



Installation of *The Journey*, Cecilia Lueza. Acrylic and resin on canvas.

Waging Peace:

A Curatorial Community Collaboration

Jennifer Hamrock,*
Georgia State University

Viki D. Thompson Wylder,
Florida State University

Anna Freeman,
Ohio State University

Marcia Meale,
Leon County School District

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Abstract

This article showcases a curatorial collaboration between educators, the Florida State University Museum of Fine Art, and Tallahassee community arts organizations on a community-wide and inclusive art exhibition. The authors outline the project by delineating the parts of the project, specifically sharing the curatorial committee process and the national call for artworks, the museum exhibition, the museum exhibition catalogue, art activities and lessons based on the museum exhibition, and how it expanded into the community through open planning meetings, collaborative workshops, student field trips, and art making in other public art spaces.

* Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to Jennifer Hamrock at jhamrock@gsu.edu.

Over the course of eighteen years, the Florida State University Museum of Art (MoFA) collaborated with local art teachers and schools on five exhibitions. These projects involved art teachers and the museum's education director planning together, developing lesson plans, showing student artworks, student museum visits, and hands on activities on opening nights. Over time, the MoFA and local art teachers developed a strong relationship. This relationship grew beyond teacher/student participation in museum education projects to the occasional submission of ideas for exhibitions by teachers and teacher implementation of programs. Unique to this joint approach has been the practice of teachers not only choosing the theme for a show, but also working together as a team of curators choosing the professional artists' works and curating those works along side of student works. On opening nights student artwork filled one floor of the museum and the professional artists artworks the other with art activities placed in front of their respective works.

A New Direction: Waging Peace

The *Waging Peace!* project was the most recent of these five curatorial efforts and grew beyond the range of the previous endeavors. The *Waging Peace!* project theme encompassed various initiatives throughout the community whose dual goals were active engagement and energy expended toward encouraging peace. The intent was to challenge people, through creative and collaborative art actions, to adopt attitudes and efforts that lead toward a balanced culture and environment. From the exhibition's inception, the project reached for a broader community coalition of participants, inclusive of various city organizations, a university, K-12 public and homeschool entities, and public community creative art spaces. *Waging Peace!* was different.

To showcase this project, we, a museum curator, a museum student intern, an art educator, and a community space volunteer, expand on the project's development, drawing upon the idea that we create our own knowledge and meaning-making from our experiences and that we contribute to our own greater social understanding (Dewey, 1934; Vygotskiĭ, 1997). We agreed that the project provided doorways for varied participant involvement, as well as celebrated active engagement in community collaborations. In the following sections, we will outline the project's planning process, participants, and the culminating exhibitions and conclude with our discussion of the personal and broader impacts of the project.

The Museum

Working as part of the Education Program at the MoFA for over twenty years, Dr. Viki Thompson

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Wylder worked under the philosophy that the museum should be the visitors' space (see Hirzy, 1992; Weil, 1999). To encourage mutuality and ensure the representation of visitors' concerns and values, the museum fostered participation in its development of exhibitions and planning of programs. These perspectives defined the nature of Wylder's involvement as Curator of Education in the production of the *Waging Peace!* exhibition. To enhance the process of facilitation, not authority, the MoFA built its schedule of exhibitions without an in-house curator. Instead, the museum developed exhibitions with guest curators. A guest curator might be a faculty member from a university department, an interested person from the community, or the Education Program from the MoFA itself.

A Curatorial Committee

In the tradition of the MoFA's willingness to invite other people into the curatorial process, K-12 teachers, and others from the community, were invited to join a curatorial committee for the exhibition. The committee consisted primarily of mostly art educators, but it also grew to include two homeschool teachers, university museum interns, a community arts council member, a gallery administrator, and a community creative art space volunteer. The group met monthly after school hours.

The committee worked as a team to choose the works from a national call for entries, contribute to the catalog, write educational materials inclusive of lesson plans, and plan artists' visits to work with students and teachers. The committee did not use a "majority vote" process. It made suggestions for potential interactions with artists, processes, and production and determined final decisions with a loose consensus of those present at the meeting.

