

**community
arts space**

Community Is Essential

March - December 2020



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CAS 2020: Community Is Essential



The Gardiner partnered with Turtle House Art/Play Centre (Turtle House), FCJ Refugee Centre (FCJ), and ArtHeart Community Art Centre (ArtHeart) to engage forty participants, ranging from youth to seniors, in clay-making activities. The group represented diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds, with participants from countries including Barbados, China, Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Libya, Mexico, Namibia, Saint Kitts, South Africa, Syria, Turkey, and Zimbabwe.

At the start of 2020, we planned to offer in-studio workshops from March to May, followed by a showcase in the Exhibition Hall over the summer. However, with the onset of the pandemic and the Museum's temporary closure, we reimagined Community Arts Space (CAS2020) as a ten-month-long project that safely offered participants technical skills, an outlet for creative expression, and most importantly, a sense of community.

During the first lockdown, the Gardiner distributed more than ninety clay packages to our three partner organizations, as well as to Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre. These kits, which included air-dry clay and basic tools, invited participants to play or work with clay, a medium specifically suited for expression around the themes of health and hope. We regarded these clay kits as care packages

meant to promote collective wellness. From April to August, participants from Turtle House and FCJ Refugee Centre's Youth Network met online for digital clay workshops led by artist Aitak Sorahitalab, practising new ways of being together while physically distancing. With Aitak's instruction, participants learned clay-building techniques and regularly shared the progress of their work with one another.

Participants also responded to weekly writing prompts that spoke to pressing social and political issues, such as COVID-19 and police brutality, that were disproportionately impacting Black and racialized community members. These digital workshops provided participants the opportunity to stay connected with their communities during lockdown. The ArtHeart participants, who did not have access to the technology for online instruction, were provided educational resources and air-dry clay to experiment with at home.

When the Museum reopened in July, we were pleased to invite the participants back into the studios. With new health and safety protocols in place, instructors Aitak Sorahitalab and Adam Williams supported the participants' work with fired clay. It was wonderful to have people work in the Museum's studios again, animating and enlivening the community and



educational spaces that are central to our mandate. As these workshops were the only opportunity for many participants to gather outside of their homes, the studio became a safe space to develop new friendships and support networks.

Inspired by the treasured relationships built over the past months, we reframed CAS2020 as *Community Is Essential*. This title honours the resilience and creativity of the participants, while recognizing the crucial work of the community partners, each of which serves historically marginalized populations. We were grateful to be able to provide the participants this opportunity to work with clay, particularly during this challenging time.

While the Museum's second closure in November has prevented us from presenting the artworks in person, we are heartened to produce this catalogue, which will go to each participant along with an archival photographic print of their work. The Gardiner will feature participants' artworks online as well, allowing friends, family members, and others to enjoy the outcomes of their efforts.

I am personally grateful to all the participants of this year's Community Arts Space project, who navigated with grace the challenges brought on by

the pandemic. I also thank instructors Aitak Sorahitalab and Adam Williams, who expertly assisted our participants in achieving their creative goals. My deep gratitude goes to the lead facilitators from each of our three partners: Tamam McCallum (Turtle House); Natasha Rollings (FCJ Refugee Centre); and Sandi Wong and Tim Svirklis (ArtHeart). I acknowledge the generous support of CAS2020's Lead Sponsor, the TD Ready Commitment, as well as funding from the Ontario Arts Council's Artists in Communities and Schools Projects. The Gardiner team is incredibly proud of this successful community collaboration, particularly those who worked closely on CAS2020's studio and presentation components, including Siobhan Boyd, Micah Donovan, Tara Fillion, and Rachel Weiner.

Working with our partners during a pandemic has intensified the Gardiner's sense of responsibility and commitment to building community with clay. I appreciate the opportunity to collaboratively shape this program with our partners in a way that honours the integrity of that commitment.

Thank you to everyone who made this happen.

Nahed Mansour
Curator of Programs
Gardiner Museum

A message from ArtHeart

ArtHeart Community Art Centre has served the community of Regent Park for almost three decades, bringing wellness and a strong sense of community through creativity and artistic expression to the area's underprivileged adults, seniors, youth, and families. By providing free studio space and programming, materials and facilitation, and our food program sponsored by Daily Bread and Second Harvest, ArtHeart nurtures the artistic mind and community spirit.

ArtHeart Community Art Centre had to pivot quickly once our studio was forced to close due to the pandemic. Since July, we have continued to serve our participants with weekly art challenges through free ArtKits, delivered curbside from our home at Daniels Spectrum. Inspired by a project initiated in Halifax by Wonder'neath Art Society, we have given out over 2,300 free ArtKits, helping to fight loneliness, isolation, and depression, while providing inspiration and engagement.

