ArtReach
The Art of Caring

ArtReach: The Art of Caring, installation view, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, March 8–August 11, 2024. Photo: Dusty Kessler.

CAM is pleased to present its annual student showcase from ArtReach, the Museum's suite of programs for K–12 schools aimed at providing support in classrooms where art is needed most. This showcase highlights work made during the first semester of the 2023–24 school year and explores the ArtReach curricular theme, "Social Justice and Healing." Artworks were made by students at Sumner, Vashon, and Clyde C. Miller Career Academy High Schools under the guidance of Resident Teaching Artists (RTAs) Colin McLaughlin, Jeremy Rabus, and Rodrick Whetstone.

Started in 2017 with Vashon High School, CAM's ArtReach Partnership ensures a consistent art curriculum is available for students year-round at participating schools through twice-weekly classes led by RTAs.

In 2019, CAM featured its first ArtReach student showcase, exhibiting artwork made by Vashon students with guidance by the first cohort of RTAs. In 2021, the ArtReach Partnership expanded when Sumner High School became CAM's second partner.

Now, for more than seven years, CAM has been providing teaching artist-led classes in creative disciplines from photography and found object installations to digital graphic design and improvisational performance in the classroom. ArtReach also supports short-term Intensive Workshops at select schools, as well as training the Resident Teaching Artist cohort for ArtReach classrooms and beyond.

Recognizing the power that art has to foster critical thinking and inspire empathy, RTAs have been instructing students how to tackle this year's curricular theme of social justice and healing through various artistic media. To encourage students to dive deeper as they considered their selected social justice issue, students were shown how to create brainstorm trees where they explored societal problems through three main avenues of Cause, Consequences, and Personal Costs. Asking the students to evaluate how issues have, and continue to, cost them personally allows them to insert themselves into these weighty issues and consider how they might be affected. For example, the causes and consequences of pollution may feel more abstract and far away until a student considers how litter makes their neighborhood less attractive or how car exhaust activates their asthma.

These brainstorming sessions also provided opportunities for students' perceptions to be challenged. For example, selecting "homelessness" as their social justice issue, one student wrote "[Unhoused people] don't want to work" as a cause. The instructor was then able to ask questions to encourage the student to consider the matter further. "True, some unhoused people may not wish to work. But if they do, can they show up to an interview in the same clothes they slept in on the street? Where can they take a shower or shave? Did you know that you can't receive payment or open a bank account if you don't have an address?"

Suddenly, a seemingly simple issue was more complicated, creating a need for the student to do more research.

The works on display in *The Art of Caring* demonstrate the various ways students explored the theme. An ArtSuit bearing a Black Lives Matter placard by a young woman at Vashon reflects her wrestling with the concept of Blackness being celebrated in mainstream American culture while, at the same time, Black authors are vilified. Another student created a poster about flooding, reflecting on her realization that natural disasters do not affect all people in the same way. Still, another student engaged in an artistic practice that captured their joy via dramatist and activist Augusto Boal's practice of image theatre. For this, students directed and pantomimed familiar scenes from their everyday lives, such as gossip at the barber shop or the teacher-favorite *Ratchet Popeye's* where students depicted a moment from a notorious fast food joint off of St. Louis' Kingshighway Blvd.

As students embark on their second semester of ArtReach with RTAs Bharat Ajari, Juan William Chávez, and Yvonne Anguiano, they continue to explore art as a vehicle for their opinions and ideas, as well as a call to action—so that they might leave the world they stand to inherit in a better state.

