

Art as a Vehicle for Social Change

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### **Introduction**

As a returning student, I bring a different perspective with me to Fort Lewis College than I have in previous semesters at other schools I've attended. I have only been at Fort Lewis for one year, and my year has been filled the most valuable learning experiences I have ever encountered in school. I have had the opportunity to read books by Howard Zinn and Vine Deloria, among many others, teaching me about the real history of our country and the importance of nature in our lives. I picked up a paintbrush and a pen and used them in ways I had forgotten in my adulthood. I learned that volunteering doesn't just bring value to others, but it has shown me a new type of humble gratitude.

My journey through higher education has been longer than most of my college aged friends' experiences here at The Fort. In previous years I would be jealous of those who were able to go out and earn their degree in four years and then jump into the working world. This experience has taught me to learn from and admire those people without becoming envious. I now see that I have had a beautiful journey through peaks and valleys, up mountains and into caves, and that is something to admire, as well.

This final semester has found me as and intern at the Durango Arts Center. Durango is not a town that I ever envisioned myself returning to after high school. Back then I had a life changing teacher who helped me discover my passion for the arts. It only makes sense that the art world would draw me back in an educational setting just as it had drawn me in as a teenager.

When I was a senior at Durango High School Mrs. Yost, my art teacher, turned my view of the world around. She had shown me an outlet to deal with my problems at the time. After school I was inspired to become submerged in the art world.

I later pursued my Associate Degree in Art and went on to study Art History at Arizona State University. During this time, I took what I thought was my dream job at a high end gallery in the arts district of Scottsdale. I quickly learned that the world of art sales wasn't about a passion for art but about money. This job turned out to be a disaster, and with much confusion and vulnerability, I decided that this field was not for me.

I had quit school once I realized I didn't know what I wanted. I went back for a couple short lived attempts at finishing a degree in Sociology. Finally, last year, I decided I will go back and finish for good. I saved up money, quit my job, relocated to Durango, and moved in with my parents. I still had the passion for art, but along the way I had discovered my passion for people.

With Sociology I am challenged to give meaning to my life by helping others. I have decided to apply my studies to helping people through the lens of an artist. After graduation I aim to share the world of art with the community just as I had been guided by Mrs. Yost over ten years ago.

Mrs. Yost passed away the summer after I graduated high school. I know that I am honoring her by using the passion she helped me find to help others in a similar way. My troubles with school and direction have only richened my experience, allowing me to bring a new perspective to my passion. Joining the Durango Arts Center as an intern was the most natural way I could think of to learn more about melding my two interests and guiding me toward my future. I know Mrs. Yost would be proud.

### **Coloring Outside of Society's Lines**

Art is a subjective term to many people. It can have a multitude of meanings ranging from purely aesthetic to a form of therapy, historical reference, or advertising. Without art, our world would look very different. It would not only look so, but it would be different as well. In addition to its ability to make a personal impact, art has served as an aid to political revolutions, social change, and community based transformations. The subject of art is typically not the first thing that comes to mind when these topics are brought up, but it holds a magnitude of power when attempting to make a change. In this chapter, I propose to show the reader various ways in which art has been used historically as a tool in social movements.

Throughout this chapter and the next, I will be examining several different types of art that are used as a vehicle for social change. I aim to define these classifications in terms of style and purpose. Style is the physical representation of the piece, and purpose is the reason in which the artist creates. I use the term Social Justice Art synonymously with Art for Social Change to describe art that seeks to engage the public and create awareness and understanding for situations in which social injustice occurs (Dewhurst, 2011).

Art for Social Change does not only exist in the form of unaffordable hangings in a museum or gallery. This particular form of art needs an outlet that will reach the masses. This classification of art is recognizable in purpose instead of style. We find that the style is not limited and often includes street art, t-shirts, graffiti, bumper stickers, murals, and sculptures. The purpose is to seek to engage the public and create awareness and understanding for situations in which social injustice occurs (Dewhurst, 2011).

### Historical Context

When an entire country is oppressed by its government, art has been used in history to assist in the revolution. This was true in Nicaragua in 1979 when the people successfully carried out a revolution against the dictator, Anastasia Somoza (MacPhee, 2009). Prior to this triumph, the pinta held importance for the people of Nicaragua. Pinta is a word for a graffiti'd political slogan. Pinta painters worked at high risks. The act was highly illegal, and offenders who were caught were executed (MacPhee, 2009).

Many people in Nicaragua relied on this form of communication for several reasons. It allowed them to stand in unity and let their voices be heard, but it also served as form of public education of social injustices. During this time, the televisions only had two stations, which mostly consisted of US programs and did not air local news. Most citizens could not view even these programs because electricity was a luxury many could not afford (MacPhee, 2009). Through artwork in the streets, community members were able to see a side of the country that wouldn't be publicized otherwise.

Social Justice Art played a similar role in South Africa in the 1970s. During this time, there was an uprising in the youth of the country fighting racial segregation that had been strictly enforced by their government throughout history (MacPhee, 2009). A group of South Africans that had been exiled used this displacement to their advantage (MacPhee, 2009). While in Botswana, they created the Medu Art Ensemble, which consisted of artists and non-artists creating t-shirts and political posters opposing the South African government (MacPhee, 2009). Teaching the art of silkscreening to fellow militants, this group was able to create a mass communication tool that could cross borders without even setting foot in the country (MacPhee,



Graffiti is often classified as vandalism, which will be discussed in more length later in the following chapter.

Graffiti was a big player in Paris during the 1960s and 70s. The city experienced a Student and Worker Revolt that allowed for artists to fight oppression using their skills. Television and radio workers were often on strike, leaving the people of Paris to look to other outlets for their news (MacPhee, 2009). Many graffiti artists were no longer making art for aesthetic purposes, but they gave new meaning to their visual space with the use of humorous slogans and eye catching pictures to address social issues.

Today, street artists are making strides with their work. While graffiti was once labelled as having “no content and no message” by famed photographer and cultural theorist, Jean Baudrillard, it is now receiving praise for its cultural significance (Neef, 2007). The art world’s view is shifting from seeing graffiti purely as gang vandalism on a wall to a performative act with a social message (Birke, 2007).

