Art, Care, & Hope: The Recipe for Expression

Art is a powerful form of expression. History shows that artists have created work that’s helped us acknowledge divinity, honor people of importance, root for love and celebrate the potential of our environments, even in times of uncertainty. As Program Manager, I am excited to infuse my skills as an artist and educator to support more meaningful connections to art with our partners. A hands-on way to achieve that is through art making. Recently, I tried this out by leading an art workshop with Project Hope.

Project Hope is a multi-service agency at the forefront of effort to move families up and out of poverty. It provides low-income women with children access to education, jobs, housing, and emergency services, fosters their personal transformation, and works for broader systems change. Complementing the support services offered, artwork brightens the ambiance and enriches the spirit of warmth, dignity, and care for all who walk through the doors. Project Hope selected a few intimate watercolors by artist Jeannie Lindheim through its placement visit. After hearing that Project Hope lacked art programming, I was ecstatic to lead an art workshop based on the Lindheim paintings that generated such a positive response from the participants.

The theme was “Woman as Storyteller: Exploring Symbolism in Painting with Watercolor.” Lindheim’s paintings often have abstract forms that lead viewers to open interpretations of what’s happening and what it could mean. The goal was for participants to focus on abstract forms or symbols they can create that tell stories of importance to them. Despite the fact that more than 80% had never painted before, everyone was thoroughly engaged in mixing colors, experimenting with different types of brush strokes, and cultivating shapes they could use to symbolize their life experiences.

To bring the experience full circle, Project Hope provided all women who participated with a copy of “The Art Lesson” by Tomie dePaola. “It’s not just about a singular experience. We want the women to know that what they do and learn can be shared with their children. Art and literacy can be tied to each other to keep the cycle of sharing skills and experiences going,” says Donna Henderson, Director of Adult Educational Services.

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Art Gives Meaning to Lives

MY ART CONNECTION adventure as Executive Director began in 2010, coinciding with Fay Chandler’s 88th birthday and the opening of “Just As I Am” at the Cyclorama and will conclude at the end of June. What an amazing journey it has been! My first day, I was feted with an original Fay Chandler artwork, a welcome gift from Fay’s cousin Jane and the first of many. I knew then that I would have a love affair working at The Art Connection and, as a benefit, increase my personal collection of art, while our organization made art collectors out of nonprofit recipient social service agencies all over Boston. In return, to date, I have donated over 50 photographs to community agencies.

MY PRIMARY FOCUS during my first three years was stabilizing the finances, cutting the deficit I inherited and raising enough each year to cover expenses. By FY13 and again in FY14, we were able to operate with a small surplus, of which I was exceedingly proud. However, especially after our dear founder’s passing in 2015, the gap in funding has been a challenge. As one solution, we have grown our signature Art BINGO event to raise more than 10% of our annual budget; we have asked artists to contribute to The Art Connection (their artwork donations go to the recipient agencies not to The Art Connection); and, yes, I have asked everybody in my family and friends’ circle to contribute per Fay’s strategy!

NOW IT WILL BE someone else’s turn, but we will need your help. With new Board leadership and new Executive leadership to come, we look to a strong future. I have tried to lay the groundwork for success. We have wonderful staff members in Sarah Shallbetter with over 16 years of institutional memory and loyalty to our mission. We acquired fresh energy when I hired Chanel Thervil, who is using her art educator degree to add art-making experiences for agency clients in conjunction with our placements.

I WILL CONTINUE TO LOVE The Art Connection, and, as a donating photographer, take joy in each of my works that is placed. I will likely stay on the Expansion Committee and will continue to cheer on the success of our “sister” sites around the country (and world!) Art BINGO will always have a place in my heart after bringing it along for six years – expect to see me there in future years. As I leave the organization in the capable hands of whomever the Board chooses as my successor, I send best wishes to all. Please make a place to support The Art Connection in your personal giving.

Susan Collings
Executive Director
“B-I-N-G-O” has been joyfully shouted 72 times now, by hundreds of guests over the past six years of Art Bingo, our annual fundraiser. Those who win have the opportunity to bring home an original work of art, juried from a diverse pool of submissions. We love our community of artists who submitted works to be included in this year’s event. We also received 55 donated silent auction items, including wine baskets, vacation homes, theater tickets, and restaurant gift cards.

For those in attendance, we all know that no one goes to Art Bingo simply to win fantastic art. We all believe in the mission of The Art Connection and understand the vital role that art plays in our daily lives—regardless of economic situation or location.

Our Bingo Callers were joined by Master of Ceremony Mike Kelley, who led a high-energy evening with artworks donated by artists Marilyn Levin, Suzanne Hodes, Anne Silber, Timothy Wilson, Leann Shamash, Jill Weber, Ellen Rich, Aline Lotter, Prilla Smith Brackett, Thaddeus Miles, Henry Olds, and Grace Galgay.

This year’s Annual Art BINGO Artist Award was presented to Ellen Rich, a five year Art Bingo artist, donor to The Art Connection placement program since 2000, and volunteer since our beginning years! A new award went to Board member Michael Bacon and Tim Burgers for the “Fabulous Food Displays” they have created each year for us at this event.

We were joined by nearly 50 amazing volunteers, who ensured the venue was set-up and cleaned up, and assisted with other logistics. Our event planning committee, led by our wonderful staff, would like to thank all who sponsored the event, purchased tickets, or just attended. It was a pleasure to see our friends and supporters, old and new.

And we hope to see YOU next year!

**Rebecca Clower**
Art Connection Board Member

**Ellen Rich**
receiving the Art BINGO Artist Award from Susan Collings.

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**Recent Art Selections . . .**

**Phyllis Berman,** *These,* oil on canvas, placed at La Alianza Hispana in Boston. Serving the Latino Community and residents of the surrounding neighborhoods to empower individuals and families, strengthen communities and develop leaders.

**Peter B. Boyer,** *Space Sheet Collage,* fabric collage on canvas, placed at MSPCC/Eliot in Jamaica Plain. Their mission enhances the quality of lives of the youth and families they serve and being inspired to make a difference.

**Maria Morabito,** *Summer,* oil on canvas, placed at La Alianza Hispana in Boston.

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PROJECT HOPE’S VISION IS ROOTED IN THE CONCEPT OF TRANSFORMATION, the process through which women gain the tools, self-esteem and confidence necessary to take control of their lives and develop the courage to seek a better future for their children, despite the enormous challenges they face. It feels great knowing that The Art Connection’s partnership can add creative expression through art as a part of their toolkit.

Chanel Thervil
Program Manager