The Project Development

Each of these curatorial efforts required several years of work from inception to reality. During the *Waging Peace!* project, a K-12 teacher first determined the theme, then committee members convened to select the artwork from the national Call for Entries, suggested other committee members or organizations that would bring additional voices to the table, and outlined accompanying educational programs for the exhibition. The word, "waging," was added to the title of the exhibition to communicate peace as an active process, not a passive one. The curatorial committee did not want the exhibition to convey "peace" as simply a lack of violence, rather they wanted the word to convey excitement, challenge, creative thinking, connection to all facets of life, and its enactment in a myriad of forms. The Call for Entries charged artists with submitting work showing "an active progress towards" peace, or a "striving towards, seeking, investigating the journey of, and achieving peace" (*Waging Peace!*, 2010, p. 6). Additionally, this exploration of the topic could be presented on "multiple levels"—on a personal level, but also from a "regional, cultural, geographical, [or] worldwide" perspective. The curatorial committee picked artists who each offered a vision meant to stir viewers to action. The museum and art educators considered each work as a potential contribution to the whole and envisioned art activities and lessons to accompany the piece.

After the exhibition pieces were selected, the group turned to the development of an open sourced lesson plan packet, additional events, an installation at city hall, the inclusion of other

institutions, class field trips, artist talks, visits, and teacher workshops. The meetings encouraged constant communication between the museum, the local art teachers, and the community spaces. Throughout the second school year of the project, both public and homeschool participating teachers implemented lessons and art activities based on the theme and the exhibition works. Collaborative student pieces were hosted at the museum, while other student artworks were displayed at city hall. The committee coordinated artists' visits to a number of schools and decided to offer a professional development workshop for teachers featuring one of the artists.

Extending Out into the Community

In the early stages of the project, two other venues were invited to collaborate, a local private gallery, the Anderson Brickler Gallery (ABG) and the other a public community creative art space, the Plant. The gallery developed a series of art activities throughout the school year involving high school students from a nearby school. This was the first time a private gallery was involved in one of the museum-school collaborations. The gallery sponsored, with the help of a local artist, the creation of a large assemblage sculpture by high school art students that was displayed along the road in front of the gallery. In addition to the sculpture, the gallery hosted an exhibition of Peace Selfies, which were part of the sculpture's planning process.

The community creative art space, the Plant, invited local artists to become involved related to the theme and exhibition. Similar to the museum's Call for Entries, the Plant made a call to community creatives to design six workshops around the theme "waging peace." These creatives came from different artistic backgrounds, professions, and media. The artists met several times in the fall to brainstorm and plan while the workshops were held January through April. Exceeding the original goal, the community creative space hosted eight workshops. The artworks created in the workshops were displayed in a May 2018 exhibition at the Plant, coinciding with the museum, city hall, and gallery exhibitions and receptions.

The inclusion of these additional collaborators/venues delivered new educational experiences to this fifth school-museum project. Not only were community members introduced and invited to participate and contribute, but teachers were encouraged to introduce their students to the extended community artwork. Students experienced the various *Waging Peace!* sites during the year throughout their art curriculum and during field trips in the month of May to view their own artwork, the artworks they studied, and the extended community artwork. Student artwork was exhibited at City Hall, MoFA, the ABG, and at the Plant. All drew visitors to their receptions.

Discussion

Although we, as organizers, saw the merit of this collaboration, we wondered if others would as well. Were we really "waging peace?" On the surface, yes: however, we realized the theme itself challenged each of us to engage more profoundly in our respective organizing roles. Our joint engagement in this project made it feel even bigger and emphasized potentials for equity, collaborating together for a common cause, the give-and-take process of ideas, meaning-making, and taking action through art.

We were committed to taking action that extended beyond ourselves. The museum became the facilitator and central meeting point where local art teachers, representatives from local art organizations, and city hall were each encouraged to participate in the development of events, installations, and the exhibition. Together the various groups collaborated effectively

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and used visual arts media as a tool to promote the ideas of the project within the local community. One example occurred after the Parkland school incident. Two art teachers responded to the tragedy by organizing an art installation that was added to the museum exhibition. A big project like this possesses obvious reasons for participation, both on personal levels and institutional levels. We identified an overarching understanding for our participation. To participate in this project, to “wage peace,” meant more than surface involvement. Each of us did not simply say “yes, I’ll do it.” Our participation transcended a tangible product to relevance in everyday life.

