

## Americans for the Arts Conference 2008 Provoking the Ripple Effect: Panelist Bios



### **Michael Davis**

Michael Davis, 1971 M.F.A. graduate of CSU Fullerton, in LA. He has exhibited in over ninety-seven solo and group exhibitions and created over forty public art installations in the U.S. and abroad. He has received two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, the Hand Hollow Arts Fellowship, and an AIA Award of Excellence. He recently completed public artworks New York and Los Angeles, and is currently working on artworks for San Francisco, CA, Kansas City, MO and Ventura, CA. Progress, a multi-media exhibition, created by Michael Davis and Stephen Moore, was on view in 2006 and a book-length catalog accompanies the exhibition.



### **Ann T. Rosenthal**

Ann Rosenthal brings to communities 30 years experience as an artist, educator, and writer. Her art installations address the local manifestation of global concerns, including climate change, food safety, and nuclear waste. Her work has been shown most recently at the Andy Warhol Museum, Exit Art, the Hudson River Museum, several northeast universities, and in Japan. In 2006, she launched the Community Trail Art Initiative, partnering with trail organizations and post-industrial communities to reconnect youth to their forgotten waterways through art. Her essays on ecoart and pedagogy have been published in several journals and anthologies. She received her MFA from Carnegie Mellon University in 1999 and is based in Pittsburgh.



### **Susan Schwartzberg**

Susan Schwartzberg is a photographer and visual artist whose work spans themes on biography, memory, studies of urban life, landscape and history. She has realized her work in multiple formats including installations, books, curated exhibitions and larger scale public works. She works with an expanded narrative and is interested in the psychological landscape, situating stories in urban life. She is a Loeb Fellow of Harvard University and works at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. She has exhibited her work internationally and has received numerous awards and commissions.



### **Amy Trachtenberg**

Amy Trachtenberg is a visual artist, graduate of L'école des Beaux Arts in Paris. Her collaborative projects have engaged widely with poets, composers, architects and landscape architects. Permanent installations include *Groundwork*, for a San Jose, CA library and The Atrium Project at Children's Hospital Oakland. *The Natural History of Market Street* was commissioned by Art in Transit of the San Francisco Art Commission and *Illuminance* installed for the inauguration of Pixar's new campus. She is currently designing artwork for the BART extension between Oakland and San Jose. Her forthcoming book, *Groundwork* from Oro Press shows the process of a site-specific piece from concept to installation with essays by Rebecca Solnit and Mary Burger. Her work is exhibited nationally and internationally. She lives and works in San Francisco.

## **Case Study: Sybil Brand Institute**



### **Project Background & Intent**

The Sybil Brand Institute (SBI), built in 1963, was at one time the primary Los Angeles County correctional facility for women, with an initial design capacity of 900, and a peak occupancy of 2,800. In May 2007, the Los Angeles Civic Art Project Coordination Committee, made up of County stakeholders and an Arts Commissioner, hired artist Michael Davis to develop an architectural redesign of the facility, with public art and art programming.

The public art plan included: the incorporation of public art and landscaping in the overall design concept to create a positive impact on the community, visitors, staff, and inmates, and the development of arts programming models for inmates that have proven to build inmate's self-esteem and a sense of achievement and thereby further the goals of criminal and restorative justice.

### **Project Partners**

Community-surrounding residents adjacent to the facility  
The Los Angeles County District Supervisor, Arts Commission and Public Works Department,  
Los Angeles County Sheriffs  
DMJM and H & N Architects  
Art facilitators  
Visitors to the facility  
Inmates

### **Role(s) of the Artist**

Michael Davis worked closely over eight months with the design team, which includes architects, Sheriff's Department representatives and County stakeholders, to recommend the best future art opportunities at SBI and create a plan to improve SBI's overall look with architectural and landscaping design, artwork installations, color schemes, furnishings and interior finishes. Davis researched practices and programs in prison arts and conducted interviews with facilitators and teachers in visual arts, drama, journal writing and horticulture. His final report provides recommendations for investing approximately \$900,000 in allocated civic art funds. The plan includes incorporation of public art and landscaping in the overall design concept, to create a positive impact on the community, visitors, staff and inmates, and the development of arts programming models for inmates that have proven to build inmate's self-esteem and a sense of achievement and thereby further the goals of criminal and restorative justice. (Final Report attached)

### **Forms and Outcomes of Project**

At the beginning of the project I was asked several questions. One in particular stood out—Why are you interested in working on a women's prison project? My answer was the effect incarceration had on the lives of so many and prompted questions of my own:

- How do we, as a society, break the cycle of recidivism?
- How do we change attitudes within the criminal justice/prison system toward rehabilitation?

