Providence, and that artists need to be central to that process.

NUA and artists can serve as an important model for the cultural shift we need to engage in if we actually don’t want to leave our children behind – a culture of caring, of kindness, of collaboration, of trying things together, of failing without fear of reflecting on our actions and together deciding on next steps, a culture of welcome and invitation, where beauty and truth matter.

Young people need spaces where they can experiment, try new things and be inspired by artists to be artists. Being an artist means being engaged actively in your own development as a human being – making things, collaborating, challenging yourself to show yourself, engaging in personal transformation and growth in order to transform society.

I am thrilled to be a part of this community dedicated to lifelong creative practice and believing deeply that artists change the world.

Thank you everyone for making my time here such a rich and rewarding learning experience!

In solidarity and with love,
Elia

We would like to especially thank our Arts Mentoring Fellows Rick Benjamin and Beth Nixon for their dedication and service to New Urban Arts! Thank you both for teaching and learning with us!

Dear Rick, Thank you for the typewriters and the poetry and service to New Urban Arts! Thank you both for teaching and learning with us!

Dear Beth, Thank you for sharing your amazing paper mache and cardboard skills, your sense of clowning and fun, your commitment to community arts and transformative spectacle!
Dear New Urban Arts Lovers,

Fall is exciting at New Urban Arts, as the staff prepares for students to return and the board welcomes new members and officers. I’m just finishing my two-year term as Chair of the Board (and an eight-year stint as a board member), and I recommend both jobs.

I’ve often heard people say that you always receive more than you give, but I never experienced that so deeply as I have at New Urban Arts.

New Urban Arts fosters an empowering creative practice in each student who walks through the door. That complex, messy, inhabiting mission has changed my life. I teach differently, I think differently, I live differently because I’ve met and learned from the students, staff, board, volunteers, and donors to New Urban Arts.

The generosity of everyone who gives money and time to New Urban Arts can flourish! It leaves me breathless. I can promise that your donations are used thoughtfully. (The finance committee meets for hours!) Each donation represents a sacrifice and a vote of confidence in the work of New Urban Arts. So — when a dedicated board member writes and asks for a donation, please know we all — board, staff, and students — appreciate your help.

I feel like I’ve graduated from New Urban Arts and, like all graduates, I’m sad not to be returning this fall. But I promise to be a dedicated alum and to see you soon at a New Urban Arts event.

Thanks, as always, for all you do.

Susan Smalyan

---

2013-14 Program Highlights

At New Urban Arts, we connect and collaborate, make art and celebrate our world. Our programs are at the heart of what we do here — 379 students enrolled and our studio was buzzing with creative energy. Some highlights:

**Exhibits of student and mentor work**
Tom Van Buskirk served as our music mentor. You can hear students’ original compositions here: [https://soundcloud.com/new-urban-arts](https://soundcloud.com/new-urban-arts)

We presented at the Bridge from School to After School and Back Conference in Seattle, WA, the New Kids Learn Conference in San Francisco, CA and the National After School Association Conference in New York, NY.

**Governor Lincoln Chafee** visited the studio.

We hosted Mentoring fellow Rick Benjamin’s Floating World Book Release.

We celebrated Arts giving.

We hosted visitors from Hope High School and Central High School’s Knight Academy.

Former mentor and community artist [Ian Cozzen](#) organized a Succulent Plant Swap.

We collaborated on our holiday art sale Cardboard Pancakes with our neighbors and community partners (short out to Everett Stage and School, PrevSlam Youth, and Riveredge) at All Saints church.

We hosted an Information session for Health Source RI.

Mentoring Fellows Beth Nixon and Rick Benjamin led paper mache creature making and pottery workshops.

We hosted many open mic and karaoke nights.

We held our all night Art Lock-In.

We hosted student-led events Spring into Hip Hop organized by alumna [Sanaa Castillo](#) and Paul Biehler’s fundraiser held by the Making A Difference Club. The Biederlaksa event engaged a huge crowd.

We rounded out the year with the Annual Party and sent off more seniors than ever before! We invited 44 students to be recognized — all successfully completed high school and 35 of them are headed to college!

---

Cake or Pie? The Team Tells All...

**Executive Director Elia Gurna (cake)**

What brought you to New Urban Art? My husband Eric had talked about New Urban Arts ever since he visited as part of a federal project looking at best practices in after school programs. He called me and told me that “the place you talk and dream about exists!” (I was working as a teaching artist in NY at the time.) So when Jason and Sarah (former E.D. and former Program Director) agreed to be interviewed for Eric’s podcast about youth development and education we made a family trip out of it and I got to see New Urban Arts in action.

