



Image Source: <http://emergingworldceramics.tumblr.com/>

# Conversations in Clay:

## Engaging community through a socially engaged public art project

Kira Hegeman\*, University of Georgia

Keywords: Creative Placemaking; Public Art; Socially Engaged Art; Conversation; Community; Clay; Participation

### Suggested Citation

Hegeman, K. (2016). Conversations in clay: Engaging community through a socially engaged public art project. *The Journal of Art for Life*. 8(2).

### Abstract

Throughout the course of a given day individuals may weave in and out of shared spaces, passing one another on the trails of a public park or across the stones of a city square, often anonymously, perhaps with a fleeting smile or nod. Creative placemaking, the practice of creating venues that enable community members to express their relationships with one another as well as the physical environment (Webb, 2014), offers a chance to re-envision the community-building capacity of such public spaces. In this paper I describe the process of designing and facilitating a socially engaged public art project for Art on the Atlanta Beltline, a temporary, annual public art festival in Atlanta, Georgia. Conceived as both an art installation and a site for informal art education, this project illustrates the potential for art making in public spaces to invite conversation and encourage empathic interaction between diverse community members.

\* Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to Kira Hegeman at [khegeman@uga.edu](mailto:khegeman@uga.edu)

## Conversations in Clay

*Snippets of conversation fade in and out of my ears as I walk by. In one corner, a mother is describing her concept to a neighbor while her son busily sculpts the face of a mythical creature. At another table, a series of couples share stories from their weekend as their hands push and pull the red clay at their fingertips. The clay they are working with is native to Georgia. The stone arches, grassy fields and looping bicycle paths of Atlanta's Grant Park serve as the backdrop for their Sunday art making. To a casual observer, these people may seem like old friends, friends whose connections stretch far beyond the confines of this two-hour free ceramics workshop. In reality, many of these people have just met for the first time.*

The above anecdote speaks to a project that first took place in the summer of 2013 as part of a larger public art festival called Art on the Beltline in Atlanta, GA. Conceived as both an art installation and a site for informal art education, this project illustrates the potential for art in public spaces—sites designed to be free and open, without fees or necessary permissions—to invite conversation and encourage empathic interaction between diverse community members. The aim of this article is to share the process of designing and facilitating a socially engaged public art project, demonstrating how creative placemaking may encourage social interaction and community engagement, with a broader goal of building and/or reinforcing a positive sense of community.

Throughout the course of a given day, individuals may weave in and out of shared spaces, passing one another on the trails of a public park or across the stones of a city square, perhaps with a fleeting smile or nod. Creative placemaking, the practice of creating venues that enable community members to express their relationships with one another as well as the physical environment (Webb, 2014), offers a chance to re-envision the community-building capacity of such public spaces. According to Maruksen and Gadwa, “the goal of creative placemaking is to advance humanity through artistic initiatives that build healthy, strong communities” (as cited in Webb, 2014, p.36). When conceptualized as a socially-engaged form of public art practice—one where patrons are invited to contribute to the artistic process (Helguera, 2011)—creative placemaking encourages community members to interact with these social and physical venues through the act of making or adding to a work of art. Through the integration of art making and public space, we may invite new or unexpected conversations and interactions between individuals as they pass through these sites. These conversations, in turn, may plant the seeds for future growth and social change.

As social activist Margaret Wheatley (2002) stated,

Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change—personal change, community and organizational change, planetary change. If we can sit together and talk about what’s important to us, we begin to come alive. We share what we see, what we feel, and we listen to what others see and feel (p. 3).

## Crafting and Conceptualizing

In the spring of 2013, I set out to create a proposal for Art on the Atlanta Beltline, an annual juried public art installation running from September to November. My dream was to create a work of art that would inspire Atlanta residents to share their stories. The driving force behind the Atlanta Beltline, a network of trails and parks situated along an under-used rail corridor circling the city, was to create avenues and pathways for connecting the different neighborhoods of Atlanta, with hopes of facilitating a more unified urban community. The Art on the Atlanta Beltline public art project was developed as a means to invite Atlanta residents to interact more with these Beltline trails through art installations and community events (“Art on the Atlanta Beltline”, 2015).



