

ART

PLACE

ARTIST

KAT CLARIDA



For more than 30 years I have been most fortunate to work as an Artist, Consultant, Trainer and Producer for many cutting edge grass-roots communication for social change projects with diverse cultures from across Canada, primarily in the four Inuit land claim territories.

Many of the social issues being explored were on themes of suicide, spousal abuse and fetal alcohol syndrome (to name a few), the result of residential school and assimilation experiences. Although this work was extremely satisfying, I began to realize I wanted to help create social change on a more personal level with people and to help them find their voice through art. In 2014 I became an Expressive Art Practitioner and my

private practice, The Shifting Tree, was born. Through the exploration of issues using all art modalities, I provide a safe place for people to explore their inner worlds and then proudly voice their world through art.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project will engage urban Indigenous youth in a personal artistic journey that will culminate in a collaborative creation reflecting their experience and place in an urban setting. Using Expressive Arts practices such as performance, written words, visual arts and mixed media, the artist is leading a group of Indigenous youth through a co-created art project where they will explore their own feelings around being in an urban setting.

PARTNER SITES

The **Odawa Native Friendship Centre** is a non-profit organization serving the Aboriginal community in the Ottawa-Carleton Region of Eastern Ontario and surrounding communities. Their mission is to enhance the quality of life for Aboriginal people in the Capital region; to maintain a tradition of community, an ethic of self-help and development as well as to provide traditional teachings from our elders.

The goal of the **Mamidosewin Centre** at Algonquin College is to empower and support indigenous students into the next phase of their lives (mino-biimaadizwin — “the good way of life”) in a way that is respectful and reflective of Aboriginal cultures.

ABOUT ART PLACE

Art Place, a 3-year professional artist-in-residence program, addresses social issues by placing artists and arts groups in community settings to co-create art projects and provide free of charge arts programming. The 2015-2016 projects enable participants from non-profit groups, in Ottawa, to take creative journeys through theatre, dance, music, storytelling and visual art. Art Place amplifies voices in various underserved communities touched by the project, to tell their stories and share their unique perspectives.

INTERVIEW WITH KAT CLARIDA

January 21, 2016

How would you describe yourself as an artist?

I am a multi-disciplinary artist; from media to storytelling to visual arts to what have you. Often the medium I work in at any given time is driven by the themes I create with and the need to explore our place in the world and how the world impacts our lives.

What inspired you to pursue a career in the arts?

I have always recognized the power of art to create change both personally and within society.

What are some recurring themes in your art practice?

My art is about inclusiveness and giving voice to the voiceless.

What are the most important influences?

The constant is my Mom the activist, even though she didn't realize she was an activist. But otherwise my influences constantly change. Lately I am smitten with the social change art of Carmel Whittle, Heather Lyn Song and Jesse Stewart.

What is your experience in art projects engaging social practice?

The majority of my art has been about social engagement and social change. To witness the marginalized and vulnerable find a voice through artistic expression is one of the most fulfilling experiences. In my workshops I watch those who are young, marginalized, broken and voiceless discover themselves and their own power through art.

What did you gain from your experience?

Art is change in action.

How long have you been active in the Ottawa arts community?

Most of my career has been in the North so I am fairly new to the Ottawa arts community. I am so looking forward to what the future brings.

What interested you about working with the AOE Arts Council?

The artist-in-residence program intrigued me, as it spoke to a desire of AOE Arts Council to develop and grow artists at the grassroots. This speaks of inclusiveness and works to remove perceived barriers to expression.

What made you want to participate in Art Place?

Participating in Art Place allows me to explore my new artistic community, especially in terms of art for social change.

What inspired you to pursue this project with this community?

I know well the frustrations and challenges youth face, especially those outside the mainstream. This project will provide an opportunity for young people to explore who they are and what is important to them in this urban setting, and then tell everyone what that means.

How would you describe the project you will be working on?

I think it is best described as a big collective HELLO OUT THERE, THIS IS US HERE! Throughout the project each and every participant will not only discover various art modalities, but also more importantly, what they want to say with their art. We will all go in and then out with a collective voice.

As an artist, what do you hope to get out of this process?

The biggest beaming sigh and pride in the braveness of each participant to push their own boundaries and those of the society they live in.

What do you hope participants will gain from this process?

I hope they will see themselves and their own power differently. I want them to have pride in their personal and collective artistic discovery. I want them to see their voices manifested.

How do you anticipate this work will have an impact on the community?

I feel there are a few layers of community that will be impacted by this project. Firstly, the Indigenous community itself as they witness the power voice of some of their youth. Secondly, the broader community as a whole as, hopefully, they may reexamine their perceptions and beliefs.

