

## **Bridging the Liminal Spaces—EXA Students Archive for ArtsChange: Interview with EXA Students Jill Therrien Ringler and Shauna DeGuire**

*Jill-* There were a lot of memories and stories but the artwork hadn't been looked at for a long time. We would pull out art and then ask, "Do you remember who the artist is? What show was it from?" And occasionally we would hear stories.... Ann was doing EXA without even knowing it! Just through her creativity and her heart she was pulling community together and doing a lot of historical trauma ritual. For example, a Vietnamese based show that included a candlelight storytelling as part of the reception.

....The shows were themed and sometimes they were themed based on, for example the Laos community of Richmond, or Youth. For one particular exhibit an artist went to people's homes in the community and photographed families, couples and elders from all different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Then Ann added an excerpt from their story about what it was like to live in Richmond. Some of them told immigration stories some of them talked about having to flee Laos because of war.

*Shauna-* I was really touched by what Ann did. She got to know the story—who the person was, who there family was.

*Jill-* So we got to see the remnants of the collection that was at the Richmond Health Center. And I don't know if you remember Shauna, the story about the butterflies....

*Shauna-* Yeah there was a shooting at Richmond health center; it was outside of the lobby waiting room.

*Jill-* You could still see bullet holes—they were patched but you could still tell.

*Shauna-* Yeah, and they had these butterflies that people had created and they put them up in the waiting room there [in response to the shooting]. And when the location changed from Richmond to Martinez they asked to keep the butterflies because they were also there for protection.

*Jill-* They also had some bizarre stories too. I spent a lot of time with Ann in the basement and I just said, there is something really creepy and amazing about this basement, medical equipment everywhere...And here is another intuitive, spontaneous thing she did, she took a poll of the staff asking them what their thoughts about the basement were and left it open ended. 85% thought it was haunted or had an alternative way of discussing that based on their culture—then she had a Shaman come in and do a ritual. Afterwards she conducted a follow up survey, and the number of people who thought it was haunted had dropped down to 35% or something like that (laughing).

*Kasey-* Unbelievable. So tell me, what was the most valuable piece of each of your experiences? What would you like to share with the community?

*Shauna-* Every body at the Richmond health center knew each other from the security guard to the staff. When we were bringing out the pieces of artwork I think it was a security guard who came by and said, "oh yeah! I remember some of this." I don't often experience such a rich history in an organization. There is a real family community there. They still value the art as a representation of a story, because with each piece is a story that people *remember*. Patients, janitors, doctors, nurses, staff, they all know each other and there is a lot of equality there.

*Jill-* I worked in the art world a long time before I decided to join the EXA program and I always strived to keep that sense of community, especially when I worked in a university gallery. Having the opportunity to do what I know how to do in an environment that is doing something that I'm striving to do, acted like a bridge for me, where I could really see a lot of potential for using art in community. It was touching to see how well that community came together and remembered each other. And we're talking about Richmond, which is a really challenged community with a very long history... and a lot of their shows were *about* that history.

*Shauna-* I think of it as a dialogue that happens in those spaces that we don't really think about, the waiting room, the hallway. Liminal spaces! It became a place to dialogue about how the physicians felt about what was going on and how the community felt about things like Chevron and refinery and gun violence.

*Jill-* They even talked about food. There was that one exhibit that was all about food, remember? It was about the history of food and about why there are so many fast food restaurants in Richmond, what happened with the agriculture in that area...

*Shauna-* ...Giant paper machete fruits and vegetables.

*Jill-* That Giant beet, so huge. I was like, "how am I going to get that on the wall? ...Shauna!!"

*Shauna-* Yeah, it made me think of other spaces as liminal spaces that have potential –like the social security office...the DMV! It made me think about how social action can happen in those spaces and it can be subtle but really powerful. You spend hours in those spaces, maybe three hours sometimes at the DMV waiting to get seen, or waiting for the doctor, and you're just staring at the wall...

*Jill-* ...And the anxiety in the room and how you could offset that by just a simple activity, viewing art.

*Kasey-* So, having had the experience there and here (at CIIS) thus far, if it were up to the two of you how to take the relationship forward between CCHS and EXA? What would you recommend?

*Shauna-* As an archivist I feel there are so many rich stories, I think EXA could help by putting the pieces together and making a book to honor the arts and therapy.

*Jill-* Considering that the center has now moved to San Pablo, an area with a completely different demographic, I'm curious about how we can keep the Richmond community involved, involve the San Pablo community and keep that thread alive, because it's really important. It seems like the folks at CCHS are really into utilizing the arts, which for a public health center is in and of itself is a unique thing. They could really benefit from developing more research so that other communities could start adopting more art too.

*Shauna-* Yeah, it just actually reminds me of how EXA serves as a bridge.

*Jill-* And back to that philosophy about the liminal space, so it's bridging *my* liminal space and it's bridging *their* liminal space and that's actually where creativity lives.

*Shauna-* As EXA people we have to know a lot about the integrative whole—because it's the history of the art community, the history of the medical community, and then we're bridging the two, facilitating the dialogue between these. And so that's always going to be a challenge: staying open, asking questions, gathering more information.

*Jill-* And also the challenge of any transition, where everything is sort of waiting to land (laughs) I had this interesting conversation about primordial soup. You think of like, a mucky lake. It can be really uncomfortable to be in transition but it's also a time to sort out what benefits us, what stays and what goes.....