



CultureWork: Current Issue

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Community Arts and Cultural Context: The Legacy of June King McFee and Vincent Lanier

In February, Drs. Paul Bolin, Kristen Congdon, and Laurie Hicks visited the University of Oregon to present at a symposium titled *Community Arts and Cultural Context: The Legacy of June King McFee and Vincent Lanier*. The participants addressed the legacy of Drs. McFee and Lanier as well as their influence on current research related to community arts. This issue of CultureWork features each of the papers presented at the symposium.

Quotes, Qualms, and Questions: The Impact of June King McFee and Vincent Lanier on My Life and Beyond. Dr. Paul Bolin, University of Texas

Explorations of Visual Culture: Written on the Body. Dr. Laurie Hicks, University of Maine

Community Arts in a Digital Age. Kristin G. Congdon, University of Central Florida

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Quotes, Qualms, and Questions:

The Impact of June King McFee and Vincent Lanier on My Life and Beyond

Professor Paul Bolin

University of Texas

It is an honor to be invited to be with you today, here on the campus of the University of Oregon. I consider it a great privilege to be asked to share with you some of my reflections regarding two remarkable art educators who have influenced me, the lives of many others, and the entire field of art education in such profound ways. It is with an opportunity like this, to pause and look toward an earlier time, that I can perceive in very clear and direct ways the impact these two individuals have had on me, both personally and professionally. And, for their influence I am extremely grateful.

Some Context

I was a graduate student in the Department of Art Education at the University of Oregon between the years 1979 and 1986. Thus, at this very time 25 years ago I was a master's degree student taking classes in Lawrence Hall from faculty members June King McFee, Beverly Jones, Rogena Degge, Gordon Kensler, and Jack Bergner. Also in that year, Tom Linehan and Terry Barrett, both from The Ohio State University, were here as visiting instructors in the Department. For six of seven years between 1979 and 1986, I was a graduate student on campus, completing my master's degree in 1980 and my Ph.D. in 1986. After graduation, I had the privilege of working and teaching within the Department for the next five years.

As a graduate student I was given the opportunity to come in contact with June McFee and Vincent Lanier through their engaging writings and by way of face-to-face conversations. This was a period of significant questioning and discussion in art education, leading to a reassessment and the shifting of priorities within the field. June McFee and Vincent Lanier were two noted contributors to this scholarly debate and re-examination of art education. The three of us speaking here today-- Kristin Congdon, Laurie Hicks, and I--along with scores of other graduate students from art education and across the campus, were beneficiaries of June and Vincent's spirited participation in this academic reappraisal and critique of the field. The work of June and Vincent led and promoted an expansion of art education that embraced, among other things, a strong community-based orientation.

This was a time of amazing energy and tension within the Department and the whole of art education. Reflecting on this dynamic context surrounding my tenure as a graduate student at the University of Oregon, this paper examines some of the fundamental beliefs expressed by June McFee and Vincent Lanier, as recorded through their writings and conversations. Using selected quotes offered by June and Vincent as benchmarks, many of which raised qualms within the field and initiated questions when they were made, this paper addresses how the words and perspectives of these two individuals have established and continue to form the foundation and direction for much of my work in art education.

Vincent Lanier

One of my greatest regrets in art education is that my years as a graduate student did not coincide well with Vincent Lanier's time as a faculty member in the Department of Art Education at the University of Oregon. When I arrived on campus in the fall of 1979, Vincent was away on leave. He returned to his faculty position in the Department the following year, but during the previous summer I had finished my master's degree and accepted a one-year middle school art teaching position in Lebanon, Oregon. The next academic year (1981-82), I began my doctoral studies in art education, but Vincent had then moved to Tucson, initiating his tenure at the University of Arizona. Vincent's final years at the University of Oregon and my first years here as a student did not mesh together well, a circumstance I do heartily regret.

Even though I was unable to take graduate classes from Vincent, his influence on me has, nonetheless, been significant. Throughout the 1980s, I had the opportunity to meet Vincent at various National Art Education Association conferences, primarily through introductions made by my graduate student peers who took classes from him during the year I had been away from campus. I was intrigued by this man who spoke his mind about art education, and did so with such vitality and passion. I learned a great deal about art education through listening to what he had to say, and also gained much from observing how he communicated his beliefs with such clarity and fervor. Moreover, not only did the content and style of his conversation at these conferences fascinate me, but the chosen forum for his discussion did so as well.

Vincent's daily routine at a conference was to "hold court," as we graduate students called it. Throughout the days of the conference, Vincent positioned himself at a strategic location in the conference hotel lobby or at the confluence of the hotel escalators, to greet, discuss, and lament the condition of art education with those he knew as they stopped by. And, because he was Vincent, he knew the majority of those who strolled passed. Needless to say, his

deliberately chosen location at the conference was filled with as much vigorous and electrified conversation as what occurred in most scheduled conference sessions.

I am not alone in this memory of Vincent's "courtly" participation at conferences. Ron MacGregor, writing respectfully yet wittily about Vincent, offers that his vibrant contribution to art education,

could be documented at any NAEA convention, where he would install himself in a chair in the lobby, and a steady stream of friends, admirers, and critics too, would stop by to chat and exchange greetings. The success of a convention hotel was, for Vincent, proportional to the comfort and quality of its foyer armchairs. (MacGregor, in Lanier, 1998, pp. 45-46)

Prior to being introduced to Vincent Lanier at a National Art Education Association conference, my first encounter with him came through one of his writings. This occurred during my first week of graduate study here at the university, which I remember quite well. As a student in Dr. Beverly Jones's course, History and Philosophy of Art Education, we were handed to read a purple-inked mimeographed copy of Vincent's 1975 article, "Objectives of Art Education: The Impact of Time." One section of the historically-directed article read:

To supplement earlier notions of art activities as limited to the training of artists and as genteel accomplishments for young ladies in finishing schools, that period ["nineteenth century America"] developed the concept of using school art as an adjunct to industrial development. Specifically, school art was to be used to reveal talented youngsters who might be trained as industrial designers in the newly burgeoning factories of the United States, primarily in New England. (Lanier, 1975, p. 180)

The notion that art instruction in schools could be used in the service of industry, particularly in nineteenth-century New England, was an idea that caught my curiosity and soon afterward propelled me toward an investigation of drawing education in nineteenth-century Massachusetts, a topic that would become the focus of my doctoral dissertation.

I completed my doctoral dissertation, titled, "Drawing Interpretation: An Examination of the 1870 Massachusetts 'Act Relating to Free Instruction in Drawing,'" in 1986. The hub of my research was a law enacted in Massachusetts, which mandated that drawing be a required subject of study in all public schools throughout the state, taking effect in May 1870. An initial motivation for the legislative action leading to enactment of this drawing education law was, as Vincent wrote, for drawing to be used in the service of industry, particularly in late nineteenth-century New England. Research conducted for my historically-based doctoral dissertation was the beginning of what has become a 20-year exploration into art education and legislative action, particularly as it occurred in New England in the final third of the nineteenth-century.

Working from this initial investigation of the Massachusetts Drawing Act, I have had opportunities to investigate and uncover a number of fascinating people and events from American history, and bring to light their connection with art education. One such historical event, perhaps of particular interest to those in the Arts and Administration Program, was the first large-scale music festival held in the United States. The National Peace Jubilee and Musical Festival occurred for five days in the summer of 1869 in Boston (Bolin, 1997). This was a grandiose affair of the time, yet it has been nearly relegated to the lost archives of American history.

This Boston-based peace festival and music celebration was conducted as an attempt to help unify a fractured and bitter nation at the conclusion of the United States Civil War. Held in the largest covered "coliseum" of its kind in America, seating 50,000 and built exclusively for this magnificent celebratory event, the five-day vocal and instrumental musical extravaganza drew thousands of participants and overflow crowds each day from throughout North America and Europe (Gilmore, 1871). The centerpiece for this event was the most powerful pipe organ every constructed, which measured 30 feet wide and 20 feet deep. Music rang from the organ's nearly 1,800 pipes, the largest of which reached a height of more than 40 feet. President Ulysses S. Grant and dignitaries from around the world were in attendance. It was truly an affair of colossal proportions, particularly so as it occurred in the years directly following the Civil War. There is much more that could be said about this event. But, it will need to be saved for another time.

So, thank you Vincent. Your statement about drawing education and its ties to industrial development in late nineteenth-century New England, which I read during my first week of graduate school, became a catalyst that initiated and has motivated my historical investigations for the past 20 years.

Vincent's writings have been described as "a stream of provocative articles designed to stir things up" (MacGregor in Lanier, 1998, p. 45). And, Vincent's writings have indeed accomplished this. Titles such as "The Teaching of Art as Social Revolution (1969b)," "The Future of Art Education or Tiptoe Through the Tea Leaves (1976)," "The Five Faces of Art Education (1977)," "A Plague on All Your Houses: The Tragedy of Art Education (1974)," and "One Word is Worth A Thousand Pictures (1969a)" attest to Vincent's hard-hitting, provocative, and assertive character.