Our CAS2020 collaboration with the Gardiner Museum, planned since late 2019, sadly was also impacted; our spring 2020 in-studio sessions were interrupted for months due to COVID-19 restrictions. Thankfully, as a true collaborator, the Gardiner also pivoted quickly and donated sixty ArtKits for our "Play with Clay" weekly challenge. We are truly grateful to the Gardiner for providing air-dry clay and tools.

In September, when we could return safely to in-studio sessions, we were able to finish our pieces. Our ArtHeart participants, most of whom are new to working in clay, were thrilled to have this opportunity to work in 3D and to express their feelings on community, even more so due to the isolation caused by the pandemic. We at ArtHeart Community Art Centre are truly grateful and look forward to an ongoing relationship with the Gardiner Museum and its talented and dedicated staff.

Sandi Wong
on behalf of ArtHeart Community Art Centre



A message from FCJ Refugee Centre

To the organizers, participants, and all those involved in CAS2020,

The project provided our community an opportunity to participate in arts programming that they otherwise would never have had access to. More often than not, programming such as this comes with restrictions of prohibitive cost, status requirements, or various other barriers. Due to these barriers, our community—a vibrant, thriving, dynamic collective of newcomers, refugees, and folks dealing with precarious status—are so often excluded from enjoying holistic social participation. So many of the folks in our community are pushed to focus on serving the immediate survival needs of housing, employment, and food security that endeavours which nourish their emotional and mental well-being are all too often left behind.

This project has provided the soul food that is so desperately craved. For a few hours a week, our participants have had the chance to reflect, respond, and work with creative outlets to channel their feelings, emotions, and thoughts. Although the project did not begin as was originally intended, thanks to the incredible dedication and flexibility of all those involved—in particular Tamam McCallum, Aitak Sorahitalab, Nahed Mansour, and Siobhan Boyd—the project continued to be a meaningful and rich virtual experience. The project's impact was taken to new heights when the participants had the chance to work with clay in-studio, and I was overcome as I was able to joyfully witness the participants working collaboratively with all the artistic elements.

I'm humbled by the dedication of all those involved to provide participants with an opportunity to engage with each other and the arts, and in particular, the dedication to provide this experience to those so often marginalized and overlooked.

It is with deep appreciation that I thank all those who have provided this opportunity to our community. Together, we are richer as we nourish each other through the arts and the community we have built.

In gratitude and solidarity,

Natasha Rollings
Access to Education & Youth
Coordinator,
FCJ Refugee Centre



Messages from Turtle House

My involvement as founder of Turtle House began in 2003. I started by interviewing key people from a variety of organizations working with refugee families to discuss the vision of an arts project for children and parents from refugee backgrounds. The Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) recognized the importance of this project and assisted by acting as our Trustee to funders.

In January 2008, after receiving a grant from United Way Toronto, Turtle House began offering our special Family Arts Program—painting, clay-making, puppets, and music—to refugee families. As clay was one of the most popular activities, Turtle House began offering free clay workshops to newcomer artists and non-artists, primarily from refugee backgrounds, under the name Turtle House Ceramics.

In 2017, I had approached the Gardiner Museum's former Senior Manager of Education Siobhan Boyd about an opportunity to collaborate. The timing was right. The Gardiner was just about to open their new Community Clay Studio, and they welcomed Turtle House to animate the space through a series of workshops, taught by Aitak Sorahitalab. In April 2019, Turtle House Ceramics held in the Gardiner's lobby a wonderful reception and exhibition titled *Mixed Feelings: Leaving Home, Finding Home* to celebrate Refugee Rights Month.

When the Gardiner invited Turtle House Ceramics to participate in CAS2020, we partnered with FCJ Refugee Centre to bring in new participants as well as our former artists, with funding from Ontario Arts Council and the support of the Gardiner. Though COVID-19 disrupted our original plans, the Gardiner staff and our artists were nimble. We redesigned the project to hold online Zoom workshops, bridging participants' isolation until they were able to safely return to the studios.

I'd like to thank the Gardiner Museum for partnering with Turtle House Ceramics since 2017. Through this partnership, the Gardiner has played a vital role in the settlement process, welcoming and connecting newcomer artists and non-artists to cultural institutions within their new home.

