



BHC-MSS 0054

Guide to the Records of We Are Artists Everyone Exhibition By

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Black Smith, Michelle, Daniels, Joy, Williams, Yohuru, Bridgeport History Center

Title: Records of We Are Artists Everyone Exhibition

Dates: 2015-2020

Quantity: We don't know yet!

Abstract:

Language: English

Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Administrative History

Exhibition history

We Are Artists Every One: The Art Center in Action, 1970 – 1986 (hereafter We Are Artists) was a project designed to examine critically the Art Center, a productive, creative space that existed in Bridgeport, Connecticut during the 1970s and first half of the 1980s. Formally known as the A.B.C.D. Cultural Arts Center, the Art Center fostered artistic expression with a social service ethos in a community that had concurrent pockets of beauty, health, ugliness and dysfunction. The exhibit was designed to not only share and exhibit the history of the center itself, but generate material that can then be added to the archives of the Bridgeport History Center and therefore preserve an incredibly important cultural element of the city's past.

The core team consisted of cultural historian and curator Michelle Black Smith, Joy Daniels, and archivist Elizabeth Van Tuyl, and project scholar Dr. Yohuru Williams as the project scholar. Williams is an expert on a wide range of African American history topics including the Black Liberation Movement.

During the planning phase, in order to ascertain what art, artifacts and materials were desired and available for the exhibition, Black Smith researched individual persons and existing collections, interviewed art instructors and participants, and viewed and assessed the condition of the art and artifacts identified for use. Black Smith traveled to the Smithsonian Institute's Anacostia Museum in Washington, DC, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City to research movements combining art and social activism in the 1970s and 1980s in cities with profiles like Bridgeport. Newspapers, vertical files and newspaper clipping files were examined for information on the activities of A.B.C.D. during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and its funding and program responsibilities for and oversight of the Art Center.

Dr. Williams drew on his expertise of the Black Liberation Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and urban trends of the 1980s both locally and nationally to provide a context for the workings of the Art Center. Dr. Williams' research originated from libraries, private papers, and public records. He also documented his personal memories of the Art Center where his father was a music instructor.

In addition to coordinating planning project tasks, communication and overseeing fiscal responsibilities, Project Director Van Tuyl's duties included converting and editing the taped oral histories to mp3 format for use on the library's web site and WAV format for long term preservation on an external hard drive, Drive HQ cloud, and for placement with the Connecticut Digital Archive (CTDA). Portions of the oral histories were then used in the exhibition, and the full of the histories are available on the Connecticut Digital Archive. Assistant archivist Meg Rinn oversaw digital ingest of material besides the oral histories to CTDA and the final arrangements of the archival collection, which this finding aid is a part of.

The exhibition itself ran from September 27, 2019 and was anticipated to last until May of 2020. Unfortunately, it was shut down on March 14, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The exhibit contained descriptive panel text, audio material, visual material accessed through a digital kiosk, original art created by Art Center instructors and students, and artifacts and memorabilia, as well as two interactive boards for visitors. These are documented through original materials and photographs within the collection, available both physically at the Bridgeport History Center and as an online exhibit available at the Connecticut Digital Archive:

<https://ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/110002%3Awaecollection>

Through the WAE exhibition, themes that are particularly resonating to Bridgeport's cultural legacy were addressed both through the exhibit and special lectures. Ranging from an emphasis on Black Arts, Black, Latino and Women's Empowerment, and Anti-Poverty and/Urban Revitalization movements, the presence of these themes helped to highlight the intersectionality of such topics when looking at the larger fields of American history, sociology, ethnic studies, and art history. Events hosted by the Bridgeport Public Library to address this elements included:

The Bridgeport Cultural Arts Center and the National Black Arts Movement, Friday, September 27, 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm. Lecture by Professor Yohuru Williams

Art Center Student-Teacher Panel Discussion Saturday, September 28 11:00 am - 12:30 pm, Art Center Alumni

History of the Art Center

The Art Center was a creative, cultural, social and political space that flourished in the 1970s and early 1980s. At its strongest and most active, the Art Center was a model for social change that broke barriers, resisted boundaries, and promoted diversity organically as well as intentionally. Approximately 15 years after its brilliant beginning, the Art Center slowly became one more victim in the statistical analysis on the impact drugs, crime, no funding and even less care can have on a vulnerable community. A casualty of shifting priorities and abandoned for a new national ideal, the Art Center lives on in the work created, the photographs that bear witness to shared experiences, and the trajectory of lives affected by both its existence and its demise.

Scope and Content note:

Arrangement Note:

In the lead up to the installation and opening night of the Bridgeport History Center exhibition, *We Are Artist Everyone: the Art Center in Action, 1970-1986*, archivists Elizabeth Van Tuyl and Meg Rinn agreed that it was essential to create a processing plan for exhibition material upon the exhibit's conclusion. This is due in no small part to the fact that one of the goals of the exhibition was to generate documentation for Art Center's history in the absence of original records. The archivists developed series and subseries, and modified it as needed.