In 1984, Vincent brought together a number of his fundamental beliefs about art education in one of his culminating articles: "Eight Guidelines for Selecting Art Curriculum Content." These eight guidelines, stated with clarity and conviction, have directed much of my thought and action in art education. Two of these guidelines, in particular, influenced greatly my beliefs about art education as a graduate student, and still impact my thinking today. These two tenets are Vincent's beliefs that within all contexts of art instruction, "Content [should] be centered on artifacts well within the cultural milieu of the learners" (p. 233), and educators should, "Structure the content of art curriculum so that it moves from the familiar to the unfamiliar" (p. 234).

These two of Vincent's guidelines for developing curriculum and organizing instruction in art education have for years guided my overall thinking and daily practice in art education. To illustrate this, I will share one instructional example I developed 20 years ago, soon after reading this article by Vincent. However, even though this is a resource I constructed some time ago, it remains an instructional tool I use regularly, even now. The project is called the *Comic Book Art Book*. This book was developed, based on my experience working with teenagers. Through my daily contact with adolescents I discovered that comic books were prominent "artifacts well within the cultural milieu" of many of them. For this reason, following Vincent's admonition, my purpose and goal in using comic books as curricular content was to have learners move from studying content that was "familiar to the unfamiliar." In this way I was working to achieve both proposals Vincent was supporting.

The outcome of my effort has been significant. Hundreds of people, young and old, in school and outside of a school context have had access to the *Comic Book Art Book*. Through these encounters, readers of the book, I believe, have been moved from the world of the "familiar to the unfamiliar." Utilizing the readers' interest in and knowledge of comic book characters, narratives, objects and settings, my role as author of the book was an attempt to connect the past with the present--to begin with what was familiar to the reader and then help move them to the unfamiliar--information I wanted them to know. The following are just a few of many examples from the pages of the book that I could show and discuss.

I found that many comic book readers were familiar with the character holding this curved-bladed spear. My purpose was to begin with the object of their familiarity, and help move them into unfamiliar territory. Through looking at and reading this book, I wanted the reader to learn that this particular type of implement is called a *naginata*. A *naginata* is a particular type of spear, originating in Japan, with a head like a sword blade, curling back very near the point. It is sometimes referred to as the "woman's spear," because women were taught to use it, mainly for exercise, but also out of necessity in case they were called upon to employ it in conflict. Also, I used the environmental setting for another comic book character to introduce learners to information about the Colosseum in Rome and similar structures in other Italian cities. The spiral designs, so characteristic of Minoan pottery motifs (c. 1800-1700 BC), are found embedded in the pages of comic books. And, still another setting from a comic book scene contains visual references to the carved wooden animal head unearthed from the Oseberg ship burial (825 AD), which is very familiar to many art historians. Our well-known everyday lives are filled with references to a world long ago or to an unfamiliar culture. What can be done to help people move from residing in a place that is familiar and secure, and to expand their aspiration and knowledge-base in order to learn about and from a world that rests outside their current place of knowledge and comfort?

Vincent's two keystone recommendations for structuring instructional content in learning so that study is made of "artifacts well within the cultural milieu of the learners" and "so that it moves from the familiar to the unfamiliar" have been primary motivators for much of my thinking and activity in art education. In so doing, Vincent expanded the notion of what art education could (and should) be, emphasizing instead a wide range of objects, contexts, learning experiences and encounters that occur beyond the parameters of public school, and embrace non-traditional community-based art endeavors.

June King McFee

I began graduate school just at the time June McFee and Rogena Degge's book, *Art, Culture and Environment* (1980) was published. I read this book during my first term of graduate study, as it was assigned for June's engaging and endearing introductory course in the Department of Art Education: Art in Society. *Art, Culture, and Environment* has done more than any other text to influence my own perspectives of art education. Its clear argument in support of democratizing the arts, focus on individual differences of learners, discussion of the critical import of understanding culture and context in order to negotiate the world of art, and inclusion of the built environment and community assessment as essential parts of art education make it, for me, a decisive text within the field. Over the years it has become the book I most often refer to in my teaching.

As a graduate student, I was also introduced to June's earlier book, *Preparation for Art* (1970). Along with presenting me with captivating broad-based ideas about art education that were new to this young graduate student, *Preparation for Art* accomplished much more. *Preparation for Art* confirmed as worthwhile some of the thoughts, notions, and questions I was developing on my own about the nature of art, the function of art in the manifestation of culture, and the breadth of what art education is and what it could possibly be. I began to personalize these ideas and questions, and connect them with tangible objects from my own experience and daily life. Objects and structures around me and within my community took on new meaning and significance. A lifetime of constructed boundaries starkly separating learning in school and living in the world began to dissipate. Now, learning and living were becoming fused, and I began to perceive my tangible surroundings in new and exciting ways.

Reflecting on that time, now 25 years ago, it becomes clear that my current and longstanding interest in and involvement with the field of material culture studies is connected directly to the ideas presented by June in *Preparation for Art* (1970). Her delineation of "art" in this volume, which I encountered as a graduate student, is very similar to Thomas Schlereth's definition of material culture I came across a few years ago, that has shaped my view of the field of material culture studies. For comparison, in *Preparation for Art* (1970), June wrote:

Art is that form of human behavior by which man [or woman] purposefully interprets and enhances the quality or essence of experience through the things he [or she] produces--from the simple enhancement of a tool to the expression of his [or her] deepest feelings and profound projections in painting, sculpture, architecture, and city planning. (p. 30)

Similarly, in his description of material culture, Schlereth (1985) offered that, "Material culture is that segment of humankind's biosocial environment that has been purposely shaped by people according to culturally dictated plans" (p. 5). In support of this notion, Deetz (1977) described material culture to include "all artifacts, from the simplest, such as a common pin, to the most complex, such as an interplanetary space vehicle" (p. 24), or "everything from a pot to a

city””(Berger, 1992, p. 8). It is not evident that June used the term "material culture" within the pages of *Preparation for Art*, but her discussion of a wide variety of "artifacts" (p. 39) from various times and cultural locations has helped to shape my thinking with regard to the tremendous value of artifact study and the investigation of material culture.

It was through *Preparation for Art* (1970) and June and Rogena's *Art, Culture, and Environment* (1980) that I had my initial contact with the cross-disciplinary field of material culture studies, as it emerged from June and Rogena's stated recognition of the need for art education to study "design in clothing, household goods, cities, buildings, television, movies, magazines, books, and advertising””(p. 6). The authors' statement that, "material culture and art continuously educate the members of a cultural group into the behavior patterns of a given society" (p. 280), was my introduction to the notion of "material culture." Since that time I (along with my good friend Doug Blandy and a few other colleagues in art education) have been able to share with many others the important benefits of engaging in the holistic and multidisciplinary field of material culture studies. I am currently teaching a graduate seminar course at the University of Texas at Austin, titled *Exploration of Material Culture*, which continues to be one of my most satisfying instructional experiences.

A new project for me within material culture studies is currently emerging. It connects directly to something June wrote about in *Preparation for Art*, which I encountered as a graduate student, and links to an interest I have had since I was a young boy. This developing investigation into a particular kind of material culture object surfaces from the questions raised in the following statement made by June:

Have you ever wondered why we decorate money? Why do we go to the great cost of minting coins and engraving currency? Apparently decoration gives added meaning. From ancient times to the present we have enhanced the value of money by decorating it with symbolic forms. We use images of our cultural heroes, our mottoes of faith, and our national seal to authenticate the worth of a coin. The decoration of baskets, pottery, tools, and implements indicates a need of [hu]mankind to enhance the appearance of things he [or she] uses. Where the symbols used are part of the folklore, the enhancement has direct value in maintaining the culture. (McFee, 1970, pp. 37-38)

As objects of material culture, coins are carriers and communicators of particular national values, and are thus perceived to portray the beliefs we embrace as a collective people. We emboss our coinage with images and motifs that act as reflections of ourselves. This is not the place today to embrace a thorough discussion of all the questions I am currently asking regarding coins (with an emphasis on US coinage), but the following are some of the basic queries guiding my initial investigation:

- What imagery has been placed on US coins, and why?
- When and why did the shift occur from placing various personifications of "Liberty" on US coins, to replace them with images of noted political figures?
- Why are the images of so few women represented on US coins?
- What roles have professional artists and designers played in the designing of US coins over the years?
- Why were images of Native Americans displayed on the one cent piece (1859-1909) and five cent piece (1913-1938)? How did the US public respond to these particular designs?
- What motivated the shift in the US one cent piece from displaying wheat stalks on the reverse of the coin to include, instead, the Lincoln Memorial, in 1959?
- Why was a fasces included in the design of the "Mercury dime" when it was introduced in 1916?
- What do the two types of flora, as well as the torch, represent on the reverse of the Roosevelt dime?
- Why are some US coins designed with parallel line-ridges along the edge (e.g., 10-cent, 25-cent, and 50-cent pieces) and others (e.g., one-cent and five-cent pieces) are smooth-edged?
- What stories and messages are being communicated through the popular US "State Quarters" and "Lewis and Clark nickels" currently being minted?