Tamam McCallum
Former Executive Director,
Turtle House Art/Play Centre



Thinking of the past three years of Turtle House Art/Play Centre (TH) Ceramics Program in partnership with the Gardiner Museum, I am thrilled to serve as an artist and educator in this practice. The Gardiner Museum's Community Art Space program that embraced this is an excellent initiative toward collaborative community art practice in the current unprecedented crisis and in the midst of equity-seeking movements. Art organizations' accountability in developing such communal narratives seems imperative in this challenging time.

Holding on to this collaborative form of art education, I see my classes in this program as a forum, and the students and myself as the participants in this forum. We are all viewed by personal character, productivity, interests, and artistic perspectives as members of a collective discussion. This forum sees each participant's art project as a different approach to our current situation and identity. Any question, argument, inquiry, concern, or emotion—collective or individual—is valid to bring to the forum as a ceramic or mixed media piece. Instead of focusing on talent, accomplishment, or achievement, we aim to unlock the knowledge, lived experiences, and creative responses in the process of creating.

Following this flow, in the online sessions in the summer of 2020, my suggested theme of "We are all in this together" altered to a question, "Are we all in this together?" The artworks were a response, or a reformation of this question, and were shared with the forum to be discussed.

During the studio phase in the fall of 2020, the Museum brought forward the theme *Community Is Essential*. Discussing the approaches, ideas, and experiences around this concept, one of the participant's definitions stated that this group of participants meant community for them, and revealed another way of looking at the meaning of community.

Creating an art-based forum that provides playfulness, openness, and curiosity has always been my vision as an educator. Admittedly, a constructive collaboration between the Gardiner Museum and Turtle House encouraged and promoted such work in this program. The evaluations and consultations reveal that holding a collective initiative with this framework is not only essential in the current time but also remains significant, relevant, and progressive in the post-pandemic time.

Aitak Sorahitalab

Community Arts Space 2020 Instructor

A message from TD Bank

To the participants of Community Arts Space 2020,

On behalf of TD, congratulations on the exceptional work you've created over the past year. Your resiliency and dedication in the face of COVID-19 are truly inspiring. Your work, beautifully represented in these pages, speaks to the power of art in connecting people and creating opportunities for healing and self-expression.

We'd also like to congratulate the Gardiner team led by Curator of Programs Nahed Mansour; the incredible artist instructors Aitak Sorahitalab and Adam Williams; and the partners Turtle House, FCJ Refugee Centre, and ArtHeart Community Art Centre. From online art workshops to the delivery of more than ninety clay packages to participants, you rose to the challenge of reimagining what community arts could look like under extraordinary circumstances.

At TD, we believe that arts and culture can bring people together, open dialogues, and provide an opportunity to learn from each another. Art can be a catalyst for change, especially when it amplifies diverse voices, creates representation, and fosters a sense of belonging, which is ever more important in these times. This year's Community Arts Space project is a great representation of that and through the TD Ready Commitment, we are delighted to be the Lead Sponsor of CAS2020.

I hope that this is only the beginning of your artistic journey.

Stuart Keeler
Senior Curator of Art,
TD Bank Art Collection





Nathan Guest

Content Cat

Nathan Guest, also known as 'Sensei' for his prowess in martial arts, loves colourful art and mandalas. This piece is about how content cats are when they are fed.



Claire Mercer

Human Heart and Uterus

Originally trained as a scientist, Claire Mercer discovered the art world over 15 years ago. Since then, she has never looked back. After completing the CTS art program in 2013, Claire has been constantly creating. Proficient in several media, her favorite forms of expression are stone carving and painting.



Ava Goodman

Community Peace Garden

Ava Goodman is an acrylic painter from Montreal. She loves to paint landscapes and enjoys birds.



Bhahrati Sapkota

***Momo on Ganesh
Platter***

This piece by Bhahrati Sapkota, born in Tibet, shows a platter with the Hindu God Ganesh and an offering of “Momo” dumplings.



Victoria Biwa

Open Yet Holding

This is Victoria Biwa's first time working with clay. She made a vase that features fun and whimsical coils and swirls.



Kan Chai

Happy Owl

Ship Plate

Kan Chai, a retired resident of Regent Park, shares that owls make her happy.



Gaetan Genesse

Monster/Demon

Gaetan Genesse is a Quebecois multi-media artist who enjoys music, circus, and graphic novel arts. This work is about backstabbing and two-faced people who fake being nice.



Jing Jianxiong

Sing and Dance

Lucky Gold Fish

Jing Jianxiong is a retired architect who loves working with watercolours. His pieces invite people to sing and dance through COVID-19, and ask for goodluck.



