

Title of Session: ArtsSites - Empty and Meaningless: The Box Project

Moderator: BJ Berquist

Guest Speaker: Adrienne Fritz

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BjB: we usually start the discussions with introductions. Adrienne Fritz is our guest speaker for tonight's ArtsSites discussion

BjB: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania and a helpdesk volunteer for Tapped In

ConnieV: I am getting my post bac certification

RoxannaA: I am a preservice teacher in Houston

MichelleT: I am a literacy coach for the Milw. Public Schools and I work the help desk

ConnieV: I am from Houston too

AdrienneF: I am an artist and ontological coach - and I live in Portland OR

AdrienneF: Shall I just run with this now?

RoxannaA: sure!

AdrienneF: Excellent....

MichelleT: ok

BjB hands the virtual floor over to Adrienne

AdrienneF: Well, first let me say that I am honored to be here this evening

AdrienneF: This is an unusual opportunity

AdrienneF: One that I truly appreciate on many levels

AdrienneF: It's this medium - the Internet - that is allowing me to expand the reach of the arts program

AdrienneF: to Europe

BjB . o O (we appreciate you joining us, Adrienne!)

AdrienneF: So, a little background on myself - and please - chime in with questions if something is not clear...

AdrienneF: thank you BJ

AdrienneF: I have been self-employed, in one form of the arts or another , since I was 15 years old...

AdrienneF: I'm 43 now, so you all do the math

AdrienneF: somewhere along the way, about 12 years ago I included technology in my artist's kit

AdrienneF: I ended up using my very....how shall we say.....

AdrienneF: Diverse background....

AdrienneF: to wrangle a job at a global high tech ad agency some years back.....one that has since gone out of business....

AdrienneF: it was during the time that I was at that agency that I had an opportunity to rediscover my love of traditional art

AdrienneF: well, sort of traditional...

AdrienneF: it had been well over 2 decades since I'd done anything even remotely like art.....

AdrienneF: it all was graphic design, advertising, marketing stuff....even designing and building websites...

AdrienneF: hmmm...

AdrienneF: I also trained others in all that

AdrienneF: about 4 years ago....

AdrienneF: came that opportunity to get back into my.....soul work...

AdrienneF: the work of using art to open people's hearts...

AdrienneF: and minds

AdrienneF: and new possibilities

AdrienneF: for their lives

AdrienneF: so I began a community art work....

AdrienneF: back then called "Everyday is Christmas"

AdrienneF: in honor of how I feel every morning I wake up and see my children with me

AdrienneF: In time, the idea grew

AdrienneF: and it became what is now my newly emerging non-profit project

AdrienneF: Empty & Meaningless: the Box Project

AdrienneF: I take this project into all kinds of educational and therapeutic situations

AdrienneF: high schools

AdrienneF: churches

AdrienneF: movements such as the peace movement

AdrienneF: etc.

AdrienneF: and over the past 10+ months I've been lucky to be involved with the women's prison in Wilsonville Oregon

AdrienneF: any questions before I move on to describe the Box Project? and Empty & Meaningless?

AdrienneF: ok, cool....

BjB: great history, Adrienne...I'm anxious to hear about the project!

RoxannaA: me too!

AdrienneF: the project is all about relationships.....

AdrienneF: the canvas for each artwork is a small paper box

AdrienneF: each box represents a relationship in the "artist's life

AdrienneF: the box always remains empty

AdrienneF: the emptiness representing INFINITE possibility inside the relationship

AdrienneF: regardless of the current structure of the relationship

AdrienneF: in my workshops.....

AdrienneF: I work with the participants to deconstruct a piece of their relationship

AdrienneF: so everyone chooses someone in their life, past or present

AdrienneF: a relationship where there's something missing

AdrienneF: or doesn't work for them

AdrienneF: they identify that piece that doesn't work

AdrienneF: for me, one of my boxes was for my father

AdrienneF: when I was a child, he abused me

AdrienneF: the thing I said that didn't work was the abuse....and all the emotional aftermath