An investigation into these and other questions concerning the small symbol-filled metallic relief-sculptures we carry in our pockets and purses will reveal, I believe, a very engaging look into current and past values displayed as a nation.

June's statements like this one about reflecting on objects in our local communities, nation, and world, and her many informative writings about art and culture, the importance of the individual, and the vital role structures, places, and spaces play in our lives, have had great impact on me and my professional work. Yet, perhaps June's greatest influence toward me has come through what I gained from her in our face to face conversations. I would like to share briefly something very important I learned from June through direct contact with her when I was a graduate student.

As a graduate student, I visited June in her office quite often. A most remarkable thing I remember from these meetings was that whenever I would enter her office, she made me think that nothing in the world was of greater import than carrying on our conversation at that moment in time. No matter what else needed her essential consideration, and putting aside pressing administrative obligations and teaching demands, I was given her full attention and she was genuinely interested and excited to hear what I was thinking and doing. She wanted to know what authors I was reading. What questions did I have? What class projects was I working on? How were studies going in my other classes, and how did they relate to what I was learning in art education? She is one of the best listeners I have ever met. Not a listener who sat aloof, quiet and reserved, thinking perhaps about other matters needing her attention. Rather, she was eager to hear from me. She did not see the situation in her office to be first and foremost her time to instruct me, but instead she made herself available to answer my questions and to direct me toward resources that would further my growth and motivate my interest as a person and as a professional. A critical

lesson I learned from June, which I have tried to demonstrate to my students over the years, is how to listen well to their needs and interact with them about exciting things they are learning and what is of primary and vital interest to them.

As many of you know, through the financial support of a number of groups and individuals, including the Arts and Administration Program at the University of Oregon, a team led by Rogena Degge and Kristin Congdon produced a videotape in 1995, titled, *A Conversation with June King McFee*. This 35-minute tape was edited and produced from many hours of conversation, and is a wonderful glimpse into June's life, motivations, thoughts, and activities. In one segment of the tape June says, "I have always had such a strong conviction about the importance of the individual, the potential for individual growth that is there with everybody." Through my many office meetings with June, I can attest to the heartfelt actions of her convictions in striving to develop the potential available within each individual, even when that individual was a young man just starting out on his graduate school journey.

I left the University of Oregon in 1992, to take a position at Penn State University, where I spent the next 10 years. In 1998, at the time I was a faculty member in the Art Education Program at The Pennsylvania State University, June was invited to Penn State as a guest speaker. During the time June was on campus I had the opportunity to talk with her one-on-one over breakfast one morning, to renew some of those conversations we had years earlier in her office. It was a delightful time of conversation about the field of art education, particularly exciting for June as she was back on the campus where she had participated in the 1965 Penn State Seminar in Art Education, a professional gathering of great significance in the development of the field of art education. In fact, that morning June and I were having breakfast in the Nittany Lion Inn, the building where the Penn State Seminar in Art Education was held some 33 years earlier.

I remember at one point in the breakfast conversation saying to June, something like the following:

June, you have written so much about the vast array of designed objects in our world--from Navaho sand painting and Australian aboriginal carvings, to community-based city planning and architecture, to museum-oriented paintings and sculpture. I have wanted the opportunity to ask you this question for quite sometime, and now that we are talking this morning I have the chance to ask it. June, do you see a difference between what we call "art" and what we call "artifact"?

As she sat at the table, June stirred her tea for just a moment, and then replied in a soft yet commanding voice, "No, not really, I don't see much of a difference between them. I see very little difference between the two." To be honest, it was the response I was wishing to hear from June. It helped to confirm my own beliefs about the value and place of material culture study--investigating a full range of artifacts and expression--for art education.

In closing my portion of this discussion today, I would like to return for just a moment to June's videotaped conversation from 1995. In one segment of the tape, June recalls that when a new graduate student would come into the program, the student would often soon thereafter ask the question: "Well, what *is* Art Education?" With a tease of laughter in her voice, as recorded on the videotape, June offered that her reply to the inquiring student would be, "What *is* Art Education? . . . It's what *we* make it. . . And, a lot of 'making it' has taken place."

Yes, June and Vincent, thanks to you and to your efforts, a lot of "making it" in art education has taken place. Innovative directions for art education have been and are currently being forged. The recognition of what is possible within the field of art education has expanded greatly--as evidenced by, among many things, this exemplary Arts and Administration Program at the University of Oregon and the community-based view of the arts that it embraces. New generations of arts participants and activists are emerging. A greater sense of the need for collaborative efforts in the arts has appeared. It may be through the direct efforts of people in this room today that these new dimensions and directions in arts activity have materialized. Yet, it is without question, that a lifetime of commitment and activity by both June King McFee and Vincent Lanier laid the foundation for the achievements and accomplishments of those who come after them.

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Explorations of Visual Culture: Written on the Body [1]

Professor Laurie E. Hicks

University of Maine

All scholarship builds on the work of others. Sometimes the debts are purely personal, as when one person draws inspiration from the work of another scholar. Sometimes the debts are broader, more institutional, as when the evolution of an entire discipline is influenced by the work of some specific scholar or scholars. I believe that debts are owed to June King McFee and Vincent Lanier in both these senses. Not only has my own thinking been richly influenced by the work of McFee and Lanier, but also the discipline of art education itself has evolved in ways that can be traced back to their research and teaching.

Both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student, I spent many hours in courses with June King McFee and Vincent Lanier. June encouraged me to approach art from a global perspective, validating my interest in anthropology and showing me how that discipline is relevant to the study of art. Vincent supported my tendency to understand human relations to the world as a function of experience that is contextualized, rather than uniform and abstract. These interests and tendencies have been central to my own development, and I can thank June and Vincent for helping me to articulate and validate this path.

What exactly did June McFee and Vincent Lanier contribute to art education? Let me briefly identify a couple of the central themes in their work before I proceed more directly to the substance of my own paper. It is my hope that the links between these themes and my own research will become clear as I proceed. Perhaps the most central contribution, which they both made, has to do with a recognition that art education should not limit itself to studying paintings and prints hung on walls, or sculptures placed on pedestals, but should also investigate aesthetic experience in the mundane world around us. Art, as McFee would say, is a culturally constituted form of communication. To understand art fully, therefore, we must investigate art forms in their cultural and community-based contexts, see how they function in everyday life, and interpret their ability to form and transform human identities. Lanier too pushed outwards from the traditional canon to confront the diversity of visual and material culture. He talked not just about paintings and sculptures, but also about clocks, cars and motorcycles, advertising, television, architecture and clothing. Art education, for both McFee and Lanier, was about learning to think critically about all aspects of our visually designed experience. I began to feel the influence of these key ideas early on in my educational career. It was in June McFee's "Art and Society" course where I first gave voice to my growing interest in body adornment and its cultural implications. And it was in Vincent's course on "The Teaching of Art Criticism" that I began to flex my contextualist muscles in order to understand more fully how we come to see and engage the world through the interpretive filters of our cultural experience.

Since that time, I have returned again and again to my experiences in their classrooms and to their published work [2]. I have used McFee's and Lanier's insights as I tried to understand how we make sense of natural and built environments and our experiences as we move through them (Hicks, 1992/1993), and, perhaps more importantly, how we come to care about and be care-givers to the environments we inhabit (Hicks, 1996). I have also looked to them as I struggled to understand and overcome what I see as the limitations of contemporary art education and to articulate the need to expand its possibilities through the metaphor of play (Hicks, 2004).

But in many ways, it is in my efforts to explore and talk about the visual and material culture of the designed body and its implications for our understanding of self and other, that I continue to carry with me the work of June McFee and Vincent Lanier. Their influence frames what seems to be my perennial fascination with the diverse forms of visual culture that are written on the human body. Let me turn, then, to this topic of the aesthetic construction of the human body, with particular emphasis on women's bodies. This is a project I dedicate to the work and teachings of June King McFee and Vincent Lanier.

Feminist writers have frequently drawn our attention to the importance of understanding how the body communicates symbolic meanings and plays a role in constructing power relations between individuals. Historically and cross-culturally, the body is marked, adorned and formed in accordance with prevailing human ideologies and social convictions. Through a variety of aesthetic devices, the body has become a surface upon which humans inscribe and reinforce cultural rules, hierarchies and commitments. The purpose of this project is to explore how the design of human bodies in general, but women's bodies specifically, are imbued with social and political meaning. My primary focus is on how women challenge existing notions of physical beauty and power through aesthetic decisions about adornment and through the physical practices of bodybuilding.

Even though I am primarily interested in the altering of women's bodies and how some women intentionally design their bodies not as a means of submission, but as a vehicle for self empowerment, I would first like to say something about the aesthetics of body manipulation more generally. Body manipulation is

nothing new. The body has always been marked, adorned, and sculpted in reference to existing human beliefs and social conventions both in western cultural traditions, and in others. Tattoos, piercings, and other forms of body customization have long been a part of the human aesthetic landscape. These alterations of the body's appearance are clearly aesthetic practices, that is, practices aimed at creating a particular visual and tactile self-presentation.