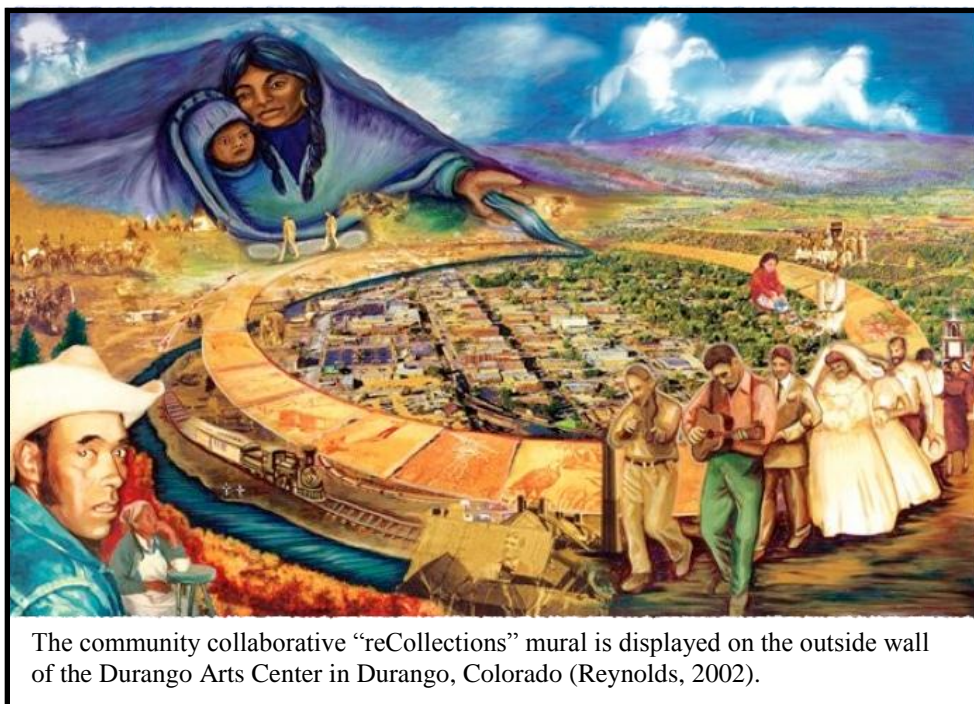
Public art is not always a deviant act. Murals are often created by many community members for a variety of purposes (Scher, 2007). The act of creating the mural itself is an opportunity to bring people together who would not normally know each other. By creating a safe space, these strangers now have an opportunity to build trust and come up with ways to make a change that they wish to see (Scher, 2007).

A great example of this community involvement took place in Durango, Colorado in 2002 (Langdon, 2002). Victoria Romero Coe, a member of the Durango Latino Education Coalition, thought up the idea to construct a work of art that she described “would be a valuable project for young people” (Langdon, 2002). Sparked by a conflict between two teenagers of different ethnicities, Coe set out to find an artist and construct a mural. The mural titled



“reCollections” was a collaborative effort that involved 16 high school students from Durango and Ignacio, local Durango artist Shan Wells, Los Angeles based artist, Judy Baca, and several other community members (Coe, 2010).

Victoria’s vision took form in 2002, two years after she had come up with the original concept. The students submitted ideas for the piece by incorporating their own family histories with the public history of the town (Langdon, 2002). Judy Baca then chose from the images and developed the mural. By collaborating on this art piece, local students were able to contribute to their culture by acknowledging each other’s ethnic diversity (Reynolds, 2002). Eleven years



later, the mural still exists on the north wall of the Durango Arts Center.

This was not the first time Judy Baca has helped make a difference in a community through her art. She is a well-known artist who organizes the public in order to make large scale murals together (Simons, 2011). By bringing community members together, she aims to enrich

the neighborhood by creating something that provides meaning and beauty, but the process of the artwork is just as important as the end result (Simons, 2011). She works to give depth and context to the space which becomes her blank canvas while giving a voice to those who have been historically oppressed. Baca has eloquently explained her art in the following quote:

Collaborative art brings a range of people into conversations about their visions for their neighborhoods and their nations. Finding a place for those ideas in monuments that are constructed of the soil and spirit of the people is the most challenging task for public artists in this time. (Simons, 2011)

Large, eye-catching works can be an effective way to make a change in a community, but art can also be used to make a difference with smaller audiences. One example of this is the Don't Target Our Children campaign (Scher, 2007). In this case, the artists were children and parents, and their art exhibit took place in court. In an attempt to stop welfare cuts, a group called LIFETIME created Social Justice Art in the form of drawings and t-shirts that would later be shown in a hearing at California's capitol (Scher, 2007). They attempted to illustrate an answer to the question "what does your education mean to you?" and came up with results that they could not express through words. These welfare dependent families now had a voice to help neutralize the negative labels in which they are typically associated (Scher, 2007). With help from their art, LIFETIME was successful in blocking welfare cuts and bringing awareness to their cause (Scher, 2007).

With small victories, larger success seems more possible. By bringing community members together, they are no longer spectators but an important tool in social change that can create pride in their neighborhood. People can begin to see within themselves the power that

they may not have had in the past (Scher, 2007). With this power, people can allow themselves to move on to larger scale social problems.

### Challenges in Social Justice Art

There are many roadblocks artists face when fighting for social justice (Scher, 2007). It is sometimes easy to bring together people of different cultures and ethnicities for a common cause. It is much more difficult when trying to close the gap between the class divide (Scher, 2007). When struggling families are working hard just to stop welfare cuts so they can feed their children, the vision of higher wages and economic equality is not necessarily their number one priority (Scher, 2007). Families and individuals who are more well-off may be satisfied with their socioeconomic status and carry burdens other than the class divide (Scher, 2007).

Funding is also a barrier for artists in social movements. It is often risky business for institutions to be involved with a social movement. Organizations who provide funding will stifle the cause for artists and activists (Scher, 2007). They often have different goals and expectations. This can also turn in to an advantage by forcing the activists to focus solely on the cause and be more creative in fund raising (Thunder Hawk, 2009).

Although the arts can help transform lives and cause change on an individual or communal level, it will rarely have an affect on a nation as a whole (Scher, 2007). Many people think in terms of smaller goals and don't aim to completely eliminate the social problem from the world (Kivel, 2009). Art is more powerful than credit given, and with broader, more creative thinking, more change is possible. If people continue to think on small levels, they will only achieve relatively small success.

Art is important in creating an audience for social movements, but it is not surprising that there are people in the art world who oppose this type of creativity (Scher, 2007). Museums and

galleries are known for their exclusivity. Being tied to a political affiliation or movement is not always in their best interest (Scher, 2007). Both of these types of establishments rely heavily on donors and the commitment of artists and community members. If they ruffle feathers by becoming involved in political activism, they run the risk of losing large amounts of their funding (Scher, 2007). This is not always the case, and many establishments, such as Durango Arts Center, recognize and embrace the significance of public art with a social message (Holtean, 2012).

