

Elizabeth Cinello

Community Art Initiatives: theoretical principles and practices - Abstract

In the past twenty years North America has been a fertile ground for community arts initiatives. These involve bringing artists together with community members to work on creative projects. In Canada, a wide range of practices and community art practitioners operate in a variety of settings. From native artists to graffiti artists, Toronto is home to a vibrant mix of cultures and artistic practices. Half of the city's residents were born outside Canada and according to government surveys, Toronto's west-end is the most culturally diverse district in Canada, and possibly in the world. Home to many new and established immigrant communities, it is also home to a dynamic and diverse arts community.

Battling poverty, urban decay and perceived notions of a crime-ridden neighbourhood without culture, artists work with residents to integrate art into the everyday life of this multi-ethnic, working class community. The paper will examine a number of arts initiatives which have propelled the area to the forefront of community arts development. Artists and community members create art together, out on the street, in laundromats, schools, homeless shelters and in collaboration with social service agencies. Together they are committed to making visible the community's diverse cultural practices. These projects involve residents who normally are excluded from participating in cultural activities, and contribute toward the creation of artistic alternatives to mainstream cultural models. What characterizes this community? Why are artists working with community members and why are community members working with artists? What are they doing and what are their goals? The paper will be accompanied by slides of art workshops, special events and artwork produced in the neighbourhood.

Biography

Elizabeth Cinello has been active in Toronto's diverse cultural community for over twenty years as a performer, writer, theatre director, instructor, arts administrator. She has been a driving force in the area of community arts development. Her work is characterized by a commitment to artistic projects that are accessible to the general public and innovative in their approach. This work has centered around women's issues, immigrant identity, and cultural expression. She has collaborated with artists who represent a wide range of disciplines and she has produced and worked on original projects for outdoor performance in parks, on the street, and in public spaces including schools, libraries, arts centers, laundromats and storefront spaces.

She is co-founder of Art Starts Cultural Centre, whose mandate is to build a healthy community through the arts. She was responsible for community arts development, innovative arts programming and mixed-media performance events. Art Starts has been recognized as a model for community arts practices in Canada. She spearheaded the development of a community-based arts facility in an award-winning library designed by internationally acclaimed architects, A. J. Diamond, Donald Schmitt and Company. She

is a member of Artscape's Community Advisory Committee working for the cultural redevelopment of a group of abandoned municipal facilities.

She has written articles on the arts and cultural practices for magazines, newspapers and books. Most recently she worked as the cultural animator for "**in the hood**". She conceived and implemented this large-scale community art project which involved over fifteen artists and hundreds of local residents making art together. She is currently serving as a member of the board for the Toronto Arts Council, an arms-length body, not-for-profit organization that advises the City of Toronto on the allocation of cultural grants and on municipal policy affecting the arts and culture.