**Youth Programs Manager Ashley Paniagua (pie)**

What brought you to New Urban Art? I wanted to learn about photography. I was a freshman in high school looking for a place to learn and nurture my desire to make things.

What do you enjoy most about your job? Connecting. I love connecting with people and connecting people to each other. There’s always space at NUA to start a conversation and build a relationship. The space is always buzzing.

**Director of Programs Emily Usthach (pie)**

What brought you to New Urban Art? I always believed that an after school program centered around the arts could exist without the expectations and constraints of a traditional school setting. That is what brought me to Providence for my graduate school studies 10 years ago. Finding New Urban Arts through multiple channels is what kept me here and believing even more.

**Finance & Operations Tamara Kaplan (pie)**

What brought you to New Urban Art? I was searching for a nice boss and a place to work that was actually interested in being a collaborative space. I started at NUA when the studio was 3 years old, so the thought of having a hand in building the culture was really important to me as well. Plus, I am a maker of things and philosophically I believe that everyone is too.

**Development Director Dan Schleifer (pie)**

What brought you to New Urban Art? I wanted to be part of a community that felt like a living embodiment of its ideals and values around social change. More literally, Andrew Desch brought me to New Urban Arts for the first time.

What do you enjoy most about your job? By raising money for New Urban Arts, I’m making it possible for our amazing program staff, mentors, and students to focus on their work in the studio.
2013–14
IMPACT REPORT

Visit us sometime!

We are located at 705 Westminster Street in the West End of Providence, Rhode Island. The best time to catch the studio site is weekdays from 3-7pm when students and artist mentors are here.

Visit our website at www.newurbanarts.org or call 401.751.4556 for more information.

THE YOUTH WE SERVE

This year, 379 high school students enrolled in our programs. In our 4,000 square foot studio, students accessed a black and white darkroom, a digital media center, silk screening and other printmaking facilities, resources for fashion design, as well as materials to support painting, drawing, installation art, and creative writing. Average daily attendance was 44 students, and average monthly attendance was 141 unique students.

57% female
42% male
1% other
<1% unavailable

26% LGBTQ

71% qualified for free or reduced-price lunch

Free lunch is for students from households at or below 130% of the poverty line; reduced-price lunch is for students from households between 130% and 185% of poverty. For a household of four with two children in Providence, 185% of poverty means subsisting on less than $43,700 per year.

76% live in zip codes 02905, 02907, 02918, or 02919; where, collectively, the poverty rate for families with children is 32%, over twice the national rate.

41% Hispanic/Latino
26% multi-racial
14% african or african american
14% white/caucasian
4% asian or asian american
1% native american

33% high school seniors
27% juniors
20% sophomores
16% freshmen

100%
of student participants agreed or strongly agreed that New Urban Arts is a safe and supportive environment.

94%
of student participants agreed or strongly agreed that they have built strong, trusting relationships.

98%
of student participants developed a way of creating that expresses who they are, and 98% agreed that they are more open to trying new things.
90 artist mentors, 143 studio buddies
and 4,000 hours to mentor
35 seniors are
offered paid
attending college
hours of summer
programming
this fall.
6 participated in
225
revenue events ranging
from small art
workshops to
student-led
2,102
people attended
College Visions,
20 public
a yearlong college
preparatory
program.
$114,000
and fundraising
events.

Get involved...
...enroll as a student anytime throughout the year.
...mentor for the entire school year from October through May. We accept applications every September.
...become a donor of tax-deductible art materials and equipment or monetary gifts. Sponsorship opportunities are available for exhibits, performances and our annual silent auction.

Application forms for students, artist mentors and volunteers are online at www.newurbanarts.org or at our studio at 705 Westminster Street.

Visit us sometime!
The best time to catch the studio vibe is weekdays from 3-7pm when students and artist mentors are here. Call 401.751.4656 for more information.
Dear artists. Thank you for bringing beauty waiting to be found. Combine and express. There are millions of other artists just
result is more than worth it.

Come into themselves. We are the leaders of revolutions, though a hard task, the end
You have the power, for you are an artist.
You hold the power to mold and make.
You have the power, for you are an artist.

Dear artist, beware. Do not be fooled. You have the power, for you are an artist.
You hold the power to mold and make.
You have the power, for you are an artist.

Stewardship
A Poem from Mid Year Makings
by alumna Briquette Larmena

Dear artists. Welcome to the world of art.
You will find the answer to every question your school teacher couldn’t answer.
The truth of life will be revealed to you, as you will be the creator. You are god.