Figure 1: Detail of finished installation

With a particular interest in narrative, community engaged art, and collaboration, I invited a colleague and fellow graduate student in Art Education, Brittany Ranew, to collaborate in developing an art project focused on shared art making and building community through arts-based interaction. The initial project was composed in two parts: the first involved public clay workshops free to any age range, experience, or ability and based around the theme of “dreams”. The second combined these varied pieces into a collective installation along the Reynoldstown section of the Atlanta Beltline. There were four workshops in total, all held on one Sunday in August and situated in Grant Park, Atlanta.. The pieces made in the workshop were fired to maturity and installed within nooks, crannies, tree stumps, and other natural elements along the trail. The intention behind the installation was a hybrid between an art installation and a scavenger hunt, enticing participants to playfully explore

the Beltline trails in search of their work. Through this installation we hoped to encourage additional social engagement, as participants interacted with one another and their works of art in a new setting.

In the months leading up to the Art on the Atlanta Beltline exhibition, we toyed with a variety of collaborative art making ideas. Would we create a trail of art with a technological aspect, allowing trail walkers to simultaneously appreciate and contribute to the work?

Perhaps we would interview elderly members of the community and somehow share their stories through visual media? Connecting all of these ideas was a central theme of participation and collaboration. In the end, we settled on a collaborative installation incorporating a series of hand built sculptures made by local residents. We chose clay from Georgian soil because it is tactile, organic, and closely connected to the place from which it originates, reinforcing a sense of relationship with a place. It also feels less intimidating than drawing based activities, which often scare those participants who have not had a long-standing relationship with art making. Clay is forgiving. There is always the possibility to ball it up and start anew.

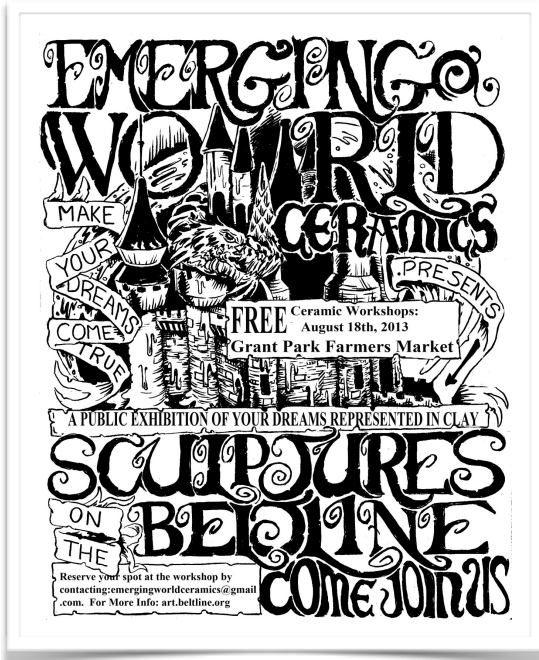


Figure 2: Flyer advertising the workshops - designed by James Woglom

Conceptually, the project was a fusion of public art and community art, with our role as artists and educators often overlapping. As public artists, we created the overall art piece: designing the workshops, firing the pieces, and physically installing them on the trail. In this regard, we attended to the visual aesthetics of the workshop space and final installation with limited external input from others. As community artists/educators, we invited participants to make art with us in a public space. While we provided a theme and general instruction, the boundaries were loose and open to interpretation, enabling participants to share a voice in the final look of the art piece. We specifically chose “dreams” as the broader theme, because they have multiple manifestations, ranging from goals for the future to the dreams you have while sleeping. Dreams invite personal stories, as individuals explore and relate their own experiences. In this sense, the theme of dreams reinforced our initial goal of opening an environment for conversation through the outlet of art making.

A secondary goal of our project was to entice members of the greater Atlanta community to explore the Beltline in a playful way. We chose to fire and install the pieces ourselves rather than coordinating community members to install, thus realizing the final piece as a treasure

hunt for participants to find and rediscover their finished pieces in a new environment. During the workshops, we informed each participant of our plan to install the finished work in a joint installation along the Atlanta Beltline.

Participants were provided a link to our [blog](#) with regular updates about the installation process and a map to the final installation site. They were invited to visit the [blog](#) regularly and venture out to the Beltline during the exhibition to find their finished pieces, as well as the work of other participants from different workshop sessions. At the end of each workshop session, participants were given the option to take their unfired pieces home immediately, though we quietly hoped they would wait to collect the fired versions (unglazed, but fired to maturity) from their final home on the Atlanta Beltline, or leave them after the exhibitions closing for the weather and world to determine their fate.