Yun Fan

Bird

Nature Fish

Yun Fan is a retired architect who enjoys nature, watercolours, and drawing.



Shi

Puppy and Bowl

Shi is retired and is a calligrapher of Chinese characters.



Ma Kwan Mei

***Conversation
with Nature***

Ma Kwan Mei is retired, enjoys painting, drawing, and volunteering by helping others at ArtHeart.



Kate Lee

***Neighbourhood
Yin/Yan***

Kate Lee is a Toronto artist who was born in Taiwan. She enjoys yoga, meditation, and regularly translates for ArtHeart.



Gloria Wong

Hands of Diversity

Gloria Wong is a retired bank worker who volunteered in Mask Making for Community. Her piece celebrates diversity in Canada.



Rama Fayaz

A Cup- To Share Community

Rama Fayaz was born in Iran. He is an acrylic painter who enjoys painting landscapes and portraits. He is new to working in clay.



Judy Ruck

Abstract Vase with Ears

Judy Ruck is a Toronto artist from the Maritimes. She likes to explore abstract art.



Sandi Wong

Family Steps Out, Together

Sandi Wong is a Lead Program Coordinator and Instructor for the Adult and Seniors of ArtHeart Community Art Centre of Regent Park, Toronto. She is also a Co-Chair of ArtHeart's Board of Directors.



Cindy Gee

Pawprint

Star Bowl



...

When I was growing up, Granny used to tell me

“When everything is falling apart and your world is crumbling beneath you, LOOK Around!

The people who love you will be waiting to put the pieces back together”

There was a deep connection – a deep sense of love only translated within the waves of humanity.

They knew the value of love, the value of the human touch,

And that was and still is the antidote to a beautiful life.

...

When there is no love, the whole world crumbles.

What happened to conscience?

What happened to humanity?

Where I come from, we call it Ubuntu,

“Ubuntu ngobuntu ngabantu” – “I am because we are,”

“I am a person through other people.

Our humanity is tied to others.”

Who am I then without you?

Honestly nothing!!!!!!!

Why then do we fight each other?

We lose breaths every day, not because of nature,

Not because of fate.

But because of our sheer irresponsibility toward each other.

What is LOVE, when we don't have Kindness?

What is Love, when we lack Responsibility?

I dream of that day – A day when we all become a people,

A people that see beyond colour, race, gender, boundaries.

A people that will uphold Peace, Love, Hope, Responsibility, Survival, Solidarity Spirit, Compassion and Respect.

TOGETHER WE CAN. LET LOVE LEAD!

Salome Chari

An excerpt from her poem titled
Ubuntu: the cradle of Human Solidarity



Eli Ibarra



Tjijandjeua **Ndjoze-Siririka**

Flower Veil

Last Son of Krypton Cradle

Made in the midst of a pandemic, each piece represents my emotional embodiment.

Flower Veil: This art piece represents flowers for those who lost their lives while at the same time we were beginning to battle a pandemic.

Last Son of Krypton Cradle: This was born out of the idea of watching too much Smallville. It also symbolises that in times of despair we tend to seek the time when we were young to escape the pain.



D.S.

love/wishes



Diana Sanchez



Brittany Samuals

Friends

Mom's Love

YC Tower



Johan Cervantes Ibarra



Ronesha Weir

Equality within the Community



Jackeline Martinez

Bouquet of Flowers



Renika Maynard

Multi-use vessel



Cynthia Rodriguez

Turtle

Bouquet



Chamique Crawford





Abdulhakim

Elmsharta

Caveman

Cooperation

Caveman expresses how human life was tens of thousands of years ago; the creation of these pieces using ceramics and acrylic colors, trying to express the difference of life between the present and the past, and the picture that I used is taken from drawings of troglodytes found in the North African desert inside caves in mountains called the Acacus Mountains.

Cooperation is about the COVID-19 crisis and living in anxiety and fear. The positive or bright side was the cooperation of the people with each other, as a person, family, society, and government to cross this crisis safely.



Abdulkerim Bozan

COVID-20

The COVID-19 virus caused a worldwide disaster and many deaths. Although Covid started in 2019, it showed its traumatic effects in 2020. That is why I titled my work “COVID-20”. I designed 20 pieces, each representing the human and the virus. I deformed the limbs of the human figure to express that people are trying to protect themselves. I also exaggerated the proportion of the virus, making them much larger than they are in real life, to express the invisible but dangerous viruses that exist around us.



