

Participating Students

Vashon High School: Jayla Boston, Charlisa Chatman, David Cosey, Classie Ewing, Vincent Ford, Ahmed Hussein, Jordan Johnson, Keyon Jones, Jeremiah Lanham, Jonah Logan, Tyler Morris, Donyell Murphy, Michala Paul, Tanayah Qualls, Mykeal Sanders, Jorica Stanban, Jordan Stanbury, Zamaya Stewart, Shadae Survillion, Na'tavyah Williams.

Sumner High School: Quinton Beaver, Noel Burton, Isaac Harper, Melita Harry, Gabrielle Hughes, Jarrell Reese, Kadie Smith, Frankie Williams, Janice Williams, Kevon Williams, Lamon Williams, Marcellus Walker.

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Gallery Guide
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ArtReach: Sumner and Vashon High Schools



A School Worth Fighting For

At the start of the 2021–22 school year, CAM was thrilled to join a number of St. Louis arts organizations and community members of The Ville neighborhood on an initiative to keep Sumner High School open. Last year, Sumner was among a roster of schools in the Saint Louis Public School District that was facing closure due to low enrollment. As CAM was already preparing for our fifth year in partnership with Vashon High School—providing year-round classroom instruction with local visual artists—expanding the program to Sumner and helping lead the initiative was an easy decision.

Sumner In Focus

Founded in 1875, Sumner High School is the oldest African American high school west of the Mississippi River. The high school boasts illustrious American icons among its alumni, including comedian and activist Dick Gregory, three of the founding members



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of the sixties band The 5th Dimension, rock 'n' roll legend Chuck Berry, and the incomparable Tina Turner. Until 1927, Sumner was the only public Black high school in St. Louis. At its height, the school's enrollment numbered in the thousands, but in the past fifty years the school has declined along with the The Ville neighborhood in which it resides. At first, The Ville was one of the few neighborhoods in which St. Louis Black residents could live; however, the 1948 Supreme Court ruling against restrictive covenants saw St. Louis move toward desegregation as well as the depopulation of neighborhoods like The Ville. The neighborhood's fortunes further suffered from city disinvestment and other municipal policies that continue to make home ownership more difficult for native residents. As a result, The Ville is plagued with vacant buildings—many of which are owned and neglected by non-resident speculative buyers—and the crime that this engenders. As a result, enrollment in Sumner dropped to less than 250 students during the 2020–21 school year, prompting its entry on the district's closure shortlist.

The Ville Fights Back

Closing was not an option for Sumner's staunchly devoted alumni association, for whom Sumner Bulldog football games are still community events. Ville residents know the historical and cultural value of the high school in their neighborhood and were not going to permit its closure without a fight. Various alumni's impassioned pleas could be seen in local news outlets, and it was this advocacy that drew several of St. Louis's arts organizations into the fight. CAM joined a cohort of arts institutions and community organizations that include St. Louis Shakespeare Festival, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, STAGES St. Louis, Robert Crenshaw & 314 Movement Lab, Craft Alliance, and Planos for the People to create an arts-pathway initiative to attract students and families back to the school.

Since the beginning of this school year, students are able to choose from one of four arts pathways: visual arts, music, drama, or dance. During the final period of each school day, students have studio sessions with professional artists, a structured curriculum, and the supplies and necessary materials provided by each arts organization. The hope is that students and families will be drawn by the new class offerings, since previous downsizing at Sumner had resulted in the cancellation of many arts-focused classes. The publicity surrounding the unprecedented participation of St. Louis's leading arts organizations may also attract families back to the school. The investment of time and resources by these arts leaders expresses the quality of the program and elicits community pride. Although the district already runs an arts magnet school, Sumner distinguishes itself as one of the few



community high schools in the city with no barriers or applications for enrollment.