AdrienneF: the anger

AdrienneF: sorrow

AdrienneF: hatred
AdrienneF: insecurity
AdrienneF: confusion
AdrienneF: not trusting men or adults
AdrienneF: that's what didn't work for me
AdrienneF: and the participants begin to open up and reveal those pieces that didn't work for them
AdrienneF: sharing, sometimes, stuff that's been hidden away for some time
AdrienneF: we work with that a bit
AdrienneF: and then when we have all cleared a space for ourselves by revealing these things
AdrienneF: we say there is now a clearing to create something new
AdrienneF: so my example is that with my father
AdrienneF: the new creation was that of forgiveness
AdrienneF: love
AdrienneF: straight talk
AdrienneF: honor
AdrienneF: freedom
AdrienneF: then I ask the participants to decorate their boxes, on the outside only (remember the inside represents infinite possibility)
AdrienneF: creating visual representations of BOTH those elements of the relationship
AdrienneF: we take anywhere from an hour and a half
AdrienneF: to 2 1/2 hours to do that
AdrienneF: any questions?
AdrienneF: (there's more - don't worry)
AdrienneF: any questions so far.....that is
RoxannaA: nope
AdrienneF: k
BjB smiles. I'm hanging on your every word, Adrienne!
AdrienneF: <---smiling
AdrienneF: thanks
MichelleT: what kind of material do people use to decorate their boxes
AdrienneF: all kinds of materials.....in my workshops I provide clipart photos books
AdrienneF: glitter glues
AdrienneF: colored tissue paper
AdrienneF: the organizations I work with fill in the blanks
AdrienneF: sometimes they provide stickers, ribbons, materials, lace, buttons
AdrienneF: it's assemblage work - 3D collage
AdrienneF: so whatever collage glue can hold (which is A LOT, let me tell you!)
AdrienneF: I also provide the boxes when I conduct the workshops
AdrienneF: now, here's the kicker for this whole project.....
AdrienneF: I keep the boxes
AdrienneF: they become part of a larger artwork...an installation I design and build
AdrienneF: what happens after the boxes are decorated
AdrienneF: is that I ask people to share their boxes
AdrienneF: share the stories

AdrienneF: share what's opening up for them - what new things - or old things are there that weren't there before?

AdrienneF: it's at this point

AdrienneF: that the individuals

AdrienneF: who worked on their own boxes

AdrienneF: their own relationships

AdrienneF: become a group

AdrienneF: the change in the room is palpable

MichelleT: are pictures ever taken with the people and their boxes?

AdrienneF: yes

AdrienneF: what occurs inside the sharing

AdrienneF: is that secrets no longer have hold

AdrienneF: over the people who've participated

AdrienneF: and by giving their box away

AdrienneF: to the bigger project

AdrienneF: they give away freedom

AdrienneF: to the people who will see their boxes amongst hundreds of others

AdrienneF: read and hear their stories

AdrienneF: when those people visit the installations

AdrienneF: at galleries

AdrienneF: schools

AdrienneF: public areas

AdrienneF: at special events

AdrienneF: all of a sudden

AdrienneF: you have a community expression

AdrienneF: about forgiveness

AdrienneF: love

AdrienneF: empowerment

AdrienneF: letting go of burden

AdrienneF: and in its place

AdrienneF: creation of something new

AdrienneF: and powerful

AdrienneF: <pausing for questions>

BjB hopes we will be able to see some images of the installations

ShereeR: Who pays for all this?

AdrienneF: I raise the money

ShereeR: How?

AdrienneF: the organizations that I've worked with the past 3+ years do not have extra funding to cover this

AdrienneF: so I design fundraising events

AdrienneF: we just completed our first auction

AdrienneF: which is the biggest effort to date

ShereeR: I see

AdrienneF: the money we raised from that will pay for two things

ConnieV: Do you do everything on your own?

AdrienneF: one is to pay for the manufacture and installation of a permanent installation at the women's prison

RoxannaA: how did you begin to spread the word about your workshops when you first came up with this amazing idea?

AdrienneF: the other is to travel to England this month to do workshops all over that country

AdrienneF: re: do I do everything

AdrienneF: I do most things

ShereeR: If you don't mind me asking, if everything goes into this project, how do you survive as an artist?