My objective was to focus on ways of building self-esteem through art programs and public art design that encourage self-expression, finding one's voice and telling one's story. I was convinced that an artist's viewpoint could change perspectives on cultures resistant to change.

- **Public Art Opportunities**

Working in collaboration with the design team and the sheriff's department we focused on creating a welcoming experience for visitors, an immediate uplift upon entering and exiting the facility. This will lessen fear and tension for visitors—particularly children—and ease the collective mind of the community. SBI will be a point of beauty that engenders appreciation and a spirit of good will—in short, to legitimize the facility in the eyes of the public. This was a major change in perspective from the barren, inhospitable, non-friendly character of SBI for thirty years. Areas of work included: entry façade, shade canopies, play and visitor waiting areas, recognition of Sybil Brand (namesake), staff dining area, inmate gallery, and horticultural and gardening sites. All these opportunities became part of the design development for the project.

- **Public Art Programming**

I worked in collaboration with the sheriffs department developing arts programming models for inmates that built inmate's self-esteem and a sense of achievement. The concept was to link art programming without disciplines to build a platform of classes specific to the inmates at Sybil Brand.

The accumulations of information for both the public art and programming formed a final report on the project and the basic guidelines for the next design development phase of the project.

### **Challenges & Lessons Learned**

The Los Angeles Arts Commission was in the forefront of incorporating public art in jail projects. And contrary to my initial stereotypic view, the Sheriff's Department supported the idea of artist involvement in the design and programming development. Several members of their staff worked with me in establishing guidelines and objectives for arts programming. I was impressed by the dedication and help of working artists in the jails who assisted me in developing ideas for classes. One of the challenges of public art is to extend the funding to as many areas as possible. The project is now on hold. Developing partnerships with outside funding opportunities with other institutions wasn't completed. I was disappointed that the project stopped mid-stream, but encouraged by how an artist can effect change, add a vital perspective, and provide a point of view outside the established process.

### **Ripple Effects**

The ripple effect is something all too common in the criminal justice system. The ripple is at both ends of the spectrum. When a woman becomes incarcerated her absence from her family and community is like a ripple that builds to a tidal wave. It affects the lives of many, each sharing, in some way, the effects of imprisonment. This leads to a set of circumstances that repeats in an ever-widening cycle, history repeating itself. At the other end of this cycle, the ripple runs through our society shifting government priorities from rehabilitation/educational programs that could help change the conditions that foster criminal activity to a mode of strict punishment and incarceration.



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## **Case Study: Envisioning McKeesport**

### **Project Background & Intent**

Until the 1950's, the City of McKeesport, about 15 miles from Pittsburgh, was the second-busiest commercial district in the region, home to U.S. Steel's National Tube division. Today, McKeesport is half its former population, has high unemployment, and its downtown is a shadow of what it once was. McKeesport is the story of many post-industrial communities in the eastern U.S. and around the world: their industrial economic base has declined, yet in its place is the possibility of a sustainable, green economy and a quality of life built on a restored environment. In McKeesport's case, the city is uniquely situated at the confluence of two rivers and is a key rest stop along a National Historic Trail: the Great Allegheny Passage that connects Pittsburgh to D.C.

In 2004, twelve nationally known artists, designers, and architects were invited by artists Tim Collins and Reiko Goto through the Studio for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University to work in former steel mill towns near Pittsburgh. Their goal was to generate public discussion about the relationships between cities, nature, and the policies that govern them. I was invited to work with artists Jackie Brookner (NYC) and Stephanie Flom (Pittsburgh) in the City of McKeesport,.

### **Role of the Artists**

As artists in residence in McKeesport's City Hall, we posed questions, listened hard, and connected the dots. We talked with many stakeholders in the community: city officials, residents, non-profits, and businesses. We asked "what are the assets and challenges of your city?" What we heard was: 'McKeesport needs a vision for the future and our youth need opportunities.' Based on the concerns and stories we were given, we connected the dots to form a comprehensive vision of their waterfront. We imagined and imaged a visitor's brochure set in the year 2020, when the vision would be realized: A beautiful park and plaza at the confluence of the two rivers, use of historic buildings along the riverfront, and a program to invest local youth in the vision.