How will your project give voice or expression to the social issue(s) you will be exploring?

The exact social change art modality will be determined with the participants. As we move through the project and the personal and collective artistic discovery, strengths will reveal themselves.

How will you know your project is a success?

When just one participant says “I never knew I had this in me.”

PASSION FOR ART AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Blog post 1 – Jan 21, 2016

What an amazing group of people to brave brittle cold to come to the first Your Brain on Art: Art for Social Change workshop #1.

Yummy hot pasta and garlic bread followed by tea and cookies warmed us up and got us all ready to jump in and explore our brains on art. And although the fire alarm kept going off – we hadn’t even smudged! – we found a quieter, cocooned room to explore our inner lives and our perceptions of ourselves through collage, mandalas and poetry.

In these Expressive Art exercises, participants explored who they were *not* and then who they were to expose the contrast and the achievements they have made in their lives.

These were incredibly powerful artistic and emotional experiences as they found new ways to validate and express themselves; and in turn, provide support and validation to each other.

Some of the experiences we shared were: “I went through a lot of emotions and some of them were of very painful times, but when I

completed my mandala I realized I have created a lot of ways of coping.”

For one participant on hearing the positive comments others had to say about their journey and strength said: “I just want to cry, thank you everyone for your support.”

These are the powerful impacts art has when used in an expressive way. It allows people to access many inaccessible parts of themselves and to find their hidden gems and strengths through their artistic expressions.

We also explored what is Art for Social Change and what we want to pay attention to over the next few weeks to define what our Social Change Art collaboration is going to address and what artistic modality would be the perfect medium.

It is obvious from this first workshop that the participants are not only passionate about art but what art can do to create social change. We are blessed.

DRUM SOUNDSCAPE AND VISUALIZATION

Blog Post 2 – February 25, 2016

It is such an honour to witness an explosion of artistic expression with these new Art for Social Change artists.

The last few weeks exposed participants to the power of music and in particular drumming and percussion on perceptions, feelings and artistic expression. Check out the drum soundscape we

created while immersing each participant in drum visualization.

Music and dance was also incorporated into a poetry creation workshop, where the artists lost themselves in the 5 Rhythms by Gabriella Roth and created poetry from their stream of consciousness writings.



As fulfilling as these art explorations were, consistent participation in our project became challenging. So we took a step back and delved into the possible reasons.

Everyone that had previously attended raved about the artistic experiences and were excited and curious to explore their own artistic abilities and how we would all participate in the larger Art for Social Change collaboration. However what we discovered is the age group of urban Indigenous youth we wanted to attract 18 to

30 year olds, had extremely busy and stressful lives juggling school, part-time jobs, homework, family and all on very limited budgets.

But we are nothing if not adaptable and malleable, so we figured a way to take the program to them and at a time more conducive to participation. We are now running our workshops out of the Mamidosewin Aboriginal Student Centre at Algonquin College, and as the word is spreading in the community, we have welcomed many new participants that otherwise would not have an option to participate.

While the workshops explore a multitude of art modalities, key to this project is the personal inner exploration for each participant and their expanding understanding of how art influences their world and their community.

In the photo above, the participants are exploring what is important to them through the creation of a group visual roadmap. This exercise revealed to them common themes in their want for change in their personal lives and their community. In one instance a powerful artistic release was experienced by one of the participants through their art. This is a case where English is a second language and there may be no words, however the art speaks volumes. A powerful example of art creating personal change.

As our project Your Brain on Art has picked up speed again we are narrowing in on just what our Art for Social Change collaboration will be. Stay tuned, this is getting exciting!!

PROJECT CHECK IN WITH KAT CLARIDA

March 31, 2016

What changes did you notice in the participants through the course of your workshops?

Throughout the Expressive Art workshops participants have all experienced changes, some subtle and others quite profound. The art experiences have all participants examining the

way they see themselves, as a cohesive group and within their community.

It has been an honour to hold a sacred space for these young people as they navigate through their lives, learning new ways of coping and thinking about their beliefs of themselves and others.

In one storytelling workshop I first asked them to write the answer to this question "If you could have anything you wanted happen in your life next week, what would it be?"

The stories all contained their hopes and dreams coming true and we explored what the stories meant to them.

The next part of the writing was to answer the question "This will affect me by...." And again we explored the positive responses contained in their stories.

The final question was, "This will affect others by..." This is where the light went on for many. It was illuminating to recognize our perceived fear of others opinions and possible actions if we followed our dreams and that these fears may be holding us back from moving forward.

