

IS ART BELONGING?

I feel an affinity with other artists, no matter what they create. I know we share a common spark that demands expression. I know we share the gift of recognizing inspiration wherever we find it. I know that other artists understand that *what* I create is as important as *why* I create. And this shared understanding is what helps me feel part of a community.

Art has gave me a voice to speak up for myself. I have been struggling for years of finding myself, trying to come out of my shell. Art has helped me from not caring about what people think of me. Art has gave me a high self esteem to speak my mind freely. It's ok to cry, and laugh, or be sad sometimes. It's ok just to be you! It's ok to get very uncomfortable at times to help you to *get* comfortable. It has brought creativity into my soul.

For me, art is a way to make our separate communities understand each other. It's the way of introducing each other to different cultures so that we can come together. Through art, people can feel accepted for who they are. When you are not accepted, you feel like you are not a part of the world. Art lets you go out and see a part of the world you haven't seen, and lets you feel accepted.

Artistry in my community helps educate and expose to the bright world those who are marginalized and uneducated because of lack of resources. When we were painting a mural in North Lawndale I participated in painting blades of grass which brought beauty to the neighborhood and brought smiles to their faces. Through art, we brought together people who haven't been exposed to art before. This creates optimism that helps people to realize a way to enhance their appreciation of life. My community that I represent has brilliancy in the arts that has not yet been recognized, and many of them with uplifting aspirations to become great artists. Budget cuts have meant that generations of children have not been exposed to the arts. Art creates community by giving people a chance to participate as part of a bigger picture.

Through art, I came together with people from different races, and it opened up my horizons, helped me learn things I could do with my time that I was not aware of before. Seeing all kinds of different pictures and sculptures, it was nice and I felt good and inspired. It let me know I can go farther in art and I want to see more of it. It was just awesome. In the community the people, I did not feel I was being judged by the color of my skin, and that is very important to me.

Art has made me feel like a part of the community because as a struggling artist it has been a chance to express myself in ways that I thought were dormant until this year when I was given a chance to express myself through my paintings. As an artist, I appreciate the critiquing I received from my fellow artists which makes me want to learn more about art.

The art, to me, makes me feel like I can talk to people through my music. Art does make me feel like I am part of a community. We talk about stuff from life to how we became who we are, and most important, we all became family.

It helps to see it through, even when I couldn't sleep at night. I truly believe in community and what's inside. We're all helpers to one another. Innocent, genuine connection, like a teddy bear! I will not be afraid because it's all in or all out, and when I participate, I'm all in. Art is creativity. It's a place in between; in between your walls. Art fills our mouth with laughter. When you in a community, it challenges you to go deeper. It's *certified*. Call me what you want. Art is my camouflage. And I will escape. Using art can help dismantle the trauma, through my poetry. Different traumas at different stages, at different ages, through the use of art itself. Make art, not war.

In the past, when I dealt with the lowest points in my depression, I felt disconnected, alone, and afraid. Through making art I discovered I had the ability to create my own sense of safety. This summer when I experienced homelessness again, I discovered the ability to foster a sense of community through sharing my work with others. After stewing with a sense of anger for months, I created a piece that I thought might actually be offensive. When I shared it with others without explaining it, someone shared how they thought the piece

could be a bridge to understanding. This opinion helped to dissipate my anger and allow me to feel understood by the community at a deeper level than I even understand myself.

Art is a way to inspire, share, expose, create, change, awake others, to bond, reinforce, promote change, remember, freedom forever to express. Love sustainably, create sustainably. By being able to scratch the surface of every facet of art, by making art with Red Line Service, I'm inspired to create, be one yet separate, to share other's experiences, to relate, to be empowered together. Art is a place to relate, to create, to strengthen, love, to promote hope, like fellowship.

Art is a way to bring people together from all different classes and upbringings. It's a way to get more people involved, spark conversation. I think we are more alike than we know, and we share often that our differences are often highlighted in the media and, unfortunately differences sometimes end up creating divisions rather than embracing what we do have in common, acknowledging the difference and the nuance. So I believe art is a great way to express what someone is going through, either past, present or what they might want to do in the future. Or potentially something that is in their imagination that they hope would actually come true.

Giving homage to our Creator, the Most High, my mother and father, but most of all my ancestors. For, without their guidance, I would not be here to share with you today. You know, a lot of people overlooked me down through the years. I feel like I'm very talented as a person, but people overlooked me even when I was a child! But through art I am able to express and share more of my creativity. It's opening me up to more and more ideas, and it gives me introduction to myself. I am sharing ideas with others because no one, no matter how much education they have, no matter how old they are, you never stop learning. I'm just finding out at age 69. I just pray to the Creator that He gives me another 69 years to fulfill the creativity that is hiding deep inside my soul. Art is my sense of freedom, it opens me up—avenues I wasn't even aware of! I have wasted so much time because no one ever cared to help me and do the things I was placed here to do. Art to me is being accepted no matter the race, gender, or economic status.

The people I met doing art shows felt like family and friends, and painting. Before I didn't have access to it, but when I do have access then I have things to show and share outside people.

Art has made me feel like I am in a community by giving me a vision. The vision is an action plan, and the skills have to have resources to support the view. The impact of art covers a lot of categories. Motivating a group of people is one of them. Our sessions help us set goals and to have a strategy plan. It also helps us develop friendships and makes us work together as a team. The friendships growing in the group help us develop ideas and add purpose to the sessions. An example of us working as a team is when we did the mosaics. During the making of our mosaics, people from group sessions would come over and say, "Add this piece," or, "Add that piece." It allows everyone to enter into a communion of spirit with other individuals. To have the impression of sharing moments, feelings, and emotions with them. To be empathetic towards what we feel.