Students work on their ArtSuits. Photo: CAM staff.
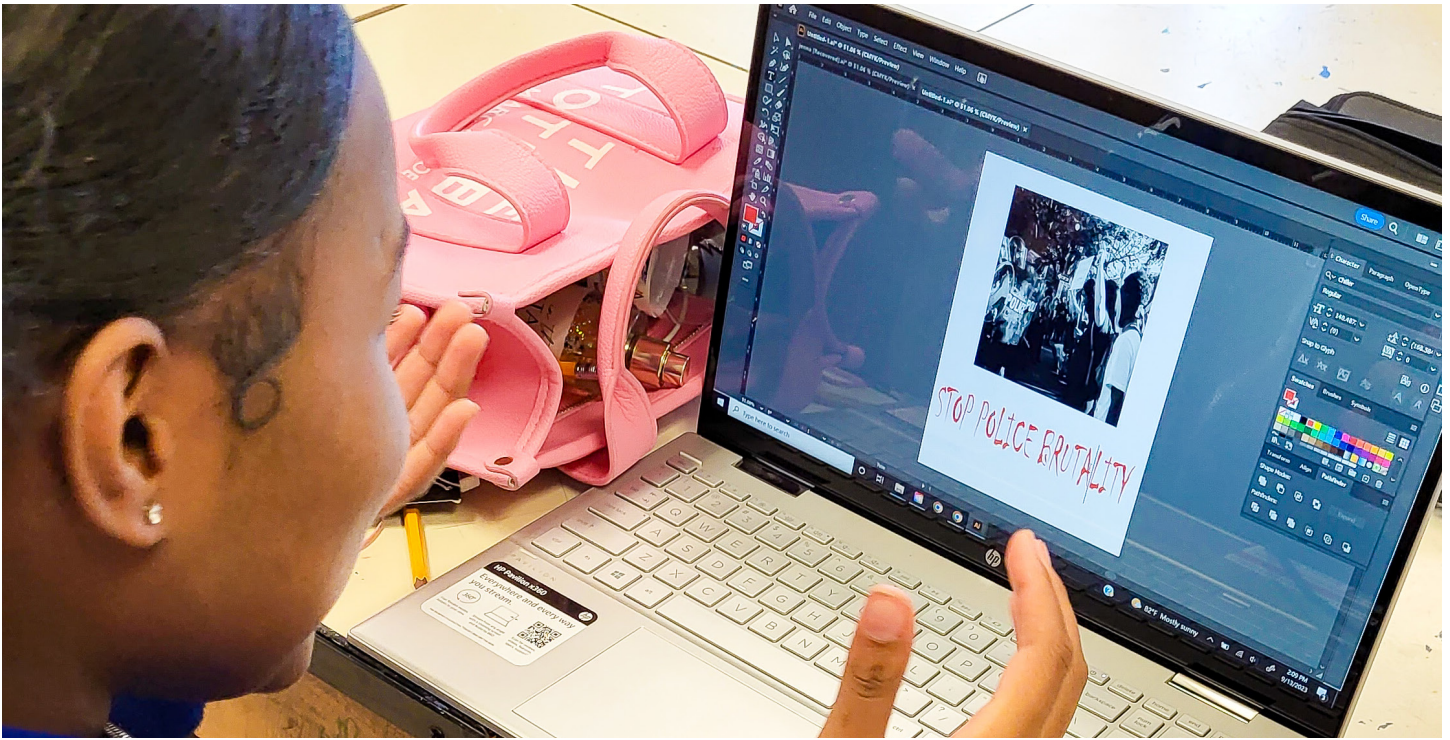
Student working on her graphic poster. Photo: CAM staff.

Participating Artists from Clyde C. Miller Career Academy High School: Dontay Couch, Cory Dunn, Laila Grandberry, Joslinn Liggins, and Allison Ruiz

Participating Artists from Sumner High School: China Edwards, Jhace Green, Jakobi Griffin, Delijah Harris, Kennedy Harris, Mora Hawkins, Kyren Johnson, Precious Johnson, Trevon Johnson, Kayia Jones, King Jones, Sharron Kimble, Jenna Vaughn, Frankie Williams, and Ronnell Williams

Participating Artists from Vashon High School: Trevon Ballinger, Brandon Bolden, Mariah Bradbury, Angela Carr, Dariah Collins, Nishay Davis, Timberly Frison, Malik Harris, Tylissa Howard, Daniel Little, Jamon Martin, Gekyle McNeal, Semaj Mitchell, Jakesse O'Kelley, Donta "Tay" Owens, Tyler Owens, Deja Pernell, Shaniyah Powell, Geremiah Pittman, Zariah Shanklin, Christopher Walker, Myasia Walker, Te'niyah Washington, Tyawna White, Kevon Witherspoon, and Nakylan Woodfork

Resident Teaching Artists featured in the exhibition:

Colin McLaughlin is a playwright, composer, actor, and teaching artist based in St. Louis, MO. His plays have been produced regionally and nationally, and often focus on social and economic justice. In 2019, his full-length play *Jailbird* premiered at the Missouri History Museum. In 2021, he served as the musical director and composer for *Mrs. Palmer's Honey*, an eight part audio play available on Spotify, and last November his play *1877*, a chronicle and celebration of the St. Louis General Strike, thrilled St. Louis audiences (all produced by Bread and Roses Missouri). In January 2023, his play *Action* brought the story of Percy Green, ACTION, and the 1972 "Unveiling of the VP King" to the stage. He has worked as a composer, musical director, actor, and teacher with Metro Theater Company, Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, The Repertory Theater of St. Louis, COCA, A Call To Conscience, and Bread and Roses Missouri.

Jeremy Rabus is a painter based in St. Louis, MO. His work has ranged from experimental collage to portraiture to the occasional landscape to a series of inner self-directed, channeled paintings to sculptural installations and mural work. Rabus's work has been exhibited in New York, Miami, Ohio, Montana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Los Angeles, Kansas City, and St. Louis. He is also a cat dad, raising three fuzzy babies at home with his partner.

Rodrick Whetstone is a graphic designer residing in St. Louis, MO and an Assistant Professor of Graphic Design Southern Illinois University Edwardsville in Edwardsville, IL. Through his work of bringing greater awareness to the instances of police brutality, he hopes to encourage a change within the system. Whetstone earned a BA from Grand View University in Des Moines, IA and an MA and a MFA in Graphic Design from The University of Iowa in Iowa City, IA.

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Open until 8:00 pm Fri

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