This is personal introspection realized through the processing of the art creation and helps individuals grow and change a way of thinking. Now that is life changing.

What issues are the participants voicing through this artistic expression in their participation in Art Place?

Our group is made up of Inuit, First Nations, Métis and non-indigenous youth making for a wonderful mix of cultures and backgrounds.

Some have been brought up in an urban setting within culturally diverse families, while some are from remote communities and have lived a more traditional life. What each of these participants have in common are the multi-generational impacts affecting many Indigenous People in Canada as a result of assimilation policies such as residential schools, loss of land, culture and loss of language etc. as clearly articulated in the Truth and Reconciliation Report. Many are only learning of the multi-generational socio-economic impacts of these experiences on their families and themselves.

In tandem with these social impacts, many Indigenous cultures come from a nomadic, highly structured community tradition and many of the critical practices needed to ensure

personal and community survival are still very much a part of our cultures today. One of these survival strategies is a limitation on personal expression of emotional pain.

It is easy to understand why this would have been important, as a small nomadic community's first priority was physical survival. If each person continually expressed their emotions, the stability of the group could be compromised and hence survival also at stake. This is a practice that is very much part of the fabric of life to this day, even though its usefulness may be past.

With these influences it is easy again to see why it may be incredibly difficult for some to express emotions using a talk therapy approach to healing. Combine this with the rich artistic traditions of Indigenous People; from storytelling, to ceremony to every form of artistic expression, once again it is no surprise that art would be an easy non-verbal way of processing emotions.

The impact of these factors was illustrated in another Expressive Art workshop.

On that day we focused on individual and community change by collectively completing a visual roadmap. Each participant was given several sections of a road for their visual representations of specific questions. The first visual was a representation of what they did not like about the society they lived in.

Each person's visual representation of this question illustrated some of the darkest aspects of society, but most visual representations reflected common societal realities such as greed and capitalism.

However, all the art experiences are designed to help participants move through troubling reflections by always providing a strength based empowerment opportunity to conclude the artistic exploration. In this way not only are participants able to see their art reflecting their own abilities to create change but also their common strengths as a group to create change.

Every participant had a very personal experience when creating their art allowing

them to explore where they are right now and what they are feeling. This self-exploration results in healing and growth.

When there were no words, there is art, when there is art; there is expression, when there is expression there is healing. This is the power of art to create change.

How are these art sessions contributing to a broader context of 'art for social change'?

The program of workshops I have designed are specific to providing opportunities to explore various artistic media such as music, storytelling, visual art, poetry, multi-media etc. while eliciting personal change through revelations contained in the art. In conjunction with personal change, each session also contains an opportunity to explore personal impacts on community.

As an Expressive Art Practitioner, I do not interpret the participants' artistic expression but facilitate their own interpretation and eventual revelation.

My goal is to help each individual discover their own internal capacity to create their personal healing, at their own pace, comfort and within a secure and safe place.

This healing journey through art first starts at the individual level and then expands to impact the families and communities of each person.

So art for social change happens first within the individual and their community nucleus, eventually having a natural impact on the communities people live in. However, throughout each workshop and within each art medium we examine how their art can create change specifically in the broader community.

Each of the workshops, no matter what art medium is being explored, begins with a personal exploration and ends with an exploration of the impacts on their community.

As the group has progressed, several common themes have emerged in their art and it is so amazing to see their surprise when they realize their commonalities, from personal perceptions to community concerns.

These themes are forming the incubation of the collaborative art for social change project. As they get closer to a final design, one thing is very clear, each participant wants to help their community have an experience that will change them also.

ART FOR SOCIAL CHANGE – YOUR BRAIN ON ART

Blog Post 3 – March 31

What a wonderful start to spring with change in the air everywhere. And as the gradual greening of our landscape takes shape the personal and group changes for the participants in our project Art for Social Change – Your Brain on Art has been no less profound.

Participants explored their own inner landscapes through mask making, spirit totem creation and group visual art collaboration.

Each art exploration is structured to encourage inner reflection and an examination of personal and group fears, beliefs, strengths and personal action in response to those discoveries.





In the strength based Spirit or Totem doll workshop the emphasis was on recognizing times of personal power and infusing their creation with these powers. These became very personal creations designed to continually remind individuals of their own superhero skills and that they can draw on this strength always.



In the mask making workshop the exploration was "Inside – Outside". We all have our inner worlds that are rarely revealed and we often display a "mask" to the outside world based on expectations or conditioning. Creating this inside and outside mask allowed participants to visualize in a tangible way their own inside and outside. A very powerful personal revelation for many.