After only two months of planning and organizing, the school board approved the arts initiative plan and delivered a stay of closure, for the time being. Time will tell if this large-scale coordinated effort will revive this storied institution. The school has seven years to increase enrollment by at least thirty percent, a tall order considering the major challenges the overall community continues to face. But Sumner's winter showcase, which put the students' artwork—visual and performative—on full display garnered attention from local press, in print, on television, and on St. Louis Public Radio. The students are beginning to rally around the cause, and the city is taking notice.

We count it as a privilege to be invited to partner with Sumner, The Ville, and its residents in this vital endeavor. You can learn more about this initiative and the latest news on Sumner's website slps.org/sumner.

ArtReach Partnerships on Display

The expansion of ArtReach Partnerships to Sumner has presented the opportunity for our Resident Teaching Artists (RTAs) to further hone their teaching skills as well. Instead of a single opportunity to teach each project's requisite techniques, the RTA can repeat the lesson with a different set of students. For example, Yvonne Anguiano has been able to build upon the fiber art unit that resulted in *Inspirational Flags* with Vashon students, so this quarter Sumner students benefit from the experience Anguiano gained. Misato Pang learned a great deal teaching nonobjective painting in her Believable Experience course at Sumner, and was able to refine her presentation for a second quarter with Vashon students. Everybody gains.

Inspiration Flags

The multicolored flags hanging from the ceiling and wall are examples of the work Vashon students made

with fiber artist Yvonne Anguiano. For Anguiano, textiles are a metaphor for the fabric of society—the lives of many individuals woven together. With this in mind, Anguiano intended the making of fiber art to serve as a practice of hope and fellowship among the students throughout the quarter. While the students worked on the flags, Anguiano asked them to consider what inspires them. As the students discovered common inspirations, they were better able to work together and learn from one another as they tried different sewing and dying techniques to create their flags. Recognizing that this would be the first art project after their lengthy time away from in-person collaboration, Anguiano hopes that the flags serve as a gentle reminder to the students that they are not alone.

Yvonne Anguiano is an artist and dedicated community member. When they aren't working with students, they create formal attire for special events and create handmade items. Anguiano serves as Board President of Solid Lines Productions, a local, nonprofit theater company that produces accessible, inclusive, and diverse performances.

A Believable Experience

The works on view in this gallery include paintings and collages created by students from Sumner and Vashon High Schools. They are a result of exercises involving the intuitive and exploratory nature of art making. The nonrepresentational forms largely arose from automatic drawing practices introduced to the students by Misato Pang to build trust in their own intuition and break their reliance upon objective image making. This helped students to focus on the relationships between color, shape, and line. By learning to relate to imagery through form rather than content, the students experienced an alternative aesthetic.

Misato Pang is a painter and educator. She earned her BA from Brooklyn College and MFA from New York Studio School, and currently teaches at Webster University and St. Louis Community College. Her works overlap personal narrative and cultural events, some of which allude to current social phenomena and political discourse in Asia. She is fluent in Cantonese, Japanese, and English, and has participated in various residencies and exhibitions in the United States and Japan. Recently, her painting *Sunday Tree* was awarded the Best of Show in *Art St. Louis XXXVII, The Exhibition*.

Artist Trading Cards

At Sumner, students put their computer skills to work under the tutelage of local interdisciplinary artist Simiya Sudduth. In order to give students a crash course in graphic design, Sudduth tasked students with creating an original set of artist trading cards. Working in analog and then digital formats allowed



students to explore how color, composition, design, and typography are combined to tell a story. Students drew inspiration from card games, collectable trading decks, and tarot decks to create their own cards and tell their own stories. The featured examples of student illustrations range from the autobiographical to cards paying homage to their favorite TV shows or hobbies.

Simiya Sudduth is a mother, multidisciplinary artist, and art educator who maintains a fluid creative practice that explores the intersections of health, wellness, ecology, social justice, and spirituality. Sudduth's expansive creative practice ranges from creating digital illustrations to painting large-scale murals to public and gallery art installations to experimental sound healing performances.