In Phenomenology of Perception (1962) Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that the "body is to be compared, not to a physical object, but rather to a work of art... it is a focal point of living meanings..." (p. 150-151). By assimilating the body to a work of art, Merleau-Ponty argues that our understanding of the body should not be relegated merely to the realm of biology and the physical. The body is also a powerful aesthetic form imbued with personal and cultural meanings. As such, the body becomes a visual artifact that reflects human aesthetic impulses, as well as the symbolic and coded system through which we present these impulses to the world. As Freud (1931) tells us "there can be no doubt that art did not begin as art for art's sake. It worked originally in the service of impulses" (p. 97). The human body is clearly the oldest and most persistent medium through which we express these aesthetic impulses.

Even knowing this, we sometimes make the mistake of thinking that aesthetic experience is something to be relegated to the museum, concert hall, or artist's studio. But in fact, as McFee and Lanier remind us, aesthetic encounters are an essential and unavoidable part of our everyday lives. They are not limited to the formal, institutional realm of art, but are integral to our daily undertakings and interactions with the world. As such, aesthetic experiences and expressions are a powerful force in the development and maintenance of our individual and cultural identities. In Experience as Art: Aesthetics in Everyday Life (1983), Joseph Kupfer writes that it is through everyday aesthetic encounters that we develop a relationship of exchange with the world. He calls attention to the role aesthetic experience plays in the individual's capacity for social participation (p. 2). Of particular interest is the fact that personal and social expressions are not seen as something separate from who we are as physical beings, but as a kind of aesthetic "ritual of the body" (Kupfer, p. 113). This ritual is a process of making visible the "inner self on the outer skin" (Wilton, 1991, p. 86), or, in other words, marking the body as an art form.

Anthropologists and sociologists have long studied the varied and complex marks humans make upon their bodies. Elizabeth Reichel-Dolmatoff (1998) observes how the skin, as the "slender layer that separates the self from the outside world"(p. 12) is individually and socially marked and inscribed with meaning. She goes on to note that manipulation of the body's appearance shows "the inter-relationship between the individual and society and at the same time demonstrates...personal self-awareness and creativity" (p. 12). However, it is only recently that we have taken such marks seriously as a form of art, as a process through which cultural and personal identity is etched on the body through aesthetic decisions of adornment and body customization. When we see women changing the appearance of their bodies, therefore, we ought to be curious to know whether and how they think these changes reflect changes in their interrelationships with other individuals or society at large. In my experience, women frequently do intend their body manipulations to have both a social meaning as well as an aesthetic form. Significant changes in aesthetic self-presentation, like those we see taking place now in women's use of tattoos and piercings, are due to women's changing conceptions of themselves and of their place in society.

It is no accident, in my view, that the choice of tattoos and piercings as the vehicle for the expression of changing social constructions of gender comes at a time of increasing attention to cultural diversity and a globalization of world cultures. Young women and men are more and more aware of traditions of body adornment from cultural settings different from their own and are challenged to adopt and adapt those traditions to their own needs. In this way, they both join and contribute to a long-standing, cross-cultural recognition of the body as a site for the inscription of meaning. To give you a quick sense of the range of meanings human beings have attributed to markings on the body, let me identify but a few. Human beings mark and form their bodies

- to indicate their affiliation to a family, clan, tribe, or other membership group;
- to indicate their age group, social ranking, or status;
- to legitimize, hide, or challenge the social order;
- to facilitate the maintenance of community;
- to mark or express the passing of time, including specific events, seasons, or ceremonial occasions;
- to protect themselves from evil spirits or illness;
- to appease the gods;
- to gain entry, on dying, into the other world, or to indicate a state of mourning;
- to be attractive to others in an effort to find or maintain a mate;
- to enhance sexual stimulation;
- to attain magical powers;
- to hide or conceal their identity;
- to mark slaves or criminals;
- to appear fierce and frightening to their enemies;
- to express their prestige and wealth;
- to earn respect and social power; or finally,
- to safely guide them through significant life transitions, like puberty.

This diversity of motivations leading people to adorn and alter their appearance is symptomatic of the complexity of human impulses and cultural experience. In this list, we can clearly see the intersection of aesthetic practices with social and cultural practices, and thus the importance of studying the link between our aesthetic choices and larger cultural realms of gender and social power.

From a contemporary feminist point of view, the aesthetic alteration of the body is a subject that provides significant insights both into the mainstream understanding of women and into women's efforts to critique mainstream expectations and create alternatives. According to French sociologist, Collette Guillaumin, for example, "physical interventions upon the body, most often mutilations, are generally aimed at the female body, or at least affect it most profoundly, and include modifying the body with surgery, or with the use of tools or objects that induce and maintain certain corporal transformations." (1993, p. 42) It is well known that feminine beauty in patriarchal cultures often come at a very high cost in terms of the health and integrity of women's bodies. One thinks particularly here of female genital mutilation in North Africa, footbinding in China, or of corsets and the surgical removal of rib bones in Victorian England and America.

As a footnote though, I want to add here that while the aesthetic alteration of the body is perhaps most striking and severe in the case of women, it is not only female bodies that are culturally constructed through the alteration of aesthetic form and appearance. Men too are subjected to various body practices. While these practices are rarely as invasive as those practiced on and by women, some can be. The Judeo-Christian or Xhosa traditions of circumcision are good examples of such practices. With this as background, let us look more specifically at a few ways in which women are using tattooing and piercing as forms of expression and as emblems of self-validation. Tattooing and piercing are not of interest only to younger women, but they have become a significant form of expression through which many younger women seek to express both their sense of individuality and, by contrast, their sense of belonging to a group or community. These forms of expression are often intended to reestablish a sense of normalcy and control in a world experienced by many of them as foreign (Martin, 1997) and, quite often, they are used to give voice to defiance. The expression of these needs is often reflected in the nature of their imagery.

In discussing the development of imagery among adolescents and young adults, Judith Burton (1999) points to an emergence of challenging, frightening and potentially for some, offensive representations of their experiences. She notes that such images reflect the confusions, fears and responses of adolescent experience, and are greatly influenced by the materials available to them for public expression. Though Burton is primarily interested in the use of materials such as clay or fiber, her description of the images of adolescents and young adults has a place in our discussion of tattoos. Young women often combine tattoos of skulls, teardrops, barbed wire, or spider webs, with the names of their boyfriend, gang or favorite rock bands in the designs they proudly wear on their bodies. However, they often do so in conjunction with images of hearts, unicorns, fairies, flowers, cartoon characters, rosaries, crosses, and other familiar, and perhaps less challenging, symbols.

This "confusion" of imagery may reflect the struggles of young women who are trying to find a place for themselves in an ambiguous social world. While drawing on conventional and familiar visual references, these women use the imagery in ways that deny their normal meanings. By tattooing their bodies with these images, they both acknowledge conventional imagery while denying the power of the surrounding society to fix and control its meaning for them. In Bodies of Subversion: A Secret History of Tattoos and Women (1997), Margot Mifflin states "tattoos serve as ...visual passkeys to the psyches of women who are rewriting accepted notions of feminine beauty and self-expression." (p. 9) If Mifflin is right, tattoos become what philosopher Christine Braunberger (2000) describes as points of introjection, as "mediating site[s] between one's psychic interior and cultural exterior." (p. 4) Tattooing thereby becomes a powerful act of contextual self-definition; to use Guillaumin's (1993) phrase, tattoos become an act of "rapport with the world"(p. 47).

Whether through tattooing or through their style of hair, dress or jewelry, young women play out the human need to define an identity by altering aesthetic appearance. Theo Kogan, actress and lead singer in the New York band Lunachicks, sees her tattoos as primal, as both physical and as a link to cultural practices not of this time and place. Kogan says "There's something very primal about it because it is such an old art" (in Mifflin, 1997, p. 136). In saying this, Kogan situates tattoos within human tradition. In so doing, she offers adolescents something that other forms of adornment do not, a degree of permanence. However, Kogan wonders if the magnetic appeal of these practices is more associated with the fact that "we don't expect to live so long... because of AIDS and drugs and the fucked up world we're in" (p. 136). Like Kogan, Mifflin (1997) speculates that "shortsighted kids living in a disposable culture simply don't consider the long-term implications of an indelible fashion statement" (p. 136).

In an effort to better understand this, I once asked several of my students who had been tattooed in their late teens, how they felt about the issue of permanence. Each of them indicated that they had indeed thought about what it might mean later in their lives, but decided that regardless of how they thought about it later, it was important to them now, important in their efforts to "reclaim" their bodies and "to express who [they were] now."

The power of tattoos to signify self and membership among young women can be seen in research done on gang members in several US cities. Research shows the use of ear and nose rings or specific tattoo designs to be typical ways by which members identify themselves and others. Tattoos, visibly situated, remind gang members of their affiliation and allegiance to a particular gang. When gang members describe themselves, they most often do so by reference to their rings, brands or tattooed markings. The power of these marks can be understood by the lengths people will go to, to have them removed. Through the X-Tattoo Program, in Phoenix, medical volunteers use modern laser technology to help ex-gang members in their efforts to rid themselves of gang markings.