At the end of all of the art exploration workshops we work to fine tune the Art for Social Change collaboration project. The group has identified the themes of mental health, self-care and the impact our natural environment can provide to counteract the sometimes negative impacts of a busy urban life.

What has grown is the creation of a visceral experience for the community of Algonquin College to allow people to visually witness the impacts of stress on their lives through the personal creation of feeling mandalas within a re-created natural space with trees, the smell of the forest and a guided meditation through a natural setting.

Stay tuned. This is going to be art revealing!

SOCIAL ART EXPERIMENT AND COLLABORATION IS BORN

Blog Post 4 - April 18, 2016

Throughout the workshops the participants were provided opportunities for artistic exploration centering on the themes of personal and community change. In the last three

workshops we focused on defining their common themes specifically around community change using art.

What emerged were concerns around mental health, the natural environment and the possible connection of the two. In our exploration the youth frequently identified their own personal use of the natural environment to centre themselves and create a sense of balance in their lives, whether it be through escaping to a forest or listening to natural sounds during the day.

Being in the Mamidosewin Centre was also a grounding place for participants where often smudging, community meals and activities provided an escape from the stresses of school, jobs, family and homesickness for a time. The atmosphere in the Mami centre was also often in stark contrast to the student commons area, just outside the door, that was often over saturated with noise and the comings and goings of college life.



The contrast between the two spaces at the college combined with the contrast of an urban life and one immersed in a natural environment, were the seeds for the art for social change collaboration.

They asked the question “How can people alter their states of mind in a highly stressed environment and how can art be used to do that?”

What they came up with is genius. To provide an opportunity for the college population to experience a natural escape and document the impact of that escape on their current emotional state through the creation of a feeling mandala before and after the experience.

The social art experiment and collaboration was born.

Firstly they created the poster for their collaboration to entice the college population to join in.

Then two of the participants recorded and edited a five minute meditation that combined a natural soundscape with a guided journey in this environment.

A small safe place was secured at the Mami Centre and then filled with pine, spruce and cedar branches. Pine fronds were hung from the ceiling and leather throws were placed on a comfortable couch.

The windows were covered with black tar paper painted with natural scenes and the room was spritz with a fir needle essential oil blend.



Each and every sense was filled with an immersion into a cocooning forest retreat.

An art station was set-up outside the door with markers, crayons and pre-cut mandalas for each participant to complete.

Over three days upwards of 30 students, professors and staff from the college took part by first completing a mandala that showed how they were feeling, immersing themselves in the natural space and meditation and then completing another mandala to observe how they were feeling after the experience, followed by a video interview about the experience.

The results were amazing and for some personally revealing.

Currently the video interviews and stills of the feeling mandalas are being edited and the video will be launched with an exhibition. We will keep you posted!!



EMERGING FROM A TRANQUIL ESCAPE

Blog Post 5 - May 18, 2016

'Tis a whirlwind project for sure and we are now all accredited to herd cats, leap mountainous technical issues and fly by the seat of our pants as we all work to complete the Your Brain on Art collaboration.

To keep our group connected we have gone virtual with each of us working on a segment of the video documentation of the collaboration for our final exhibition.

At the end of March the collaboration culminated in a three day social art experiment that provided a visceral experience for the community of Algonquin College allowing people to witness the impacts of stress on their lives.

The youth designed their poster.....



....recorded and edited a meditation....laid out the art materials and invited students and staff to the experience.

Each participant was invited to put their current feeling into a 'before' mandala drawing...



....then they were immersed in the private forest setting complete with pine essential oil spray, headphones and a comfy leather strewn couch as they closed their eyes and listened to the meditation.

Upon emerging from this tranquil escape they put their current feeling on an 'after' mandala. The transformation was amazing; in their art, in their demeanor and most importantly in their stress level.

The youth recorded interviews with students and staff and asked them to describe their

experience of the art, the meditation, and how they felt before and after.

The three days of video, stills and art was contained in three video and still cameras. Our challenge, certainly technically, was how to have our now virtual group edit the video and plan for a final exhibition. Thankfully we think we have all the bugs worked out, all footage collected and shared and the editing of the video is under way. If all goes according to the latest Plan 'C' our exhibition will be held the last week of May. Check the Art Place Facebook page for updates on the exhibition! It is a whirlwind for sure, but not one that anyone of us would have missed.



ART FOR SOCIAL CHANGE GOES VIRTUAL

Blog Post 6 - May 18, 2016

As our group has scattered, some home to small communities, some to full-time summer jobs we decided to meet virtually and complete the video we shot of the art for social change collaboration.