*In this sense, the theme of dreams reinforced our initial goal of opening an environment for conversation through the outlet of art making.*

## Conversation

The idea of conversation was central to the project. Conversation has the potential to build bonds, break down barriers, and remind communities of their interconnectedness. As Wheatley (2002) stated above, conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate

change. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) spoke to the concept of dialogue as a form of resistance to the status quo, to an oppressive power regime or systemizing form of education. Through dialogue, individuals are empowered to re-imagine settings and relationships in conjunction with others. They are invited to share their stories and visions in concert with other individuals, who in turn may share, or expand on such visions.



Figure 3: Unfired work in progress

Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is linked to marginalized communities in a political context, such

as minority or migrant populations living in the periphery or in less empowered conditions than a dominant majority. In terms of socially-engaged public art, the defined contexts of oppression may be broadened beyond a given minority population to cross economic, cultural, and political lines, suggesting that at some point, all individuals living in a given



Figure 4: View of workshop participants

society are subject to the often implicit and sometimes explicit guidelines outlined by systems of power (Bourriaud, 2002; Biesta, 2012; Freeman and Vasconcelos, 2010; Richardson 2010). The act of authentically conversing with individuals serves to humanize individuals (Freire, 1970). Through an art workshop, individuals are given a stage to share their stories. Such an experience may further empower these individuals to believe in their own value as members of a community. As open and public sites,

these workshops offer a venue for discourse between members of different social strata, ethnicities, or belief systems. When participants from a wide-range of backgrounds are invited to join a workshop, they are also invited to engage in a broader social discourse—a discourse that presents the opportunity for expanding individual world-views.

A socially engaged public art site, such as the one described in this article, invites a varied group of individuals, often strangers, to come together for dialogue and creating together. In the studio classroom setting, it is common for student artists to discuss their work (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, & Sheridan, 2007). One artist may ask about another's technique, or request the critical eye of a colleague. The questions that are born from these exchanges easily open the door for deeper conversations to take root (Barrett, 2010). As Carroll (2004) stated: "...the capacity of art to quicken the social glue of fellow feeling is an advantage that has no substitute. Art is a lever on human nature that enhances sociability" (p. 101). When the studio setting is pushed beyond the walls of a given institution, it merges this atmosphere of discourse and reflection into the public arena. In this context, individual identities are celebrated and community is forged as a network of diverse individuals rather than a fixed entity (Kester, 2004).



Figure 5: Finished installed piece

## Place

The site of our four clay workshops was strategic. Rather than working within an existing classroom, we constructed a new one in the grassy fields beside the Grant Park Farmer's market. Two large tents provided shelter for a set of table nodes—groups of two large tables arranged in squares that allowed 10 to 12 participants to sit around them in a “table in the round” type atmosphere. The set-up enabled participants to see and converse with one another while also maintaining a manageable and intimate group size.

Workshops were held outdoors in order to limit any physical barriers to participation. Public spaces can be, as Grodach (2010) asserted, “sources of local uniqueness that may help to build community interaction and attract neighborhood investment in the face of globalization's tendency toward homogenization and privatization” (p. 475). By situating our workshop at an area park rather than inside a community building, we hoped that a lack of physical barriers would also help to break down social or mental barriers blocking individuals from artistic engagement. Our overarching goal was to create art from the community within the community. While a park building or community shelter might provide protection from the weather and more space to work, it would also isolate the workshop from the surrounding environment. Our hope was that individuals passing by would engage in a workshop, inquire about what was taking place, or possibly ask to join.



Figure 6: Workshop participants

Loosely our project may be viewed as a form of public intervention. Through the development of a temporary art classroom within an established public space, we offered an opportunity to reimagine the form and function of both this public space and traditional notions of the art classroom. The concept of “interventionist art” is built on the premise that socially engaged works of public art hold the potential to challenge the systems that mediate our civic conduct (Richardson, 2010). They challenge daily activities and perceptions of space as well as the nature of social interactions in the civic realm. According to Richardson (2010),

Interventionist art thus *deterritorializes* public space by reworking and providing alternatives to “legitimate” public exchange and practice providing opportunities for the viewer/participant to collaborate with the artists to *reterritorialize* the space (p. 30).

## Creation

*Standing beneath empty tents, waiting for the first group of participants to arrive, we were understandably nervous. Various concerns arose: what would we say; how would we teach technique; were our supplies appropriate; would people make interesting work; would they like us; would it rain?*

Before we knew it, the tables were filling up with participants. Some were starting to play with the clay in front of them. Shaping and molding it. Others were hesitant, maybe feeling like a fish out of water. When it was time to begin, we introduced ourselves and explained the goals of our project: to create a community engaged collaborative art piece for Art on the Atlanta Beltline. We discussed the local origins of the Lizella clay that each artist now held in their hands and demonstrated basic wedging and coil building techniques. As the artists began to work we travelled around the tables, providing assistance when needed, inquiring about the work, and sharing stories with workshop participants.

