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ArtShow 2 Grow: A Review

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A Review by Heather L. H. Jordan



ArtShow 2 Grow. Shirley Brice Heath. Partners for Livable Communities. 2005 Alweis Films.

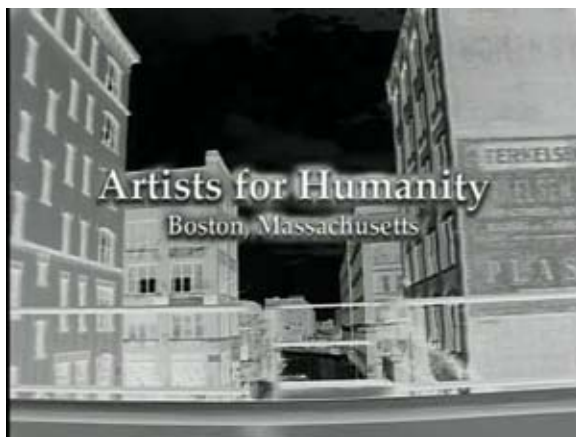
“If we don’t have art in our lives we can never really be healthy people. And if we don’t participate in creative endeavors, we can never really be whole and well-adjusted.”

—Frank X. Walker, Kentucky Center Governor’s
School for the Arts Director and Artist

Karen Springsteen’s earlier review of *ArtShow: Youth and Community Development* demonstrates Shirley Brice Heath’s interest in exploring “a wider range of modalities in community literacy.” With the release of her DVD *ArtShow 2 Grow* (read as “arts show how to grow”), Heath provides a high-quality documentary that includes interviews, on-site footage, and a director’s commentary.



This DVD documents five different community programs involving youth and adults in productive, artistic endeavors. Instead of just reading about these inspirational stories, the documentaries allow us to see the environments, facilities, materials, and outcomes of these projects, as well as the artists and administrators who work in these programs. Artists for Humanity documents a Boston program aimed at the fine arts. This program has two segments in the DVD, an original documentary from 2000, and an update filmed in 2005, so viewers can see progress of the program from its creation. Other documented community programs that focus on the fine arts are Student Illustrators in Rohnert Park, California, the Kentucky Center Governor’s School for the Arts in Louisville, Kentucky, and The Point in South Bronx, New York. The Food Project is another Boston program focusing on teaching the community how to gain and maintain agricultural sustainability.



Susan Rodgerson developed a community project in 1991 that allowed six young men from the Martin Luther King, Jr. School in Boston to participate in a constructive summer activity. Artists for Humanity started out in a small room with boards on the windows to keep out the gangs. “They painted everything they could drag in from the streets,” Rodgerson, now Executive Director for the program, said of the first six members during an on-camera interview. The first documentary leads viewers through images and a documentation of what once was to interviews with the original six, now-older artists and the story of the project’s progression. This includes not only an entrepreneurial day, where students were able to sell their work for profit, but also a gallery showing of the young artists’ work. Viewers come full-circle, from the image of the small room to the new building which was designed by one of the original six members, who has now become an architect. Through this documented story, the viewer gains a real sense of the continual investment back into Artists for Humanity, which now offers more space and materials to further new generations of artists and their educational growth.

Students from two small towns in Rohnert Park, California are members of Student Illustrators, a program where high school students make illustrations for other students and faculty in their school. The documentary shows the changes in Rohnert Park from a rural lifestyle to more of a suburban community—the scene transitions from a black-and-white, almost barren landscape, to a color storefront, visually showing this change in the community. Even though these changes have been taking place, there are still very few jobs available to teenagers, according to Jennifer Wolf, a teacher at the high school. Student Illustrators pro-

vides an opportunity for gifted and talented students to pursue techniques that otherwise might go unnoticed by the school system. This program also teaches business skills to high school artists and designers because they are paid with art supplies and field trips. In the documentary, viewers see that one of these field trips provided networking opportunities for two of the Student Illustrators to showcase their work in a San Francisco art show, which definitely seemed to encourage the students' artistic endeavors.



Kentucky Center Governor's School for the Arts: Louisville, Kentucky
 The segment on the Kentucky Center Governor's School for the Arts in Louisville uses interviews to overlay images of student artwork and classes that are available in this program. One female student from rural Moorhead, Kentucky, Naomi Sheehan, faced dyslexia and other challenges early in her education. The Governor's School gave her the opportunity to pursue her dream of becoming a visual artist. Beginning with an on-screen interview of Sheehan, images of her artistic talent are then displayed while she narrates her experience for the viewers. Frank X. Walker, director and artist for the Governor's School, emphasizes the need to provide this program to rural students. The video transitions are fluid and clearly show the audience what is at stake for members of a rural community who do not have access to larger artistic endeavors. Walker exemplifies the overarching theme of this documentary when he states "if we don't have art in our lives we can never really be healthy people. And if we don't participate in creative endeavors, we can never really be whole and well-adjusted." We also see how the Governor's School classes are interconnected; for example, Walker shares the story of one art class that attended a dance rehearsal in order to gain perspective on movement in their own artistic medium. Dance rehearsals, paintings, portraits, and interviews show viewers the multifaceted Governor's School for the Arts program.