In addition to our brochure, we wanted to give the community tools to realize the vision. We developed a comprehensive, modular action plan that could be tackled by teams with various expertise. Our brochure and plan were enthusiastically received at a public meeting. At the end of our residency, Jackie returned to NYC, I returned to Massachusetts where I was living at the time, and Stephanie who lived in Pittsburgh took on a demanding job. The vision languished.

### **Project Partners & Funders**

City of McKeesport, Redevelopment Authority of McKeesport, Carnegie Mellon University, Steel Valley Trail Council, McKeesport Area School District Technology Center (ATC), Mon Valley Media, National Park Service-Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program. Funders: Buhl Foundation, Grable Foundation, Murphy Foundation, Redevelopment Authority of McKeesport, Steel Valley Trail Council, NPS-RTCP, Pittsburgh Foundation, Regional Trail Corporation (RTC), Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (R2TC), Allegheny County Health Department.

## **Forms & Outcomes of the Project**

**Phase I: Youth Earn & Learn, 2006.** In 2006, I returned to Pittsburgh and made the “Youth Earn & Learn” Program a reality. The program goals were to: Impart the cultural and natural history of the riverfront; Introduce “green” careers; Translate lessons learned into public art; Celebrate students’ creativity and success, and pay them for their participation.

I delivered a 3-week program for 10 high school students and two teachers. Two weeks were spent learning about the social and natural history of the riverfront and the community through visits with local professionals and field trips. The final week was an intensive banner making workshop with JoAnn Moran of rePublicArt.org (based in Connecticut), in which the students, who had little art training, translated their vision for their riverfront and city into public art for their community. The banners were installed along their main street, literally connecting City Hall to the riverfront. The students were officially acknowledged by the President of City Council in a public celebration.

**Phase II: Community Trail Art Initiative (CTAI), 2007.** Though the Youth Earn & Learn program was highly successful, it could only accommodate a small number of young people. For 2007, McKeesport high school art students and undergraduate art students designed banners which were painted by the community through a series of public workshops. The banners were organized into five themes--flora, fauna, history, river views/geography, and trail users. Though the learning was not as deep, the program reached many more people through the workshops. These were often in conjunction with a community event or festival. This format was highly effective: while children painted the banners, we handed out trail maps and talked with parents about the trail. Though children were particularly attracted to the banner painting, all ages joined in.

**Phase III: Community Trail Art Initiative, 2008.** For 2008, I blended the first and second programs, partnering with Propel charter schools to design and paint banners and create a trail guide. Propel places a strong emphasis on the arts and interdisciplinarity. They have a dedicated Arts Coordinator for all their schools, and each school has one or two full time art teachers. The teachers are enthusiastic and appreciative, unlike the local high school I worked with in 2007. I will be working with three Propel Schools, all located in post-industrial communities. We just completed our first project, creating five banners and a trail guide.

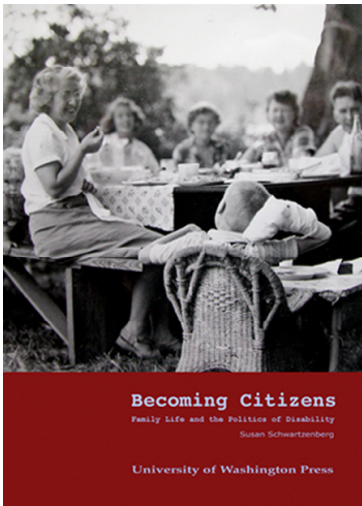
## **Successes, Challenges & Lessons Learned**

The program continues to be a work in progress. I am not certain as to which format is the most effective: small, intensive workshops, large community events, or partnering with schools who share our mission. I hesitate to create an organization that would offer ongoing programs; however, without this, funding is piecemeal and undependable. I have learned that artists have unique skills and insights—we are systems thinkers and recognize patterns. We are able to connect the dots. We can work on a different level from specialists who often fail to see the ‘big picture.’ Our vision and imagination can ignite the creative fire in others, especially youth who need positive outlets for their passions. Art can carve out space for new ways of thinking and being, in partnership with professionals in other disciplines. The challenge is to be recognized as having equal worth to non-arts professionals and to be compensated accordingly so that we can bring what we do best to a project.