Alas as limited internet access impacts some participants and time commitments plague others, we have struggled to virtually collect all the hours of video and sound files and share the editing of the final video. But we are nothing if not determined to document the social art collaboration and hold a virtual exhibition on the [Art for Social Change Facebook Page](#) and a Youtube channel.

The group is very proud of what they have accomplished, both personally and within their community. In previous posts I documented a little of the personal journeys of participants as

they discovered themselves using art in an expressive way. Many of these discoveries included finding their own strength, voice and power as we created together using music, dance, poetry and visual art to name a few. A common theme that emerged for many was the immersion in art making gave them a respite from a sometimes extremely stressful life. They all realized their art provided a calming and peaceful effect which; when we dug further, was equated to having the same effect as being immersed in nature.

These factors determined their final collaboration to provide an art and nature immersion experience to the Algonquin College community. The response was illuminating for most as they experienced the impact of art-making and a meditation in a forest setting.

Some did not realize how stressed they had been before the experience as their “before” and “after” art illustrated their current state. There was no guessing the force of the impact and many asked if they could have a copy of the mediation the group created to continue using in their daily lives. In addition many were able to discover how art-making provided an outlet not only for their creative sides, but also their emotional lives. Many stated they were going to begin incorporating art-making into their lives.

Certainly this was something our group had already come to realize through their own art-making in the expressive workshops. The youth expressed they will continue to use art in their lives, for some as a means of personal exploration or as a coping tool, for several others as a beginning to explore other artistic practices.

As an Expressive Art Practitioner the use of art as a healing tool is paramount in my practice and I witnessed a lot of healing and growth throughout this project. It has been an honour to work with these young people and the project could not have happened without the support of Art Place. Thank you!



NAVIGATING LIFE AND THE NEED FOR YOUTH PROGRAMS: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS WITH KAT CLARIDA

May 27, 2016

How would you describe your overall experience with Art Place?

I LOVED it!

What are some of the most significant things you've learned throughout your project?

Within the Art for Social Change, Your Brain on Art project I certainly learned how hard it is to organize a one-off group of Indigenous youth who have aged out of younger youth programs. The age group, 18 – 30 years, although in desperate need for programs that assist them in navigating life in a city, have tremendous challenges around attending programs while juggling school, work and family. In hindsight I would have brought the program into an existing older youth program possibly attached to the Odawa alternative high school where participants are already gathered. Our project had some hiccups due to our first location and workshop times being inaccessible for most of the youth.

In addition, although I feel it is critical to provide food to workshop participants I did not anticipate the costs associated with providing a healthy supper each week. In addition I would have started the process of determining the group collaboration project earlier in the process to allow more time for its execution and exhibition. Of significance however my Social Art and Expressive Art practice has grown as a result of my residency, in one part due to the social media exposure and the cache of being a artist in residence with AOE Arts Council.

How was your project a success?

Throughout the workshops, and previous to the collaboration, I witnessed tremendous personal growth in the participants as they learned new art tools and experienced the personal healing of expressive art. Within the collaborative art for social change portion there was a tremendous amount of pride expressed in the various elements created, the mediation, the natural escape room, the “feeling art” and then

as they carried the collaboration out. The participants witnessed real change in the people they invited to partake of their social art and this gave them an insight into their own power to use art to create change.



What do you intend for audiences to see, experience, and think about when learning about your project?

I intend for them to see that community art creates change, not only in the participants creating the art, but in their own perceptions.

In what ways did or will the community benefit from your project?

This project had a wonderful effect on the Mamidosewin clients and the staff and students of Algonquin College that took part. In many ways it opened the doors to the non-indigenous population of Algonquin to come

and have an experience inspired by indigenous spiritual beliefs. Although we did not ask participants whether they had ever entered the Mamidosewin space, anecdotal observations by the project youth indicated that although First Nations, Inuit and Métis students and staff mingle with the entire school population in classes or in leisure it is very seldom that non-Indigenous enter the Mamidosewin Centre. In this way I feel we were able to open the doors to an integration that does not often happen.

In your opinion, what did the participants learn from the project?

Aside from the plethora of art modalities taught, poetry, music, painting, drawing etc. I feel they learned their own power to create personal change and community change using art. Each of the participants continues to use art to process their emotions and deal with stressful and confusing situations.

Do you have anything else you would like to share about your project or the program?

I do hope Art Place continues to support those in Expressive or Community Art. I feel it offers new tools to create real personal and community change beyond the fine arts world. Fine arts are not accessible to many. What Art Place was able to achieve with this program is a host of young people not only creating change but becoming more curious of all art practices.

**Art Place is made possible by the following supporters:
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