The use of tattoos to represent relationships can also be seen in the use of tattoos to illustrate relations of a more intimate nature. This includes familial as well as romantic relations. One of my students described for me the primitive she had tattooed around her left upper arm. For her, the significance of the tattoo did not lie in the design but in its placement on her arm. She told me how her grandfather would reach out and lightly take hold of her arm as he spoke with her and how he had done this for as long as she could remember. Upon his death, she acquired the tattoo as a memorial to her love for him.

Like tattooing, piercing has emerged as one of the latest forms of body practice among young women. Unlike the traditions of body piercing in many

aboriginal societies, this new appropriation is intended to throw off, to reject, tradition and society's control over one's own body. In *The Body Project* (1997), Joan Brumberg describes what I have seen in my students, that most use the perforation of their bodies as a provocative symbol of their right to do as they please with their own bodies. Several of my female students have told me that the act of piercing is a way of asserting their own identity regardless of the expectations and standards of their parents or the society at large as to what it means to be a girl, especially a "good girl." This image comes from a long tradition of imagery that clearly articulates standards of womanhood and 'femininity' and is promoted through the power of contemporary video, print and electronic media. They see the act of piercing as an "act of art", an act that clearly is intended to confront and liberate them from what Simone de Beauvoir calls 'biological ideology'. In *The Second Sex* (1953), de Beauvoir says

"As against the dispersed, contingent, and multiple existences of actual women, mythical thought opposes the eternal Feminine, unique and changeless. If the definition provided for this concept is contradicted by the behavior of flesh-and-blood women, it is the latter who are wrong: we are told not that Femininity is a false entity, but that the women concerned are not feminine." (p. 237)

Thus in the eyes of my students, the piercing of navels, tongues, eyebrows, nipples and other areas of their bodies can be understood as an attempt to throw-off the "eternal Feminine, unique and changeless." This taking charge of one's own body, of altering it so as to make it clearly one's own, is also evident as motivation in the tattoos of many older women.

While the previous examples show body manipulation as a strategy for asserting and defining identity in younger women, many women are taking to heart Adrienne Rich's challenge to reclaim our bodies by regarding the physical as a "resource, rather than a destiny" (1976, p. 13). Rich notes that many women are alienated from their bodies both in wishing they weren't there, and at the same time in feeling "incarcerated" in their bodies. By "appeal[ing] to the physical," we may reassert control over an identity we may feel has been lost to wider cultural forces.

This is clearly illustrated in women who tattoo over mastectomy scars. These women embrace their physicality as a form of aesthetic resource. They appear to take seriously Foucault's characterization of the body (1984) as an "inscribed surface of events", "totally imprinted by history" (p. 83). For these women, both the mark left by the surgeon's knife and the tattoo itself are such imprints. Both marks represent efforts to save a woman's life - one her physical life, the other her emotional life. While the scar left by the surgery remains as a reminder of her threatened past, the marks of the tattoo signify a process of reclamation and recovery that open up to the future. Both sets of marks highlight the relevance of Foucault's particular view of the body as a surface upon which "patterns of significance" are inscribed.

Mifflin (1997) offers two examples of women who have survived breast cancer and turned to tattoos as a medium for reclaiming their bodies. In 1980, Marcia Rasner underwent a double mastectomy. After years of struggling with her scarred body and "wounded self-image", Rasner submerged her mastectomy scars in "life-affirming organic imagery." (p. 8) This tattoo was not her first, but was dramatically different in intent. While Rasner's previous tattoos were intended to express a sense of self, her most recent marks speak to a process of self transformation.

Mifflin quotes Rasner as saying, "I have a picture of me taken before and after, and I can see the change in my eyes in those pictures. It's a feeling of having taken something essentially negative and turned it into something beautiful" (p. 8). Toward this same end, Andree Connors had a rose tattooed over her mastectomy scar. Connors' tattoo was an attempt to aesthetically and politically mark her body. Mifflin cites Connors as saying "This is an invisible epidemic: everybody looks 'normal' cause they're wearing prostheses. So the message does not get across to the world that we are being killed off by breast cancer" (p. 152).

As both Rasner and Connors point out, this process of inscription is a process of private and public ritual that commemorates the passage from one state to another. Tattooing in such cases becomes a "defining" or "redefining" aesthetic for these women, no less than for younger women dealing with the concerns of adolescence and young adulthood.

My goal in this paper so far has been to show that women's body adornment and modification is a fruitful object of study for arts professionals interested in exploring the political and aesthetic dimensions of the body within community and cultural contexts. Expanding this discussion to include the practice of bodybuilding may offer us additional lessons about the politics and aesthetics of the body.

Let me start with a very brief clarification concerning different forms of body practice within the realm of weight lifting. Bodybuilding is the act of altering the form and size of one's muscles through the process of weight training to achieve a particular body shape or aesthetic semblance. Bodybuilding is different from power lifting. According to the students who workout in the weight room in my university gym, power lifting is a process of performing three movements: a bench press, a dead lift and a squat. Bodybuilding, on the other hand, is the use of repeated weight lifting to change one's physical appearance. Both body practices require considerable strength and endurance as well as a lot of time and money to spend in or on a gym.

Bodybuilding as a cultural phenomena came from the practices of professional strong men and weight lifters in the late 1800's. These men performed on stage, in circus sideshows and at rodeos. Social views of appropriate female roles and behavior precluded women from participating. This did not, of course, prevent women from building muscle and becoming physically strong through normal physical labor.

Despite the presence of highly muscled women, there has existed an insidious belief in the inferiority of women's bodies and a cultural insistence on controlling women's place in society. Women's anatomy has been treated as destiny. Focussed on women's unique reproductive role, society has often disqualified women from participating in sports and other physical activity on the grounds that this would threaten women's special moral obligation to preserve their vitality for childbirth. Since physical activity has been seen as undermining women's social role as wife and mother, women's efforts to assert

their physicality, strength, and personal empowerment in the public sphere have been codified as radical, subversive, and unfeminine. Even though these beliefs have faded slowly over time, organized women's bodybuilding did not develop until the 1960's and 70's and women bodybuilders are still seen as outside the norm today.

It is clear that we construct our bodies within a complex and, in many ways, inescapable system of power relations. This is particularly true for women whose construction of self is dominated by the male gaze. Many feminists have sought to challenge the power of such constructions, looking for subversive and liberating images of women. The work of philosopher Honi Haber [3] is of particular interest within the context of this paper. In an unpublished presentation, "Muscles and Politics: Shaping the Feminist Revolt" (1991) presented at the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport, Haber talks about the importance of liberating images, images that "problematize seeing and assimilation" (p. 6) and subvert the restraints of patriarchal power. In her work, Haber sees the images of muscled women as possessing such "liberating subversive" potential and as opening up the possibility for women to resist "readings of timidity, weakness, and inferiority, by creating her body as her own interpretation...and in doing so, force[ing] cultural reinterpretations."

Similarly, Leslie Heywood (1998) describes women bodybuilding as a creation of subversive monstrosity. Bodybuilders "aspire to be monsters, to become the dictionary definition: 'one unusually large for its kind; extraordinary and often overwhelming in size.' Bodybuilders want to stand out, have no one take them at face value" (p. 8). Sam Fussell, in *Muscle, Confessions of an Unlikely Bodybuilder (1991)*, agrees with Heywood, "Shock value is all. It's saying, or rather screaming, 'more than anything else in the world, whatever it takes, I don't want to be like you. I don't want to look like you. I don't want to talk like you. I don't want to be you.'" (p. 137).

However, women bodybuilders are faced with more than the goal of becoming something that everyone else is not. Women's bodybuilding, having emerged from athletic and aesthetic structures that are defined within the context of masculinity, is by nature a contested terrain. Body building, as an aesthetic and cultural form of athletic prowess strives to represent the other, the extraordinary, the monstrous. This is made clear by the behavior of the male bodybuilders who inhabit the gym where I workout. They grunt and strut with a clear sense of pride in the physique they have created through the practice of weight lifting. Among bodybuilders, a desire for sleek, contoured muscles is only surpassed by the desire for colossal size. But women bodybuilders must also be feminine. Women bodybuilders must be both monstrous and feminine, a clear aesthetic contradiction. As a result, women bodybuilders strive to achieve the aesthetic norms of femininity while at the same time, pushing against them as they develop the size associated with the expectations of bodybuilding. Heyward describes this as a process of using "their bodies to depart from as well as incarnate the norm" (p.11)

This inherent conflict has played itself out at various levels in women's bodybuilding. In George Butler's and Charles Gaines' 1985 film, *Pumping Iron II: The Women*, American bodybuilder, Rachel McLeash comes face to face with Australian power-lifter and bodybuilder Bev Francis. McLeash enters the competition with an aesthetic form that is athletic, highly toned, and feminine. In comparison, Francis' highly sculpted and incredibly muscled body reflects not the expectations of femininity, not even muscled femininity, but those of bodybuilding more generally. Her aesthetic presence pushed against the societal norm for women, yet was fully in accordance with the existing aesthetic expectations of bodybuilding. As the film showed, the judges were not yet prepared to treat women's bodybuilding on a par with men's. The idea of highly muscled women was "a contradiction to, even an attack on, our sense of reality" (Dobbins, 1994, p. 8). The image of Bev Francis was an unwelcome subversion of established cultural norms of a feminine aesthetic. In this case, aesthetic judgments, informed by expectations of how a real woman should look, blocked official recognition of Bev Francis' efforts to sculpt her body solely according to the established criteria of the sport itself. She placed eighth in the competition even though she more than any other participant, embodied the aesthetic expectations of bodybuilding.