The first series is the grant application itself, including the final grant draft Series I, Grant application submitted to the Connecticut Humanities, as well as supporting material etc. The final draft of the grant, as submitted to CTH, is placed first in the series. All other material follows.

Series II, Working files, represents the research and development that went in to preparing the grant, exhibition, and events. Two subseries exist in original order: the first is curator Michelle Black Smith's work on both a flash drive and manuscript notes and the second is archivist Elizabeth Van Tuyl's files. Additional files from other participants in the exhibition's planning and implementation phases are expected to be added in the future.

Exhibition materials comprise the third series and make up the bulk of the collection. Subseries 1, exhibition items and panels, contains the physical copies of panels, item labels, and facsimiles that were a part of the exhibition, along with object photographs and digital copies. Subseries 2, the oral histories, are actually their own independent collection given the identifier BHC-ORH 004, but are cross listed in this collection as they were generated as a part of the grant *and* exhibition items unto themselves.

Subseries 3, photographs, is currently undergoing refinement. It will consist of images from the Arts Center itself and photographs of activities from the various events that were a part of the exhibition. Subseries 4 contains paperwork related to these events, including opening weekend. Subseries 5, videos, is undergoing refinement but will include a copy of the opening night's lecture along with other video footage.

Subseries 6, the Kiosk, is currently undergoing research to find the best way to preserve the Kiosk's material. It contained interactive elements related to the Arts Center including the oral histories, photographs, the art itself, and a survey about the exhibit.

The last subseries, 7, contains ephemera such as flyers, the guest register, and other promotional material for the exhibition and events.

Administrative information:

Provenance: Acquired directly from individuals involved with exhibition and actively created by Bridgeport History Center archivists.

Preferred Citation:

Records of We Are Artists Everyone Exhibition (BHC-MSS 0054) Bridgeport History Center, Bridgeport Public Library.

Names and Subject Tracings

Personal names

Anderson, Cindy
Black Smith, Michelle
Bridgeforth, Wendy
Cary, Pattie
Gardner, Teddy Daniel
Grant, Ryan
Johnson, Ben

Stamats, Richard
Tisdale, Charles
Williams, Cyril Lamont
Williams, Ralph
Williams, Yohuru

Corporate names

A.B.C.D. Cultural Arts Center

Subject tracings

Art--Study and teaching--Activity programs

Detailed box and folder listing

Box 1

Series II, Working files

Subseries 1, Michelle Black Smith

1. Flash drive, Cultural arts center project-planning WAE implementation, 2015-2019
2. Working schedule, 2016
3. Research, 2015-2016
4. Correspondence and planning, 2015-2018
5. Notes and general correspondence, 2016-2018
6. Notes and general correspondence, 2016-2018
7. Connecticut Humanities feed back from grant draft, 2017
8. Bridgeport Art Trail booklet, November 2017
9. Mailing list and post-its from Black Wall Street event, 2017
10. Installation notes, 2018

Subseries 2, Elizabeth Van Tuyl

11. CT Humanities Council, 2018
12. Contacts, 2018-2019
13. Contracts, 2018-2019
14. Exhibition check list, 2019
15. Funding, 2018
16. Metrics, 2018
17. Programs, 2018
18. Publicity, 2018-2019
19. Other admin, 2016-2019
20. Administrative costs, expenses, 2017-2019
21. Administration costs, expenses, Joy Daniels invoices, 2018-2019

Series III, Exhibition

Subseries 4, Events

22. Opening night acknowledgements, September 27, 2019
23. Opening weekend promotional material, September 27-28, 2019
28. Opening night expenses, September 27, 2019

Subseries I, Exhibition items

24. Facsimiles displayed in exhibition cases, 2019
25. Exhibition panel drafts, 2019
26. Labels for exhibition items, 2019
27. Exhibition checklist and exhibitions and site interpretation, September 2019

Subseries 2, Oral histories

See BHC-ORH #004

1. Anderson, Lucinda "Cindy" (1 cassette tape; 1 mp3)
2. Black-Smith Tompkins, Michelle (1 cassette tape; 1 mp3)
3. Bridgeforth, Wendy J. (1 cassette tape; 1 mp3)
4. Carey, Patricia S. (1 cassette tape; 1 mp3)
5. Gardner, Teddy Daniel (1 cassette tape; 1 mp3)
6. Grant, Ryan (1 cassette tape; 1 mp3)
7. Stamats, Richard (1 cassette tape; 1 mp3)
8. Williams, Cyril Lamont (1 cassette tape; 1 mp3)
9. Williams, Ralph (1 cassette tape; 1 mp3)
10. Williams, Yohuru (1 cassette tape; 1 mp3)

Box 2

Series III, Subseries 6, Kiosk

1. Kiosk, 2018-2019

Subseries III, Subseries 7, Ephemera

2. Flyers, 2018-2020
3. Guest register pages, 2019-2020
4. Photocopies of clippings about the Arts Center, 1980s