In today's world, social movements are rarely attempted without some type of art to assist the cause. Art helps us think outside of the box and create something new. People are constantly trying to break out from the ordinary, and with art, this becomes possible (Scher, 2007). It helps spark new conversations and break down boundaries between cultures that are otherwise unfamiliar to us. It helps us tell our story and ignite interest in others. With art, we can slow down and reflect on our beliefs. These beliefs are what give people the passion to make a change in this world.

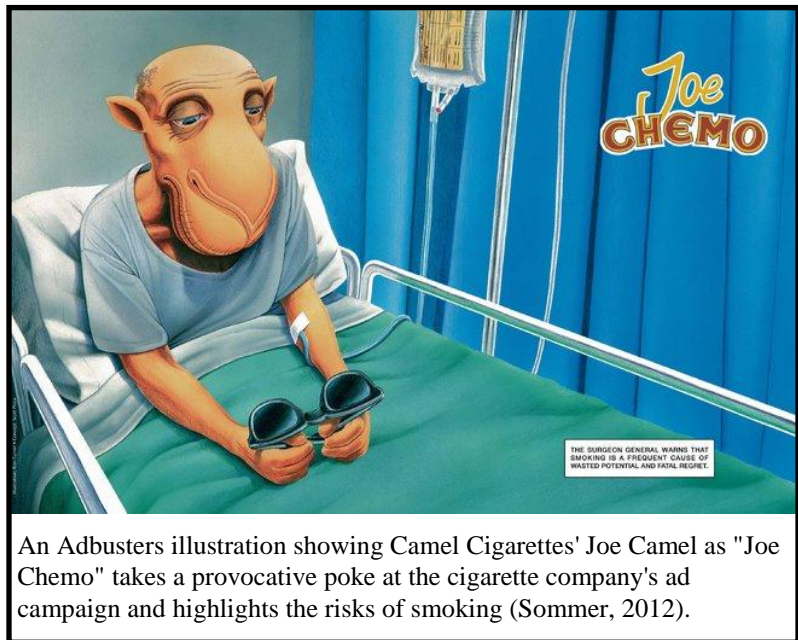
### **Understanding the Framework of Social Justice Art**

In any field of study, understanding terminology is important in understanding the subject matter. The study of art for social change blends the art world with sociology, which can be two very different focuses. This chapter aims to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the various interpretations of Social Justice Art and give examples of how this type of art is currently being utilized in by artists and community members.

In order to understand the various aspects of art in social movements the wording must be clearly defined. Author Marit Dewhurst has studied and written about arts-based social justice programs and offers helpful terminology (Dewhurst, 2011). She most commonly uses the term “Social Justice Art” and describes it as “artwork that addresses or attempts to impact social inequality and injustice” (Dewhurst, 2011, p. 366). Dewhurst (2011) explains that this type of artwork is defined by many and has several different names such as “activist art, community-based arts, public art, art for social change, theater of the oppressed, art for democracy, and community cultural development” (p. 366). Despite the variance in terminology, this definition describes that relationship that all forms of Social Justice Art share (Dewhurst, 2011).

Social Justice Art takes on many forms. It varies depending on the artist, the cause, the audience, and the geographic area. Public art is common because it reaches many audiences, but this art is not just confined to the streets. It can be seen virtually in the form of blogs and social media as well as publication such as Adbusters (Duncum, 2011). Adbusters Media Foundation is a group that uses art and journalism to satirize mainstream political and corporate advertisements. They bring awareness to social injustice by altering a company's logo or advertising layout to convey a different message than that which was originally intended (Duncum, 2011).

Terminology can be essential, not just in defining Social Justice Art but when determining the difference between art and vandalism, as



well (Calhoun, 2008). To many artists fighting for social justice, legality is not an issue, and vandalism is part of what makes their message stronger (MacPhee, 2009). Those who recognize graffiti as a respected art form rather than an act of deviance struggle to define a clear line between the two for the general public to understand (Calhoun, 2008).

Vandalism is easily defined in style; it is a deliberate destruction of public or private property. When defining purpose, we observe two motives. The first is civil action. This purpose for acts of vandalism is to create awareness of through opinion and revolt. The artist aims to convey a social message. Vandalism also comes in the form of hate speech. The

purpose of this type of vandalism is to discriminate and dehumanize with no constructive goal. Hate crimes are not an art form and should not be associated with the use of vandalism when communicating a social message.



In August of 2008, the question “what is the difference between art and vandalism?” arose after a Denver art gallery’s graffiti’d wall was painted over (Calhoun, 2008). The art gallery had deliberately constructed a mural painted by local children and graffiti artists on the outside wall of their business. The wall was mistaken for illegal tagging containing anarchist messages and was covered up by the police in effort to prepare the city for the Democratic National Convention, which was held in Denver the following day (Calhoun, 2008). The mistake was addressed by the city and led Denver’s Department of Public Safety to define new context for graffiti, recognizing the difference between graffiti as vandalism and graffiti as art. (Calhoun, 2008). While the wall was not originally intended to make a statement, the gallery

owners have decided to address the subject of censorship in the artistic planning of their next mural (Calhoun, 2008).

Graffiti as an art form is often misunderstood by the general public, and some artists and community members are helping to make it more commonly accepted. Debra Greenblatt, a Durango resident, came up with the idea to showcase street art at the Durango Arts Center (“Durango arts center,” 2012). She felt there was a culture of young adults in Durango who had a lot to say but no outlet in which to express themselves. The Arts Center agreed that the art of graffiti should be recognized and lent their Barbara Conrad Gallery to a whole different group of artists in April of 2012 (Holteen, 2012).

The exhibit, called Open Art Surgery, proved to be a huge success during its one week of showing (Holteen, 2012). Local artists, as well as artists from Boston and Oakland tagged their own work straight onto the white walls of the Arts Center (Holteen, 2012). The opening was unique for this organization, also. There was a line of people outside, waiting for doors to open, and they eventually crowded the gallery (“Durango arts center,” 2012). The attendees included faces of a younger crowd than the Arts Center typically draws to events (“Open art surgery,” 2012). They all showed up to see artists who were unknown and unrepresented in the juxtaposed setting of street art indoors.