Bev Francis' fate in that competition was not entirely surprising. Bodybuilders, both male and female, challenge culturally defined aesthetic norms for both men and women by their sheer physical presence. Bodybuilders "take up space" - more space than the 'normal' person; they insert themselves more forcefully than others into the public sphere. As a result, they may be perceived as engaging in a kind of trespass: taking up space that is not theirs. For some bodybuilders this trespass is a conscious act of defiance, an intentional breaking of the norm in order to assert a form of physical liberation through aesthetic self-transformation. While this is true for both men and women, the cultural context of female trespass imposes different meanings on the bodies of women bodybuilders. Taking up space, too much space, has a particular cultural meaning for women who have been expected to remain in the background, deferential, and physically ineffective. The cultural challenge embodied in Bev Francis' self-transformation inevitably attracted resistance.

Women's bodybuilding is, thus, another intersection point where aesthetic practices and cultural norms come together. The practice both challenges existing social norms and brings them visibly to the surface. Women bodybuilders catalyze a kind of cultural reaction, making gender expectations visible by their transgression. Whether this, or any other form of transgressive body practice, will be liberating for women in general can never be entirely certain. Much depends on how the society assimilates their challenge.

My goal in this paper has been to open up an area of the everyday to aesthetic investigation. Following the lead set by McFee and Lanier, I want to emphasize the legitimacy of studying the ways in which everyday aesthetic practices intersect with cultural meanings, political power, and opportunities for liberation. As I have suggested, aesthetic alteration of the body is a primary means of gendering the human body. Both men and women participate in practices of body transformation in response to their culture's expectations of how women and men should look. While the inclination to use the body to express personal and cultural meanings is not itself restricted to one gender, the implications of particular body practices may differ, depending on who is engaging in them. Playing with gender boundaries or with culturally imposed limitations on a particular gender inevitably manifests itself in practices of the body. It is through the body that we come to subscribe to or rebel against, appropriate or challenge, particular social meanings in the broader communities to which we belong. It is for this reason that an understanding of our body practices is so essential to a feminist approach to women's aesthetic experience today.

The act of altering the appearance of one's physical form transforms the body from biology into cultural artifact. As a result, the markings and transfigurations

of the body enable it to become a potential site for asserting, maintaining, and challenging social relations. Unlike the students of Susan Bordo, however, whom she describes (1988) as seeing the body as "the enemy, to be beaten into submission," (p. 92) the women I have been discussing have embraced and celebrated their physical presence in the world through adornment and self-transformation. Kim Hewitt (1997) refers to this as "an act of reclamation" (p. 79), a liberatory process of women laying claim to their own bodies. I believe that it is in this spirit that feminist scholars and arts professionals should continue to study the body manipulations of women of all ages, celebrating both the creative impulse that informs body practices, and participating in the re-thinking of the social relationships that these body practices symbolize and help to make possible.

In conclusion, I hope that those familiar with the work of June King McFee and Vincent Lanier will have found it easy to see the trajectory that led from their work to my own. Like Lanier, I locate the aesthetic in everyday life: in the body work of tattooing, piercing, and bodybuilding. Like McFee, I see cultural meaning in this aesthetic production. The everyday aesthetic experience requires cultural interpretation. As I have shown, the meanings embedded in tattoos, piercings, and bodybuilding vary with age and gender, and depend upon the nature of the surrounding community and its beliefs and prejudices. This has been rich territory for my own socially critical scholarly work, and it remains fertile ground for art education itself as it evolves to include more and more aspects of what some now refer to as visual or material culture.

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[2] Though both McFee and Lanier have published article after article on art and its various cultural foundations and implications, I have found their books to be the place where I return. My copies of McFee's *Preparation for Art* (1961), *Art Culture and Environment* (co-authored with Rogena Degge) (1977) and *Cultural Diversity and The Structure and Practice of Art Education* (1998), and Lanier's *The Arts We See* (1982) are well worn and easily accessible on my office shelves. They find their way into much of what I write and teach.

[3] Honi Fern Haber died of cancer in 1995 at the age of 37. She was thirty-seven and had spent much of her adult life creating and studying muscled bodies. She was fascinated by the aesthetic and political potential of women's bodybuilding and was herself a dedicated amateur bodybuilder. I dedicate my work on the aesthetics of muscled women to her. Her contributions were significant.

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CultureWork: Current Issue

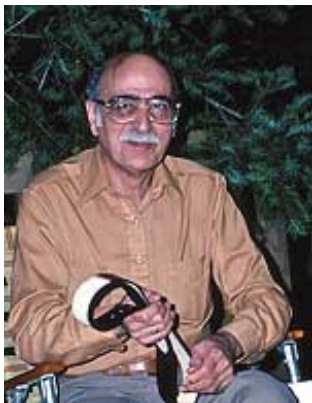
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Community Arts in a Digital Age

*Professor Kristin Congdon
University of Central Florida*

I earned my Ph.D. in art education from the University of Oregon in June of 1983. If I remember correctly, I was the last student whose dissertation June McFee supervised before she retired. I recall thinking when I graduated that this was a great distinction to have. Because she was retiring, I worked really hard to get my graduate work done in a timely manner so that she, and no one else, could sign as the chair of my dissertation committee.

My choice of Oregon for graduate school was not taken lightly. My husband and I had good jobs and had just purchased our first house in Milwaukee when I decided I needed to do further graduate work and that the University of Oregon was the school for me. It was the only place in the country at that time where I could get a Ph.D. in art education with faculty support for studying folk art. In the eyes of the Art World, folk art at that time was considered to be unworthy of serious study as it was a lesser form of creativity, produced by unsophisticated people. But June felt differently. So did Vincent Lanier. And Vincent liked to work with people who would risk their professional careers by challenging the status quo. He was often viewed as a renegade, and he enjoyed keeping company with like-minded individuals.



As early as 1979, Vincent Lanier, who was a great admirer of John Dewey, wrote that educators needed to adopt an egalitarian view on aesthetics in which "all visual stimuli from natural objects and popular and folk arts and mass media contain the possibilities for significant aesthetic experience" (p. 15). It was clear to him, way before so many others came to this realization, that rich aesthetic experiences can happen outside the museum and gallery frame of reference (1980, p. 18). In fact, he would sometimes begin a seminar by asking what students watched on television the night before. He was also a fan of movies, and it was no secret to any of his students that Sophia Loren was his favorite star. He displayed a rather seductive poster of her on his office wall and he often looked up from his desk to admire her.

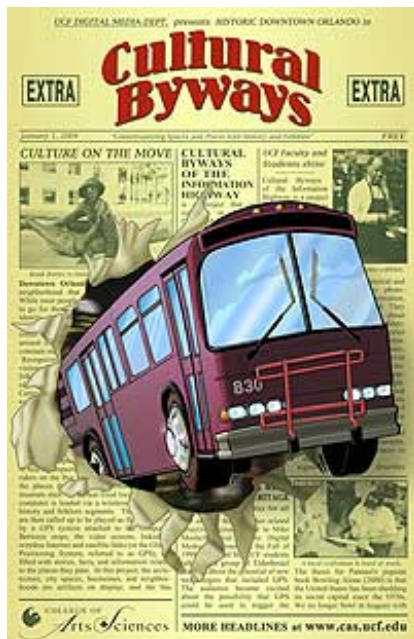
While Vincent worked from a fringe position in the field of art education, critiquing the establishment as he wrote, June engaged in solid research, positioning herself in the anthropological and psychological academic centers, as she encouraged those who study art to broaden the scope, diversify the creators, and look to the context of origin in order to understand an object's meaning and value. In 1966 she wrote that studying art should focus on two goals: "(1) helping students see the functions of art in culture as it transmits values and attitudes, and identifies cultural meanings, [and] (2) helping students respect and understand cultural pluralism in our society by becoming aware of the functions of art in our many subcultures" (p. 134).

Because I had worked in inner-city schools, in correctional settings, and in a residential treatment center before coming to Oregon, my interest was in marginalized populations and the ways in which they create and understand the world around them. Studying at the University of Oregon gave me a supportive space to do my work. While other schools may very well have valued my interest in under-supported students, they likely would not have supported their aesthetic or their visual expressions. Rather, they would have suggested that if we study popular art or folk art in educational settings, it would only be to bridge the gap, allowing for movement to those art works that are recognized by the establishment as holding the greatest value. For this great gift that came from all members of the art education faculty at the University of Oregon, I am extremely grateful.