## **Ripple Effects**

The ripple effects from these projects and programs have been numerous. In 2004, the Mayor of McKeesport had little awareness of the trail and its benefits. In 2007, a trail group in McKeesport was formed, which was the Mayor designated as an official city commission. Through CTAI, hundreds of children, parents, and citizens of the region know about the trail and are using it. Continuing the program in the Monongahela Valley will hopefully have a similar outcome to McKeesport, where communities begin to recognize the economic, ecological, and human benefits of their trail. Hopefully, that awareness will translate into sustainable and healthful regeneration of these post-industrial economies and populations.

## Case Study: Becoming Citizens; Family Life and the Politics of Disability



### **Project Background and Intent**

Becoming Citizens was initially commissioned through the Seattle Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs. The program, Artist's Residencies Transforming Urban Places, matched an artist with a community to realize a collaborative project. In 2002 I began working with the Seattle Family Network, a group of parents who are the principle caregivers of a family member with a cognitive disability. They came together to work with an artist to tell the stories of the senior families in the disability community. This was a group of pioneering parent advocates who during the cold-war era, went against conventional medical wisdom—and chose to bring up their “children with mental retardation” in the family home. Living in the community their children were often denied access to public schools, churches and many other services, motivating the parents to invent an alternative vision. Their efforts culminated in the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This civil rights legislation secures a public education for every person with a disability in America.

### **Forms & Outcomes of the Project**

- Nationally distributed book
- Traveling Exhibition
- Add My Story Workshop – modeled for other organizations
- Timeline – made through history workshops to understand how the story is situated
- Community designed events and presentations to bring the book to families, neighbors, students and educators, social service workers, civil rights lawyers and disability advocates, policy makers, local historians, the arts community and the general public
- Book integrated into reading lists for University disability and visual studies programs
- Story of civil/disability rights activism and social change added to the historical record

The principle product is a book published by University of Washington Press. It chronicles in images, documents, testimonies and snapshots stories of family and disability and the ways ordinary citizens become activists. Other products and outcomes include a traveling installation of artifacts, images and documents, a series of talks, conferences, additional story-telling workshops that created a second informal document, and history workshops. The extended committee also did extensive outreach within their respective communities of families, professionals, and advocates. As the project grew, the encircled community audience(s) became more aware of it and were efficiently drawn to contribute and participate in a specially orchestrated dedication event upon the books publication.



## **Ripple Effects**

The long-term effects of a project are always hard to measure—how does a project remain alive after the artist is “finished.” How do people use or maintain the work. How can we as professional artists help those around us understand the role an artist can play in the community – not only in the creation of an end product but by generating a set of relationships that allow all members of the participating group to be transformed.

In this project I lived with the committee members while in Seattle – so the project grew through meetings and conversations, as well as during social events not directly related to the project. The multiple outcomes, including workshops, book, timeline, installation, and research materials involved significant coordination, and participation by all involved. These combined products also meant that the conversation around what constituted art became an important element in the exchange between artist and community. Tied to the book was the idea of its distribution – so there continues to be presentations, community advocacy events, book talks and conferences. The book is found in libraries across the country, it is on required reading lists in disability, philosophy and visual studies programs. It continues to be given to policy makers throughout the country to help them understand the disability experience. It has also strategically been given to archives and libraries with a focus on Disability and activism throughout the country.

## **Change and Influences**

In the years during the projects development and its continued evolution I believe I influenced the community by producing an artwork they are proud of and admire, as well as giving them confidence about their work and its place historically. It helped them to feel less “invisible.” The project also gave them a tangible product and helped them find ways to use it as a piece of their community and advocacy efforts. They changed me by introducing me to the nuances of a complex human experience, that I now feel aware of and in turn have become an advocate for— disability rights and universal access. We influenced each other by conversations on the meaning of democracy, citizenship and activism in contemporary life.

Book information and purchase University of Washington Press  
<http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/search/books/SCHBEC.html>



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## **Case Study: Groundwork**

*Painting, sculpture and architecture are finished, but the art habit continues.* Robert Smithson

### **Project Background and Intent**

In the fall of 2000, with a positive burst of democratic imagination, the voters of the City of San José, California funded the reconstruction, replacement or expansion of all existing branch libraries in consort with the passage of a 2% for public art. Through the San José Public Art Program and with various stakeholders, Amy Trachtenberg was commissioned to design the artwork for the Hillview Library in the Tropicana neighborhood of E. San José.

### **Project Partners**

Project partners included The City of San José Public Art Program, Arts Commission and Office of Cultural Affairs, Department of Public Works, The City Library Department, Aedis Planning and Architecture, the building contractors, adjacent elementary, middle and high schools and community members.

