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SCHOOL & FAMILY

◀ SAPPHIRE COOPER AND FSU STUDENT ▲  
CREATE STREET ART WITH STENCILS AND CHALK

# GIVING A VOICE TO ISSUES

CAMPERS LEARN ABOUT ART AS CATALYST FOR CHANGE

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**A**s an assistant professor in FSU's Department of Art Education, Sara Scott Shields prepares art teachers for careers in public and private schools. When she learned that her students would have to meet a new requirement to earn their teaching certificates, she responded the way any good art educator would: with a creative solution.

Shields and her students worked to develop a framework and curriculum for the Art for Social Justice Interdisciplinary Summer Camp and invited middle and high school-age children to attend. The FSU students took the lead on the design of the camp and the actual instruction, which gave them classroom experience with kids in a low-pressure setting.

In its inaugural year, this two-week camp allowed participants to explore the intrinsic value of art and its importance as a catalyst for change. "Historically, the arts have been a way to give voice to issues that maybe words don't have the body for," Shields said.

Much of the content for the camp was developed in collaboration with Debi Barrett-Hayes, a veteran art educator at Florida State University's K-12 Charter Research School. She has taught art at a K-12 level for 35 years and is acclaimed for her work in the classroom. She explained that "kids spent the first week of camp looking inward. They made their own journals and they had prompts every day to think about and write about." These included questions about identity, causes campers care about, and how they might make a difference.

FSU student Logan Pattysyn was surprised by how conscious the campers were of the challenges our communities face. "I thought we'd have to feed them social issues but they know what they're passionate about. They've been very open and compassionate and they want awareness to be spread."

Out of the journaling exercises came individual, introspective art projects. FSU student Morgan Jackson described how the campers were encouraged to carefully consider and select the most appropriate materials.

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“We had a questionnaire asking how are you going to symbolize your ideas in your artwork. The students are thinking about what they’re using and how that affects their message.”

Campers were challenged to use a variety of materials in their projects and experiment with new methods. They had access to everything from paint and markers to digital design software and video equipment. To help give context to the art for social justice concept, campers were introduced to the work of contemporary artists who tackle social justice themes. Taking inspiration from these artists, campers thought about a broad spectrum of issues including environmental, animal, and human rights causes.

During the second week, campers were asked to direct their creativity outward and share their messages with the community. The issues of gun violence, discrimination and equality had been raised before the shooting in Orlando, which occurred between the first and second weeks of the camp. In light of that tragedy, many campers were moved to examine their concerns and express them in a public way.

Sapphire Cooper, 17, was one of them. Inspired by the street artist Banksy, she created temporary street art using stencils and chalk on SouthWood’s sidewalks. “Hopefully that will spread the message and have a domino effect. I’m not trying to force the issue on people, but I hope they’ll think about it.”

That idea of spreading awareness in a positive and collaborative way was one that echoed throughout the camp. Barrett-Hayes said that “in the world now, there’s a lot of talking without listening. In here, it’s a safe place to talk about your ideas and everyone’s



listening even if they don’t agree with you.”

Fifteen-year-old camper Makenna Callaghan was excited to be part of something that allowed for differing perspectives. “Someone might have an opinion on something and it’s their final word, there’s no more talking about it. Sometimes it’s hard, even with friends and family, and it shouldn’t be. This camp shows that art can help people start talking about things.”

As a culminating project, the campers are working as a group on the construction and decoration of a “little free library,” a small wooden box to hold books that will ultimately be located on Shumard Oaks Blvd. Anyone in the community is invited to take a book or bring one to share. Shields says that the goal of this project is to promote literacy and “give kids access to reading 24/7. It’s an engaging way to involve the community.” More than that, it underscores the camp’s teachings of philanthropy, reciprocity, the sharing of knowledge.

Camper Mackenzie Broome, 11, appreciates these lessons and is eager to carry the message forward through creative expression. “If you’re passionate about something that involves world problems and equality, it’s cool to express yourself through art.”

*Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Education and Exhibitions Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area’s umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*