Since leaving Oregon in 1983, I have taught in many different disciplines and areas of study in university settings: art education, art therapy, community arts, art history, philosophy (focusing on aesthetics), humanities (especially contemporary multi-cultural studies) and now film and digital media. I recognize that it is unusual for someone to move disciplines so frequently in academia, but this shifting and playing with new contexts has worked well for me. With each move, new ideas have pushed my research in another direction. It is my recent work that I will highlight here. It has been over 20 years since I left Oregon and my studies under the guidance of June McFee and Vincent Lanier (and, I should also acknowledge the rigor and keen insights from Rogena Degge). In spite of two passing decades, it is easy to see how what I do is now both different and the same. Grounded in similar values and belief structures on how to approach art, I now use newer media to explore issues of creative diversity, cultural context, and aesthetic appreciation. Each of the three projects I will discuss here is community-based. Each of these projects relies on a team of faculty, students, and community members. We are all collaborators. All three projects came

about when I moved my tenure from the Art Department at the University of Central Florida to the School of Film and Digital Media. This move from one faculty and discipline to another has given me access to faculty and students with theory and technical skills in newer media. Vincent must be smiling. He was a strong voice for the use of technology to be used in diverse educational settings.

Cultural Byways on the Information Highway



Cultural Byways on the Information Highway is a project that, in part, addresses Orlando's lack of identity. Seen by outsiders as a tourist designation, a place to fly to in order to go to Disney, perhaps it also conjures up ideas of palm trees and warm weather, but little else. In a like manner, few residents of Orlando have any idea that it was once a place identified with ranching and the citrus and turpentine industries (Congdon et al, 2003, p. 27). Before Disney was built, Orlando was a small town located in Mosquito County, a name that was later change to Orange County since the idea of going to a place with a name like "mosquito" wasn't very attractive to tourists. Orlando grew tremendously with Disney and it continues to change as a fast growing metropolitan area with new immigrant populations and a focus on entertainment and the arts.

The Byways project's goals were basically two-fold: 1) to teach both residents and visitors about Orlando's folklore and history, and 2) to make use of new technology on downtown's free buses, called Lymmos, to explore how it might be used for educational purposes. This project involved numerous faculty and students, each building on their areas of expertise. Faculty and students came from Film, Art, the Text and Technology Ph.D. Program, History, Folklore, Music, Computer Science, and English. They were researchers, photographers, scriptwriters, producers, artistic directors, and computer experts. Segments were either "Moments of Folklore," or "Moments in History." Our partners were the Orange County Regional History Center, the Department of State, Florida Folklife Programs, and Transit Television Networks, which owns the video systems on the buses. We had a grant from the Florida's Department of State, Division of Historical Resources to get the project started. Students worked for money, class credit, or as volunteers. They road the buses, critiqued each other's work, and spent long hours learning computer programs.

Using wireless Internet and a GPS (Global Positioning System), downtown buses were able to download history and folklife segments that were shown on newly installed ADA (American Disability Act) video equipment. Between stops, the video screens were filled with stories, facts, and information that corresponded to the building and public spaces outside the bus window. These segments included historical and contemporary photographs, animation, text, and limited sound since the buses were so noisy that sound was not effective. They presented facts about people and architectural spaces, stories about ghosts, information on ethnic music, stained glass windows in churches, Asian restaurants, tattoo parlors, hip hop nightclubs, the historical progression of certain buildings, local musicians, crafters of musical instruments, and popular places to visit. Because the stops on the Lymmo bus are frequent, each segment is very short, from 30 seconds to two minutes. Angel Lopez makes a cuatro, a traditional Puerto Rican instrument, an art collector gets another tattoo, Josian Alicea, a Puerto Rican guiro-maker is highlighted, and the murals at St. George's Greek Orthodox Church are introduced.

[>>Click to watch these Cultural Byways segments on the UCF Cultural Heritage Alliance Website<<](#)





The segments played on the Lymmo bus system for almost five months. As with all projects like this one, we learned a lot. It took much more time and effort to make it work than we thought. Sometimes the segments were displayed as steaming videos instead of data linked to the GPS. But it was a thrill to see it work right when it did. And when riders recognized that the information related to a building or a space outside the window, it was especially rewarding.

Currently two things are happening with the byways project. We are designing a kiosk that will be displayed in the Orange County Regional History Center. Participants will be able to access the segments through a map, as if they were on a walking tour. This change of venue may allow us to use more sound, thereby making it assessable to more people. Segments related to lung cancer are now being developed for a more extended bus route. The design and content of these segments are oriented toward the particular ethnic community the bus might be traveling through. Language, color selection, pacing, and appropriate content are being carefully researched to target Haitians, various Asian populations, or African Americans.

The byways project was ambitious. We know that in the future more and more educational opportunities will open up to artists and educators as we learn to use the GPS more creatively. During our brainstorming and daydreaming moments we talk about being able to travel by car, train, or plane while learning about a selected topic, perhaps African American history in Florida, ghost tales in the south, how the Underground Railroad worked, or religious rituals that take place in a given locale. We now have an extensive database of information. In the future more and different kinds of educational segments can be built using this data, which has been archived in our university library. The possibilities for research and education are staggering, and with the success of the byways project, more people and organizations are beginning to inquire about possible opportunities.

Folkvine.org

In November, Craig Saper, Chantale Fontaine, and Alex Katsaros, and I published a Culturework article on the Folkvine.org project. In this project, the four of us, along with other team members, placed four Florida folk artists on the web in a way that represents their aesthetics

and ways of living in the world. All four sites are community-based in that public events were organized in order to receive feedback and direction on how to represent each artist and community. We are currently in our second year of funding from the Florida Humanities Council. We will add three new artists who are: 1) Lilly Carrasquillo, an Orlando artist from Puerto Rico who draws on influences and folk traditions from various Hispanic cultures making masks and ofrendas (Day of the Dead altars), mostly from papier-mache; 2) Taft Richardson, an African American artist and preacher from Tampa, who constructs sculptures from discarded bones; and 3) Kurt Zimmerman, a longtime Cocoa resident who worked for years at the Space Coast and paints UFOs and fantastic animals, memorializing them as they ascend to heaven.

The entire site will be overlaid with three humanities topics. These topics are social economy, place-making imagination, and re-creative identity. Lilly Carrasquillo's site will be bi-lingual. As in our first year of funding, we will hold public events for each artist and his or her community.

As we move into the second year of work on this project, I begin to think more and more about the nature of "community," and June McFee's work. The book she wrote with Rogena Degge, *Art, Culture and Environment* (1977), rooted art in the lives of everyday people as it looked for ways to enrich our communities through aesthetic awareness. This work, coupled with the recent work of Harry Boyte (2004), *Everyday Politics*, furthers my ideas about what projects like Folkvine.org should do. Boyte believes that Jane Addams' ideas, now over a hundred years old, about educating people to actively involve themselves in politics is key to breaking down "the walls that keep us isolated and powerless" (p. 182). Recognizing that danger can plague any information society, he also acknowledges the power that it can provide (p. 181). The Folkvine team believes that there is power in making diverse ways of creating and shaping the world visible. Boyte writes:

Energy generated by steam and electricity transformed preindustrial societies into industrial societies. Money replaced raw materials as the main strategic resource. Today, data-transmission systems and the theoretical knowledge required to organize information drive innovation, comprise strategic resources and power, shape the world economy, and alter human relationship." (p. 180)





By making visible our artists we hope that many alternate and diverse ways of living and finding joy in this world become available as possibilities for all of us. Ruby Williams's understanding of the links amongst farming, family, and creativity processes is important; Ginger LaVoie's quiet meditative quilting experience that slows and centers is useful in our often too fast-paced world; and Diamond Jim Parker and the Scott Family's ability to make us laugh, delight in that which is silly, and ground us in kit-bashing strategies is not only powerful, but significant to our health and creative spirit. (For those of you unfamiliar with the term "kit-bashing," for Diamond Jim Parker, it was taking a miniature model circus kit and adapting it and changing it to meet his own imaginative needs. In a sense, the Scott Family and Ruby Williams live their lives like this with bartering, using tossed out objects, and constructing places and spaces that fit their own personal ways of living in the world.)

Boyte's participatory ideas about citizens involving themselves politically is to think of "social capital" the way that John Dewey thought about it. It means that everyday citizens can and should participate in challenges associated with problems such as racism and poverty. They can also actively involve themselves in radical ways that could affect our educational process (p. 114).

Democracy, therefore, is not only in the hands of legislators. For instance, Ruby Williams thinks about education in a way that embraces formal schooling, but she also understands that learning takes place in community settings and that it includes ethics, racial understanding, and proper respect for family members and the land. Taking responsibility for one's community, for her, is key to a good education.