Hunts Point

Hunts Point Industrial Park in South Bronx, New York got its start when four area artists (including a dancer, comedian and painter) began cleaning up abandoned buildings to offer something more to their community. In an interview with the four co-founders, each jokingly shares their desire to do more than just the standard nine-to-five job. Providing dance, art, music, communication development, theater, business, photography, and computer Internet classes, the program relies on volunteers and community involvement in order to thrive. One of the co-founders, Mildred Ruiz, explains, "People wanted to come in and

start their own programs, even without funding... This community took control of this organization and made it theirs." Starting as an abandoned warehouse building, the program grew as the level of community involvement grew. This section of the DVD provides images of the instructional segments as well as interviews with instructors, community members, and former youth in the neighborhood who have grown into professionals and come back to teach at The Point. Arthur Aviles, for example, is a world famous modern dance teacher who was formerly with the Bill T. Jones Dance Company. Now, he teaches dance and choreography to both youth and adult learners in the same neighborhood where he grew up. This documentary section also shows the ability to earn money from these artistic talents, which is exemplified in interviews and imagery of graffiti artists who were commissioned by Coke and Reebok to create advertising.



The Food Project: 2005, 12 minutes

The Food Project shows how a Boston community is able to provide agricultural sustainability with fully organic agriculture. The program relies on a group of area youth and adult volunteers to plant, grow, harvest, maintain, and sell their produce at local farmers' markets. From start to finish, the community is involved in every aspect of the process. This program is able to provide financial compensation to its contributors because of its profits from the produce sales. Although the student volunteers usually join the program for the money, many become invested in the process and continue to help even when financial compensation is no longer the motivation. This story is depicted in a twelve-minute documentary that includes sharp visuals and educational interviews that show possibilities for other community programs.

Artists for Humanity: 2005, 12 minutes

This section shows the growth of the Artists for Humanity program since the original 2000 documentary was filmed. Viewers see the decisions made for the new building location as well as the construction of the building itself. The hope, according to one artist, is to provide a location where the community and the gallery can work together. Another addition to this updated version of the Artists for Humanity documentary is the notion of art as business; the program allows students to develop skills that will help them find job opportunities. Audio clips overlay the still images of art inside the new gallery and footage of students working on their creations. Also, when selecting this segment, the viewer can either choose

to watch a follow-up documentary about the Artists for Humanity program that was included in the longer ArtShow segment, or she can select the photo gallery segment which provides still images from the accompanying documentary. All of these options make this segment ideal for in-class use for instructors.

The *ArtShow 2 Grow* DVD as a whole is visually stimulating, user-friendly, and highly informative for anyone interested in establishing and maintaining a community program where art and/or the environment are concerned. The ArtShow documentary done in 2000 is 56 minutes in length, the Artists for Humanity community project from 2005 is 12 minutes long, and The Food Project, also done in 2005, is also 12 minutes in length. Each of these three areas of focus has its own menu and links for more background and information. A viewer is led from one visually pleasing menu to the next via growing vines and is able to navigate easily through this DVD set up. Viewers can also opt to listen to director Heath's commentary, which overlays the visual images of the first community program, to gain further insight into the program's goals and achievements.

If a viewer chooses the ArtShow segment, she is in for a visually pleasing and educational experience. The winner of the Chris Award at the Columbus Film and Video Festival in Columbus in 2000 and the Gold Award at the World Fest Video and Film Festival in Houston (also in 2000) the ArtShow segment is a well-made and informative documentary that provides even more project distinctions.

This detailed visual and audio representation of various community programs that involve youth and adults in productive endeavors is available through Partners for Livable Communities at <http://livableresource.org/artshow2grow.html>. Included with the DVD is a complimentary print copy of *ArtShow: Youth and Community Development*, the resource guide and research report on youth learning in community organizations that was reviewed in this journal by Karen Springsteen. By clearly demonstrating and showing viewers the community programs and how they work, the *ArtShow 2 Grow* DVD is a valuable tool for educators and community members interested in building or exploring artistic and environmental literacy programs.

Heather L. H. Jordan is a Ph.D. student focusing on literacy studies and technology in the Rhetoric and Technical Communication Program at Michigan Technological University. In 2005, she received her master's degree in composition studies with a certificate in literature from The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio. This past year, she completed a Mae Jackson entry for the *African American Women Writers' Encyclopedia* and presented on ethnographic research at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Chicago, IL.