Many of the participants entered the workshop with little experience in clay or art making. Some were artists in other media including woodworking, theater, sculpture, puppetry, and music. A number of the participants had a connection to Brittany and I—friends or family—but a surprising number had found the workshop through fliers or social media. As a workshop facilitator, it was incredible to witness how wide our net had been cast. Having no experience with Twitter at the time, I was completely surprised that our little workshop had found its way to Twitter feeds, and that complete strangers found it interesting enough to join. As the workshops began, participants mentioned their limited experience in ceramics or lack of ideas for their sculptures. Several also discussed nervousness about not knowing where to begin, but an excitement to try.

Early in the first session, I noticed one participant turn and consult her elementary aged son frequently for advice. Together they discussed the next steps in their creations, devising solutions to unforeseen problems as they arose. She was working on her first novel and so decided to create a book out of clay that would represent her dreams of publication. She readily admitted her own lack of experience with the medium, as well as her enthusiasm to learn. She was eager for help from both myself and the other artists at her table.



Throughout the 60 minutes of this first workshop, I spent a large portion in consultation with her, collectively devising the best strategy to achieve her goals. Soon the input from one another was not enough, and the critique spread across the table: “How do you think I should make this? Do you think this looks alright? What are you making?” These questions served as icebreakers for the patrons at the table, a way to create initial common ground. As the questions flowed, they subtly morphed into more personal queries: “Where are you from? Where do you live? How did you get involved in this? How long have you lived in Atlanta?”— opening the door to broader narratives about places lived and commonalities shared.

During the second session, the largest at 22 people, the conversations were quite different. While the first session’s interactions focused primarily around local entertainment, the ones in this session revolved much more around the participants’ personal dreams. Similar to the first session, this workshop had a diverse mix of participants ranging from single college students to families with small children, and parents with their adult children. Compared to the first session, this second session had a higher number of young children, which may have contributed to the types of conversations—conversations less grounded in daily life activities but more focused on the workshop’s theme. The dreams that people shared spanned the gamut of the word “dream.” Some of the dreams discussed related to future goals and ambitions, aligning with my own expectations for how the theme would be interpreted. Yet, a surprising number of conversations gravitated towards dreams formed in sleep.

At one table, a family of four—mother, father, daughter and son (between the ages of four and seven)— were particularly inspired by the dreams they had recently had while sleeping. The mother and daughter talked in depth about some of their particularly compelling dreams, which helped guide them in collectively creating a unicorn drinking from a pond. As they talked about their dreams, this family’s work gravitated to a more fantastical realm which included a unicorn, an alien, and an unnamed creature, which some might call a monster. Through this process a forum for sharing dreams opened up around their table, incorporating other families and adult participants into the conversation. When I navigated



Figure 7: Finished installed piece

around the table, I noticed these participants openly sharing their recent dreams with the whole table, even those participants with whom they had just met.

Throughout the day, dreams seemed to offer a point of connection for participants. Some found significant inspiration from the theme, while others were guided more by the clay itself and the process of creation that comes through exploration and play. Consistently; however, the theme of dreams seemed to offer a starting point for dialogue. For the table above, the theme presented a playful forum to share some of the imaginative and unexpected events that happen in dreams. For the woman in the first session, the theme created a space for her to discuss the book she planned to create and perhaps give the dream new life by sharing it with others. As a facilitator, the theme served as a starting point for developing a relationship; by asking participants if they had a dream they were thinking about, I was able to learn about each participant and enter into a dialogue that could expand and transform as we continued to talk.

## Working With the Unexpected

*Like something out of a cartoon, this sunny summer day rapidly turned from beautiful to torrential as an afternoon thunderstorm swept in. The rain entered the picture as the second of four sessions was wrapping up and the third was soon to begin. Knowing that it might rain, we had set up our workstations under large party tents, leaving only items we deemed unessential outside of the tents. With this sudden change in weather, our first priority as facilitators was ensuring that all participants were dry and all perishable materials were protected. Despite the downpour, participants still arrived for the session, many running to seek the shelter of the tents, while participants from the previous session huddled in to make room, even utilizing the storm as extra work time.*

Distracted by the rain, our verbal introductions and building lessons were more scattered than usual. Looking down, we soon realized that we were situated in a low point, as the ground flooded at our feet. Our eclectic group of friends, recent participants and newly arrived students, very quickly transformed into a type of workshop pit-crew, with everyone working together to maintain the space. Cardboard boxes were strategically placed underneath tables to keep feet dry, tables were moved to the driest sections of the tent, finished sculptures were relocated to keep them safe, and towels distributed for chairs and participants in need.