The short length of the show, as well as the anonymity of the artists lends to the nature of graffiti as a whole (Holteen, 2012). With an exhibition in an art gallery, a setting where artists typically showcase their own individual pieces in order to share their art as well as make a name for themselves in the local art world, Durango artist Nick Jones explained why people may have a hard time understanding the purpose of Open Art Surgery. In an interview, he said “A lot of

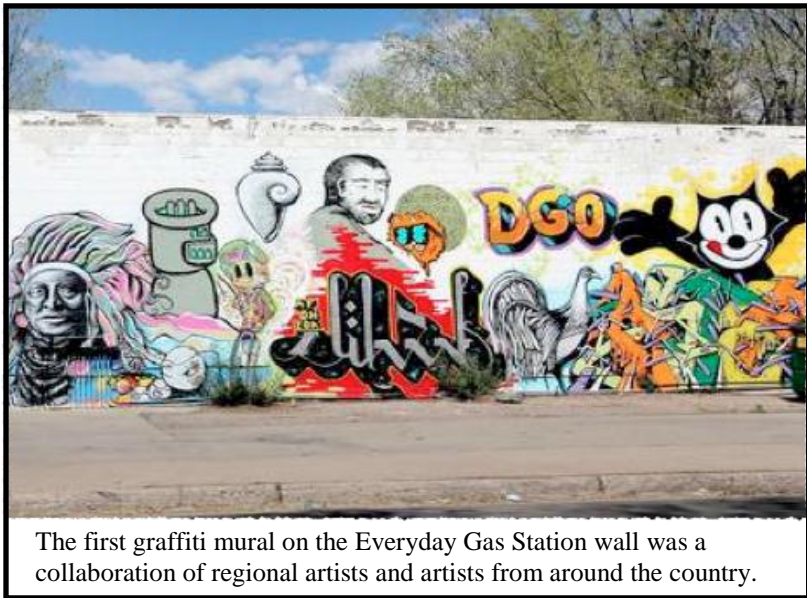


this show has to do with impermanent art and creation for the sake of creating. We're bringing a different paradigm into the gallery, a paradigm of anonymity" (Holteen, 2012).

While this art exhibit was mostly well received by the community, it managed to stir a little controversy as well ("Public art," 2012). During the time of the exhibit, graffiti artists tagged a wall on the Everyday Gas Station in town. This was approved by the gas station owner who opted to keep the mural even after the Open Art Surgery event. The business did not have

the proper permits, and was informed that the city may have to paint over the wall (Chamberlin & Votel, 2012).

This caused controversy with locals who were happy to see graffiti being recognized as a positive form of public art ("Public art," 2012). While



many community members were upset by the threat of removing the mural, the artists themselves had a different outlook. By nature, graffiti is a type of art that is meant to be impermanent. This controversy concluded in Everyday seeking the proper permits and creating a revolving mural that is repainted with a new theme each season (Anonymous employee of Everyday Gas Station, personal communication, February 27, 2013).

Durango Arts Center was able to tap into a trend that is growing throughout the world of art education. Art programs that promote community involvement encourage artists to take into account social, political, cultural, and economic context when creating their art (Grant, 2011).

Students are becoming socially engaged by incorporating such modalities as environmentalism, social work, and journalism into the thought process they use to create artwork. This interdisciplinary focus is becoming increasingly popular in graduate level fine arts programs (Grant, 2011).

### Social Justice Art in the Classroom

While the socially responsible artist is revered in higher education, there is a struggle to include these types of programs in K-12 environments (Duncum, 2011). Arts-based social justice education can be used as a tool to empower the younger generation of students (Dewhurst, 2011).

Incorporating art for social change welcomes children to explore issues in a unique way. Teaching the process of creating Social Justice Art to children is very different than it is when teaching adults (Knight, 2010). When learning art in historical and critical context, children look at issues with a different lens than they would if they only studied visual arts in art class without including history and critical thinking. By giving students the opportunity to focus on visual culture and historical context, children can learn valuable lessons that will help in other areas of their education and lives (Knight, 2010).

Instead of a passive view of art that accepts the way things are, children who are socially engaged in their art education are less likely to have a complacent stance (Knight, 2010). They can instead approach art by examining a piece, asking question, and explaining how they see and experience it. Teaching children to think critically in art class also teaches them to interpret other areas of their lives with this approach (Knight, 2010).

Advances in Social Justice Art are being made in art spaces such as the Durango Arts Center by helping the public understand and embrace unique art forms such as graffiti. With this ingenuity, art for social change can continue to make people to stop, look, and think. By helping children and older students create socially responsible art with meaning, teachers have the power to inspire futures that ask questions and take action in creative ways.

### **Ethnography**

The Barbara Conrad Gallery is the largest of The Durango Arts Center's three galleries. I spent most of my time during the four months of my internship acting as the receptionist at the gallery's front desk. I was able to greet incoming visitors, answer inquiries via telephone and in person, and discuss the artwork with guests. I experienced locals, old friends, passers by, and tourists visiting Durango from all over the world.

The Durango Arts Center is a wonderful resource for people in the Durango area to engage in the arts. Anyone can come view the galleries, take an art class, or see a play. Although these great services are open to the public, many guests are timid or feel out of place in this environment. As a front desk receptionist, it was my job to make sure everyone felt welcome and that they view the Arts Center as a fun art experience instead of a stuffy, exclusive gallery.

This ethnography aims to communicate my observations of visitors who entered the Durango Arts Center. Some people seemed to feel very uncomfortable while trying to stay quiet, not touching anything with their hands in their pockets. In contrast, other groups would use the center as a meeting place where they felt comfortable and able to speak freely with friends. Visitors' attitudes also varied towards me. I noticed that some would treat me differently based on their comfort level.

While interning at the front desk, I kept a double entry journal and posed questions about the behaviors of the hundreds of visitors I greeted. I wanted to know how different people composed themselves in this environment. I asked myself questions such as, "What part of the gallery does this person walk to first?" and "How does their body language change upon entering the Arts Center?" I questioned why people might be more or less comfortable in this

environment and how that may affect the way in which they interact with me, a representative of the Durango Arts Center.

While observing the characteristics of gallery visitors, I considered my appearance and demeanor, as well. I usually wore jeans and tennis shoes with a nice looking shirt. Sometimes I wore t-shirts, and I wore dressy attire when I was working special events. I am a white, female college student in my twenties. I tried to convey professionalism in my demeanor and my speech while working. I always greeted guests by saying hello and making small conversation if they seemed like they would be receptive.

#### Behavioral Observations

Based on the notes I took, I came up with the following five categories of gallery visitors: The Time Filler, the Uncomfortable Onlooker, the Arts Appreciator, the Arts Enthusiast, and the Arts Exclusivist. I approached each category by examining the person's assumed reason for coming into the gallery, their assumed comfort level, how they interacted with me, and how they interacted with the art. For the purposes of this ethnographic paper, I did not observe the Durango Arts Center employees or volunteers.