AdrienneF: I live in a situation where my costs are minimal

AdrienneF: and the contributions of materials is astounding

AdrienneF: the fundraising is proving to be fruitful

AdrienneF: fundraising

AdrienneF: now that this is all I do

AdrienneF: I don't have my focus divided by a day job and this anymore

AdrienneF: so I can take all that training in advertising, marketing, conversation and my ontological training and apply it to my own soul's fulfillment

AdrienneF: contributing to others through the arts

AdrienneF: RE: spreading the word

AdrienneF: I began by telling my friends what I'd created

AdrienneF: and then when I was invited to share my idea and conduct the work with others, I swallowed my fear and went out and did it

AdrienneF: it wasn't until I began working in the prison

AdrienneF: that I became fully committed to the project

AdrienneF: and to be honest

AdrienneF: it wasn't until this week that I acknowledged how powerful the work I do is for others

AdrienneF: in the business of setting up a non-profit to forward this work

AdrienneF: I asked for kudos and references

AdrienneF: I was scared to death asking - I was sure I'd opened a can of worms

AdrienneF: that the feedback would be brutal

AdrienneF: what I got instead

AdrienneF: was praise

AdrienneF: and thanks

AdrienneF: the work has its own life - it is making its own journey - and it's been kind enough to take me with it

AdrienneF: <g>

MichelleT: do you ever work with high school students? (Teens or children)?

AdrienneF: yes

AdrienneF: my first group was a classroom of 8th graders

AdrienneF: they were amazing

AdrienneF: despite their verbal protestations

AdrienneF: the work they did was phenomenal

ConnieV: What type of environment in the schools do you prefer to do the boxes

AdrienneF: hmmm.....I like a room where the kids can be complete free to create

AdrienneF: and truthfully, that can be a number of locations

AdrienneF: my requirements are that every person have table space upon which to work

AdrienneF: that I have a chalkboard or whiteboard upon which to do the example work

AdrienneF: usually with a volunteer from the group

AdrienneF: I also ask that there be support available to the kids

ConnieV: What do you do in situations where a student may have an unusually tough breakthrough?

AdrienneF: either school counselors be present during the workshop, parents, certainly the teacher

MichelleT: Do you ever play music while people are decorating their boxes?

AdrienneF: No, no music....

AdrienneF: the environment is quiet...it's time for them to ruminate...have conversations...

AdrienneF: be with each other

AdrienneF: re: tough breakthroughs

AdrienneF: it's critical that I not be the only person there to counsel the rare kid who has a major breakthrough

AdrienneF: I must be supported by the counselors

AdrienneF: and teachers

AdrienneF: and preferably the parents

AdrienneF: I also suggest that local resources be made available

AdrienneF: some of what these people experience goes beyond what we can do for them in this workshop

AdrienneF: and having mental health resources available to them is important

ConnieV: Do you primarily work in OR?

AdrienneF: I did until this month

AdrienneF: I'm off to England to do this work there

AdrienneF: with the prison, at-risk youth and the homeless

AdrienneF: and then in 2005 I'll also be in the schools

AdrienneF: I have a collaborator who does a similar process to mine using drama

RoxannaA: do you find that the same kind of things missing from people

AdrienneF: and we are kicking off our combined work this month

AdrienneF: yes

AdrienneF: the kids in school

AdrienneF: the inmate

AdrienneF: the peace activists

MichelleT: Do any adults follow up after they create their box as to how this project has changed their live?

AdrienneF: all have the same issues

AdrienneF: concerns

AdrienneF: desires

AdrienneF: in their important relationships

RoxannaA: I can imagine...

ConnieV: How has the Internet helped your project?