Throughout the process, I expected the artists working to throw in the towel and leave for better shelter. The workshops were free and there would be no repercussions for leaving,

but, to my surprise, they stayed. Despite soaked feet, cramped tables, and what felt to me like utter chaos, they continued to work. Echoing the atmosphere of the earlier workshops, participants joked and shared with one another. The weather forced us all to work together in an unexpected capacity. In a sense, this group was pushed to bond even more rapidly than previous groups through the act of looking out for one another.

In the fourth workshop, we were forced to abandon the organization and aesthetics we had painstakingly laid out in the morning. The rain had moved on, but the damage remained. The ground was now made of cardboard boxes, towels were wet, and tables were cluttered with drying sculptures. But the sun had returned, and a new group of artists ventured out to the park to make art. The participants in the last session were very understanding of the slightly chaotic set-up. In the end, the results were much the same. Disheveled or not, each session brought with it a set of unique sculptures and complimentary conversations.

Technically, the sculptures were sturdy, fireable and an appropriate thickness. Aesthetically they were diverse and well articulated, especially given the time frame and experience level. While the sculptures remained as a product of the project, a less permanent aspect of the project came in the excitement and collective participation expressed through each session. Conversations were abundant and the conversations that arose seemed natural and carefree. Grounded in a practical task of learning an art skill and developing a collaborative installation, these workshops implicitly worked in fostering an environment for unexpected connections and imaginings.



Figure 8: Finished installed piece

## Sculptures In Their New Homes

The final pieces were installed on the Atlanta Beltline at the beginning of September, after a period of drying and firing. In this first iteration of the project, Brittany and I did not

formally invite participants to help install the work, though we did provide regular updates about the process for participants to follow. On one afternoon, we carried all of the pieces, somewhere around 90, to our given Beltline site along a wooded section that had been predetermined by the Art on the Beltline selection committee. Working with the environment around us, we nestled sculptures in tree trunks, along abandoned railroad trucks, atop rocks, and amongst other natural landscapes. At the end of this installation day, we photographed each piece in its new home and uploaded it to the website, providing clues for participants to find their work. On this installation day, a variety of pedestrians, cyclists, and runners traversed down the trails. Nearly everyone who passed stopped for a moment,

either to look at the sculptures or inquire about the project—many even wondered if we had made all of the pieces ourselves. Through these interactions, we were able to share the story of the workshops and recognize the contributions of our participants. For the most part, these Atlanta residents were excited to see the work on the trails, telling us that they loved having something new to look at as they walked by. Turning away to continue with the installation, I often noticed these passersby's "off-roading" to catch a closer glimpse of the different sculptures and to look for new ones embedded in the landscape.



Figure 9: Finished installed piece

found their pieces. Appreciating the beauty of letting the installation take on a life of its own, we decided to purposely leave the pieces at the end of the installation, rather than systematically removing them.

In December we ventured back out to the trails. At this point many of the pieces had disappeared, offering an opportunity to wonder where they ended up. Perhaps they were added to a budding collection, participant's home, or to another natural landscape? A handful of sculptures, however, were left. These pieces has been gathered together and arranged in a flat area beneath a tree, peppered with medium sized rocks. It is difficult to

know for sure how they came to this spot, but their placement brings visions of children acting out narratives or creating new compositions for these pieces.

## Conclusion

Dewey (1938) and Eisner (2002) posited that each experience has the potential to spark a change not yet known in the moment. It is interesting to wonder what a given experience may inspire in the future thoughts and lives of its participants. So often, it seems as though urban living is defined by anonymity, where social ties are obscured by expanding populations, cars, and growing technological interfaces. One of the more surprising and inspiring aspects of these workshops

was the sense of warmth and camaraderie that came about in the interactions between participants, many of whom had known each other only in the capacity of these one hour sessions. Prior to the workshop day, I found myself worried about how the participants would respond to leaving their work. Would they be disappointed, especially if it was their first handmade ceramic sculpture? To my surprise, their responses were overwhelmingly positive. The artists loved the idea of having their work displayed in a public setting and the



Figure 10: finished installed piece

added adventure of finding it among the Beltline scenery. As the workshops ended, what the artists talked about most was having fun, making something new, and meeting other people.