One of our new artists, Taft Richardson, believes that we should focus on the resurrection. While it may sound like he is only talking about the resurrection of Christ, he also means the usefulness of dead animal bones to make art, as they symbolize transformation. This transformation, in his mind, represents the power involved in lifting up one's spirit to engage in community goals. In his case, art and the wellbeing of children in his African American neighborhood are synonymous. As you create a work of art, power is recognized, and youthful creators get linked to objects and ideas that bring them into a caring, participatory community. It is active engagement in the process of living that makes for, in Boyte's words, good citizens, and in Richardson's, a good life.

Boyte believes, and McFee would agree, that we have isolated ourselves in such a way that we only communicate with those who are most like us. Boyte claims that we must learn "the skills

of negotiation among diverse interests . . . across partisan and other divisions, to accomplish tasks or to solve problems" (p. 37). For McFee, we could learn to do this by studying diverse kinds of art within their contexts. For the members of the Folkvine team, the Internet presents itself as a new tool that allows participants outside certain community groups to move into spaces that are foreign, providing them with alternative ways of thinking and responding to the world. We believe that our artists are smart people. They have struggles and solve problems by creatively engaging in their worlds and the objects around them. It may strike you odd or funny that someone like Kurt Zimmerman could mentally and spiritually balance the early part of his life, as a German-born United States World War II soldier, by picking up road kill and memorializing it by lovingly painting these animals in their journey to the next world. Or it may surprise you to know that in Taft Richardson's mind, art is learned in church, because we learn to say the Lord's Prayer, and it begins with, "Our Father who art in heaven," thereby recognizing the art process as divine and powerful. These new ways of thinking and understanding the world can not only help us broaden our lives and possibilities but they can help us create our own worlds in ways that teach us new language systems, connect us to others, and envision possibilities for engaging in everyday politics.

Boyte believes that we have lost the idea that making a contribution to family and community is key to our identities. In contrast, today, we define ourselves by how much we can purchase. We are consumers, and not contributors (p. 7). One of McFee's goals is to build community through the study of art. McFee and Degge write, "To some degree we can respond to any people's art even through their language may be incomprehensible to us. But we can only understand their art in the degree we can learn their culture" (p. 279). Each of the Folkvine artists contributes to the building of community through their art and we construct each site by informing the web participant about the art as it connects to the cultural context and language. Technology is the tool that allows us to educate others about their lives and work.

Charles Kuralt (1995), one of my other mentors, once said, "I'd rather know bird songs than know French" (p. 89). While I wish I knew French better than I do, I also crave an understanding of those language systems not generally taught about in formal educational settings. If I can learn to enter into a world view and language system that engages my imagination in ways that give me great insights, teach me how to stretch the boundaries of what I think possible and reasonable, and move into ways of being that solve pressing problems related to violence, depression, and apathy, then I feel great pleasure and satisfaction in the process of learning.

Motorcycle Stories

In 1976 Vincent Lanier predicted that by the year 2000, the fine arts definition would include the folk arts, the popular arts, and mass media (p. 13). While we might not talk about what has happened to definitions of art quite the same way, it is clear that the boundaries of art categories have dissolved so greatly that it is even hard to define the term "art" as distinct from "life," let alone what makes something fine art or mass media.





In 1998, the Guggenheim Museum curated a controversial exhibition on motorcycles. Although it was a smash hit with the general public, some critics had problems with everyday utilitarian objects being placed as fine art in a major museum. In January of 2006, this exhibition will be reconstructed for the Orlando Museum of Art as one of their blockbuster shows. They expect huge crowds that will diversify their audiences. Because Daytona Beach has a well-established Bike Week in the Spring and Harley Davidson has a large presence in Orlando, hopes for a wildly successful show are high.

In partnership with the Orlando Museum of Art and this exhibition, UCF's Cultural Heritage Alliance will begin to collect motorcycle stories from Central Florida. As we begin this project, we recognize that we have a lot to learn. What are the many sub-groups that ride motorcycles? Do they each have identifiable symbols,

aesthetics, and language systems? How far should we go incorporating related material culture such as clothing, tattoos, customized bikes, motorcycle rituals, and language? How do we handle the sexist nature of some of the cultural practices? What kinds of images and stories are appropriate and inappropriate for museum audiences, and if we engage in censorship, how do we do it? How might the nature of the Cultural Heritage Alliance website change with motorcycle culture as a section, and what might we be saying about our own identity by choosing this diverse culture as one we highlight? For example, Chantale Fountaine, the Cultural Heritage Alliance Web-designer, informs me that there is a bikers' club in Central Florida called VOBC or the Very Odd Bikers' Club. Their initiation requires that new members "bike around naked." They have a must-read book called *The Ghost of Scootertrash Past*. If our website is to be used by children, how do we incorporate intriguing and compelling groups like this one?



Problems with addressing certain aspects of a culture that might appear controversial to some have come up before. In the Folkvine project we talked about cross-dressing as part of Diamond Jim's clowning practices.

Before we reached the comfort point in addressing this topic with him, he passed away. Therefore, as our key informant was gone, this topic is absent from the website. But one can hardly think of motorcycle culture without thinking of ways in which females are denigrated by sexualizing them and making them into an objectified attachment to some macho biker's machine. These topics and the issues connected to them should not be avoided. I believe, (and I think June and Vincent would be agree with me here) that it is precisely at these moments where the power to teach has the most potential. It is our hope that we find ways to address these issues in collaboration with the cultures involved and we do it in a way that can involve dialogue from all age groups. If we do this right, we will have engaged ourselves with others in what Boyte calls, "the politics of respect," which "taps and also develops the intelligence and skills of American citizens for practical public action" (p. 15). Perhaps, as we learn more about diverse motorcycle cultures, we will learn more about aesthetics, gender studies, economics, ritual practices, identity politics, and ways to have fun.

A Few Other Words

My work in community art has not jumped from my Oregon days to these three projects without many assorted projects and ideas sandwiched in between. Most notable have been my many projects with Doug Blandy. Each of these research efforts is rooted in the work of June McFee and her desire to build community, diversify the kinds of art we value and study, and center our understanding in their context of origin. But, when Doug and I work, we enjoy coming from the position with which Vincent Lanier was so comfortable: challenging the status quo by looking at what is happening in popular culture and marginalized communities.



In 1987, then Assistant Professors at Bowling Green State University in northwest Ohio, we coordinated an exhibition on the art and aesthetics of fishing. We hired local experts in model boat building, fly tying, taxidermy, and fishing aesthetics to identify objects of value and arrange them the gallery space. The exhibition with the most publicity and attendance at that time, it generated controversy and strong feelings from those who thought it was timely and made a strong and useful statement about art and those who thought that what we had done was close to blasphemy, by allowing everyday people who knew little to nothing about "art" (or ART) to place everyday objects in a "fine art" gallery (Blandy & Congdon, 1988).



In 1990 we wrote an article titled, "Pornography in the Classroom: Another Challenge for the Art Educator," (Blandy & Congdon) which again ignited a controversy. Some said we went too far in our proposal to discuss what were seen as taboo topics in school classrooms, and others claimed we had incorrectly labeled some master works as pornographic.

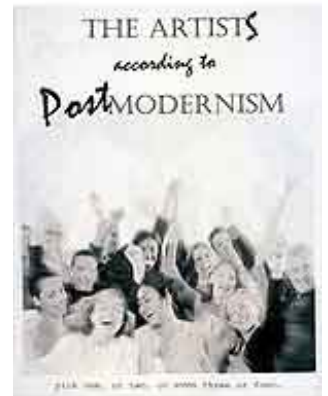
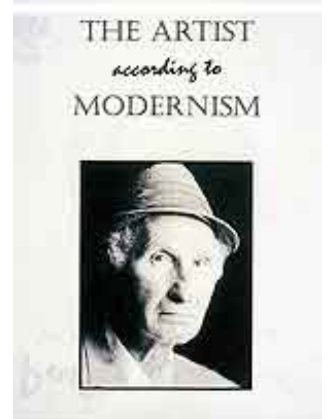


In the mid-1990s we both started using zines as a format for art criticism and aesthetics in our university classes. We gave talks on zine-making and wrote about it in *Art Education* (Congdon & Blandy, 2003). Since then a number of teachers from across the country have contacted us about using zines as an art form that encourages dialogue about controversial issues. We have also explored the potential of electronic boards used by soap opera fans as models for art critical practices (Congdon & Blandy, 2001). Recently, we have written about appreciating the fake (Congdon & Blandy, 2001), and why we should study kitsch in the classroom (Congdon and Blandy, in press). In all these research projects we pose questions that anticipate dialogue because we have stepped outside the normal

academic process and center of the established art world. In each case we have also identified communities of people who routinely engage in certain aesthetic practices that have been marginalized, devalued, and silenced from formal educational settings. In doing so, we have explored new communities, learned new language systems, and discovered new ways of thinking. We have built on the strong foundational work of June King McFee and Vincent Lanier as have so many other art educators, cultural activists, and community arts specialists. The good work of these two outstanding scholars and mentors may not always be acknowledged, but their influence is unmistakable.

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