The Time Filler is a person who visits the gallery because they are waiting on something or someone. Many times this visitor has a class in the Arts Center or is a parent waiting to pick their child up from a class. This person may be waiting on dinner reservations, killing time during a lunch break, or taking shelter from the rain or snow. This visitor's attire varies from business casual to clothing suitable for a dance class or casual clothing that can be worn by anyone strolling down Main Street. The Time Filler visitor typically has a nonchalant attitude and is seemingly comfortable in the space. He or she will walk around the gallery and view the art until their time has been filled.

The Uncomfortable Onlooker doesn't seem to have much experience in an art gallery. Although seemingly awkward and shy, this visitor is often interested in the art. He or she may be accompanied by another person but will speak softly so as not to be heard by others. I would not consider it rude, but the Uncomfortable Onlooker is not interested in making conversation with me past the point of saying hello. In fact, this type of visitor will typically first walk to an inconspicuous corner of the gallery before viewing the rest of the art.

The Arts Appreciator is quite indifferent and difficult to describe. Visitors in this category are there for the sole purpose of viewing and appreciating the art. They don't express an inordinate amount of engagement, but they are not uninterested either. Some people might view this group as the "typical art gallery visitor," but this is not the case, as the Arts Enthusiast is most common at the Durango Arts Center. When interacting with me, the Arts Appreciator is polite and may ask questions from time to time but hardly engages beyond that.

The Arts Enthusiast is the group that I most commonly experienced during my time at the front desk. This group consists of those who are very active in the arts community as artists, patrons, and local art lovers. The Arts Enthusiast is typically a member of the Arts Center. The organization relies on people like this to thrive as a successful non profit. This visitor comes in to experience receptions, theater events, and other special events. I would see these visitors often not only at events but to buy tickets, bring friends in to see an exhibit, or just to briefly stop by with any inquiry they may have. They are usually dressed nicely for an event or even just dropping in. Personal appearance seems to be important to the Arts Enthusiast. I had a positive experience with this group. We often knew each other by name, and they were almost always polite and pleasant to talk with. They were extremely comfortable in the space, and would use

the Durango Arts Center as a place to socialize with one another. Since they were regular members and active participants in the art community, they knew each other well.

The Arts Exclusivist is the smallest category of visitors I encountered. This group is similar to the Arts Enthusiast because they are often seen at events in the gallery. They are active members of the arts community and sometimes volunteer with the Arts Center. This group is just as valuable to the Arts Center, but they act very different. They, too, have a polished appearance and dressed nicely. I did not find them as polite as any of the other groups. They were typically rude or did not acknowledge me at all. I experienced the attitude of the Arts Exclusivist as entitled, arrogant, and flippant. There is nothing inconspicuous about these types of visitors. Anytime they would approach me would be to carry out a chore that they wanted done; otherwise I was seemingly nonexistent. I would consider their comfort level to exceed the appropriate amount, treating the Arts Center as their living room instead of a public place.

#### Affects of Comfortability Upon Revisiting

I would often see repeat visitors in the gallery. As they returned, I could tell that there was a heightened sense of comfortability in some groups. The Time Fillers who visited on their lunch hour would come back every now and then, but I did not work consistently enough to recognize any specific patterns within this group. I didn't see much repeat activity from the Uncomfortable Onlooker, but the Arts Appreciator, Arts Enthusiast, and Arts Exclusivist would frequently visit the gallery. Each of these three groups would consist of individuals who became more and more comfortable upon return.

I judged comfortability based on body language, speech, and reaction towards me. I found the most change in the Arts Enthusiasts. Once they recognized me as a regular fixture at the Arts Center, they focused more attention on conversation with me. They walked more freely

around the gallery, and they would speak more freely with acquaintances and strangers in my presence.

Some of the Arts Excluvivists' body language would change, as well. They became more relaxed upon revisiting. I would see conversations between one another become louder and less reserved. Their interaction with me changed as well but did not grow. They actually ignored me more once they entered the gallery and recognized me. I don't think they felt the need to be polite as much as they did when I was a stranger.

The Arts Appreciator group didn't change significantly, but I did notice some slight variances from visit to visit in some individuals. They would recognize me and become more cordial in conversation, still keeping it minimal. They were more familiar with the gallery, and they would return to a piece they particularly liked and speak more freely with one another.

It was difficult to see much change in individuals upon revisiting the gallery because I was not at the front desk everyday. I could only examine those whom I recognized previously. I had to make sure to take close observations in my journal once I realized a person was a frequent visitor.

### Conclusion

These five groups of Durango Arts Center visitors seem to follow a unique set of norms in terms of interacting with me and viewing the art. I conclude that the comfortability level of gallery viewers affects their composure in this particular environment. The more comfortable they feel around art, the looser they would become, which would be mirrored in their actions.

Durango Arts Center is open to everyone and values each visitor whether they are comfortable in this atmosphere or feel more awkward than others. The beauty of a public art resource such as this is that it attracts all kinds of personalities and would not be the same if



these visitors didn't gather here. This was an important lesson for me to learn and can help me when observing and interacting with various groups in the future. I learned what it means to be conscious of my surroundings while working in a busy setting.

### **Community Map**

Durango Arts Center has recently been honored with the Durango Chamber of Commerce's 2012 Non-Profit of the Year award (Butler, 2013). Recognized for being an integral part of the four corners region for over fifty years, the organization has gone through many changes recently. In May of 2012 Peggy Zemach was hired as Executive Director, and she announced in January of 2013 that the Arts Center's membership count has gone from 300 to 900 in the past three years (Butler, 2013). The Durango Arts Center understands that in addition to the dedicated employees and volunteers who help the advancement of this organization, the value of community partnerships is immeasurable. They would not be a thriving non profit organization without the support of these partners and the individual donations from community members.

### **Challenges in Non-Profit Organizing**

The prosperous non-profit organization seen today was not always a reality at the Durango Arts Center. It has faced many challenges in funding in the past. As an intern, it was obvious to me that the devoted employees often remember those times and know that fund raising still is and will always be necessary to keep the success of the Arts Center from declining.

In a 2007 Durango Herald article about upcoming changes to the staffing of the organization, Goebel (2007) interviews the board president at the time. She describes the challenge in distributing funding and keeping the interest of artists and supporters:

“We started as a visual-arts center,” Thompson said. “I’m not sure a strategic decision was ever made to become a children’s arts center. We’ve been opportunistic when it came to funding.”