Through a socially engaged art event such as this, there is the potential for re-imagining community spaces and interactions (Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1995). Through the process of art making, workshops such as these provide a collective environment for conversation across potentially diverse swathes of communities. Situated in public settings, they temporarily reconfigure social space to potentially awaken a new understanding of communal spaces and interactions (Biesta, 2012). As one-off sessions, they have the immediate benefit of engaging community members in art making and conversation. Though limited in physical time, they offer the potential to plant seeds for future growth; seeds of inspiration, encouraging students to continue creating art, seeds reminding individuals of their community

connections and investment, and seeds to encourage participants to imagine new possibilities. With each new year, the project itself has the opportunity for renewal and re-contextualization. In the summer of 2015, I repeated the project again with a new colleague, Hannah Leathers. Together we developed a new theme around monsters; one that was equally as approachable for a diverse audience of participants but also led to new and diverse conversations. Working with Art on the Beltline for a second time, we had a new, more prominent installation site, complete with gullies and rock faces to install the creatures. Though the project was very similar in creation and conceptualization, even with an unexpected rainstorm, the new round of participants, collaborations and connections enabled continued growth and expansion.

This project holds significant potential to involve community input in deeper and broader ways. There is the potential that participants could return for a second session to glaze their work or schedule a collective time to install the work in it's new home, perhaps reinforcing the strength of bonds formed during workshop sessions and the longevity of the programs collaborative elements. Each new iteration of the project brings an opportunity to build off of insights gained from previous endeavors, while also working with the ever-present uncertainty of a socially engaged, public project, where the contributions and environmental conditions can never fully be predicted beforehand.



Figure 11: Portion of the 2015 Art on the Beltline piece

## References

- Art on the Atlanta Beltline. (2015, September 23). Retrieved from <http://art.beltline.org/>.
- Barrett, T. (2010). Aesthetics, conversations, and social change. In T. Costantino & B. White (Eds.), *Essays on aesthetic education for the 21st Century* (pp.123-142). The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Biesta, G. (2012). Becoming public: Public pedagogy, citizenship and the public sphere. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 13(7), 683-697.
- Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational aesthetics*. Dijon, FR: Les presses du reel.
- Carroll, N. (2004). Art and human nature. *Journal of Aesthetics & Art Criticism*, 62(2), 95-107. doi:10.1111/j.1540-594X.2004.00143.x
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: Kappa Delta Pi.
- Eisner, E. W. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Freeman, M., & Vasconcelos, E.S. (2010). Critical social theory: Core tenets, inherent issues. *New Directions for Evaluation*, (127), 7-19.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Grodach, C. (2010). Art spaces, public space and the link to community development. *Community Development Journal*, 45(4), 474-493.
- Helguera, P. (2011). *Education for socially engaged art*. New York, NY: Jorge Pinto Books.
- Hetland, L., Winner, E., Veneema, S., & Sheridan, K. (2007). *Studio thinking: the real benefits of visual arts education*. New York, NY: Teacher's College Press.
- Kester, G.H. (2004). *Conversation pieces: Community and communication in modern art*. Berkely, CA: University of California Press.
- Richardson, J. (2010). Interventionist art education: Contingent communities, social dialogue, and public collaboration. *Studies in Art Education*, 52(1), 18-33

Webb, D. (2014). Placemaking and social equity: Expanding the framework of creative placemaking. *Artivate: A Journal of Entrepreneurship in the Arts*, 3(1), 35-48.

Wheatley, M. (2002). *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

## About the Author



**Kira Hegeman** is currently pursuing a PhD in Art Education at the University of Georgia, with a focus on arts-based research, informal sites of learning and socially engaged art. Kira's interest in community and public art grew from her position as Art Director for Art Relief International, a Thailand based organization devoted to empowerment and community building through the arts. Continually inspired by the power of creative expression to promote communication, confidence, and group cohesion, Kira's research interests include the role of interactivity, public space, and collaborative art making in fostering conversation across diverse social lines. Kira works as both an artist and educator, striving to create visual works that invite participants to collaborate in the art making process through storytelling, public workshops, or interactive elements. Follow her on Twitter [@kirahegeman](https://twitter.com/kirahegeman) and follow the Beltline project [@monstermenageri](https://twitter.com/monstermenageri)

## Special Acknowledgments

The author would like to extend a special acknowledgement to Brittany Ranew from the Georgia Museum of Art, Education Department, for her work on the development and implementation of the Beltline project.