AdrienneF: re: follow-up

AdrienneF: yes, I do get follow-up from folks

AdrienneF: sometimes in the form of their volunteering with the projects
AdrienneF: other times I get donations
AdrienneF: and yet others visit a show, or see me somewhere and point to their box...
AdrienneF: and tell me what it meant for them to do that
AdrienneF: re: the internet
AdrienneF: here is a great example of its valuable use form
AdrienneF: I can be with you...people I haven't met
AdrienneF: who have an interest in having an empowered community
AdrienneF: I also met my English collaborator through the internet
AdrienneF: through the Prison Arts Network
AdrienneF: and my website
AdrienneF: is the key to getting information into the hands of people across the world
RoxannaA: are you going to be over there for an extended period of time or are you just visiting?
AdrienneF: just two weeks this trip
AdrienneF: I will return in June
AdrienneF: for a few weeks
AdrienneF: then we kick off our combined tour/workshops in January 2005
AdrienneF: and I'll likely be there 1/4 of my time
AdrienneF: my intent
AdrienneF: it to train others in this process
RoxannaA: how many people do you plan on training?
AdrienneF: to have other artists and life coaches and counselors be part of E&M
AdrienneF: I don't have a definitive answer re: #s at this point
AdrienneF: One counselor is coming onto the project this Saturday
AdrienneF: she works with abused youth
AdrienneF: and she sees the enormous potential of this project for her kids
AdrienneF: as well as opening the eyes of the public
AdrienneF: which is another very large component of this process
AdrienneF: the public installations
AdrienneF: and the workshop and open forums that accompany them
AdrienneF: the website has very basic information on the project
AdrienneF: I'd like to show you one of the very first boxes that was created nearly 4 years ago now
AdrienneF: it was perhaps the 2nd or 3rd box
AdrienneF: (I now have over 400)
AdrienneF: maybe more
AdrienneF: http://www.urbanesque.com/empty/box_stories.html
AdrienneF: this box was done by a very dear friend named Larry
AdrienneF: you know how you think you know people?
AdrienneF: kind of have an idea of who you think they are? who they are for you?
AdrienneF: in the process of his creating this box for my project, I learned so much more about this courageous man
AdrienneF: that I had no idea existed
AdrienneF: he said to me that out of his doing this box, he became a new man
AdrienneF: one able to take his message of overcoming drug abuse

AdrienneF: deadly sexual practices

AdrienneF: etc.

RoxannaA: I got goosebumps looking at this...very powerful

AdrienneF: to others to let them know the dangers of those behaviors

AdrienneF: he re-gained his practice of being a Christian

AdrienneF: went to a progressive church

AdrienneF: began singing in a choir

AdrienneF: became a public speaker

AdrienneF: and just stuck his neck way out there to assist others

AdrienneF: and he says

AdrienneF: it started with this

AdrienneF: he was free to say whatever was there

AdrienneF: he knew he was safe

AdrienneF: and he took the opportunity to change the drift of his life

AdrienneF: We see that a lot....

AdrienneF: If you click on the images

AdrienneF: you'll get a larger view of the box side it represents

AdrienneF: this next link will take you to early sketches of what I saw as sculptures to house the works....

AdrienneF: <http://www.urbanesque.com/empty/sketches.html>

BjB: I think it takes a very special and strong person to be able to cope with the heavy emotional load this project deals with.

AdrienneF: the photo there is the very first sculpture I created for this project

AdrienneF: you know BJ, the thing about what I get to do is that although I originally thought this would be an amazing avenue for others to heal

AdrienneF: I soon learned that I get the greatest gift of all

AdrienneF: I get healed.....

ConnieV: This must be so rewarding

AdrienneF: It is an amazing life

AdrienneF: I make very little money at this time - and is in stark contrast to the 6 figures I brought home in advertising

AdrienneF: and I would not trade this for anything

AdrienneF: nor would my family

AdrienneF: it was all of us who chose for me to follow this path

AdrienneF: put it to a family vote...including that of my mother and ex-husband

AdrienneF: I am truly blessed

MichelleT: I agree

RoxannaA: I hate to have to leave...thank you Adrienne. I am deeply moved by what I've seen and heard here tonight. I wish you the best of luck.

AdrienneF: Thank you Roxanna

AdrienneF: when you have a chance

AdrienneF: go to www.urbanesque.com

AdrienneF: there you will find info on Razor Wire Phoenixes

BjB: I hope you will join us again, Adrienne and let us know how your trip to England went

AdrienneF: the prison project under E&M

RoxannaA: first chance I get, I'm there!

AdrienneF: I shall - you can follow the whole trip on www.urbanesque.com

AdrienneF: through our BLOG

AdrienneF:

AdrienneF: more powerful internet stuff

BjB: cool, Adrienne!

ConnieV: thank you for your time and for sharing

BjB: Thanks so much for joining us tonight...I feel renewed

MichelleT: Thank you

AdrienneF: You're welcome Connie

AdrienneF: You too Michelle

AdrienneF: you're Welcome

MichelleT: I'm inspired by your work.

AdrienneF: I'm honored...

AdrienneF: it is a privilege...and a surprise!

MichelleT: I will share your story and art work with a art teacher at my school

AdrienneF: very cool

BjB hugs goodnight

AdrienneF: hugs back...

SusanR: Thank you Adrienne.