It's a common challenge among nonprofit arts organizations. Funding is geared toward arts education. And the majority of programming at the DAC reaches children and youth, though what receives the most coverage is the exhibits.

"It's sort of like the tail wagging dog," Thompson said. "We don't always want to follow the funding, but I think that is what we have done."

Thompson said that the growth of the Arts Center had been more organic than strategic. She said that the melodrama is another change that will require revision of the strategic plan the DAC put together two years ago.

"We have alienated some of the visual artists," Thompson acknowledged. "We need to fix that. I will know we have succeeded when well-known and respected artists in the community don't abandon us."

The entire article seems to have a defeated tone. Two years later, we hear a more definitive vision of the Arts Center from an article by Swan (2009):

I see the DAC as the "United Way" for all arts and arts organizations in the region. I see the DAC providing a space for Music in the Mountains and the San Juan Symphony and other nonprofits so they can invest more of their money in their programs.

I see the center providing rehearsal and performance space for children's dance, theatre and music. I see the DAC bringing in nationally renowned artists to teach workshops. I see expanded exhibits, more juried shows and prize money as well as grants and commissions for local artists.

I see space appropriately equipped to support local artists who teach and mentor. I see workshops and contests for writers, poets and playwrights. I see resident dance and theater companies doing cutting-edge work at the DAC.

I see an arts center that serves the entire community without competing with other institutions, galleries or artists. Finally, I see a Durango Arts Center that relies on the people of the Four Corners as its foundation.

#### A Brighter Future

The following current mission of the Durango Arts Center shows its dedication to education and community involvement in the arts: created and sustained by the people of the Four Corners region, the Durango Arts Center promotes the exploration, education, enrichment and enjoyment of the arts. The Arts Center's direction is determined by the diverse board of directors. In 2010, Terry Swan, the president of the board described this group as an optimistic mix of people with ages ranging from younger than 30 and older than 60 (Swan, 2009). The board members "serve on committees, raise funds, staff the center and its events and contribute considerable creativity, time and, yes, dollars" (Swan, 2009). The dedication of the board of directors is an inspiring example to all involved in DAC's fundraising. The organization thrives because the people who run it care just as much as the people who rely on it as their community arts resource.

#### Supporters

Operational support is mostly provided by grants, award and gifts, earned income, memberships, and corporate sponsorship. An additional 20 percent comes from contributions and in-kind donations. The first half of 2013's sponsors include the following businesses for each respective event:

**Tafoya Barret and Associates, PC** ♦ Four Corners Commission Exhibit

**Maynes, Bradford, Shipps, & Sheftel, LLP** ♦ The Colorado Plateau-A Storied Land Exhibit

**1st Southwest Bank** ♦ Masks: Creating Identity Exhibit

**Durango Friends of the Arts** ♦ Creativity Festivity Event

**ConocoPhillips** ♦ Celebrating Ute Culture Exhibit

**Pediatric Partners of the Southwest** ♦ Family Gallery Activity Guide

**Bank of Colorado** ♦ Sweethearts of the Arts Event and Exhibit

**Alpine Bank** ♦ 2013 Theater Season

**Intelligent Investment Management** ♦ Individual Theater Performances

This is only a small sampling of the corporate sponsors who are helping to make this year's arts programs a success.

Durango is fortunate to have the resources, classes, exhibits, theater productions, and programs that the Arts Center provides. The town prides itself upon having a strong community, and the Durango Arts Center is proud to be a long-standing contributor to that vision. Currently the following annual events can be experienced:

**Four Corners Commission** ♦ A juried exhibit that allows artists to showcase their work in the  
Barbara Conrad Gallery

**Sweethearts of the Arts** ♦ Each February the DAC honors community members for their  
contribution to the local arts

**Creativity Festivity** ♦ 2013 marks the 20th anniversary of this event which celebrates learning  
through the arts

**10-Minute Play Festival** ♦ Writers submit ten minute plays for the chance to win cash prizes  
and to see their work performed on stage

**Theater Season** ♦ This year is the first annual DAC Theater Season that provides "more edgy  
adult dramas and musicals as well as poignant comedies"

**Autumn Arts Festival** ♦ September's juried festival is an opportunity for artists to earn awards while showing their work on 2nd Avenue in Downtown Durango

**Winter Solstice Artisans Market** ♦ This is an art exhibit/market where artisans can share their work with the intent to sell their pieces

In addition to these annual events, the Arts Center works hard everyday to feature special programs and attractions.

**Plein Gallery Shop** ♦ The gift shop sells textiles, ceramics, paper, woodwork, glass, jewelry and various other art pieces from the local region and around the world

**Facility Rentals** ♦ The theater and dance studio can be rented out for various events, classes, or meetings

**Art Classes** ♦ Classes for adults and children are offered to the public or arranged for private groups such as families who home school or birthday parties

**Scholarships** ♦ Many people don't know about the scholarships that are offered to help pay for classes and various other programs

**Summer Art Camps** ♦ The wide variety of arts camps offered are available to children, teenagers, and families

**Performing Arts Camps** ♦ The talented teachers at DAC show children and teenagers how to make films, write plays, and perform in theatrical productions

**Docents** ♦ Volunteer docents are dedicated to educating the community about the arts

**Art Library** ♦ Thanks to the many donations of arts related books, the library is a great resource for local artists and students

The success of the Durango Arts Center is reliant upon the charitable community.

Without the passionate employees, board members, volunteers, sponsors, visitors, and artists

these diverse and eclectic programs would not exist. The Arts Center has proven that it can go from a struggling local organization to an award winning non profit community center that is committed to the culture and creativity that Durango and the Four Corners region have to offer.

Paste Community Map Image



### **Reflection: Final Analysis**

As I set out to research the use of art in social movements, I did not know exactly which direction the paper was going to take. I had thought about researching the subject in terms of a specific geographic area. I also played around with the idea of focusing on Social Justice Art pedagogy. Once I began reading scholarly journals and articles, I realized that I did not want to limit myself to one region, and I did not want to focus solely on education.

I quickly learned that there was a lot of unclear information about the types of artwork used in social movements. Some articles would use the terms graffiti and street art synonymously or lump graffiti in with vandalism. Many sources did not clearly define their term, but some of them were very helpful in this way. I knew that my biggest challenge would be communicating exactly what I wanted to say without the reader becoming confused by the terminology.

