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Art Education Conversations: Greely Myatt and Kim Warnette

Greely Myatt is widely recognized for his whimsical sculptural objects and monumental installations made from found objects. Engaging with Surrealism, pop, folk and outsider art, he has developed a visual language of truly reimagined but recognizable forms. His works provoke a conversation with the viewer around relationships, connections, identity and place, time, and space, art and its history, and concepts of art and craft. He is a Professor Emeritus at The University of Memphis Art and Sculpture Department and has exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions across the United States, Japan, and Europe---source: David Lusk Gallery

<https://www.davidluskgallery.com/artists/greely.myatt>

<https://www.memphis.edu/art/people/gmyatt.php>

<http://www.sandlerhudson.com/greely-myatt>

Instagram.com Greely Myatt @greelymyatt

Kim Warnette received her MFA in Visual Information Arts from Memphis College of Art in 1991 and began her teaching career with Shelby County Schools in 2007. She is the co-founder and former owner of Sidewalk University International Book Store, and Adrenaline Art Gallery. She was an educational researcher for Foundations for Gifted Children where she developed her research-based focus on innovations in the Arts to impact and accelerate learning and achievement in schools and communities. Kim is the self-appointed guru of a Visual Arts STEAM Studio Lab, and an award-winning Visual Arts Educator at Rozelle Creative and Performing Arts Optional School in Memphis, Tennessee.

Our conversation is about the *Quilt Codes to Computer Codes Mural* project that incorporates art history, legend, and storytelling—and best of all it teaches surprising life lessons. The most powerful part of the project was the opportunity for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade kids, from a small neighborhood elementary school, to work in a real collaborative space, with an award-winning professional artist. Students got to authentically experience a sculptural studio at the University of Memphis where they used a power tool to adhere metal quilt squares into the final sculpture. This is when the kids truly understood who Professor Greely Myatt was as a human being, and they fell in love with him, because of how he honored them and enabled them to be part of the creative process from beginning to end. Seeing the paper quilt codes they made in class become a prototype, and then being able to see firsthand how their paper quilt code was made into a metal piece when they were able to add pieces to the actual sculpture - this is what a life changing moment looks like to a kid!

Key Understandings:

- Creative sparks, or collaborative insights happen often because of how the art experience changes you—or another way of looking at it—who grows from the experience?
- Was it just the kids who were exploding with excitement over this new world they just entered or does the artist experience growth as well?
- Professor Greely Myatt says, “What I got from this is that I have made a lot of these quilts. And they are always really straight. Everything is measured and cut to the mark, but the kids had such freedom with the way they approached the process, that opened up another way of making these quilts for me personally.”

Brief Definitions:

Quilts Codes: describes a legend and controversial belief that quilts were used to communicate information about how to escape to freedom by way of the Underground Railroad.

Recyclables: a substance or object that can be recycled

Peter Halley: Peter Halley is an American artist and a central figure in the Neo-Conceptualist movement of the 1980s.

Computer Code: Is a term used to describe text that is written using the protocol of a particular language by a computer.

Prompts or Questions

1. Do you have a quilt that connects you to your family, culture or community?
2. Is there a story behind your quilt?
3. What recyclables were used to create your quilt?

Links

In our conversation, we talk about how after attending Professor Greely Myatt's Art in the Making masterclass workshop at District Learning Day and seeing how he develops his sculptural metal quilts using quilt codes—that it gave me this crazy idea. I was looking for a spectacular way to connect art with innovation and launch a cool STEAM Studio Lab at my school, and Professor Myatt's sculptural quilts created that light bulb moment. He agreed to teach kid-sized masterclasses, where, in a collaborative way the students would work with him to design a quilt sculpture called: "Quilt Codes to Computer Codes." You can't get more Rock Star than that—a famous professor at a university sculpture department teaching kids at a small neighborhood school. His installations are all over the world. Our quilt sculpture takes the art history legend of the quilt codes and its symbols of liberation—and embellishes it with computer code design elements, inspired by artist Peter Halley, to show how today's symbols have the capacity to convey transformative messages that liberates young people to see and think in the language of innovation.

<https://uacmem.org/projects/quiltssurround>

<https://www.artsy.net/artist/greely-myatt>

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