Dear artist. Connect, find others.
There are millions of other artists just waiting to be found. Combine and express.
It is your birth right.

Dear artists. Thank you for bringing beauty into the world. You are gods. Art is life.

The Benefit Print
It started off with a picture file from the RISD library — images included animals, plants, cars, and trash... In the studio, students were enlisted to trace or draw original images based on the pictures in the pile.

Thematically I described what we were doing as, “we’re going to make a crazy garden picture.”

That went on for two or three Mondays and then I took all of those things and cut them up and taped them together and burned a screen. Three students (Brianna, Diana and Julia) and I printed this screen and were experimenting off of it. For two of these students it was their introduction to print-making. We printed for a long time — that’s when we decided to turn it into the benefit print and Mimi and I pulled it together from there. Rob and Ashley and Sam helped print it. There were many people involved from start to finish.

— Artist Mentor Alison Rutsh as told to Elia Gurna Spring 2014

Greetings from all of us at S.T.A.B.!

How very nice to meet you, NUA lovers! We’d like to introduce ourselves. We are the Studio Team Advisory Board, a group of student volunteers dedicated to improving New Urban Arts. We’ve comprised of high school students from around Providence, working in all different kinds of media – photography, fashion, charcoal, watercolor, embroidery, screen-printing, sculpture, multimedia arts and many others!

Perhaps you have visited NUA for an Art Party or another event, but have never been into the studio on a typical afternoon. If that sounds like you, let us introduce you to the NUA we know! The community we have at New Urban Arts is full of cool, welcoming people, and it’s especially wonderful because it’s truly open to everyone. Even “non-artists” join our community and soon find they love making art. One of our members (STABies) put it perfectly: “The art you make here doesn’t have to look like Van Gogh, and you don’t have to know how to draw to come to NUA.”

What makes the space so special to us is how contrary an environment it is to school. Many of our members reflected on the importance of New Urban Arts to their experience. “Here, it’s on your own terms.” New Urban Arts is nothing like a high school art class, which some of our seniors haven’t had since elementary school. There is complete creative freedom: mentors aren’t meant to be formal teachers, but instead, help out on whatever level any student needs, from showing them a new skill to giving feedback on an independent piece of work.

“I think it’s the lack of pressure,” reflects one of our STABies. “No one feels pressured to be someone they are not.” Perhaps mostvaluably, NUA is a safe space. “Anybody can come; it’s anti-bullying, anti-prejudice, anti-harassment.” For any time of our lives, whether happy or sad, leisure or crunch-time, NUA is the perfect place to be.

We at STAB work to make the studio the absolute best it can be. Our role includes some serious tasks, such as hiring new mentors at the beginning of each year, and small scale research to find out how we can improve the studio, but the best part is event planning. Recently, STAB coordinated Artsgiving, the studio’s annual thanksgiving-time art-making secret-santa extravaganza. In the past, we’ve had fun organizing things like Nerd Week (which included a Pie Day on March 14th, and other activities throughout the week like a steampunk day), field trips to Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art and the Louder Than A Bomb poetry slam, and the annual Mid-Year Makings and Art Party shows.

We also have big dreams for the future; our members imagine the studio getting a fuzzy carpet or a Velcro wall, or even becoming a whole country. Others think of goals for improvement, like color film development, fixing up our loom, or getting a 3-D printer, or planning activities like cake decoration and a day of finger-painting.

With glitter,
the Studio Team Advisory Board

Studio Team Advisory Board
This year we had an active Studio Team Advisory Board (STAB) which supported the organization during critical staff transitions. Of the twelve active participants on STAB, nine were seniors, bringing with them extensive experience of the organization and a strong student voice. STAB met twice a month from October to May. During September they led the mentor selection process. STAB held a mid year retreat in February and an end of year retreat in June.

Letter from the Collective Imaginary Desk of the Studio Team Advisory Board (STAB) which supported the organization during critical staff transitions.

Perhaps mostvaluably, NUA is a safe space. “Anybody can come; it’s anti-bullying, anti-prejudice, anti-harassment.” For any time of our lives, whether happy or sad, leisure or crunch-time, NUA is the perfect place to be.

We at STAB work to make the studio the absolute best it can be. Our role includes some serious tasks, such as hiring new mentors at the beginning of each year, and small scale research to find out how we can improve the studio, but the best part is event planning. Recently, STAB coordinated Artsgiving, the studio’s annual thanksgiving-time art-making secret-santa extravaganza. In the past, we’ve had fun organizing things like Nerd Week (which included a Pie Day on March 14th, and other activities throughout the week like a steampunk day), field trips to Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art and the Louder Than A Bomb poetry slam, and the annual Mid-Year Makings and Art Party shows.