Everyone takes their own personal opinions into account when reading a story or paper. In this case, I wanted the reader to understand the point of view that I was trying to convey. Most importantly, I wanted to make a clear distinction between graffiti and vandalism without ignoring the fact that the two intersect. I also felt that it was important to describe the difference between vandalism for the purpose of communicating a social message and for the purpose of discrimination and prejudice. Obviously both are criminal acts, but the intent behind the acts must be considered.

Another challenge I encountered was tying my internship together with my research paper. At first, I didn't think the Durango Arts Center really addressed the issue of social movements. It is an excellent non profit that has potential for this platform, but I didn't know if they really utilized this opportunity.

The most interesting piece of my research was when I learned how the Durango Arts Center fit into the subject of Social Justice Art, despite my reservations. I felt closer to my internship once the two projects collided. I searched through old articles and documents to find more information about Open Art Surgery, the Everyday Gas Station controversy, and the reCollections mural. After speaking with the Executive Director, Peggy Zemach, I learned that this is a subject they want to further explore in the future. Using the Arts Center as a place of research really helped me associate the paper portion of my class with my internship duties.

Going forward, i would like to show my research to the Durango Arts Center in hopes that they will be open to sharing the message of Social Justice Art. Art is very commonly used in social movements, but it can also be overlooked in a historical context. I would be interested in seeing research in the use of art in government campaigns such as political campaigns like Obama's "Hope" image, Nazi propaganda, and China's "One Child" policy. I think these topics could look at the use of art in social movement from a different prospective. I would also like to see the use of art in times of cultural oppression explored in more depth.

After speaking with Jen Stark, my Sociology Block advisor, I finally decided the direction in which my paper would lead. Jen helped me see that most of the topics I researched fell into the four categories of Social Justice Art, Graffiti, Vandalism, and Mural artwork. All four interests crossed over into one another. One would be easily confused with the other, and we decided that it was necessary to define each focus in its own right. Once I realized the defining characteristics that set these four apart are style and purpose, it became easy to show the message I was trying to convey all along.

There are so many options for researching this topic, and I only scratched the surface. All in all, I enjoyed the research and learned a lot myself. I think dividing the four main points

into clear terms not only helped me engage the reader, but I also found a way to clarify my own thoughts. I know I will look at Social Justice Art through a different lens than I ever had before, and I hope the reader does as well.

### **Reflection: Evaluation of Internship**

Upon entering my internship with the Durango Arts Center, I was asked to meet with Peggy Zemach. We sat down and discussed my intentions for this semester and how I could make the most of my internship. I let her know exactly what my Sociology Block program was and what my paper would be about. We also talked about the Durango Arts Center's needs. Peggy gave me the task of communicating with the La Plata County Economic Development Alliance, or yeslpc.com for short, to revamp their Arts and Culture web page.

Along the way I was able to assist with the yeslpc.com web page in addition to other specific projects. I created a flyer for the DAC's summer theater camp, and I designed an activity flyer for children visiting the gallery. I loved this creative aspect of my internship.

Most of my hours were spent manning the front desk, greeting visitor and taking on any small project from stuffing envelopes to sweeping the floor. The employees made my time memorable even when I was given tedious tasks. They would always engage in conversation, and they seemed genuinely interested in my major and my involvement with the Arts Center. The volunteers were also pleasant to work with, which is why I will be volunteering even after my school semester is over.

One of the most fun experiences I had was assisting a class for two home schooled families. The families used the Arts Center as a way to work creativity into their curriculum. We made clay masks together, and I was able to get a glimpse into the educational side of the DAC. In the future I wish to create a workshop that combines visual arts with dream symbolism and metaphor. After expressing this interest with Sandra Butler, the Educational Director, she offered for me to assist her in this art class.

I believe that I have built a strong rapport with the Durango Arts Center employees, volunteers, and members. I look forward to my future with the organization in whatever form it may take. This internship became a rewarding experience, and volunteering will be in my near future. As I continue on to life after graduation, I am confident that I will take this experience with me long after the classes are over and the papers are due.

### **Advice for Future Durango Arts Center Interns**

#### **Contact Info**

Jeannie Berger  
Volunteer Coordinator  
970-259-2606  
802 E 2nd Ave  
Durango, CO 81301

#### **Applying**

- ◆ Contact the volunteer coordinator with a letter of interest and resume
- ◆ Prepare for the interview
  - ◆ know how many hours are needed to fulfill block requirements
  - ◆ discuss what you hope to accomplish
  - ◆ know what your availability might look like throughout the semester
  - ◆ prepare reference list (they check refs!)

#### **Advice from a Former Intern**

- ◆ DAC is really fun, but also be prepared for not-so-glamorous jobs like stuffing envelopes and filling holes in the wall
- ◆ Know what is expected of your role by reading the intern orientation on the following page
- ◆ Go out of your way to introduce yourself to everyone!
- ◆ Think of ways in which you can act as a liaison between DAC and FLC
- ◆ Approach the experience as if it were a paying job
- ◆ Don't be afraid to share your opinion and suggestions
- ◆ Ask if you can attend a board meeting or employee meeting
- ◆ Make sure they know if you are interested in future employment

## **Intern Orientation**

### **Front Desk Duties**

- ◆Greet and welcome visitors to the DAC
- ◆Answer the phone and transfer calls to staff members
- ◆Take messages for staff
- ◆Check voice mail
- ◆Process artwork sales
- ◆Sell tickets as needed
- ◆Count visitors who come through the door
- ◆Perform tasks as assigned by staff: stuffing envelopes, labeling for bulk mailings, assisting with housekeeping in the gallery, etc.
- ◆Provide information to our visitors.

### **About the DAC in general.**

The Durango Arts Center is a 50-year-old non-profit arts organization.

Mission Statement: Created and sustained by the people of the Four Corners region, the Durango

Arts Center promotes the exploration, education, enrichment and enjoyment of the arts.

The direction and policies of the DAC are set by the board of directors, a governing body consisting of at least 10 individuals.

The DAC receives operating support from grants, awards/gifts, earned income, membership and corporate sponsorship. Another 20+% comes from sponsorships, contributions and in-kind donations.

### **DAC Programs**

**G.O.A.L. (Girls' Opportunities through Arts and Leadership)**, an educational program for middle school girls

#### **Gallery Exhibits Program**

- ◆Barbara Conrad Gallery
- ◆DAC Art Library
- ◆Fifth Corner Photo Gallery
- ◆Online exhibit

**DAC Docents**, a committee which offers exhibit tours to adults and children

#### **Various Arts Classes and Workshops**

#### **Volunteer Program**

#### **Fundraising Programs**

**Cover Letter and Resume Example**

Dear Jeannie,

I am writing because I am interesting in interning with the Durango Arts Center in January. I will be entering my final semester as a Sociology major at Fort Lewis College, and I am very interested in working with the arts after graduation. As an intern, I would be happy to help out in any way you may need. I have strong professional office experience, and I am always looking to learn new skills.