Sama Kokabi

Community

Leaves

The world is disintegrating in many ways, and disunity that is afflicting the human race is increasing daily. How long will injustice continue? How long will chaos and confusion last? If there's one thing that the pandemic has taught us, it's the notion that we cannot bring change individually. Consider a leaf, although it possesses certain capabilities, individually its impact is limited. It's only when many leaves come together in harmony that a meaningful impact is made, such as providing shade. Just as among human beings, they are united in their universal condition – subject to the eternal patterns of growth and decay as they progress through the seasons during their limited time on earth.



Mozhgan

Abbasroohollahi

Simurgh
(Phoenix)

Simurgh is the deity of birds that were born in the thirteenth-century poet Farid al-din Abi Hamid Muhammad ben Ibrahim's (called Attar or "perfumer"), mystical epic *Mantiq al-tair* ("The Language [Parliament] of the Birds"). Birds understand that the name of their king, the *Simurgh*, means thirty birds. Hoopoe encouraged birds to find this king. In the beginning, some of the birds excusing to join. In the end, thirty birds reach the mountain on which the *Simurgh* lives. They see that they are the *Simurgh*, and that the *Simurgh* is each of them, and all of them. The *Simurgh* is alive, and that the *Simurgh* is each of us.



Mehrnoush

Persian Rython

We are all in this together

Surviving



Diala Aleid

Are we all in this together?



Ahmed Babolly



Tugce Alemdar

Beans



Carine Nasri

Don the Planter

From Within



**Ghazaleh
Naderian**

***Playing indoor,
playing outdoor***

Playing at home all day long with a toddler during the hard time of a pandemic is challenging. I carved two of my son's images onto the clay. He is my inspiration. I enjoyed the process as it was my first experience working with air dry clay. My challenges were time and space at home, but I overcame these struggles by working hard. I learned new things like how to work with clay and how to carve the figure onto the surface of the clay. The work represents my everyday life spent with my baby at home during this difficult situation. Staying positive and showing our strength to loved ones, I created a calm situation at home, and making this artwork was part of that creation.



About Community Arts Space

Grounded in the real and metaphorical ability of clay to transform, the Gardiner Museum's Community Arts Space is a platform for experimentation and socially engaged art. We work within and beyond the Museum's gallery walls to re-envision what equitable community engagement looks like at a cultural institution.

Community Partners



ArtHeart provides free visual arts education, programs, materials, and healthy snacks to children and youth, as well as hot, nutritious meals to adults and seniors living in Regent Park and the surrounding neighbourhoods. ArtHeart offers participants a supportive environment in which they can create and learn, build self-esteem, and develop life skills.



FCJ Refugee Centre serves refugees and others at risk due to their immigration status, and welcomes anyone asking for advice, counsel, and support regarding their refugee or immigration claim process.



Turtle House Art/Play Centre was designed primarily for children and parents from refugee backgrounds to explore their creativity and make meaningful connections. Turtle House envisions and is dedicated to playing a vital role in building a Toronto where refugees and immigrants are welcomed, arts flourish in every neighbourhood, and people are encouraged to explore their creativity.



CAS 2020 Instructors

Aitak Sorahitalab is a visual artist, art instructor, and arts manager with more than fifteen years of experience in the field. Aitak works with various arts organizations in the city and is the co-founder and Executive Director of Airsa, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing newcomers with professional development in the arts sector.

Adam Williams is the studio owner of Clay Space. He studied painting and drawing at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto but finished his degree at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad in 2010. His most recent work has focused on architectural models as a metaphor for vision and aspiration. Adam is particularly interested in the intentions of designer homes and communities versus the lived experiences of their inhabitants.

CAS 2020 Project Leads

Nahed Mansour, Curator of Programs, Gardiner Museum

Tamam McCallum, Executive Director, Turtle House Art/Play Centre

Natasha Rollings, Access to Education and Youth Coordinator, FCJ Refugee Centre

Sandi Wong, Board of Directors' Co-Chair, ArtHeart Community Art Centre

CAS 2020 Project Support

Diana Sanchez, Facilitator from FCJ Refugee Centre's Youth Network

Tim Svirkllys, Studio Manager, ArtHeart Community Art Centre

Lead Sponsor



**TD READY
COMMITMENT**

Additional Support



**ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO**

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Gardiner Museum Staff Acknowledgements

Siobhan Boyd, Former Senior Manager of Education/Adjunct Curator

Kelvin Browne, Executive Director and CEO

Micah Donovan, Curatorial Installations Manager

Tara Fillion, Art Director

Garcia Gómez, Studio Coordinator

Sequoia Miller, Chief Curator

Rachel Weiner, Senior Manager of Marketing

Noel Yardley, Studio Coordinator

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