We also have big dreams for the future; our members imagine the studio getting a fuzzy carpet or a Velcro wall, or even becoming a whole country. Others think of goals for improvement, like color film development, fixing up our loom, or getting a 3-D printer, or planning activities like cake decoration and a day of finger-painting.

With glitter,
the Studio Team Advisory Board

AnNUAL PUBLICATION 2014 · ISSUE No. 9

Stewardship
A Poem from Mid Year Makings
by alumna Briquette Larmena

Dear artists. Welcome to the world of art.
You will find the answer to every question your school teacher couldn’t answer.
The truth of life will be revealed to you, as you will be the creator. You are god.

Dear artist. Connect, find others.
There are millions of other artists just waiting to be found. Combine and express.
It is your birth right.

Dear artists. Thank you for bringing beauty into the world. You are gods. Art is life.
Summer Programs

Over the course of five weeks during the summer of 2013, New Urban Arts engaged 25 students in our summer programs. The summer program is treated as a rigorous internship, and students are paid a stipend of $400 upon successful completion of one of three programs. The Inquiry Group consisted of 10 students, working around the theme “Faking It.” They studied questions of forgery and imitation in the art world and beyond. In the Untitlement Project, 10 students explored identity, primarily through poetry, and five students on the Mural Team conceived and produced a large-scale mural for the side of our new building. In addition, New Urban Arts offered an Open Studio four days a week for two hours each day.

Students began the program with a full day orientation reviewing workplace behavior and expectations. The program met over five weeks, Monday to Thursday, 12noon to 5:00pm July 8 to August 16, 2013. Students received free lunch every day through the Federal Summer Food Program and were provided RIPTA bus passes to and from the program each day.

Art Inquiry

The Art Inquiry theme for the summer was “Faking It.” Through independent research, field trips, and a mix of structured individual and group art making activities, ten students explored ideas of belief and doubt, forgery and fabrication, authenticity and authorship, lies and deception. They created counterfeit artworks and learned trompe-l’œil, they made replicas and reproductions, created parodies and montages. They studied the art of illusion and tricks. Students visited the Glass Flower collection at the Harvard Museum of Natural History, created hoaxes at Narragansett Beach and presented workshops at Boston’s Institute for Contemporary Art’s Teen Night. The Art Inquiry program culminated in a public art exhibition in October 2013 that was attended by 127 people.

Untitlement Project

Ten students participated in the Untitlement Project, led by veteran Artist Mentors Sydney Peak and Jorge Vargas. Students explored issues of gender, identity and relationships. Through creative writing and conversation, students examined inequities around language, power and privilege. The Untitlement Project hosted spoken word poets Kevin Cocal and Jamala Woods for an Open Mic night at New Urban Arts. In addition, 70 people attended the Untitlement Project Showcase in August 2013.

Mural Team

Four students participated on the mural team, under the mentorship of Redina Frias. Students learned about the role of murals in the field of public art, practiced painting the inside of one of New Urban Arts’ bathrooms and completed a large-scale public mural on the side of New Urban Arts’ building. The Mural Team’s new piece on the side of our building is visible here: http://bit.ly/NuAMural

Organizational Products

Based on this work of students and mentors in the Inquiry Group, our summer curriculum resource guide was completed in November. It is available here: http://bit.ly/NuAQRG13.

Reflection and Evaluation

During the fall and winter, New Urban Arts underwent the RI Program Quality Assessment (RPQA) process as a requirement of our 21st Century Community Learning Center grant. This process is a facilitated self-evaluation of programs and included the participation of six staff members, two artist mentors, two students, one Arts Mentoring Fellow, one board member, and one former board member. The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE)’s Program Quality Advisor Shvam Kooch-Walker facilitated the process.

Family and civic engagement, staffing and professional development and administration were all cited as strengths of the program.

Areas identified for growth were:

- Expanding young people’s understanding of post-secondary options and opportunities
- Identifying potential partners and community resources in mental health to support youth and recent alumni
- Developing strategies to connect with alumni
- Clearly establishing a parent policy in conjunction with the Studio Team Advisory Board.

New Urban Arts means everything to me. Without NUA I wouldn’t be able to be the artist that I am and I wouldn’t be able to be as confident as I am. Without NUA I wouldn’t have the confidence to be free and feel good about myself and love everybody around me no matter who they are. I don’t know where I’d be and who I’d be without NUA and I sure as heck don’t want to know. I love this place. It is everything.

Alejandra Mayorga, student