

SCHOLARLY AND CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Karen Gergely

I consider myself a socially engaged artist and educator that encourages communities to learn together and share experiences, skills, traditions, and stories in the name of art! Socially engaged work often is ephemeral, and relies on the stories told about shared experiences to keep the project alive. Frequently in this work, the artist becomes a true collaborator with a community, a catalyst and a facilitator, often encouraging participants to take the lead as the artist guides and cares for the group. Socially engaged works are often social-justice-minded and work to elevate marginalized peoples or communities. This type of collaboration and idea sharing are at the heart of my teaching philosophy and art making process.

I am trained as a painter and a drawer and have worked in video, sculpture, and installation. I use these skills to socially engage a community by recording everyday personal histories to share in effort to keep traditions alive, and help foster a community that willingly engages with itself and others. As native West Virginian with a strong heart for Appalachia, one of my first and most formative adventures was a five-month thru-hike of the entire Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine. This experience was the spark that began my socially engaged art pursuit and instilled a yearning for authentic community and shared experience.

Because socially engaged art is often experiential, ephemeral, and not product oriented, it does not often find its way into the traditional gallery scene. I rely on collaboration with artist residencies and experimental institutions to provide space for the work. In the past 3 years I've been granted two artist residencies, both which have afforded me time to focus on storytelling and collecting in a community.

BRICKSCAPE

I was chosen as one of 9 nationally recognized artists to work as an artist in residence at *Brickscape*, a 6-week artist residency program on the 11th floor of the Union Building in Charleston, West Virginia during summer 2018. Artists were brought in to create installations and socially engaged works using the Union as a home base. Over the course of the 6 weeks, my project, *THE EXCHANGE LAB*, engaged the Charleston, WV community through facilitated storytelling, story sharing, and creation. The project was a place where stories could be freely shared and heard, a space where new and meaningful experiences could occur, and fresh ideas could be cultivated. *The Lab* was a home to guided meetings, social gatherings, and significant conversations. Guests were often asked to bring something with them to start the conversation - an idea, a memory, and sometimes a personal item that represented a time when they felt strong. My role in *The Lab* was to be a conduit, a facilitator and a medium to help cultivate these interactions among strangers and friends. This residency allowed me to embed myself in the culture and seek out the strengths of the community. I was interested in seeing how neighborhoods have changed over time, where folks felt a strong sense of belonging, how they are choosing to invest in that community, what scares them about the future, and what brings them hope. As a physical space, *The Exchange Lab* became an archive of these events and conversations.

NORTH MOUNTAIN

The work created at North Mountain Residency in Gerradstown, West Virginia in the summer of 2016 was very different. This residency granted me time to process recorded stories and images I had been collecting for several years from coal towns in Welch, West Virginia. The work produced at North Mountain is currently being exhibited in two separate exhibitions The Phaze 2 Gallery in Shepherdstown, WV, September 2018, and the Eisentrager Howard Gallery University of Nebraska in Lincoln, October 2018.

#Superawesomefunnight2017 and 2018 was a collaboration with Appalachian Musicologist and Storyteller Adam Booth. The work was commissioned by the West Virginia Governor's Honors Academy, and program for high achieving high school students from around the state, and the Honors College at West Virginia University. The event was a carefully curated set of interactive, community enriching experiences over 90 minutes.

LECTURES // CONFERENCES

I am really proud of the scholarship I have been able to do since coming to Graceland, and I am grateful for the continued the support. In the fall of 2017, I presented my research *Building Better Risk-Takers and World Changers, Social Practice in Foundations* at the 16th Biennial National FATE Conference (Foundations in Art, Theory and Education) in Kansas City. Not only was this a conference that caused me to reevaluate and reinvigorate my teaching practice, it led to an invitation to be a featured speaker at the inaugural Teaching Social Practice Conference at UMass Dartmouth in Dartmouth, MA. At this conference I shared my research on *Share Circles and Active Listening*. After presenting at this conference, I was contacted by THE UNION in Omaha, NE to give a series of weekend workshops on socially engaged art to their artists in residence.

In 2018 I presented my research at the National College Art Association (CAA) *Challenges and Triumphs of Curating Socially Engaged Works* at the conference in L.A., 2018, and co-facilitated a round table discussion about *Social Practice: Doing and Teaching*. I will be a featured artist and educator on the *CAA Pedagogical Conversations* podcast discussing teaching and social practices this year.

Because of my presentation at CAA 2017, I have been invited to be a featured lecturer at *ArtTalk*, a lecture series at George Fox University Department of Art and Design in Newberg, Oregon this November. I will be presenting my work and discussing socially engaged practice, along with studio visits with upper division students.

In addition to co-chairing a panel on *Social Practice and Service Learning* at the upcoming CAA 2019 conference in NYC in February, I am excited to be presenting *Slowing Down and Diving Deep: Cultivating Research Skills, Experimentation, Conceptual Development and Aesthetic Inquiry in Foundations* at SECAC (South Eastern College Art Conference) at the University of Birmingham, in Birmingham, AL, and *Technology's role in Socially Engaged Art* at MACAA (Mid America College Art Association Conference) at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, NE, both in October 2018. I'll be returning to the biennial FATE Foundations in Art: Theory and Education Conference at Columbus College of Art & Design in Columbus, OH in April 2019 to chair a panel on *Art and Activism in Foundations*.