### **Role of the Artist**

On parallel tracks of historic research of the locale and early intervention with the architecture team, I developed the concept for a large entry rotunda to be the locus of the artwork celebrating the communal history of agricultural labor. By interviewing community members, the personal anecdotes related to local labor history and disdain of urban sprawl became the catalyst for the artwork. I was drawn to instill a sense of memory of the mid 20th century agricultural worker, the ingenuity and toil of that labor. Equally and in response to the lament about the sprawling mall and tract housing surrounding the Tropicana neighborhood, I looked at ancient and contemporary architectural forms of community gathering nodes with elements both natural and hand-hewn. This resulted in a hands-on fabrication approach. With my project partners, I led a series of art and design workshops with eighty students, informing them about basic tenets of the opportunities between architect, artist and community. The student artwork was saved and displayed for the inauguration of the library. By collaborating with the architectural design team in the earliest phase, the building was altered to include the rotunda concept. I worked closely in design development on many integrated details throughout the building. Building on the extraordinary cooperation of the design team and community, I was funded by the San José Public Art Program to develop a book showcasing the various processes of research, design, community engagement and the crafting of Groundwork.

## **Forms and Outcomes of Project**

The major physical form embodied in the commission is the rotunda itself. Two stories high, it is pierced by window openings allowing natural light to enter at 360 degrees. As a library utilizes most all of the wall space for bookshelves, I captured the support columns as one of two primary canvases for the artwork. Eight freestanding columns are composed of materials that recall the labor of the land. Each element evokes an aspect of the natural and labored history of that landscape. Forty tractor tires form the column bases. The tactile nature of each tier of material is intended to be an encounter with materiality: the knobby black rubber of tires, the silken, hand-hewn old growth redwood, the grooved stainless steel abutted against the burgundy skin of the madrone branches. The farmed landscape provides the source for the other component of Groundwork: a series of twenty-six abstract paintings called The Shadow Frieze encircling the rotunda, evoking the aerial views of the tilled earth, orchards, and crop rows. Tropicana is an assembled, painted wallwork made from fruit crate elements bearing nostalgic imagery on the labels with names of farms, produce and the UFW union emblem.

On essential fronts, my goals were supported by the public art program project manager: early interventions with the architects allowed for the building form to be heavily affected by the rotunda concept in a desire for a timeless form. Our subsequent art and design workshops established the students as primary stakeholders, young artists and citizens with a voice. Several of the youth came to City Hall to speak on behalf of the project while many adults were harder to contact: immigrants and working poor, they were not inclined to participate in a public process. Offering a view of the nascent project to the youth, they brainstormed alongside of our development, learning to look at architectural models, plans and sketches while looking forward to making the library into their community center. They built pieces using the artist concepts, also learning about repurposing of materials. Additionally, we had groundbreaking cooperation with our low-bid contractors, initially hostile to the mandate to incorporate the needs of the artist. In a real coup, they agreed to mount the forty tractor tires on the structural I-beams at the onset of building and protect them throughout the eighteen months of construction visible to the community.

## **Challenges and Lessons Learned**

Key to the development of Groundwork was the early inclusion of the artist both with the design team and the community. Initially stymied about where to consider siting artwork in such an undeveloped building, I was able to affect the sense of the building to suit the needs of the history and community as well as to provide unexpected situations for the installation of artwork. Our ability to interact with the local youth more than compensated for the thin adult turnout at our early public meetings. While encouraging a civic engagement, the art-deprived youth got their hands messy and hearts and eyes opened. Despite some expectations for a more typically narrative representation of the concept, there was support to develop the columns and The Shadow Frieze on more abstract terms. Given more available time, it would have been good to plan a follow up session with the same students in the new library and walk through, three years hence. The optimum outcome would be that the community room of the new library would have regularly scheduled art classes for the throngs of student users of the library.

## **Ripple Effects**

The art and design workshops and the trip to City Hall exposed the students to our worlds as artists, designers, public art practitioners and policymakers. The Groundwork book provides an essential backstory to some of the research material and community engagement that I drew from. It clearly shows process and sourcing at many stages of the project. This “book as window” serves many functions revealing how the embryonic ideas form for an artwork in relation to site, history and memory. It addresses the range of conceptual opportunities with material constraints. Intended to reach architects, artists, planners and civic deciders, pushing against the expected outcome can be understood by way of such a publication.