While two of us felt no initial doubt they were waging peace, two of us were not completely convinced. Jennifer and Anna felt the necessity to see a greater evidence of project impact. Impact increases the value of the effort to more than a line on a CV or self-satisfaction. Patience and time became factors and signs of waging peace in themselves. Because the processes of this collaborative project changed at every stage, it was significant the individuals involved trusted those stages. The support and reassurance gained from witnessing others fulfilling commitments helped to dissipate self-questioning, “Am I doing enough? Am I alone?” We gradually became aware of increased project effects, though many such effects may remain intangible.

While we could not know the totality of the impacts of this exhibition, we have clues. We viewed approximately 300 entries and selected 49 artworks by 40 motivated artists. We were supported in our endeavors by the institutions in which we work as well as other institutions within the community. Thirteen teachers joined the curatorial committee to give of their free time for this project. At least 24 schools joined the project and over 700 students developed their own work based on pieces in the exhibition to include creative writing, historical and civic research, as well as visual arts—painting, drawing, sculpture, and video. Thirty-nine teachers attended a workshop at the museum given by an artist in the exhibition. Additionally, ten teachers participated in other associated educational programs like artist visits. Over 100 people from the community participated in the workshops at the community creative art space, and four exhibition receptions were advertised through various platforms to invite the community.

The final impacts of this project are probably unknowable, but we sensed the continuing impact of the museum as a facilitator of conversations between artists and the community through the vehicle of the exhibitions. The museum catalog can continue those conversations. Through telling the story of this project we viewed the interweaving of this theme with art

motivated participation. The changes in the various processes of the project—the slowing down and increasing momentum of the collaborative efforts, the creation of opportunities at every stage with multiple individuals, and the wonder that came with perceiving our efforts—produced the consensus this project was waging peace. We waged peace through our participation; but not through our individual participation, rather through a collaborative and community curated exhibition, through multiple artistic materializations from individuals across the country, through various interpretations used in classroom curricula, through community involvement, and through the distance these actions might travel.

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About the Authors



Jennifer Hamrock, Ph.D. was a nationally board certified public high school art teacher, as well as taught third and fourth grade regular education. She earned a M.A. in art education from East Carolina University and her doctorate in art education from Florida State University. She currently is a lecturer in the Welch School of Art and Design at Georgia State University teaching art education and foundations.



Viki D. Thompson Wylder, M.F.A, Ph.D. served as Curator of Education for the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts (FSU MoFA) for more than 20 years, recently serving as Curator of Education Emerita. In this role she acted as co-curator of a number of exhibitions, including five with public school art teachers and other members of the community. *Waging Peace* (catalogue) developed as the fifth in this series. Dr. Wylder curated two traveling exhibitions of work by the artist Judy Chicago and worked to acquire over 20 pieces by the artist for the FSU MoFA's permanent collection. She published a number of articles/essays on her education work as well as the work of Judy Chicago. She served at times as an adjunct professor in the Art Education Department as well as the Women's Studies Program at Florida State University.



Anna Freeman is a student in the Arts Administration, Education and Policy doctoral program, specializing in Art Museum Education at the Ohio State University. She received her BA from the College of Charleston in history with a minor in arts management. Afterwards Anna attended Florida State University, graduating with an MA in Art History with a focus on Museum and Cultural Heritage Studies in 2018.



Marcia Meale, Ph.D. taught public elementary school art k-5 for over 33 years, retiring in fall of 2019. She received her B.A. from FSU (1973), M.Ed. from Florida University (1975), and Ph.D. from FSU (2005). Additionally, she was an adjunct instructor at University of South Carolina, Tallahassee Community College, and Florida State University. Dr. Meale has participated in museum-school collaborations with the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts for fifteen years.