I am reaching out to you because I wish to use this next semester working in a field I am passionate about. My internship requires that I work with a specific community I am interested in, and I have always loved the visual and performing arts. I would also like to explore the option of working with DAC after I receive my degree if that is a possibility.

In previous positions, I have performed an array of administrative duties in fast-paced, high demand work environments, giving me the opportunity to build my communication, organization, and teamwork skills. I am sure I would be a great addition to the DAC team. Please take the time to review my attached resume and contact me to discuss more details. I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Best regards,

Katie Betka



**KATIE BETKA**

123 Main Street, Durango, CO 81301

970-123-4567

email@fortlewis.edu

**EDUCATION****Fort Lewis College, Durango, CO**

Bachelor of Arts Degree, Sociology, Degree expected April 2013

**EXPERIENCE****Mercury Payment Systems, Denver, CO****9/2010 – 7/2012****Channel Sales Coordinator**

- Acted as the first point of contact for valuable sales partners in the credit card payment industry
- Exercised strong communication skills by acting as a liaison between sales associates, sales teams, and internal departments
- Audited payments to business partners ensuring they were distributed seamlessly and accurately
- Promptly responded to and resolved any issues concerning the needs of partners and their clients

**Channel Sales Administrator**

- Operated and managed incoming inquiries for the Channel Sales team via telephone, fax, and email
- Worked as a liaison between customers and the internal departments within the company
- Communicated closely with my department to increase my knowledge of the industry and to help educate fellow employees
- Researched and analyzed data to address operational challenges and customer service issues

**FlexPrint, Inc., Tempe, AZ****6/2009 – 8/2010****Supplies Expeditor**

- Searched for ways to increase profit and limit loss when purchasing supplies for customers
- Investigated unexpected situations such as defective product or delayed shipments
- Prepared and sent monthly overage invoices
- Responsible for taking incoming phone and email orders for customers' printing needs

**Customer Service Representative**

- Managed my own schedule by preparing client visits, in-office time, and follow-up appointments
- Prepared and presented quarterly reviews of our company's progress for my managed accounts
- Provided support for the sales team by searching for new opportunities for existing clients
- Visited clients on a quarterly basis to collect billing information and to address any issues or needs

**Gainey Village Health Club and Spa, Scottsdale, AZ****11/2007 –****6/2009****Spa Coordinator**

- Coordinated daily activities for high profile guests at a four star salon and spa
- Oversaw scheduling for 30 spa therapists and salon technicians
- Enthusiastically greeted guests as they arrived and handled payment upon exit

**SKILLS**

- Easily relate well with customers through written, telephone, and interpersonal communication
- Advanced in Word, Excel, and Outlook; proficient in PowerPoint and Apple iWork
- Ability to take on multiple tasks and reach deadlines on time with exemplary results

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Study Connection Mentor 2012 – Present (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Colorado)

Festival Volunteer 2012 (Durango Apple Days)

Furry Scurry Event Volunteer 2012 (Denver Dumb Friends League)

### Related Materials

## La Plata County Economic Development Alliance Arts and Culture Web Page



La Plata County  
Economic Development  
**ALLIANCE**

Pioneer Spirit. Business Smart.

- [Home](#)
- [About La Plata County](#)
- [Doing Business](#)
- [Data and Property](#)
- [Be an Investor](#)
- [About the Alliance](#)

### Arts & Culture

We have a vibrant Arts and Cultural Community.....Whether you are taking your family to an event, taking friends or just you, you will experience an awesome Community event! The Smithsonian Magazine awarded Durango among the **20 Best Small Towns** in America.



Got Questions? Contact Us!



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& Needs

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**7th Annual  
Economic Summit**

### News and Media

[Alliance Events Calendar](#)

[Alliance Press Releases](#)

[Business News in La Plata County](#)

[Featured Investors](#)



Check It Out!  
I'm from  
DURANGO



#### Durango Arts Center

Created and sustained by the people of the Four Corners region, the **Durango Arts Center** promotes the exploration, education, enrichment and enjoyment of the arts. Located in downtown, The Arts Center has become the hub for cultural innovation in southwest Colorado, allowing visitors to enjoy the visual arts, theater, dance, live music, education programs for children and adults and many other activities for all ages.

The **Durango Discovery Museum** invites guest to get in and geek out. As the Four Corners' and Durango's hands-on, interactive science center for all ages, the museum offers a dynamic new space for family adventure and exploration, school field trips, early childhood learning, and special events. The museum opened in **February 2011** in Durango's historic and historical Powerhouse (aka the Pow) with a mission to "spark curiosity, ignite imagination, and power exploration."



Collage Page



Paste Open Art Surgery  
Flyer



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### Time Log

Date	Activity Narrative	Hours
1/2/13	orientation and paperwork	2
1/3/13	front desk duties	3.5
1/10/13	front desk duties	4.5
1/11/13	front desk duties	3
1/12/13	front desk duties	3.5
1/17/13	front desk duties	7
1/21/13	front desk duties	2
1/24/13	front desk duties	7
1/25/13	front desk duties	7
1/26/13	Kid's Follies dress rehearsal	3.5
1/31/13	front desk duties	7
2/1/13	clean up from Kid's Follies	3.5
2/2/13	clean up from Kid's Follies	3.5
2/4/13	worked in library	3.5
2/5/13	worked in library	7
2/7/13	1st Thursday	3.5
2/9/13	Sweethearts of the Arts event	5
2/13/13	front desk duties	7
2/14/13	print and hang posters around town	4
2/16/13	disassemble exhibit	7
2/21/13	front desk duties	5
2/22/13	front desk duties	7
2/20/13	prepared interview questions to ask donors	1
2/28/13	Durango Film Festival	4
3/2/13	Durango Film Festival	3.5
3/9/13	front desk duties	3.5
3/14/13	front desk duties	7
3/15/13	front desk duties	3.5
3/16/13	front desk duties	3.5
3/19/13	assisted with art class	4

Date	Activity Narrative	Hours
3/22/13	usher for play	3.5
3/23/13	front desk duties	7
3/28/13	front desk duties	3.5
3/29/13	front desk for opening reception	3.5
3/30/13	front desk duties	3.5
4/2/13	front desk duties	3.5
4/4/13	1st Thursday	4
4/5/13	front desk duties	3.5
4/6/13	front desk duties	7
total		175